Acting with care:

How actor practice is shaped by creating

theatre with and for children

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Abstract

Research has investigated the backgrounds, dispositions and skills of artists working with children in both school and in out-of-school contexts (Ascenso, 2016; Brown, 2014; Galton, 2008; Jeanneret & Brown, 2013; Pringle, 2002; Pringle, 2009; Rabkin, Reynolds, Hedberg, & Shelby, 2008; Waldorf, 2002). Actors make a significant contribution to this work but few studies focus in depth on how they create theatre with and for children.

Incorporating constructivist, phenomenological (Van Manen, 1990) and case study methodologies, this research investigates the practice of nine actors who create theatre with and for children in diverse contexts. Drawing on document analysis, surveys, semi-structured interviews and performance observations, the research explores two key questions: What characterises the practice of actors who create theatre with and for children? and How is actor practice shaped by working with children?

This thesis explores actor practice in relation to being, doing, knowing and becoming (Ewing & Smith, 2001). Shaped to be outward facing and ‘pedagogically tactful’ (Van Manen, 2015), actor practice gives emphasis to four key qualities: listening, reciprocating, imagining and empathising. When creating theatre with and for children, pedagogically tactful actors are guided by a sense of care and respect. This thesis adds to the discourse about artists working with children, making actor practice visible and drawing attention to their beliefs, goals, motivations and acting techniques.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

- the thesis comprises only my own work towards the PhD except where indicated in the preface,

- due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

- the thesis is less than 100,000 words, excluding footnotes, appendices, acknowledgements, table of contents and lists of figures and tables.

Signed:

(Jennifer Andersen).
Acknowledgements

This thesis was inspired by the wonderful work of my creative collaborators throughout my life—adults and children alike—and was completed with invaluable help from many quarters. My deep thanks go to the actors who participated in this study. They were passionate, thoughtful and provocative, and gave generously of their time. I am very grateful, too, to my supervisors for their expert guidance, warmth and encouragement. Finally, I wish to thank my family for their endless love, support and good humour.
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Chapter 1  Introduction

This thesis explores ‘actor practice’, conceptualised as being, doing, knowing and becoming. It identifies the characteristics of practice of actors who create theatre with and for children and examines how this work is shaped by engaging with children in a range of theatrical contexts. These contexts include performances in theatres, schools and outdoor public places, and workshops in education and community settings. Children’s responses to these theatrical experiences are well documented (Jeanneret & Brown, 2013; Klein, 2005; Omasta, 2011, Reason, 2006) but the practice of the actors who create them is less well understood.

Some of what is known about actors who create theatre with and for children comes from the body of research that identifies the dispositions, skills and backgrounds of artists working with children in diverse settings and disciplines (Ascenso, 2016; Brown, 2014; Galton, 2008; Jeanneret & Brown, 2013; Pringle, 2002; Pringle, 2009; Rabkin, Reynolds, Hedberg, & Shelby, 2008; Waldorf, 2002). The approaches that artists use to engage children share some over-arching characteristics, such as a focus on playful interactions and on open-ended exploration of creative ideas (Brown, 2014; Imms, Jeanneret & Stevens-Ballenger, 2011; Lord, Sharp, Lee, Cooper & Grayson, 2012). These characteristics are expressed differently in each artform, though, and there is little known research focusing on how actors engage with children.

Although many actors work with children at some point in their career, few undertake specialised training in working with children. Instead, they largely learn ‘on the job’ where their skills and approaches to practice are not well documented. Despite numerous studies that note that professional practice is shaped by experience (Ewing & Smith, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schön, 1991; Palmer, 1999), missing also is an explanation of how engaging with children shapes actor practice.

Although actors are frequent subjects of biography, in part because of their deep understanding of the form (Pender, 2015), little research about actors working with children investigates their personal experiences or draws on their own voices. It is not clear why this is the case, although it may be related to a low status view of actors in the theatre industry (Crawford, 2015a; 2015b; Moore, 2004). This research follows the
example of studies that draw on the voices of practitioners in other professions (Ascenso, 2016; Boyack, 2011; Selkrig, 2009; Wales, 2006) by using document analysis, interviews, surveys and observations of performances to explore the lived experience of actors who create theatre with and for children. In doing so, it aims to offer actors and other professionals who work with children a conceptual framework that prompts reflection about the complexity of their practice and how professional learning is shaped by experience.

1.1 Outline of the Study

This study explores the individual and shared experiences of nine actors who create theatre with and for children. It investigates two guiding questions:

1. What characterises the practice of actors who create theatre with and for children? and
2. How is actor practice shaped by working with children?

To investigate these questions, the thesis first outlines my own experience as a maker of theatre with and for children. My personal story then widens out in Chapter 2, first to a demographic snapshot of actors working with children in Australia and then to a two-part review of the literature. The first part of this review positions the practice of actors who create theatre with children within the broader arena of teaching artist practice.1 This literature, which has relevance to artists working in diverse arts disciplines, focuses on the professional identities of teaching artists, their motivations and skills, and how their practice is influenced by working with children. The second part of the literature review discusses the less well researched field of actors who create theatre for children. It focuses on why actors work in this field and discusses significant features of their practice.

Chapter 3 returns to a personal perspective by contextualising my position as a researcher with extensive experience in creating theatre with and for children. This section foregrounds a description of the methodology and how it developed throughout the

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1 In the first issue of the Teaching Artist Journal, Booth (2003) defines a teaching artist as “an artist with the complementary skills and sensibilities of an educator, who engages people in learning experiences in, through, or about the arts.”
research, prompting a shift from the use of logical, thematic research methods to the more immersive and intuitive practices of phenomenology.

The process of contextualising the practice of actors working with children, begun in the literature review, continues in Chapter 4 with an overview of Australian theatre with and for children. Drawing on a document search and personal professional knowledge, this overview was used to formulate a typology of children’s theatre actor practice for use in this research, including to guide the participant selection.

The nine actors who participated in this study are introduced in Chapter 5 by short case stories that highlight salient aspects of their individual practice. Over the next three chapters these stories are deepened, compared and synthesised through a multiple case analysis of the data that draws on Ewing and Smith’s interpretation of practice as being about doing, knowing, being and becoming (Ewing & Smith, 2001). Chapter 6 explores the characteristics of the participants’ practice through a discussion of their motivations and goals for creating theatre with and for children, and their beliefs about children and theatre. The inquiry into the characteristics of actor practice continues in Chapter 7 with a focus on the participants’ knowledge, skills and techniques. Chapters 6 and 7, which deal with the first question of this research—what characterises the practice of actors who create theatre with and for children—are followed in Chapter 8 by an exploration of the second question—how the participating actors’ practice is shaped by creating theatre with and for children. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 each end with a reflective passage that connects with the element of practice discussed in that chapter. Structured as a recursive, layered discussion that builds on each previous chapter’s reflection, these sections synthesis the features of being, doing, knowing and becoming in actor practice brought into focus by this research.

The thesis concludes in Chapter 9 by proposing the concept of the pedagogically tactful actor and presenting a culminating discussion of what this project has revealed about actor practice and research.
1. Introduction
2. Literature review
3. Methodology
4. Mapping theatre with and for children

FINDINGS

5. Survey data and case stories
6. Characteristics of practice: BEING
7. Characteristics of practice: DOING and KNOWING
8. Shaping practice: BECOMING

9. The Pedagogical Actor

Figure 1.1: Outline of thesis
1.2 Researcher Background

The two threads of art and children are woven throughout my life beginning with my good fortune to have had parents who loved and valued children’s arts. They instilled in me the belief that Ferdinand the Bull\(^2\) was a great work of literature and that the best gig on television was to be a presenter on Playschool\(^3\). Perhaps even more importantly, they encouraged my own creative pursuits, ferrying me first to music and dance classes, and later to youth and community theatre rehearsals. I grew up with the belief that working with children in the arts was a worthwhile occupation and actively looked for opportunities to do so from the start of my career as an actor and music teacher. These opportunities have included creating and performing theatre for children, facilitating drama workshops with young children and families, working as a youth theatre tutor, teaching piano and leading music classes for babies.

Having worked in this branch of the arts for twenty-five years, I am alert to stories of other actors who make theatre with or for children but am often disappointed with the lack of detail they provide. Interviews with actors who work with children are rare and, outside academia, are usually found in the mainstream media in the uncritical form of pre-season publicity. Actors in these interviews predictably characterise young audiences as ‘honest’ and cite the need to work hard to engage what they term ‘children’s short attention spans’. While some also note the importance of respecting child audiences with skilful, authentic performances, very few explain what these performances entail or how this work shapes their own practice. When I encounter theatre with and for children I want to know why it was made, what the actors contributed to the concept, script and staging, and how it made them feel. Outside informal conversations with peers, there are few opportunities to satisfy this curiosity.

In 2009, I was given the chance to reflect upon my own actor practice in new and challenging ways through participation in a research project at ArtPlay, a children’s arts centre situated in the CBD of Melbourne.\(^4\) This stimulating experience, which involved

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\(^2\) This classic children’s book written by Munro Leaf and illustrated by Robert Lawson was first published in 1936.

\(^3\) Playschool is a long-running Australian television program for preschool aged children. It is characterised by intimate direct address to the camera by its rotating cast of two presenters.

\(^4\) ArtPlay is a public children’s arts venue in Melbourne where children aged 0-12 create art alongside professional artists working in all artforms. The research was an ARC Linkage Project: Mapping and
interviews, focus groups and informal artist and researcher presentations, piqued my interest in the academic study of art made with and for children. I was later employed as a research assistant on two other research projects at ArtPlay. In the course of this work, I noticed that artists readily engaged in deep conversations about their practice and surmised that, like myself, they may have been afforded few opportunities to do so in the past. I was drawn to the rich discussions that emerged from these three projects so, when formulating my own eventual research, I was motivated to investigate theatre with and for children through the under-represented lens of actor practice.

The complexity of acting, and its relationship to the beliefs, experiences and physicality of the actor, has always fascinated me. This research is therefore based on the premise that acting is more than a set of skills—that it is also a way of interacting with the world. Spatz argues that gender, cultural practices, race and class are not simply extra elements with which acting must contend, but “epistemic fields which intersect with acting most directly at the level of technique” (Spatz, 2015, p. 153). Age is another such epistemic field but its relationship to actor practice is usually only considered in relation to the age of the performer, where it plays a role through the actor’s experience, bodily presence and physical capabilities. What this thesis seeks to understand is how the age of the audience, the other party in the children’s theatre relationship, intersects with actor practice.

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*augmenting engagement, learning and cultural citizenship for children through ArtPlay workshops with artists* (Jeanneret & Brown, 2013).
1.3 Key Terms

This section lists the definitions of key terms used in this thesis and outlines how they were decided upon. Some of the terms (e.g. ‘practice’ and ‘participation’) will be discussed further throughout the thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Children from birth to twelve years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>A live performance event encompassing a range of styles and forms including clowning, comedy and dance-theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre with children</td>
<td>Theatre in which children participate as devisors or performers of the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre for children</td>
<td>Theatre that is performed by adults for child audience members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>The people attending theatre for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Children involved in devising or performing theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>A person who creates theatre, drawing on their own experiences and skills as a performer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>The act of “doing things with and for other people within a purposeful, informed, ethical and aesthetic framework” (Ewing &amp; Smith, 2001, p. 16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Summary of key terms

1.3.1 Theatre and actors.

The broad definition of theatre used in this thesis reflects the practical reality of modern actors’ professional lives, where they may work across different creative disciplines and draw on diverse skills such as devising, dancing, clowning, and improvising (Throsby & Zednick, 2010). Boundaries between established theatrical forms are often blurred and performers’ tendency to move across them dilutes distinctions made between different professional titles such as comedian, theatre maker and actor (Richards, 2003; Thornton, 2005). New and blended theatrical forms also challenge the distinction made between ‘performers’, as practitioners who express versions of themselves, and ‘actors’ who interpret roles (Kirby, 1995; Schechner, 1982). Even practitioners working in the more specialised field of theatre with children are described by a proliferation of terms. Internationally, several are used including ‘actor-teacher’ (Jackson & Vine, 2013), ‘arts instructor’ (Kim, 2015), ‘Theatre in Education actor’ (Hennessey, 1998), ‘teaching artist’
(Booth, 2003) and ‘artist teacher’ (Thornton, 2005). These titles attempt to capture the combinations of aesthetic and educational work that actors undertake in schools, youth theatres and public settings such as galleries and museums.

Uncertainty around terminology is reflected in the difficulty that practitioners have in naming and defining their practice. In the survey for this research the participants were asked to describe themselves as professional practitioners. One third of them identify primarily as actors, a third as theatre makers and a third as performing artists (see section 5.1). Only two identify with a single term, reflecting the multiple skills and roles that actor practice typically involves across diverse contexts. While acknowledging that theatre performers can be described by multiple terms, for clarity, this study refers to all the participants as actors. To distinguish between the actors participating in this study, and actors in the wider population, references to the former are capitalised from this point on as ‘the Actors’.

1.3.2 Theatre with and for children.

Echoing the many terms used to describe practitioners, there are also several terms used to describe theatre involving children, including ‘theatre for young people’, ‘theatre for young audiences’ and ‘theatre with, for and by children’. I have chosen to use the term ‘theatre with and for children’ because it acknowledges the spectrum of participation that children may experience in the creation and/or reception of the work. This term, and its relevance to the typology of actor practice developed as part of this study, will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

1.3.3 Audience and participants.

The range of participation afforded to children in contemporary theatre is reflected in the words used to describe young people in these experiences. In theatre for children they are usually referred to as ‘the audience’ or as ‘spectators’ but in theatre with children they are more commonly referred to as ‘participants’ or as ‘actors’. Sherman (2016) argues that these words have “hidden sensory biases” (p. 24). For example, ‘spectator’ suggests a passive state that may not accurately reflect the emotional, intellectual and physical involvement that a person may feel when watching a theatre production. Sherman solves this problem by using the word ‘attendant’ to describe any non-performers in a theatre
work. While it is tempting to use this all-encompassing phrase, at times throughout this thesis it was important to clearly identify the roles that children take on or are placed in in the theatre. In these cases, I have therefore used a more specific term, such as ‘audience member’ or ‘youth theatre participant’.

1.3.4 Practice

During the early stages of this research it became evident that ‘practice’ was a concept with multiple interpretations that needed to be explored and defined by myself and the participating Actors. An analysis of practice by Ewing and Smith (2001) resonated with my personal experience as an actor and offered a strong framework for the research. A discussion of practice, and of Ewing and Smith’s work, is presented below.

1.4 A Framework for Practice: Doing, Knowing, Being and Becoming

Professional practice has been theorised as both a personal (Schön, 1991) and social (Lave & Wenger, 1991) undertaking that is continually shaped by experience and reflection (Palmer, 1998; Schön, 1991). Ewing and Smith (2001) offer a framework that synthesises these elements, describing professional practice as being about “doing, knowing, being and becoming” (p.16). Professional theatre actor practice can therefore be seen to include the skills, knowledge and techniques that actors use to create theatre, the motivations, goals, beliefs and values driving their work, and the personal, social and artistic outcomes of it. These elements align with the two themes of this thesis: the characteristics of practice, and the way practice is shaped by working with children. Ewing and Smith’s framework has therefore been used to guide this study of actor practice.

Doing, knowing, being and becoming underpins a collaborative exploration of professional practice initiated by Higgs and Titchen (2001), which compares three relational professions: health care, education and the creative arts. Intersections between these three fields occur on several levels. At the career level, they can be combined to create hybrid professions. For example, health care and the creative arts come together in the professions of art therapies, and teaching artist practice is a collaboration between education and the arts. At the level of practice, the three professions are linked by some shared qualities. These include:
• the need to serve the ‘client’ (i.e. the patient, student or audience member) in an ethical, skilful way,
• sensitivity to context, and
• an awareness of how to use experience to inform and transform future practice.

Another concept common to health care, education and the creative arts is artistry. A perennial preoccupation of studies of practice, artistry refers to the expert, often tacit, elements of practice that transform it from adherence to a codified set of actions to a craft. Ewing and Smith, and other authors in the collection (e.g. Andresen and Fredericks, 2001, pp.72-89), note the difference between the propositional knowledge of technical skills and processes, and the artistry of practice. They propose that rather than being conceptualised as expertise achieved through experience, artistry can be considered as the thread of “aesthetic judgment” running through every stage of practice (Ewing & Smith, 2001, p. 22). Ewing and Smith capture this idea by describing practice as “doing things with and for other people within a purposeful, informed, ethical and aesthetic framework” (p. 16). Their definition acknowledges the ongoing ethical dimension of practice that connects what people do and know with who they are and who they are becoming.

1.4.1 Being, doing and knowing: Characteristics of actor practice

The individual and contextualised nature of actor practice is foregrounded in Zarrilli’s observation that, “Every time an actor performs, he or she implicitly enacts a “theory” of acting” that is influenced by context, history and culture. (Zarrilli, 1995, p. 4). This view does not mean that actors cannot learn from each other, only that experience and circumstance must be acknowledged when examining actor practice. Situated, individualised stories of practice like Dario Fo’s Tricks of the Trade may, in fact, resonate more deeply with actors than how-to manuals offering instruction on acting technique because they allow the reader to determine the relevance of the author’s experience to their own situation. They also acknowledge that, much more than a collection of skills, professional practice is intimately entangled with identity and belief. Certainly, the concept of ‘the actor’s life’ can exert a powerful influence on the way actors

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5 Dario Fo’s memoir, Tricks of the Trade, is a beguiling and informative exploration of the Italian actor, writer and political activist’s origins, craft and ideology (Fo, 1991).
perceive themselves and their work (Crawford, 2015a; Moore, 2004; Nobis, 2015). It explains the compelling nature of books like Simon Callow’s appropriately named memoir, *Being an Actor* (Callow, 1984), that, in addition to explaining acting technique, explore the emotional, moral and political dimensions, or what Ewing and Smith call the ‘being’, of practice.

Being is self-evidently personalised, so research that hopes to consider this facet of practice must consult with practitioners themselves. As Higgs and Titchen (2001) contend, “To understand the roles, needs and realities of participants in professional practice, we need to hear their voices, their knowings and their stories” (p. 8). This thesis presents nine such stories with the aim of understanding what characterises the practice of actors who work with children.

### 1.4.2 Becoming: Shaping actor practice

The culminating concept in Ewing and Smith’s framework, ‘becoming’, is aligned with the word ‘shaping’. The authors describe becoming as the process by which people use self-reflection and feedback from others to “grow in and through their practice” (Ewing & Smith, 2001, p. 25), reconciling their goals with their experience. They identify three stages in this constantly evolving process: the stage of “self-focused survival”, the stage of “self-centred concerns” and the “other-centred” stage (p. 25). These stages broadly describe the progression from a focus on the personal acquisition of basic professional competencies towards a focus on the needs of the ‘client’, or in the case of the actor, the audience or non-professional participants. This progression is individualised and shaped by context, which includes both the immediate circumstances of the practitioner’s work and the wider social circumstances in which it occurs. Thus, an actor’s becoming may be influenced by, amongst other factors, their personal beliefs and prior experiences, the theatrical setting of each performance and attitudes towards theatre in their community.

Ewing and Smith’s description of becoming as a progression through three stages of professional development does not suggest that when practice has reached the other-centred stage it has reached a point of perfection at which further development is unnecessary or impossible—becoming is not conflated with arriving. Expert practitioners continue to seek out new challenges and experiences, and to experiment with different
approaches and techniques. Their practice is therefore in a perpetual process of being shaped.

What, then, does shaping mean, in the context of actor practice? To be shaped is to be changed in some way—to be influenced, directed, oriented towards, moulded, refined, modified or developed. Depending on the theatrical experiences involved, the process of becoming in and through actor practice can have positive or negative connotations and can range from complete transformation to a gentle change of emphasis. How actor practice is shaped by creating theatre with and for children is therefore a complex question that needs to be addressed in conjunction with an exploration of the characteristics of actor practice that focuses on actors’ ways of being, doing and knowing. The literature review in the next chapter uses the concepts of being, doing, knowing and becoming to consider research that investigates: why actors and other artists work with children; what skills, beliefs, knowledge and methods they draw on; and how their practice is influenced by their interactions with children.
Chapter 2  Literature Review

When I began this research, I expected to be mainly consulting literature about theatre with and for children. That literature includes much compelling research about how children perceive theatre (Klein, 2005; Omasta, 2011; Reason, 2006, 2010) but it gives little attention to actor practice. There is, however, a body of literature focused on how artists working in all artforms engage with children. It explores the approaches, skills and attitudes shared by artists who work with children and was therefore a valuable point of reference for this research.

The first section of this literature review considers the demographics of Australian actors who create theatre with and for children. It then moves to a discussion that situates actor practice within the wider field of artists from all disciplines who work with children in school and community contexts. Finally, it examines research about actors who create theatre for children. Throughout, Ewing and Smith’s framework of professional practice (Ewing & Smith, 2001) guides a discussion of the skills, motivations, goals, values and professional development of actors who work with children.

2.1 Who Are The Actors Who Work With Children?

Throsby and Petetskaya (2017) estimate that in 2017 there were approximately 7,900 actors and directors out of nearly 50,000 practicing professional artists in Australia. In common with other artist groups, the actor population is less culturally diverse than the general Australian population. Unlike other artist groups, however, there are more male (61%) than female actors (39%) in Australia. Australian actors are well educated, with 77% having undertaken formal training. Despite these high levels of education, 32% of actors say that on the job experience is their most important source of training. In addition to this learning-by-doing, or what Crawford (2005) only half-jokingly calls, “making it up as they go along” (p. 1), 45% of actors are engaged in some form of formal ongoing training, prompting Throsby and Petetskaya (2017) to speculate that, “Overall, lifelong

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6 Since 1983 Macquarie University, with funding from the Australia Council for the Arts, has conducted six reports on the living and working conditions of professional artists in Australia. In this latest report (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2017) actors and directors are placed in the same category. It was not possible to ascertain from the report what percentage of the 7,900 actors/directors quoted here refers to actors. It is, however, likely to be over 7,000 as there are few professional directors in Australia, and the previous report (Throsby & Zednick, 2010) found that there were approximately 7,000 actors out of 44,000 practicing professional artists in Australia at that time.
learning may perhaps be a stronger reality in the arts than in many other professions” (p. 7).

Like all artists, Australian actors have what are known as portfolio careers. This means that they spend a little more than half their time on their core creative practice and just under half on other arts related or non-arts related work (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2017). Arts-related work refers to activities that draw directly on actors’ skills, many of which, such as facilitating private drama classes, involve children. In the twelve months to April 2006, 30% of children aged five to fourteen attended a performing arts event outside school hours and 4% had participated in drama activities, mostly through drama lessons (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). They may have also encountered theatre through street theatre performances or the incursions and artist residencies available to schools. While no figures are available for how many actors work in these contexts, the number of children participating in theatrical encounters would suggest that a significant number of actors work with children in arts or arts-related jobs at some point during their career.

2.2 Actors Creating Theatre With Children

Actors create theatre with children in education settings, theatres, the street and other public spaces such as galleries, museums and children’s arts studios. In response to a perceived lack of knowledge about how artists working with children in all artforms engage with children, a growing body of research has examined their practice in schools and community settings (Brown, 2014; Galton, 2008; Jeanneret & Brown, 2013; Pringle, 2002; Pringle, 2009; Rabkin et al., Waldorf, 2002). These studies examine what motivates artists to engage with this work, the goals they have for children, the skills they bring to successful encounters and, in two cases, how these experiences shape their practice (Ascenso, 2016; Mages, 2007). These studies also note that, although encounters between artists and children are influenced by the duration, setting and purpose of the programs, patterns are also evident across contexts.

2.2.1 Professional identities of actors and other artists who work with children.

A significant thread of the literature about artists working with children is concerned with identity, focusing on the difficulties that artists experience because of their indeterminate
roles in these jobs. For example, artists working in schools are employed to create art with children precisely because they have specialist art making skills, yet they are also charged with delivering educational experiences. Artists’ work with children in school and non-school settings is often automatically associated with teaching. Teaching is, in turn, also sometimes viewed in narrow terms and is linked to instruction and direction. Some artists experience a tension between the simultaneous roles of creative practitioner and teacher, and the implied behaviours and practices commonly associated with them (Pringle, 2009; Thornton, 2005; Waldorf, 2002). Rejecting the assumption that teaching requires them to instruct students or manage student behaviour, some artists prefer to position themselves as facilitators or co-learners (Galton, 2008; Jeanneret & Brown, 2013; Pringle, 2002; Pringle, 2009). They actively emphasise these not-teaching identities at the start of their encounters with children by sharing information about their personal and professional lives. Establishing relationships that lie outside familiar teacher-student interactions allows them to model what it means to be an artist, pique children’s curiosity, propose creative challenges, and use flexible strategies for behaviour management (Brown, 2014; Galton, 2008; Pringle, 2002).

The ambiguous role of the teaching artist can also be a source of conflict between artists and teachers if they have different goals for, and approaches to, art making and classroom management (Galton, 2008). It is important to note, though, that these observations do not imply that artists have superior abilities to teachers. Expert art making knowledge and skill is no guarantee of an artist’s ability to communicate with students (Kim, 2015), and many effective school teachers are also accomplished artists (Pringle, 2002). As Risner (2014) notes, teachers may be justifiably wary of teaching artists who do not understand the complexities of the classroom situation.

Theatre in Education productions contain both performance and workshop elements and actors working in this area may also experience unease about their professional identities and responsibilities. Jackson says the ‘in-between’ world of Theatre in Education is perfectly captured by a school student’s question to a Theatre in Education company: “So are you really a theatre company then?” (Jackson, 2013, p. 120). In contrast, other Theatre in Education actors are quite certain of their roles. Milne (1998) quotes Barbara
Ciszewska, a former director of Arena Theatre, a Victorian-based company⁷, as saying, “We’re not teachers, we’re actors; teachers teach and actors act. Why should we pretend to take over the teacher’s role in the classroom?” (p. 163).

Although tensions certainly do exist between artistic and teaching roles it is important not to over-emphasise them. A report on the role of artist-educators working for the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) program found that although some of the participating teaching artists struggled with aspects of working in schools, such as sharing their arts practice through an integrated curriculum, the majority (75%) were comfortable with their dual roles and considered them to be complementary parts of their practice (Waldorf 2002). The term ‘teaching artist’ may itself be misleading, suggesting, as it does, that there are two primary roles in arts work with children. Jeanneret and Brown’s study of arts programs at ArtPlay, a public children’s arts space, showed that artists engage children by adopting a range of other roles including “model, facilitator, monitor and director” (Jeanneret & Brown, 2013, p. 23).

In contrast to the many titles used and roles adopted by actors creating theatre with children, actors who create theatre for children, (i.e. actors who perform theatre to child audiences) are mostly known simply as ‘actors’. This may be due to the fact that few actors perform exclusively to child audiences, but it could also be because this work is not recognised as a distinct profession. Two Australia Council for the Arts reports on Australian artists’ work, pay and backgrounds offered ‘children’s/young adult writer’ as a category for authors, but no corresponding one for actors who work with children (Katz, 2005; Throsby & Zednik, 2010). The limited research about actors who work with children that is discussed later in this chapter suggests that while their practice does share much with acting for adults, it is also distinguished by some unique qualities.

Actors frequently create theatre both with and for children, but I will consider the literature about them separately, beginning with that which investigates the practice of actors who create theatre with children.

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⁷ At the time this quote was given Arena Theatre was a Theatre in Education company. It has since changed its artistic focus.
2.2.2 Motivations of actors and other artists to work with children.

Research about artists working with children in schools and communities reveals that they are motivated by a range of factors. Likely due to the insecure financial status of creative work (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2017; Throsby & Zednick, 2010), artists consistently report that they value the opportunities for paid employment offered by working with children (Ascenso, 2016; James, 2006; Pringle, 2002; Rabkin et al., 2011) but other motivations have been found to be equally or more important. These include variety (Animarts, 2003), the artists’ desire to share their passion for education and the arts (Imms, Jeanneret & Stevens-Ballenger, 2011; Pringle, 2002; Rabkin et al., 2011; Waldorf, 2002), and the positive influence working with children has on artists’ practice (Ascenso, 2016; Rabkin et al., 2011; Waldorf, 2002).

Waldorf (2002) discovered that most teaching artists working in the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) program had established views about the importance of arts education, often shaped by their own positive or negative experiences as students. As one artist said, “Theatre arts, choir, and dance shaped me as a person. I vowed to try to have that kind of impact on kids” (p. 6). Significantly, over 75% of participants in that study had a family member who was a teacher or came from families that valued education highly, suggesting that they were familiar with, and held positive beliefs about, school-based education. They saw their work as arts advocacy and were motivated by a desire to enrich children’s lives through the pleasure of making art. They wanted to develop children’s confidence, curiosity, thinking processes and ways of learning and their work placed an emphasis on collaboration and problem solving. These findings resonate with other studies which show that artists want to share their arts practice with children (Brown, 2014; Galton, 2008; Jeanneret & Brown, 2013; Pringle, 2002). Artists hope that by doing so they can stimulate children’s creativity (Animarts, 2003; Brown, 2014; Pringle, 2002), offer them opportunities to express themselves (Galton, 2008; Rabkin et al., 2011) and nurture in them a passion for the arts (Ascenso, 2016; Brown, 2014). The artists participating in these studies are equally driven, however, by the personal benefits they receive by engaging with children. These include enjoyment, a commitment to social change and professional development.
The pleasure of helping children develop their own ideas was a key motivation for two teaching artists in a study analysing the psychosocial development of practitioners working with children in City Drama, an inner-city drama education program (Mages, 2007). Mages’ study has relevance to this research because it focused on two actors, rather than artists working in other artforms, and therefore offers insights specific to actor practice. Mages ranked the practitioners’ pedagogical focus from external through to personal, relational and then societal outcomes. Although separated by fifteen years of experience, both actors aimed to give children a voice and a creative outlet. They trusted the children to make informed choices in their everyday lives, based on what they had learned in the program. The older actor had an additional, overarching ambition for the betterment of society through the grassroots work of teaching children to express themselves with theatrical improvisation and game-play. He observed that, “Kids want a few basic things. They want to know that they’re safe. They want to know that they’re cared for. And they want to know that they’re heard. Well we do all of that” (p.104). He added that these social goals were happily linked to his personal love of theatrical play and improvisation, which he viewed as a skill that anyone can do “once you find your voice” (p. 102). In contrast, although the younger actor was committed to the social aims of the work, his views were more closely linked to his career goals. He had plans to leave the company so he could experience a range of performance opportunities not available to him at City Drama, including creating theatre for, instead of with, children.

Ascenso’s study for London Music Masters (LMM) explored a similar realm to Mages’ study. It examined the emotional, artistic and social motivations of musicians working with children (Ascenso, 2016). LMM engages professional classical musicians to teach instrumental music to primary-school-aged children and, for many, the sheer pleasure of sharing music with a new and receptive audience is a strong attraction of the work. As one musician said of witnessing children’s engagement in music, “It’s very uplifting!” (p. 27). Several participants also commented on the additionally motivating power of what Ascenso calls ‘generativity’, or the sense of responsibility to pass on their love of classical music to the next generation. The musicians believe that a love of music can benefit individual children if it inspires them to become practicing musicians, and that it can contribute to the future sustainability of the artform if the children become new audiences.

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8 They were referred to as ‘actor-educators’ in the study.
While it is difficult to know if the musicians’ “long-term hope that [children will] keep in contact with music” (p. 9) can be realised, a report for The Australia Council for the Arts, *Arts in Daily Life: Australian participation in the arts* (Australia Council for the Arts, 2014), offers some support for their optimism. It found that 35% of current Australian adults were not taken to arts and cultural events as children. Of this group, 59% are now involved in the arts as audiences and 37% are involved as creators. This compares with people who, as children, were taken to arts activities by their parents at least once a month: as adults, 80% of this group attend arts events, and 63% engage with the arts as creators. These statistics suggest that exposure to the arts in childhood has a lasting effect on a person’s interest and access to the arts in later life.

### 2.2.3 Skills and techniques of actors and other artists working with children.

The results of numerous studies of artists working with children offer a broad consensus about the skills required to engage children in meaningful arts experiences. In a report aiming to acknowledge, evaluate and raise the standard of this work, Lord, Sharp, Lee, Cooper and Grayson (2012) consulted with artists, managers, educators and programmers to identify the characteristics of high quality arts practice with children and young people. The final list recognised the following qualities:

1. striving for excellence,
2. being authentic,
3. being exciting, inspiring and engaging,
4. ensuring a positive, child-centred experience,
5. actively involving children and young people,
6. providing a sense of personal progression, and
7. developing a sense of ownership and belonging.

These qualities reflect a mixture of the goals and approaches of individuals, organisations and programs and, as such, can be interpreted widely. A strength of the report is that it considered how the details of quality arts experiences are nuanced by context, such as the size of the organisation or whether the work is with, for or by children. It noted, for example, that concepts such as ‘actively involving children’ are expressed differently in theatre with children and in theatre for children. Artists play a key role in realising these
qualities in both contexts and in the following section I will discuss studies that have explored this contribution in school and community settings.

Building on Waldorf’s study of teaching artists in the CAPE program (Waldorf, 2002), the Teaching Artist Research Project (TARP) conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago (Rabkin et al., 2011) investigated the practices of teaching artists in a range of arts education sites, focusing strongly on their work in schools. The study was motivated by a view that the absence of such research may prevent schools and communities from drawing on artists’ readily available but invisible skills and restrict efforts to advocate for their work. The researchers surveyed more than 3550 artists and program managers, and interviewed 211 artists, teachers and other professionals associated with teaching artist programs in twelve communities across the country. The emphasis on school programs focused the research on the teaching qualities of teaching artists. It provides a comparison with a smaller, in-depth English study, *Creative Practitioners in Schools and Classrooms*, which explored the pedagogies of artists working in schools through the Creative Partnerships program (Galton, 2008). In this project, three partnerships involving eleven artists were studied using observations and interviews with artists, students and teachers.

The two studies first defined, respectively, good teaching practice (Rabkin et al., 2011) and pedagogy (Galton, 2008). Drawing on a range of sources, Rabkin et al. identified three main principles of good teaching: teaching that is meaningful and student-centred; teaching that is collaborative, supportive and social; and teaching that is cognitive (i.e. in-depth). These qualities align with the characteristics of quality arts experiences for children identified by Lord et al. (2012) noted above. Differentiating pedagogy from teaching, Galton says that teaching is just one aspect of pedagogy, which includes the wider moral and social context of activities with children. For both Galton and Rabkin et al., the subject matter of these activities is important, but less so than the process by which practitioners “make judgements about the *fitness for purpose* of particular actions within a particular context” (Galton’s emphasis) (Galton, 2008, p. 8).

Galton’s work was partly driven by the observation that many practitioners attribute the success of both artists and teachers more to their personality traits than their acquired pedagogic know-how. Galton rejects this analysis and his view is supported by a study of teaching artists in South Korea which found that many teaching artists there have a poor understanding of arts education pedagogy and would benefit from training in children’s
personal and educational needs (Kim, 2015). Galton and Rabkin et al. shared an ambition to articulate the dispositions and skills of teaching artists so they could be consciously incorporated into future arts education practice. That is also a goal of this research.

Rabkin et al. (2011) sought to understand how teaching artists realise the three principles of good teaching mentioned above and to discover what distinguishes their practice from the work of classroom teachers. Concurring with other studies (Brown, 2014; Pringle, 2002), they found that, while few teaching artists have undertaken formal teacher training, they have a mixture of attitudes and learned approaches that contribute to their success when working with children. They found that the work of teaching artists is usually student-centred and is based on a belief that students’ ideas, experiences and values should be given a voice through the arts. This is combined with teaching artists’ belief that students need and enjoy genuine challenges that allow them to make connections between their own experiences and the broader world. Most teaching artists acknowledge the importance of imparting discipline-specific skills but they are more interested in engaging children in emotionally, physically and intellectually resonant experiences. These experiences are often hands-on and involve a degree of risk, collaboration and problem-solving. Rabkin et al. found that teaching artist work is characterised by playful social interactions and is honed by practise, experimentation and ongoing reflection. These qualities are closely tied to practitioners’ concepts of art making as an open-ended lifelong process of discovery which Rabkin et al. identified as a powerful model for student engagement.

The methods of teaching artists described by Rabkin et al. (2011) align with those demonstrated by artists in the Creative Partnerships program (Galton, 2008). Galton also noted that the relationships the artists established with children were a significant feature of their practice. As noted earlier in the section on identity, some of the artists in this study differentiated themselves from teachers by sharing details about their lives with the students and outlining how they had become professional artists. The difference between the artists and teachers was felt most strongly by students when the artists accepted their ideas, gave them open-ended tasks that offered them choice, and resisted solving their problems for them. One artist explained to the researchers that he aims to “be a person who responds to ideas that the children are coming up with and then bring our practice to share” (p.32). The students appreciated this approach and said that making their own
decisions was “magic” (p. 40). The artists stimulated the students’ ideas by creating “cognitive conflict” (p. 33) rather than offering a predetermined pathway towards a completed artistic product. In doing so, they demonstrated that doubt and experimentation are key features of the artistic process. This approach did not always work, though, because too much choice and too little direction sometimes led to confusion and the artists were then forced to clarify the framework of the task.

The second part of the quote given above—“bringing our practice to share”—is significant. The artists often modelled their practice by working alongside children, which is a strategy that encouraged collaboration and co-learning. Collaboration and co-learning are processes identified in other research about artists working in community and school settings. An Arts Council England study examining the role of artists in ‘sites for learning’ found that co-constructivist learning was a significant feature of this work. It was achieved through “discussion and the exchanging of ideas and experiences” as participants and artists worked alongside one another (Pringle, 2002, p. 8). In this project, the artists acted as facilitators rather than directors and encouraged participants to explore their own ideas within a guiding framework. Pringle linked this approach to Lave and Wenger’s concept of ‘communities of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991), in which novices or apprentices learn skills and philosophical approaches to practices by working alongside accomplished masters. This relationship is common in youth theatre where teaching artists act as mentors (McDonald, 2005), working alongside participants who may be only a few years younger than themselves. McLean and Richer’s report on Australian theatre for young people recommended that youth theatre emphasise this reconfiguration of the relationships “between artmakers, arts educators, and young people as partners in creating and learning cultures” to assist arts practice (McLean & Richer, 2003, p. 5).

The artists in Pringle’s research (2002) said that their practice was enriched by the partnerships formed during the work but noted some limits to co-learning, including the need to direct some projects more explicitly to meet the requirements of a public outcome. In one of the few explicit references to children in the study, which did, however, include several projects involving young people, one artist said that collaboration was difficult with young children because they need more direction than adults.

The balance between collaboration and direction in artists’ work with children was explored in greater depth in Brown’s multi-dimensional portrait of artists working at a
public children’s arts space, ArtPlay (Brown, 2014). An artist working with school groups there commented that practitioners need to collaborate with children by working alongside them, whilst simultaneously maintaining an awareness of the big picture to which the activities are contributing so they may judge when more specific direction is required. Collaboration was also evident between and within families in the ArtPlay workshops, with artists encouraging co-operation, group problem-solving and friendships. Collaboration and direction were both shaped by workshop context. Short, one-off programs required stronger frameworks than multi-session programs that allowed participants to build relationships with one another and explore their ideas together.

2.2.4 How working with children influences the practice of actors and other artists.

The literature shows that artists have personal and professional motivations for working with children. They believe that their practice is positively influenced by the work and that it offers them opportunities to make a worthwhile contribution to children’s lives. Many of the teaching artists interviewed by Waldorf (2002) said that sharing their practice with children “deepened their own understanding of their craft” or reminded them of the importance of “creative thinking and risk taking” (p. 12). Some also made professional connections through the CAPE program that led to future employment. The practicalities of school-based teaching artist work did, however, present some difficulties for artists. These included low pay, insecure employment, the frustration of working in multiple sites, and the time taken away from the artists’ personal arts practice. While the study acknowledged these industrial problems, it did not explore if or how they impact upon artists’ engagement with children.

The ways that working with children shape artists’ practice was explored in detail through the study of musicians working for London Music Masters (LMM) cited earlier in this chapter (Ascenso, 2016). LMM was concerned that if working with children is continually characterised as an altruistic, one-way exchange, musicians’ contribution may be undervalued. LLM speculated that this could deter musicians from seeking work that could offer them valuable professional development. To challenge this view, LMM commissioned research into the reciprocal effect of community engagement on musicians. It found that musicians taking part in the program were deeply affected by the
work, especially by being reminded “in a very real way of the power of music” (p.7). Through direct engagement with children, they experienced a renewed appreciation of the core purpose of their work, which is to communicate with audiences “on an emotional level” (p.7). The musicians noted that this purpose could often be lost in the orchestral music world where adult audiences can be simultaneously more critical and more reserved than children. The social experience of working with children was welcomed by the musicians, who typically spend many hours a day in solitary practice or performance. They said community music helped them to develop personal connections with teachers, other musicians and children. It also helped them to improve their communication skills so they could engage more effectively with audiences through their music and through verbal interactions. For some musicians, the improvisational aspects of working with children forced them to reassess their habitual expectations about musical outcomes and methods, and to enhance their personal creativity in ways that their orchestral work did not permit. Additionally, the work offered an opportunity to critically reflect on their own childhood musical experiences and to draw on them in their practice.

Some of the strongest responses from musicians working with LMM related to the personal development they experienced through working with children. This included enhanced feelings of “wellbeing and personal identity” derived from the opportunity to support children’s creativity and learning (p. 3). The work also helped the musicians to develop a better understanding of child development and of “how to behave around children and how to treat them” (p. 17). The musicians noted that they had learnt to take on children’s emotional and intellectual perspectives so they could explain complex tasks and adapt the program to each child’s needs. This approach had the additional benefit of reprioritising the musicians’ concerns and goals about music and their lives more broadly.

The studies considered in this section of the literature review note that the practice of artists working with children is shaped by multiple factors, including the site and duration of the encounter and the number and age of the children involved (Brown, 2014; Jeanneret & Brown, 2013; Galton, 2008; Pringle, 2002; Rabkin et al.). Lord et al. (2012) argue that these factors are more significant than the differences between artforms. While this may be true for the purposes of assessing the quality of arts experiences for children, as that study did, differences between artforms may be important for other reasons, such as for offering artists specific direction about how to engage children through their artform.
Theatre is a temporal and relational art that often places strong emphasis on interactions between people. These qualities may be highlighted in the methods actors use when working with children, which may be different to the methods used by artists working in other artforms. The discussion of the unique details of actor practice in this thesis aims to enrich current understandings of the general principles of practice of artists working with children identified by previous research.

2.3 Actors Creating Theatre For Children

The studies of teaching artist practice discussed above reflect researchers’ interest in the motivations, goals, beliefs and skills of artists working with children. In contrast to these detailed studies, discussions of theatre for children rarely focus on actor practice. A review of Australian theatre for young people conducted for the Australia Council for the Arts made just one reference to actor practice (Australia Council for the Arts & NSW Ministry for the Arts, 2003). It observed that, with few training opportunities available to actors, the sector lacks performers “with an awareness and confidence in communicating with children” (p. 9). The review identified four desirable qualities of good theatre for children, but these were only discussed in relation to the productions, not to actor practice.

The following section examines the limited literature about actors who create theatre for children. I will first consider research that explores how actors create theatre for children and then turn to one significant study that investigated the motivations of two actors.

2.3.1 An intricate communicative web.

Oily Cart is an English theatre company specialising in theatre for the very young and for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). In her study of the company’s creative development of a theatre work for babies, Young observed that, despite a growing availability of art experiences for children under the age of two, there were, at the time of her research, few highly experienced practitioners working in this field. A new production by Oily Cart presented an opportunity to identify the acting skills that contribute to successful theatre productions for this age group (Young, 2004). Through interviews, observations and direct participation as an audience member, Young found that the actors played an important and complex role in facilitating and guiding the experiences of children aged between six months and two years, and their parents. The
long-term development of the work was important to the actors and included an extended research period where ideas were tested with trial audiences. The actors took on several roles in the final semi-improvised production. At times, they acted as performers and at others they operated as facilitators, supporting children and carers to engage in playful interactions. “Reading the atmosphere” (p. 24) of the performance, and building on small, seemingly inconsequential actions, the actors created “an intricate communicative web” (p. 19) of words, sounds, props, facial expressions and movement that responded to the audience’s diverse needs based on age, ability and interest. These strategies were most evident when the actors were working with babies. In these encounters, the actors ‘matched’ the babies’ vocal sounds and physical movements, and presented simple, clear facial expressions. These interactions, and the more robust exchanges they had with toddlers, created a sympathetic and playful mood that was suited to the participants’ individual preferences and requirements. The actors’ restrained exchanges with babies were based on the knowledge that infants prefer to interact with their carers, and the adult audience members found this approach to be “gentle, smooth and reassuring” (p. 20). The actors’ flexibility was also evident in the way they quickly identified and adopted the ‘house style’ of behaviour management in educational settings, offering the professional carers (i.e. childcare workers) subtle cues that affirmed and supported their interactions with the children. The actors also used a variety of strategies to accommodate children who behaved in unexpected or disruptive ways. In doing so, they attempted to balance the dramaturgical needs of the performance with their relationship with the audience.

Young concluded that, although some of the skills the actors used in this show would be developed in any performing arts training course, others were unique to working with babies, toddlers and their parents and carers, and should therefore be acknowledged and valued. Her study offers a rare analysis of the specialised nature of actor practice required for the creation of theatre for children.

2.3.2 Knowing the audience.

A strong theme emerging from Young’s study was the actors’ ability to set everyone in the audience at ease, using different strategies for parents, carers and children of different

9 ‘Matching’ describes a specific kind of interaction in which the performers interpret the babies’ actions. It is not the same as copying because it aims to initiate a non-verbal conversation with the babies rather than merely reflecting the movement back to them.
Acting with care: How actor practice is shaped by creating theatre with and for children

Jennifer Andersen

Actors working for Imaginary Theatre, an Australian children’s theatre company, faced a similar challenge when the company created stage adaptations of the popular Australian Tashi novels for audiences aged between three and ten years, an age range that encompasses diverse needs. The director’s doctoral thesis offers a detailed account of how the actors addressed these different needs by developing their knowledge of children (Radvan, 2012). The company recognised that “theatre for children needs to know its audience very well” (Radvan, 2012, p. 23). They drew on research by Klein (1992), who observed that actors creating theatre for children need to understand how children of different ages perceive theatre, to avoid ‘folk’ interpretations of their behaviour as audience members. Radvan takes Klein’s idea further, though, proposing that actors’ own experiences of childhood do not qualify them to understand the childhood of today’s children. Radvan’s view contrasts with the findings of the LMM research (Ascenso, 2016), which found that musicians’ reflections on their own childhood musical experiences informed their interactions with children in a positive way.

The Imaginary Theatre actors were committed to developing what Radvan calls a “dramaturgy of the audience”¹⁰, based on theories of how children of different ages experience theatre and research into the audience’s responses. They adopted an intensive regime of observation and audience consultation to inform this dramaturgy, including:

1. the director observing the audience from within the auditorium,
2. the actors observing the audience from the stage, and
3. the actors talking to members of the audience during the interval and after the show.

The personalised non-performative encounters between actors and audiences described in point 3 were designed to show children that they were being seen by the actors. Through these interactions, the actors developed “relaxed and natural” relationships with the young audience both on and off stage (p. 43) and built a store of knowledge about children as individuals and as age groups. Radvan argues that these one-on-one conversations fostered relationships with children and gave them permission to respond to the performance as individuals. This strategy resonates with the teaching artist literature which notes that artists develop positive relationships with participants through

¹⁰ This is a term coined by Volker Klotz to describe how the audience and their responses can be a central organising consideration in the theatre making process (Wartemann, 2009).
informal interactions (Brown, 2014; Galton, 2008). An issue not explained by Radvan is the question of how children who have not had an individualised encounter with the actors experience the performance.

Reflecting on the process of making the *Tashi* shows, Radvan identifies some specific qualities required of actors who perform to children. He finds that actors need to be child-centred, which he interprets as having a genuine interest in, and liking for, children without demanding their “unlimited attention and adoration” (p. 44). The artistic collective of Imaginary Theatre, which includes actors, devised a company manifesto that states their views on children. It says that children are complete and competent individuals who have their own needs, desires and fears, and who have a right to high quality theatre experiences and respectful relationships with adults. This philosophical framing of the child audience informed the technical processes used by the actors to make the *Tashi* shows and echoes the studies of actors creating theatre with children discussed earlier, (Australia Council for the Arts & NSW Ministry for the Arts, 2003; Lord et al., 2012).

### 2.3.3 Acting and presenting.

An acting technique that Radvan identifies as being suited to performing to children is that of “show[ing] that you are showing” (Radvan, 2012, p. 73). This phrase refers to a form of acting that balances ‘being in character’, with ‘presenting a character’. The former is associated with naturalistic acting, where the actor is emotionally and physically absorbed by their character. The latter is associated with non-naturalistic performance styles such as clowning, which overtly acknowledge the presence of the performer. Radvan says that the technique of showing that you are showing is especially useful when performing to young children who may not understand that characters are not real but are constructed by actors. It is also a useful technique for adult actors to use when they play child characters because their physical reality makes naturalistic representations of children problematic.

Radvan’s analysis of acting styles is supported by Klein’s work on children’s psychological processing of theatre (Klein, 2005). She encourages writers, directors, designers and actors to respect children’s abilities by offering them complex but developmentally targeted work, but cautions that psychological realism performance
techniques such as Method acting\(^\text{11}\) may be inappropriate for many children’s theatre scripts that require a more playful approach. Jackson (2013) adds to this with his discussion of Theatre in Education. He proposes that the multiple tasks of Theatre in Education actors, which include presenting scenes, engaging with the audience in character and facilitating discussion with the audience, require them to take on States’ three modes of performance (States, 1983). These modes are: representational (character-driven); collaborative (audience-inclusive); and self-expressive (skill-based). Jackson’s emphasis on the applied theatre tasks of Theatre in Education suggests, however, that the skills of Theatre in Education actors are determined more by the form of the work (i.e. participatory) and its function (i.e. empowerment) than the age of the audience. This idea is reinforced by the characterisation of the Theatre in Education actor as a researcher.

### 2.3.4 Actor as researcher.

This literature review began with a discussion of actors working in education and community settings as teaching artists and then moved onto an examination of the literature about actors performing to children. Theatre in Education is positioned between the two fields, straddling theatre and education, and presentation and participation. Hennessey (1998) argues that in all these areas of Theatre in Education, the actors’ work is characterised by research. Theatre in Education actors use information-gathering research when devising material and they use action research when developing that material with successive participatory audiences. As an interactive learning environment, Theatre in Education creates a unique relationship between actors and audiences and asks audiences to be directly involved in the dramaturgy or research of the work. This type of research is also used by actors working in other contexts, though, as a storyteller explained in Pringle’s research (Pringle, 2002). He said, “You don’t know what something means, particularly what a story means, until you begin to tell it with that particular audience and then the meanings emerge collaboratively through the interactions that go on” (p. 48). Hennessey acknowledges that this form of action research is not exclusive to Theatre in Education actors but he suggests that, along with devising processes, it is used more often by them than actors working in other contexts. However, like Jackson’s analysis of the three modes of Theatre in Education acting discussed

\(^{11}\) Method acting technique is an American adaptation of the acting methods developed by Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski.
earlier, the presence of children may not be the decisive factor here, as actors use these techniques in other forms of applied and participatory theatre.

2.3.5 The attraction of theatre for children.

There is little known literature about why actors create theatre for children, but the following quote expresses one actor’s perspective:

There are some actors that I have worked with who have said, “What are you doing Theatre In [sic] Education for?” As though it has no worth to them as performers. Whereas the area is much more in tune with my liking for how theatre can function—it’s lighter, more flexible and more exciting. (Anonymous, 1984, p. 22)

This emphatic defence of creating theatre for children is by Geoffrey Rush, one of Australia’s most accomplished actors. At the time of the interview from which the statement was taken, Rush was the new artistic director of Magpie, a South Australian theatre for young people company, a role to which he brought his long experience as an actor in theatre for children. There are few studies that expand upon such comments to systematically explore the motivations of actors who work with children. An exception is James’s detailed portrait of three children’s theatre practitioners (James, 2006). As an experienced producer of children’s theatre festivals in Canada, James perceived persistent prejudice against practitioners making theatre for children and wondered what would motivate artists to work in a sector that was so often dismissed as second-rate. She interviewed one director and two actor/director/theatre makers and, as such, the discussion of actor practice is closely intertwined with a consideration of other aspects of theatre creation such as writing, devising, producing and directing. Although James considered all three practitioners together and separately, my discussion of her research will focus on findings about the two actors, David Craig and Stefo Nanstou.12

Craig and Nanstou were drawn to creating theatre for young people by their determination to earn a living as actors. Craig noted proudly that after working in Theatre in Education early in his career, not only was he in a better financial position than many of his peers,

12 The two participants in this study were David Craig, a Canadian actor/theatre maker, and Stefo Nanstou, an Australian actor/theatre maker. Craig has created theatre for children of all ages, while Nanstou has specialised in making theatre for teenagers.
he regularly performed to full auditoriums, rather than being forced to settle for “sixty-three adults in some drafty place in the evening” (p. 28). Craig and Nanstou’s success has also enabled them to tour internationally, which they enjoy, and which Nanstou said was invaluable for his professional growth because it has given him the opportunity to test productions in different cultural settings and to exchange ideas with other artists.

Financial autonomy was an important motivation for both actors but they also valued the creative scope and autonomy afforded to them by working in Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA)\(^\text{13}\). They observed that mainstream theatre for adults does not readily accommodate the aesthetics or subject matter they are interested in exploring and is often characterised by poor industrial conditions for actors. They contrasted this with theatre for young people which has offered them opportunities to work in collaborative, non-hierarchical environments and to work on a “high conceptual level” (p. 90). Craig and Nanstou have expressed their creativity through multiple aspects of TYA production, including writing and directing work that is meaningful to themselves and their audiences. Both actors are interested in young people and are proud that their work has made a positive contribution to children’s lives. They believe that young people have a right to high quality theatre that is well crafted, age appropriate, has “emotional integrity” (p. 83) and communicates with the audience “on an equal level” (p. 82).

Craig and Nanstou both identified challenges with creating theatre for children and teenagers but they viewed these challenges in a positive light. The limitations of touring theatre productions include the number of actors, the size of the set, and the duration of the show, but Craig said that these strict parameters have enhanced rather than restricted his creativity. Nanstou observed that teenagers are demanding audiences because they are hard to please and because, like young children, they offer immediate, unguarded responses. He explained that this honest feedback has stretched his abilities as a performer. James’s findings can be compared with the other literature in this review that focuses on actors and teaching artists working with children in other contexts (Ascenso, 2016; Mages, 2007). These studies show that working with children can have a significant, mostly positive effect on the way artists think about their practice and their

\(^{13}\) James uses ‘Theatre for Young Audiences’ throughout her thesis to describe theatre for children up to the age of eighteen.
relationship to art and society. Working with children may also offer them new and rewarding professional opportunities.

2.4 Summary

The role that artists play in creating arts experiences with and for children has been explored through research identifying the backgrounds, dispositions and skills of these professionals working in both school and in out-of-school contexts. Although this research does not focus specifically on actors, it offers insights relevant to artists practicing in any artform, including theatre. There are few studies of actors who create theatre for children and these are largely concerned with strategies that enable child engagement (Ravdan, 2012) or that suit the theatrical genre or form (Jackson, 2013). With one exception (James, 2006), they do not substantially draw on actors’ own voices, perspectives or experiences. Further, each of these studies focuses on a single context in which the participating actors work, such as Theatre in Education. This research therefore addresses the need for more detailed, holistic representations of actor practice that include a consideration of the diverse theatrical contexts in which actors work and how engaging with children in these settings shapes actor practice.
Chapter 3  Methodology

The methodology of this research was influenced by several key factors. The first was my own experience and interest in theatre with and for children. I am aware of and relish the diversity and complexity of actor practice and was therefore seeking to understand the meaning, purpose and method of their work with children. Oriented towards relational forms of meaning-making, I sought to reach this understanding through direct engagement with the Actors. In doing so, I was drawn to the productive blend of logical and intuitive modes of thinking that characterise both creative practice and qualitative research. This chapter traces the methodological journey that I undertook, starting with an acknowledgement of how my own experience as a maker of theatre with and for children framed the research. It then outlines how the methodology evolved throughout the process, bringing me to a deeper understanding of the data and research practices.

3.1 Researcher Positioning

Murray’s observation that all writing is autobiography (Murray, 1991) suggests that we cannot escape ourselves in art or in research. Reflecting on the theatre I have made and the way I approached this study, this is certainly true for me. I cannot erase the fingerprints that my personal history leaves upon my work and nor, perhaps, should I want to. After all, it is from what Murray calls the “tap roots” (p. 67) of these histories that sprout the motivation, experience and texture that make creative and academic work unique and meaningful. I bring to this study my formative years as a child and teenager involved in school drama productions and youth theatre, and my experience as a professional actor and theatre maker. Drawing on this history, I move between many identities: child, adult, audience member, actor, theatre maker, teaching artist, parent; and to this list I now add researcher. These identities co-exist within me, taking turns to come to the fore, depending on the situation I find myself in. When listening to one of the research participants, Naomi Brouwer, describe her efforts to create a truly democratic child-led youth theatre company, I remember my first thrilling experience of group-devised theatre as a fifteen-year-old and I understand, in a personally situated way, the creative and political significance of what she is striving for. Touching on an even earlier part of my

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14 As mentioned in section 1.3, from this point in the thesis, the participants in this study are distinguished from other actors by using an upper case ‘A’ to refer to them.
life, when observing *The Moon's a Balloon*, a performance for young children, my remnant preschool-self is lost in the fiction and then, in the next moment, I am scribbling down a question to ask one of the actors in the post-show interview.

Linking all these selves is a desire to understand what the experience is like for the actor. Encountering any theatre involving children, I will think, “Do they seem comfortable? Are they relating well to the audience? If not, why not? Does the problem lie with them or the structure of the play? Is there that elusive theatrical magic in the room that makes everyone breathe in unison, and how is the actor conjuring it? What brought them to this work? What other work do they do and how does it relate to this performance?” More prosaically, but no less significantly, I might also wonder if the actor is being paid, how the production is being funded and who will be packing the set into the van afterwards. These are questions that preoccupied me long before I began this research, prompted by my own experience of making theatre with and for children and my knowledge that the circumstances under which theatre is made have a strong influence on the final product and how the actors feel about it. Crawford (2015a) explains that the artistic, industrial and social lives of actors are closely intertwined, each influencing the other for both good and ill, so it is important to be aware of them and to consider their significance at any given moment.

My personal experience of the children’s theatre sector has also guided the research method of this study. I already knew many of the participants before inviting them to be involved, I am familiar with the types of theatre they are engaged in, and I understand many of the practical considerations that shape their work. This places me in what Acker (2001) calls an ‘insider’ position, which offers the researcher certain insights into the field but also challenges him or her to view it with fresh eyes. The productive tension arising from this position will be discussed later in the chapter in the sections on interviews and reflexivity.

Personal interest is one of two important elements of heuristic inquiry, a form of phenomenology that emphasises the researcher’s own experiences and knowledge (Patton, 2002). The other, that participants have a shared interest in the research topic, will be explored in section 3.4.2 on participant selection. While remaining open to new perspectives, heuristic inquiry allowed me to acknowledge and examine how my own experiences as an actor working with children brought into focus certain questions and
insights. For example, my experience of play-oriented theatre with children attuned me to practices that emphasise play and led me to investigate them further with participants.

My creative practice has taught me that the type of theatre actors make reflects the kind of person they are. My beliefs, aesthetic preferences, ambitions and personality traits have guided my career, from the style of theatre I have made to the people I have made it with. They have led me towards theatre that explores symbolic, non-verbal languages and emphasises intimate relationships with audiences and other actors. Ewing and Smith’s model of practice, explained in section 1.4, resonates with me because it encapsulates this relationship between who I am, what I do as an actor and how that work continues to shape me. My interest in the practice of actors who work with children is therefore cultural as well as technical, seeking to understand the why as well as the what and how of what they do. The aim of reaching a holistic understanding of the participants’ practice is reflected in the methodological orientations of the study, the research design and the methods, to which I will now turn.

3.2 Methodology

My background in theatre, a relational artform in which actors engage in collaborative meaning-making with each other and the audience, orients me towards social constructivist methodologies. Constructivism considers knowledge to be not just acquired but actively made by people, together and separately, through an interpretation of experience that draws on prior understandings, experience, beliefs and judgements (O’Toole & Beckett 2013; Von Glasersfeld, 2005). The links between these factors are often of interest to researchers with a constructivist orientation for whom why someone thinks something is as significant as what they think.

Concerned with understanding the multiple and intertwined dimensions of actor practice, this research attempts to move the discussion beyond the mechanics of theatre performance to investigate the meaning and purpose of actors’ experience. This is not a straightforward task, because, as Van Manen (2015) observes, “It is much easier to describe the cognitive than the pathic aspects of our world” (p. 85). Mood, atmosphere, tone and relationships are harder to capture than function, action and purpose, partly because they are sensitive to context and partly because they are less overtly perceptible, even to the person experiencing them. It is easier, for example, to describe and analyse
the content of children’s theatre scripts and how they are technically translated for the stage than to capture the intention, ambience and fleeting interactions of live performance, or to unravel the factors that contribute to them. Understanding the multiple dimensions of practice therefore calls for methodologies that acknowledge the intersections between experience and tacit and explicit knowledge. Bruner’s identification of the narrative and paradigmatic modes of apprehending and interpreting the world (Bruner, 1987) offers just such a framework and provides a key reference for this study.

Bruner’s insight that there are two equally important modes of knowing resonates with my own experience of creative practice and is consistent with a constructivist orientation to research. The narrative mode is concerned with understanding the personalised meaning of experience by telling stories that are situated in “time and place” (Bruner, 1987, p. 13). The paradigmatic mode is useful for understanding and communicating propositional, explicit knowledge. It favours logical and deductive methods of coding and categorising, looking for patterns and diversity in information and testing them against hypotheses. Both modes seek, in their own ways, to present convincing and resonant interpretations of experiences or events, and to prompt questions about the wider context in which they are located. They are complementary and intertwined and, when used together in research, can capture the relationship between the particular and the generalisable by identifying patterns and diversity within a group of personal stories.

Bruner’s work names and champions the human instinct for ordering and reflecting on the layers of experience through story. The word, ‘ordering’ is important here, because it points to the way the two modes of knowing work together. Stories without order have little attraction for or worth to the reader, and often not much for the teller either. Consciously or unconsciously, we draw on paradigmatic tools to sort, sift, prioritise and shape the content of our stories. Conversely, there are stories to be told in disparate experiences and in all data. The two modes therefore construct meaning by working in tandem, not in opposition to each other. Throughout this chapter I will explain how the narrative and paradigmatic modes of knowing were employed in different layers of this research. The study began with an orientation towards paradigmatic methods but as it progressed other methods were drawn into the process, signalling a shift towards the narrative mode. The next section discusses how the research design evolved in response to this methodological shift.
3.3 Research Design

There is no perfect formula for conducting a qualitative case study, just a body of approaches that researchers must choose from based on their relevance to the work (Stake, 1995; Willig, 2008). The goals of this research were to explore what characterises the practice of actors who create theatre with and for children and how this work shapes their practice. These questions resonate with Gadamer’s argument for an approach to research in which understanding is achieved through entering into a dialogic relationship with what or who is studied (Gadamer, 1982). In doing so, the research design draws inspiration from other studies of creative practice that “engage in a dialogue” (Prior, 2012, p. 101) with participants, emphasising methods of direct engagement with them (Brown, 2014; LeBank & Bridel, 2015; Prior, 2012; Selkirk, 2009). With the aim of constructing a contextualised, detailed and multi-dimensional view of the participants, the research was designed as a multiple case study. This offered a way to explore the diversity of the participants’ experiences and to determine if there were common themes amongst them. I am not claiming, however, that broad generalisations can be made from this small sample. Rather, I was seeking understanding through in-depth exploration and representation of actor practice with the purpose of building up a “lore” of experiences (Van Manen, 2015, p. 85) that may resonate with other actors and researchers of actor practice.

The research design was planned and emergent. Starting with a document search (see Chapter 4), I began with a clear plan to generate data from multiple sources with the aim of creating a holistic portrait of nine purposefully selected actors who work with children. Semi-structured interviews formed the greatest part of the data in this study but other qualitative methods, including document searches and surveys, were used to contextualise and enrich meaning co-constructed by the participants and myself in these conversations (Simons, 2009; Yin, 2009). These methods were guided and connected by two consistent research questions, the first of which included several sub-questions:

1. What characterises the practice of actors who create theatre with and for children?
   1.a What motivates actors to create work for and with children?
   1.b What values, beliefs and goals inform their work?
   1.c. What skills and techniques do they use?
   1.d How does context influence actors’ work with children?
2. How is actor practice shaped by creating theatre with and for children?

These questions also informed the thematic single and multiple case analysis that was conducted at all stages of the layered data generation. With its initial focus on systematic and thematic methods, the research design began by adopting a paradigmatic mode of knowing. It evolved in response to the formative analysis which suggested that observations of three performances and follow up interviews with selected participants would further deepen the understanding of individual and multiple cases. As lived experiences, the observed performances were suited to the narrative mode of understanding identified by Bruner (1987) and therefore involved a more exploratory, descriptive method of analysis, interpretation and representation. This constituted an orientation towards phenomenology, a methodology that is concerned with understanding the meaning of unique experiences in the “lifeworld” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 4). That understanding is reached through the act of writing about the experiences, so narratives therefore constituted a small, but significant part of the research. This is discussed further in section 3.4.9.

An iterative process of analysis progressively constructed a multi-dimensional picture of the views and characteristics of nine actors. The section below discusses the methods of generating, analysing and representing the qualitative and quantitative data of this study and considers the challenges of using the chosen methods to explore the individual and shared aspects of actor practice.

### 3.4 Methods

This research used multiple methods to construct a layered and holistic picture of actors who work with children. An emphasis on dialogue with the participants focused the data collection on the interpersonal method of semi-structured interviews. This rich data set was further contextualised and deepened by two targeted document searches, participant surveys and observations of performances. Together, the data sets were used to tell a wider story of actor practice and to offer different perspectives on the research questions.

Table 3.1 (p. 39) shows the methods used, their purpose and how the resulting data were analysed. It is followed by a detailed explanation of each method, outlining the iterative process of data generation that occurred throughout the study and how it influenced the participant selection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Document search 1</strong> surveying the current Australian children’s theatre industry</td>
<td>Iterative, deductive process using emerging themes</td>
<td>1. To discover what theatre is being created with and for children in Australia 2. To inform a typology of practice 3. To guide the participant selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant identification and selection</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1. To gain a representative sample of the typology of practice developed in the document search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial round of recruitment (5 Actors)</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1. To test the selection of participants against the selection criteria, leaving scope to respond to gaps or repetitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey</strong> including closed and open questions about the Actors’ backgrounds, training, values and beliefs</td>
<td>Numerical and thematic analysis of data</td>
<td>1. To explore the relationship between participant experience and the typology of practice established in Phase 1 2. To generate background information about the participants’ training, identity and employment which informed subsequent interviews 3. To encourage participants to consider the research themes prior to the interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Document search 2</strong> seeking targeted information about the confirmed participants</td>
<td>Data were cross referenced and merged with interview and survey data.</td>
<td>1. To discover focused information about individual participants’ practice (i.e. how they described their own practice and the views they expressed in media interviews) to: a) inform interviews and b) bring focus and depth to the interview and survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second round of participant recruitment (3 Actors)</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1. To respond to identified gaps in the representation of the typology of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First semi-structured interviews</strong> with eight participants expanding on the survey themes</td>
<td>Iterative analysis using inductive and thematic methods</td>
<td>1. To offer participants an opportunity to explore and express their beliefs, values, motivations and experiences about creating theatre with and for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment of and interview with final participant</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1. To respond to an identified gap in the representation of the typology of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations of work by three participants representing three different types of participation by children</strong></td>
<td>Narrative inquiry</td>
<td>1. To obtain a deeper understanding and description of the participants’ practice through a lived experience of their work 2. To observe and compare performance skills, strategies and styles employed in different theatrical contexts 3. To present an opportunity for themes or questions about participants’ practice to arise and be confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second interview</strong> with the three participants whose performances had been observed</td>
<td>Iterative analysis using inductive and thematic methods</td>
<td>1. To explore themes arising from the first interviews 2. To ground participant reflection in the specific co-experienced event of the observed performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Data collection summary
3.4.1 Document search 1.

At the start of this research, a document search was undertaken to map the sector by identifying the actors creating theatre with and for children in Australia. It was also used to construct a typology of practice to guide the participant selection and subsequent interpretation and analysis (see Chapter 4). Although documents are commonly thought of as stable data, many of those relating to theatre practice must be considered provisional. This is because the children’s theatre sector is an evolving arena in which the activities, aims and beliefs of practitioners, producers and venues are subject to frequent change. There has not been a survey of Australian children’s theatre since 2003 and at the time of writing there was no comprehensive national industry list available. The mapping of Australian theatre with and for children I conducted for this research was therefore informed by personal knowledge and a web-based document search of state government arts touring programs and artist, venue and festival websites. A drawback of this approach is that when these websites are updated they leave no record of previous iterations. The methods used for the first document search were sufficient for identifying potential participants for this study and for contextualising their work, but a more comprehensive quantitative survey of the sector is required for future research in this area. The picture that emerged from my mapping exercise represents a snapshot of Australian children’s theatre occurring in a specific time in history (i.e. 2014). It was given depth and historical context through the other research methods used in the study.

3.4.2 Participant selection and recruitment.

This research used a purposeful sampling of nine actors whose length, breadth and diversity of experience working with children made them “information rich” participants that could “yield insights and in-depth understandings” of creative practice (Patton, 2002, p. 230). To select them, all the actors identified in the first document search were first categorised according to the typology of practice developed through that same search. A list was then made of actors whose combined experience represented all the categories in this typology. Their selection was also influenced by two other factors. The first was accessibility, with the participant selection drawing on actors from the two states I spend most time in, Victoria and South Australia. The other was the actors’ experience and investment in working with children. The purpose of this research was not to evaluate the
quality of the participants’ work, but to understand the characteristics of it and how engaging with children shapes their practice. The cases in this study are therefore not primarily presented as exemplars of practice, but as catalysts for discussion (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). It was, however, important that the participants were experienced and invested in working with children, so they could offer nuanced reflections on their practice. This was gauged in a variety of ways, including: the number of projects with children they had engaged in; whether they had committed the time and effort to devise or produce this work themselves; and, in some cases, the ways they had spoken or written about working with children. I did not select, for example, actors who had performed in only one theatre production for children, however high profile that performance may have been, because I was interested in talking to actors who had numerous experiences to reflect upon. Although the study was not focused on devised theatre practice, an actor’s investment in making original theatre for children suggested a deep interest in the field.

The internet and social media have offered artists multiple platforms to write about their work and many actors publish thoughtful statements about children and theatre on their websites that indicate their engagement with this field.

A second element of heuristic inquiry, mentioned earlier in this chapter (see section 3.1) is that the ‘co-researchers’ (i.e. the participants) “share an intensity of experience” of the subject (Patton, 2002, p. 108). This facilitates a constructivist orientation to research as participants and researchers can, together, build understanding through “shared reflection and inquiry” (Ibid.). The professional backgrounds shared by myself and the participants helped to establish rapport and a common sense of purpose between us.

Ethics approval was granted by The University of Melbourne following the usual Human Research Ethics Committee procedures. Initially, only five actors on the short-list were approached, allowing me to monitor throughout the data collection process aspects of theatre practice that were under-represented in the study, and to address these gaps through two subsequent participant selection rounds. By the end of the process twelve actors had been invited by email to participate in the research and all but three agreed to be involved. Written consent was obtained from participants and all agreed to take part in every aspect of the study, except for one who did not give permission for her work to be observed. The final nine participating Actors, and the relationship of their work to the typology of practice, is shown in Table 4.3 (p.69).
It is common for researchers to offer participants anonymity by using pseudonyms and altering other details that could identify them. This acknowledges the limited control they have over how their words and actions are interpreted and represented by the researcher. The Actors were given an opportunity to clarify, change or delete any aspects of their interview transcripts that they wished but the analysis of the data is entirely mine, not theirs. Offering anonymity was an option that I chose not to use in the final representation of this data, though. In his study of children’s experiences of theatre, Reason (2010) questions the assumption that anonymity is the ideal state of reporting, proposing that naming people’s utterances and creativity can be beneficial to them. Given the small size of the children’s theatre field, it was in any case not possible to guarantee anonymity to the participants in this research. For these reasons, they were asked for permission to be identified by name in this thesis and potential future publications, which they all granted.

3.4.3 Surveys.

After giving consent to participate, the Actors completed a short survey sent to them by email (see Appendix B). Built on an artist survey developed by Jeanneret & Brown (2013) and research questions brought into focus by the literature review, the survey used a combination of closed and open-ended questions and served multiple purposes. Primarily, it functioned as an introduction between myself and the participants. It sketched a broad-brush self-portrait of their practice for me and offered them an opportunity to consider the research themes in preparation for the interviews. The survey generated useful baseline data about the Actors’ training, identity and employment. Using this information, I began to articulate the relationship between their individual experiences and the typology of practice established in the first document search. The survey responses were also used to inform the observations and interviews and to contextualise the data emerging from those methods. The survey findings are discussed in section 5.1.

A promise of surveys is that they offer useful comparable information through the posing of identical questions and limited answer formats. Their value is influenced, though, by the number of respondents and the way they interpret and complete the questions. With only nine Actors involved, the survey offered limited quantitative value, although patterns that did emerge are noted in the findings.
Four Actors expressed minor frustration with the survey. They reported that they felt uncertain when faced with question 5 which asked them to quantify the percentage of their work that is for different age groups. This uncertainty may have been because the wording of this question did not indicate if they should consider all the work they have ever done with children or only their most recent work. This oversight may also reflect my own lack of clarity about the purpose of this question. Designed early in the research process, before the themes were consolidated, it proved to have limited relevance to the findings. This experience shows that surveys need to be designed carefully, with an eye to exactly what kind of information is being sought and why. All the questions, including those that invite open responses, need to be expressed unambiguously so participants know how to answer them. This is also an ethical issue as it is important not to waste the participants’ time by collecting information that is not relevant to the study.

3.4.4 Document search 2.

After the Actors had confirmed their participation in the research, I conducted a further, targeted document search to inform the upcoming interviews. Focused on understanding their personal practice and guided by my own experience as a freelance actor who has engaged with the media, I re-read their professional websites and sought out media interviews and articles about their work. This document search raised some specific questions and provided information about some of the participants that I used to personalise the interviews. It also helped me to understand references made by them in their interviews to different aspects of their work.

3.4.5 Interviews.

Like many forms of knowledge, professional practice can be intuitive and tacit (Schön, 1991, Van Manen, 2015), recalling Polanyi’s observation that, “We know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). Although the outward manifestations of practice can be observed, and inferences made from those observations, the motivations, experiences, beliefs and goals that inform practice may be better explored through communication with the practitioners themselves. Aligned with constructivist methodologies, an effective way of exploring the Actors’ tacit knowledge was through semi-structured interviews that offered them an opportunity to “reconstruct their experience and to explore their meaning” (Seidmann, 2006, p. 92) through conversation and anecdote.
Semi-structured interviews formed the core data set of this study. All the Actors were interviewed at least once, with these conversations lasting between thirty minutes and one-and-a-half hours. Three Actors were interviewed twice, the second time after I had observed them performing with or for children. These additional conversations allowed me to revisit the research themes with specific reference to the performances and to further explore statements made in the first interviews.

The interviews used both modes of knowing put forth by Bruner (1987). Drawing on the paradigmatic mode, they were guided by thematic interview questions that were shaped by the research questions, literature review, document analysis and survey analysis. These included:

- Describe your theatre background and experience, with specific reference to your work with children.
- What do you understand by the term, ‘creative practice’?
- Why do you work with children?
- What are your goals for the children you work with?
- How do different settings influence your work with children?
- How is working with children different to working with adults?
- How does working with children inform your practice?

Purposefully open-ended, these questions allowed the Actors to dwell on topics of significance to them, acknowledging that they are the expert interpreters of their own lives. They were encouraged to respond in a narrative way, with anecdotes and biographical stories, an approach that led to new lines of questions and discussion. Formative analysis occurred during interviews as I silently compared responses with existing data or noted new, potentially significant lines of inquiry, while being conscious not to become distracted from the main purpose of the research.

Interviewing is a craft that can be developed through careful planning and practise (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2006). Before interviewing the participants, I tested the initial thematic questions by applying them to my own actor practice but, even so, during the interviews some questions were revealed to be awkwardly worded or irrelevant to an individual Actor. After the first interview with Dan Goronszy on September 1, 2014, I noted in my research journal that the questions had seemed repetitive and did not follow a logical
progression, prompting me to revise the order and to be prepared for the subsequent interviews to take a more spontaneous course. This iterative process of refinement continued throughout the data generation process, but the core substance of the questions remained constant over the nine interviews, validating the choice of questions and facilitating the multiple case analysis.

Day-to-day conversation requires a sense of the whole as well as an ability to be in the moment, to let the discussion unfold naturally. So too does an interviewer need to reflect on the significance of what the participant is saying, to draw out salient threads, whilst simultaneously being a naïve listener, to avoid over-directing the conversation. Throughout this stage of the research I learned when to hold back from questions until a line of conversation had run its course and to keep a mental record of which questions had or had not been answered. I also became better at refocusing the interviews when they had wandered away from the main themes.

Interviews are recognised as co-constructed events between researchers and participants (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Kvale, 1996). Kvale characterises the qualitative research interview as a “co-authored” conversation that forms a narrative which is led, clarified or nudged in different directions by the interviewer (p. 183). This stance echoes a vision of theatre itself as what British actor Tim Crouch calls a “structured conversation” between actors and audiences in which meaning is not just presented and received but is actively co-constructed through the interaction (O’Kane, 2012, p. 105). Just as writing can both create and describe knowledge (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005), so too can interviews generate new ideas, questions and ways of thinking about practice. Several of the participants confirmed this when they said that the interviews helped them to consider and articulate their practice in different ways.

The actor-audience relationship is also echoed in the interview process, which requires a heightened state of attention to the participant’s mood and involuntary reactions, to pace and to the technical requirements of the encounter (Seidman, 2006). Like performers, interviewers need the qualities of concentration, openness and absorption. They are also required to establish trust and rapport with their co-constructors of meaning, facilitating the interviewees’ engagement and investment in the process, thereby encouraging a free exchange of ideas (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Seidman, 2006). I was aided in this process by my insider position as a fellow actor working with children which gave me a shared frame
of reference with the participants. My status as an informed, friendly and interested peer was useful in gaining trust, creating empathy and facilitating understanding. I also created a conversational atmosphere by conducting the interviews in a place of the participants’ choice and allowing plenty of time for each encounter, to avoid creating tension because of an impending deadline. The importance of this strategy was confirmed in Ellen Steele’s interview. Conscious of the fact that she was fitting the interview into her lunch break between rehearsals, I was reluctant to pursue some lines of conversation in case we ran out of time. Although every question was addressed, that interview was the least detailed of the nine conversations. Reflecting on this later, I realised that I was also constrained by the fact that I knew less of Ellen’s work than the other Actors’, having only seen her perform once. This emphasised the importance of background research when conducting interviews.

An insider position has both positive and negative potential, favouring understanding but risking an uncritical method. In such cases, Reason (2010) recommends marrying existing knowledge with a reflexive state of “not-knowing” (p. 53). This allows the researcher to be open to participants’ individual experiences which, by their very nature, will always be personal and specific. I adopted this advice throughout the interviews, asking the Actors to clarify or confirm my impressions of their practice and to describe their work as if I knew nothing about them. This did, on occasion, result in data that challenged or added to my existing understandings. For example, I was surprised to learn that Jens Altheimer did not consider his project Ingenious Contraptions\textsuperscript{15} to be a creative experience for children, even though it was highly engaging. He explained that although the children were involved in the construction of the final product, there was not sufficient time for them to contribute to the design, which Jens had prepared before the workshops. As an audience member of this work, I had assumed that the children had designed it and did not appreciate that this would not have been possible given that the design and workshop preparation took, by Jens’s estimation, thirteen weeks to complete.

Kvale (1996) refers to transcriptions as “maps” (p. 165), the style of which depends on their intended use. With a belief that how things are said is as important as what is said, I made verbatim transcriptions of the interviews, noting pauses, repetitions, stumbles and emphasis. This allowed me to record, re-experience and reflect on the significance of the

\textsuperscript{15} Ingenious Contraptions was a project Jens created at ArtPlay, in Melbourne, in 2012.
emotional tones expressed through the vocal patterns of the interviews. All the participants were sent transcripts of their interviews for them to read and, if necessary, revise but none of them made any changes. At the time, I took this to mean that they were all satisfied with their answers but the second interviews, with the three Actors whose performances I observed, challenged this assumption. During these conversations, the Actors all said they had thought deeply about their first interviews and added information that clarified or challenged their original statements. Although this does not negate the validity of the other six Actors’ responses, it does point to a limitation of the research design. It suggests that, just as my own understanding of the research themes was gradual and iterative, so too did the participants benefit from the opportunity to reflect on the research questions over time and to refine their responses. It also suggests that talking directly with participants may be a more effective method of member-checking than presenting them with their words in a written format, which they may not read or have the time to address (Yin, 2009).

3.4.6 Observations.

In his philosophical study of pedagogical practice, Van Manen (2015) notes that teachers “do not care for their students in the abstract; they care for their students as real persons who have names and personalities and with whom they have concrete interactions” (p. 88). He argues that stories about real encounters can facilitate practitioners’ understanding of how to work with children. Likewise, actors’ work with children is made up of real events and relationships, each story of which is situated within wider personal and social narratives. As the research progressed, observations of live performances emerged as a useful way to contextualise the first complete round of nine interviews. It is important to note that although the three Actors who performed these shows are highly skilled, these events are not put forward as perfect examples of theatre with and for children. Rather, they act as instigators for discussions of practice. The choice of performances was partly pragmatic, based on what was available at the time. It was also informed by the typology of practice that had informed the participant

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16 ‘Performance’ here includes the pre- and post-show audience activity in the foyer or public space in which the performance took place.
selection. Combined, the chosen performances represent all the categories in this typology except theatre for children aged birth to two years old (see Table 3.2, p. 50).

During the formative analysis it became obvious that the two categories of theatre with children and theatre for children in the typology of practice were inadequate to describe the nuances of participation afforded to children by the Actors’ work. For this reason, I decided to include a third, middle category of ‘theatre with/for children’ that could accommodate theatre that blends elements of performance for children with significant opportunities for creative participation by children. The issues involved with re-categorising the nine Actors according to this expanded typology are discussed further in Chapter 5.

In seeking to analyse, interpret and represent the participants’ theatre performances, I was drawn to phenomenology, which offered a methodology to explore lived experience through a heuristic method of shifting between what I observed and how I made sense of it based on what I already knew. Van Manen (1990) says that phenomenological research is based on the identification of one’s own curiosity about a topic as a “true phenomenon” (p. 40). This interest guides the research, from the decision to focus on a certain experience to the interpretations made of it. My interest in the lives of children and actors led me to attempt to understand the phenomenon of their theatrical encounters and relationships. Phenomenology presented a challenge to do this not just by describing these phenomena (i.e. performances) but by writing about them in a way that evokes their fundamentally important elements and offers possible interpretations of their meaning (Van Manen, 1990).

Richards notes that, “Theatrical performance practices are complex, both as a matter of practical accomplishment and as a subject for theoretical speculation and analysis.” (Richards, 2003, p. 25). One difficulty with analysing such complex events is that shared points of view are only ever approximate, throwing into doubt the validity of one person’s interpretation and representation of the event (Von Glasersfeld, 2005). Acknowledgement of this dilemma is often reduced to a simplistic competition between objectivity and subjectivity but Van Manen (1990) suggests that these words need not be considered binary opposites. He proposes that objectivity can be thought of more productively as meaning that the researcher is faithfully oriented towards the observed phenomenon and that subjectivity can mean that this orientation is strong precisely because it is personal. I
attempted to maintain this sense of personalised focus when observing the actors’ work by experiencing and interpreting the performances primarily as an audience member. Simultaneously, I sought to maintain a higher than usual awareness of my fellow audience members’ responses, the Actors’ techniques, the setting, and the structure of the work. Guided by the research questions and themes, I took brief notes during the performances and wrote detailed descriptions immediately afterwards. These served as field texts that were used to inform multiple iterations of three differently styled narratives. Wolcott (1994) describes this process of reworking the raw data as ‘transformation’. It involves three stages: describing the event; analysing it for patterns and relationships; and interpreting the meaning of it. The completed narratives aimed to capture salient aspects of the performances, and to prompt further discussion of the research themes through a comparison with the interview data.

I was initially reluctant to observe the Actors’ work as I did not want to appear to be evaluating their practice. Committed to drawing on their own interpretation of their experiences, I was wary of speaking for them or, worse, misrepresenting the performances. Engaging in narrative inquiry changed my mind, though. Richardson compares writing from different points of view and in different styles to the multi-faceted perspectives offered by crystals (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 963). One perspective revealed by ‘crystallization’ is the writer’s own thoughts, doubts and implicit understandings. As I wrote the narratives, I began to appreciate my own tacit knowledge about the Actors’ work, how my experience as an actor and theatre maker was shaping the research and what I still did not know. I understood that if I approached the observations with a genuine sense of curiosity about the Actors’ practice the resulting narratives could offer insights to complement or even challenge, rather than merely illustrate, the Actors’ stories. As Sherman writes, phenomenological description has the potential to “provoke the imagination of a reader and encourage interrogation of one’s own experience” (p. 23).

There were two other positive outcomes of the observations. Firstly, the performances offered a valuable dimension of lived experience to the research. Secondly, my observations enlivened and enriched the second interviews with those three Actors, allowing us to explore together the meaning of specific incidences of practice. In retrospect, it would therefore have been useful to observe work by all the Actors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Theatre form</th>
<th>Audience Age</th>
<th>Authorship</th>
<th>Type of Participation</th>
<th>Performance Site</th>
<th>Funding Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Curious Game</em> (Carolyn Hanna)</td>
<td>Improvised participatory street theatre</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Listies Make You LOL</em> (Matthew Kelly)</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Moon’s a Balloon</em> (Stephen Noonan)</td>
<td>Dance-theatre</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Characteristics of the observed performances
3.4.7 Second interviews.

Follow up interviews were conducted with the three Actors whose performances had been observed. A relationship had already been established with these participants, so these interviews quickly focused on exploring the research themes with reference to the performances. They also clarified and expanded upon issues raised in the initial interviews, engaging the participants as coresearchers.

3.4.8 Analysis, interpretation and representation.

Used together in this research, the paradigmatic and narrative modes contributed to a holistic understanding of the data. Guided by the key questions, the surveys and interviews were analysed with a logical and cyclical method of coding, analysing, interpreting and reconsidering the data (Hammersley, 2011; Porter & Robinson, 2011; Simons, 2009). The notes taken during and immediately after my observations of the three performances were transformed, analysed and represented through successive iterations of narratives.

Simons (2009) describes qualitative case analysis and interpretation as an iterative and accumulative process of organising and reviewing the data using both systematic and instinctive methods. Data is logically organised into provisional and emerging categories so it can be “examined for connections, patterns and propositions” (p. 117). Interpretation proceeds through a holistic engagement with the data that draws on this formal deductive analysis and the researcher’s “personal and intuitive” responses (Ibid). Simons notes that interpretation and analysis are undertaken concurrently, “moving backwards and forwards between the data, the understandings that you are gaining, the questions you are refining and the next field visit, set of observations or interviews” (p. 118). Interpretation of the data in this study was therefore led by a heuristic approach (Patton, 2002) that drew on the evolving analysis and my existing knowledge and understanding of theatre with and for children.

The surveys in this study generated some quantitative data that were analysed numerically and “displayed” through tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). These are presented and discussed at the start of Chapter 5. Drawing on a small number of participants, this data set could not be used to make generalisations about actor practice, but it contributed
to a holistic understanding of this specific group of practitioners. Analysis of the qualitative data in the surveys and interviews was thematic, beginning with categories based on the original research questions and Ewing and Smith’s model of practice (Ewing & Smith, 2001), and widening out to incorporate salient emerging themes. Interview and survey quotes were identified by the name of the participant and a colour code. This created a visual representation of the relevance of each theme to individuals and to the group. For example, a glance at the many light blue quotes under the theme ‘Social Justice’ indicated that one participant explicitly mentioned this topic more than the others. The coded data were also annotated with: links to other data sets; notes and questions about additional contextualising information; and my growing understanding of the themes themselves. I also wrote a summative paragraph at the end of each theme which acted as a formative analysis of the coded data. For example, at the end of the theme ‘Collaboration’ I noted the high number of participants who had emphasised the importance of collaboration, and which of them had mentioned it in relation to adult actors or to children. When revisiting this theme later in the analysis process, this summary prompted me to consider the importance of the different types of collaboration to the Actors’ practice.

Guided by my own “sense of the worth of things” (Stake 2006, vii) new themes were identified by the frequency with which they occurred, and the emphasis given to them by the participants. This emphasis was sometimes clearly remembered after the interview, but was also identified through close listening of the audio recordings when making verbatim transcriptions. The iterative nature of qualitative analysis and interpretation leaves open the possibility of allowing the data to shape or add to the research questions. Although some significant new themes did emerge, the core questions in this study remained constant throughout the life of the project, suggesting that they were relevant to the participants and well suited to the inquiry.

Phenomenology seeks to understand the ‘essence’ of an experience—in this case what it is to be an actor who creates theatre with or theatre for children—by challenging the researcher to experience the phenomenon under consideration as directly as possible (Van Manen, 1990). As an audience member, I was immersed in the observed performances and sought to capture this in the subsequent analysis. Notes taken during and immediately after my observations reflected my initial impressions and responses to the research
questions. These were transformed, analysed and represented through narrative. Narrative was also used in other ways in this research, though, so a distinction needs to be made between:

1. narrative as a way of thinking,
2. the analysis of narratives, and
3. narrative analysis of experience.

1. Narrative as a way of thinking resonates with Bruner’s identification of the narrative mode as a way of knowing (Bruner, 1987). The Actors conformed to Bruner’s claim for the ubiquity of this mode by, unprompted, exploring their practice through stories that articulated their experiences, feelings and beliefs. Touching on the personal, social, industrial, emotional and philosophical aspects of practice, these anecdotes offered vivid descriptions of their lives as creators of theatre with and for children which served as rich data for subsequent analysis.

2. The analysis of narratives is a process of searching for patterns and significance in stories such as the ones told by the Actors.

3. Narrative analysis of experience creates stories out of separate elements such as field notes, participants’ stories and survey responses (Polkinghorne, 1995). It uses the narrative mode to transform, analyse, interpret and represent data, although not always in that tidy order.

The goal of phenomenological narratives is to offer “plausible insights that bring us into more direct contact with the world” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). The ambition of the narrative analysis of the observed performances was, therefore, to create convincing depictions of the emotional climate and unique qualities of each event, capturing the dual “landscapes” of narrative: action and consciousness (Bruner, 1987, p. 14). The resulting narratives reflect a commitment to faithfully record what happened joined with the licence to follow my own interests and instincts. Barone (2000) says that trusting in instinct allows metaphors to emerge that can succinctly convey the participants’ situations and guide what information should be included and what may be omitted. Using “writing as a method of inquiry” (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 960), and aiming for depth rather than breadth in the narratives, emerging themes were brought into focus through a process
of re-writing from different viewpoints and in different styles, including fiction and poetry.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue that effective narrative analysis comes from a “sense of the whole” rather than searching for causal links between incidents (p. 7). Therefore, instead of attempting to offer chronological descriptions or thematic analyses of the performances, the narratives sought to highlight significant, resonant aspects of the Actors’ practice using the literary style best suited to each event. The narrative of *The Moon’s a Balloon* describes the dynamic flow of energy between the actor and audience; the narrative of *The Listies Make You LOL* focuses on the emotionally charged pre- and post-show atmosphere; and the narrative of *The Curious Game* is written as an imaginary reconstruction of the performance from a child’s point of view. Each one frames the subsequent discussion of the three Actors in that group by offering detailed, empathetic and convincing portrayals of practice (Barone, 2000) that invite the reader to enter into a participatory relationship with the data, to co-construct meaning (Bruner, 1987).

Bruner (1987) says that “arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifeliness” and are judged by different criteria (p. 11). The systematic deductive analysis of the surveys and interviews offers a logical pathway through the research questions while the narratives invite the reader to participate in a deeper understanding of the Actors’ work by exploring the “landscape of consciousness” (p. 14). The language of the two types of analysis are distinctive and suited to their separate, though linked, goals. The thematic analysis follows a logical, linear trajectory, while the narrative writing attempts to answer Van Manen’s challenge to capture the pathic aspects of experience with language that is “oriented to the experiential or lived sensibility of everyday life” (Van Manen, 2015, p. 85). Together, they offer a multi-dimensional representation of actor practice.

Multiple case studies aim to represent both individual cases and the group, a tension that Stake (2006) refers to as the “case-quintain dilemma” (p. 39). Each case in this research was considered separately and as part of the whole, looking for both unique and common factors that contributed to an understanding of the overall research questions. Each participant’s interview and survey was analysed with reference to the formative analysis of the previous cases, which was, in turn, revised in light of the new contribution. Themes grew and shrunk, interview questions were refined, and research journal entries recorded.
new insights, doubts and lines of inquiry. A consolidation of shared themes led to a ‘progressive focusing’ of the data (Stake 1995), enriching and clarifying significant concepts. As an exploratory multiple case study that sought depth of understanding rather than causal explanation, unexpected, outlying or contradictory data, or what Yin (2009) calls “rival propositions” (p. 187), compounded rather than disproved the formative analysis (Stake, 2006).

Closely connected to analysis and interpretation, representation of the data in a qualitative multiple case study needs to move back and forwards between cases, and to express the positive tension between the individual and the group. At the start of Chapter 5, the nine research participants are introduced through individual case stories. These case stories draw attention to the unique aspects of each Actor’s work and to other factors that contextualise their participation in the research, including where the interview took place and their previous relationship to me, if any. Inspired by their own strong emphasis on personal history and vivid story-telling abilities, the case stories draw on biography and narrative to offer a sense of the ‘who’ as well as the ‘what’ of each Actor’s practice. Acknowledging actors as fruitful biographical subjects, Pender says that actors understand biography on “a complex level” because their job involves successfully inhabiting and portraying other people’s lives (Pender, 2015, p. 217). The Actors’ willingness to talk about their beliefs and past experiences and how these relate to their work resonates with Ewing and Smith’s model of practice, outlined in Chapter 1 (Ewing & Smith, 2001). It states that the practitioner’s ‘being’, which includes values, beliefs, goals, motivations and personal history, is entwined with what they do and know, and who they become. The case stories use salient biographical details to distinguish the participants from each other, so they may be easily identified in the subsequent multiple case analysis which attempts to represent them equally through a comparative discussion of the research themes.

3.4.9 Reflexivity.

The interpretive nature of qualitative research calls for analysis and representation that is dependable, credible and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is achieved through careful documentation of the research process, creating an “audit trail” (Hammersley, 2011, p. 29) that acknowledges the source of the interpretations. The iterative and interpretive nature of this study is acknowledged throughout and was
documented by saving progressive versions of the analysis. The use of a variety of relevant data allows the reader to judge the credibility of the interpretation, and rich description gives the reader the necessary information to establish the transferability of the study. The findings of this research are supported by detailed descriptions of practice, drawing on multiple data sets. The use of lengthy interview quotes allows the data to speak for itself and for the reader to establish their own judgment about, and relationship with, the subject matter.

Acker (2001) proposes that the insider/outsider position can be seen not as a dualistic concept, but as a productive and dynamic one that can be continually reconsidered throughout the research process. For this project, this meant adopting a position of personal and epistemological reflexivity (Willig, 2008), questioning my motivations for the participant selection, responses to interview statements, relationship to the participants and interpretation of the data. By maintaining an awareness of the scope and limitations of my own experience, I allowed my previous assumptions and habits of thoughts to be challenged but was also able to draw on prior knowledge where relevant.

I used a variety of techniques to maintain an openness to emergent themes that were not funnelled by my own experience. These included revisiting the data, self-checking through use of a research journal in which I could play devil’s advocate to my formative analysis, and member-checking. Where I was in doubt about the meaning of an Actor’s statement, I clarified it with them, cross checked it with other data or excluded it from the analysis. This was an attempt to achieve the “empirical”, “politically disinterested” and “critical” stance that Barone says is necessary for good “storytelling” research (Barone, 2000, p. 192) but which is also important for all research. Guba and Lincoln’s additional criterion for the evaluation of research practice, authenticity, resonates with ideas of fairness and integrity in the generation and use of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The risk that the participants may feel misrepresented by my final interpretation and representation of their practice was guarded against by taking this thorough and sceptical approach to the analysis.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined how my methodological orientations and personal experience framed the research. Seeking a broad and deep understanding of the practice of actors who work with children, the multiple methods used in the study investigated individual
and shared experience through multiple perspectives. Open to an emergent research design, the study has expanded how I think about research methodology and methods. I was initially drawn to logical, systematic methods, which served the early part of the research well. A clear alignment between the research questions and the interview questions facilitated the coding and analysis of the participants’ responses. A more flexible and intuitive approach was required to integrate the themes that emerged from the interviews, and the observations of live performances presented yet another methodological challenge. These complex events called for an approach that could offer “compelling and insightful” insights of lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990, p. 8). Writing narratives about them allowed me to explore themes that were not directly suggested by the research questions, but which offered other valuable perspectives and deepened the inquiry. The following two chapters therefore move between individual and multiple cases and the two modes of knowing identified by Bruner (1987) to create a layered portrayal of the practice of actors who create theatre with and for children.
Chapter 4  Mapping Australian Theatre With And For Children

This chapter surveys the professional field that Australian theatre actors work in, in order to contextualise the conditions that influence how and why they work with children. It includes a typology of practice that was developed to guide the selection of participating actors.

While some studies provide an historical analysis of the field (Butler, 2003), this study sought to create a snapshot of contemporary Australian theatre with and for children that identified salient characteristics of practice. This task had its challenges, though. The first was the availability of current information, discussed in section 3.4.1. Since the demise, over the past decade, of the peak youth arts body, Young People and the Arts Australia (YPAA)\(^\text{17}\) and the national youth arts magazine, *Lowdown*\(^\text{18}\), two central sources of information about the sector have disappeared. Additionally, many companies creating theatre with and for children are not easily identified because they have a low public profile. The information gathered to map Australian theatre with and for children was therefore gleaned from multiple sources. These included: state and territory arts ministry websites, focusing on each state’s educational and regional touring programs for 2013; theatre venue websites; funding announcements; media reports; and my own professional knowledge. Using these sources, I first compiled a list of organisations and individuals creating theatre with or for children in each Australian state and territory. After examining the websites of these organisations and individuals, this list was further refined to include only those whose main creative output was centred on children (see Appendix A). It therefore excluded state theatre companies offering education programs to secondary school students to help them access theatre productions produced primarily for adult audiences.

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\(^{17}\) YPAA was the Australian branch of ASSITEJ, the international peak body of theatre with and for children and young people. It lost Commonwealth funding in 2012 but Australia retained membership of ASSITEJ through a combined financial contribution by the major subsidised children’s theatre companies.

\(^{18}\) *Lowdown* was a national youth arts magazine published between 1979 and 2011 by Carclew, South Australia’s Youth Arts Centre (Carclew, 2014).
The second challenge in surveying the field of Australian theatre with and for children was to devise a way of categorising this collection of theatre companies and individuals. Theatre for young people has always been resistant to being ordered by genre, artistic style or creative intent due to the evolving nature of the work (Hunter & Bourke, 2013). This problem, shared with theatre with and for adults, is often solved by classifying theatre by funding and administrative models. The Australia Council for the Arts Theatre Sector Plan 2012-14 identifies six types of theatre, largely, but not entirely, based on their funding status. They are:

1. commercial,
2. professional subsidised,
3. unsubsidised independent,
4. participatory,
5. community, and
6. amateur.

(Australia Council for the Arts, 2012)

The anomalous categories here are participatory and community theatre because these titles refer more to theatre styles than funding statuses or organisational structures. The remaining categories reflect an essentially hierarchical view of the theatre world. A report by the Australia Council about professional development in Australian theatre reinforces this by depicting the theatre sector as a pyramid, with a few large, highly subsidised organisations at the top, some small to medium companies in the middle and large numbers of freelance artists at the bottom (Bailey, 2008). While the number of organisations and individual artists in each category makes such imagery tempting, there are three problems with this hierarchical interpretation. The first is that it implies, even if unintentionally, that the work produced by the major companies is superior to that of smaller organisations and individuals—that they are, in fact, at the top of the creative food chain. Secondly, it suggests a refinement of ideas and skills from the lower orders to the top of the pyramid with an accompanying trajectory of employment for theatre artists. The anomalous categories here are participatory and community theatre because these titles refer more to theatre styles than funding statuses or organisational structures. The remaining categories reflect an essentially hierarchical view of the theatre world. A report by the Australia Council about professional development in Australian theatre reinforces this by depicting the theatre sector as a pyramid, with a few large, highly subsidised organisations at the top, some small to medium companies in the middle and large numbers of freelance artists at the bottom (Bailey, 2008). While the number of organisations and individual artists in each category makes such imagery tempting, there are three problems with this hierarchical interpretation. The first is that it implies, even if unintentionally, that the work produced by the major companies is superior to that of smaller organisations and individuals—that they are, in fact, at the top of the creative food chain. Secondly, it suggests a refinement of ideas and skills from the lower orders to the top of the pyramid with an accompanying trajectory of employment for theatre artists. The anomalous categories here are participatory and community theatre because these titles refer more to theatre styles than funding statuses or organisational structures. The remaining categories reflect an essentially hierarchical view of the theatre world. A report by the Australia Council about professional development in Australian theatre reinforces this by depicting the theatre sector as a pyramid, with a few large, highly subsidised organisations at the top, some small to medium companies in the middle and large numbers of freelance artists at the bottom (Bailey, 2008). While the number of organisations and individual artists in each category makes such imagery tempting, there are three problems with this hierarchical interpretation. The first is that it implies, even if unintentionally, that the work produced by the major companies is superior to that of smaller organisations and individuals—that they are, in fact, at the top of the creative food chain. Secondly, it suggests a refinement of ideas and skills from the lower orders to the top of the pyramid with an accompanying trajectory of employment for theatre...
professionals as they acquire more experience. Rather than gradually working their way up such a career ladder, though, as the same report finds, theatre professionals tend to move between categories (Bailey, 2008). The third problem with the pyramid image is that it says nothing about the characteristics of theatre made by each category. Generalisations can be made, but they are not always accurate, which inhibits an understanding of how each context may influence actor practice. To better understand this issue, I used a modified version of the six Australia Council theatre categories to examine the characteristics and affordances of the organisations creating theatre with and for children identified earlier. I merged commercial and professional subsidised theatre into one category because both work with large budgets. I also merged participatory and community theatre as they both involve working with non-professional actors. I excluded amateur theatre altogether because its widespread nature and strong adult focus was beyond the scope of this study (see Table 4.1 below). Although this exercise offers a snapshot of the scope of theatre being made with and for children in Australia, it also highlights the limitations of these categories. The next section discusses the categories and proposes a more detailed typology of practice that I developed for this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre category</th>
<th>Typical characteristics and affordances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Commercial and professional subsidised theatre | • Large budgets  
  • Theatre for children  
  • Main stage and customised venues  
  • Costly production values  
  • Large casts  
  • Large audiences  
  • School and family audiences  
  • Audiences aged birth to twelve years |
| Unsubsidised independent theatre         | • Small budgets  
  • Theatre with and for children  
  • Small and non-traditional theatre venues  
  • Small casts  
  • Small to medium audiences  
  • School and family audiences  
  • Audiences aged birth to twelve years |
| Participatory and community theatre      | • Small to large budgets  
  • Theatre with children  
  • Public spaces, schools, theatres and art studios  
  • Small to large groups  
  • Small to large casts  
  • School, child and family participants  
  • Audiences aged birth to twelve years |

Table 4.1: Characteristics and affordances of theatre with and for children


4.1 Commercial and Professional Subsidised Theatre

In 2016, nine of the 289 arts organisations defined by the Australia Council for the Arts as “key organisations” created theatre specifically with or for children and were supported by recurring government funding. Unlike these professional subsidised theatre companies, commercial theatre companies do not receive government support, funding their work instead through ticket sales and sponsorship. Although commercial and professional subsidised theatre obtain their income from different sources, they both have large budgets and share some characteristics of practice.

Commercial and professional subsidised theatre productions for children are likely to be produced in medium to large theatres, referred to in the theatre industry as main stage venues. Examples include the Sydney Opera House and the Queensland Performing Arts Centre. Due to the size and design of such venues, audiences are usually large in numbers and are positioned in fixed seating directly in front of the stage. Subsidised professional theatre companies are also financially well placed to customise non-traditional venues. For example, Slingsby\(^9\) has designed self-contained, intimate, tent-like environments that enclose the performance and audience spaces (The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy) and Arena Theatre Company\(^11\) has presented theatre for teenagers in a purpose-built motocross arena (Skid 180) and in a house (The House of Dreaming).

Productions in these theatres usually play to two distinctly different audiences: to school groups on weekdays, and to families on the weekends, school holidays and evenings. The performances may be suitable for a range of ages, although commercial productions tend to be aimed at younger children. The physical separation of performers and audiences in main stage venues influences the type of audience participation that is possible during the performances. It is usually verbal, infrequent or individualised, such as when a single child is invited on stage. It may also occur when performers mingle with the audience in the auditorium. For example, before and after performances of their Tashi\(^22\) shows, Imaginary Theatre’s actors chat casually to seated children, to set them at ease, while in

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\(^9\) Slingsby is a South Australian theatre company whose work appeals particularly to children aged 8-14. [http://www.slingsby.net.au](http://www.slingsby.net.au)


\(^22\) The Tashi novels by Anna Fienberg, Barbara Fienberg and Kim Gamble are a popular series of books for readers aged around 5-10 years.
Belvoir Street Theatre’s *The Book of Everything* a chase scene spills over into the audience.\(^{23}\)

The experiences afforded to children in main stage theatre productions are shaped by resources. With substantial budgets and the technical support available in large main stage venues, these productions can incorporate sophisticated staging devices such as impressive sets, video projections and complicated lighting plots. They can also support large casts and technical crews. Large theatres require large ticket sales, though, so the risk of financial loss is great for these productions. This is a reason why commercial children’s theatre has traditionally been dominated by conventional narrative forms and adaptations of films, books or television shows that have high audience recognition. The pressure to offer saleable content is also felt by government subsidised theatre companies, but because innovation is a condition of their funding these companies often commission new writing, nurture creative teams and experiment with theatrical forms (Windmill Theatre, 2013; Terrapin Puppet Theatre, 2014). Both commercial and professional subsidised theatre companies operate as producers, hiring different artists and technical crews for each production.

### 4.2 Unsubsidised Independent Theatre

The unsubsidised independent theatre sector is a very broad one, encompassing small companies with simple organisational structures as well as sole traders working as buskers, puppeteers and storytellers. These practitioners can be distinguished from commercial theatre companies in that they produce their own work rather than hiring other artists to do so. Actors working in the independent theatre sector perform in a range of venues including small theatres, schools, libraries and the street. Small to medium theatre venues are found in many regional and suburban locations, seating anywhere between 50 to 500 people. Many have flexible staging and seating configurations, that make them highly suitable for touring productions and for shows using unconventional seating and stage designs. Many major arts venues also have small, transformable studio theatres, allowing them to present a wide range of independent productions that have simple, creative sets that can be mounted and removed quickly for a short season. Like

\(^{23}\) A 2013 production of *The Book of Everything* presented in the Melbourne Theatre Company’s Lawler Studio used several types of audience participation which helped to create a sense of friendly anarchy that mirrored the characters’ own desires to break free from conventions.
main stage venues, small to medium theatres can play to families of young children and school audiences at different times of the week. The relative intimacy and flexibility of these venues facilitates physically interactive performances, and they are also suitable for young children because they are not too big to be potentially intimidating to novice audience members.

Unsubsidised independent children’s theatre organisations also produce the greatest part of theatre that tours to educational and care settings such as schools, kindergartens and childcare centres. The audiences in these settings are peer groups accompanied by teachers or carers. Audiences are usually seated close to the adult performers, facilitating a range of audience participation techniques. The theatre work presented in these non-theatre venues, which may include school gyms and childcare rooms, is determined by specific practical and economic constraints. Stage designs need to be simple and flexible and, as can be seen from state educational touring programs such as Regional Arts Victoria’s arts and education program, most casts are very small (Regional Arts Victoria, 2013). While these parameters may inspire some ingenious solutions, they also place some restrictions on the work. It can be difficult, for example, for unsubsidised companies to perform full Shakespeare plays in schools because they cannot usually afford to pay more than two or three actors.

Many independent theatre companies also present work in intimate community settings such as libraries and community centres, typically for school holiday programs targeted at families with young children. These venues present similar opportunities and challenges to educational venues.

4.3 Participatory and Community Theatre

Participatory and community theatre refers to theatre made with non-professional actors and does not clearly align with any single funding status. Participatory and community-based work may therefore be created by artists working within a range of organisational structures from unfunded youth theatre companies to major organisations such as Polyglot Theatre, which is one of the largest and best funded children’s theatre organisations in Australia. Its current work involves close, sometimes long-term interactive relationships with communities and audiences.
Four types of participatory/community theatre involving children are:

1. street theatre,
2. school and community residencies,
3. youth theatre, and
4. public workshop programs.

Street theatre is performed in open public spaces where direct physical and verbal interaction with the audience is an unpredictable and integral part of the work. Street performers are increasingly engaged by city councils and major events such as arts festivals to present experiences that can reach large numbers of people across a day or weekend of programs. These performances range from giant dinosaur puppets to intimate pocket theatre shows performed to one or a few people at a time. They are frequently characterised by direct address to the audience, non-narrative forms and highly visual designs.\textsuperscript{24}

School and community residencies are different to the in-theatre school performances described in the previous theatre category because they require actors to work with children to make theatre in their local community or school environments. They typically take place over a long time period which allows creative and personal relationships to develop between actors and participants (Imms, Jeanneret, & Stevens-Ballenger, 2011).

Youth theatre and public workshop programs position young people as capable theatre makers in studio-like settings. Depending on the program, they may involve one-off experiences or regular ongoing attendance. They are significant employers of professional actors who facilitate theatrical experiences for young people aged anywhere from birth to twenty-five years, with or without their parents.

4.4 Searching for New Categories of Practice

One of the questions guiding this research was what effect context has on the practice of actors who create theatre with and for children. To answer this, I first had to identify the main factors that influence their work. The overview of theatre with and for children in Australia presented in this chapter goes some way towards doing this, but it also reveals

\textsuperscript{24} The website of a single street performers’ agent such as Slack Taxi (\url{http://www.slacktaxi.com.au/}) confirms the very large number of acts available for this kind of work.
the limitations of categories based on a single criterion such as organisational structure. Although broad trends are evident when using this form of categorisation, such as that main stage venues are mostly used by commercial or subsidised professional theatre companies, the many exceptions to and overlaps among categories suggest that the organisational structure that an actor works in is not the most significant influence on their practice. If all three organisational categories make theatre for children from birth to twelve years old, for example, then there is no reason to consider them separately when discussing how age may influence actor practice. Conversely, the obvious fact that actors do interact differently with babies and twelve-year-old children shows that the age of the people involved in theatrical encounters is an important contextualising dimension of practice. The characteristics and affordances of children’s theatre identified in the mapping exercise above were used as a starting point for constructing a formative typology of practice consisting of six factors that influence encounters between actors and children (see Table 4.2 below). This typology was also informed by the literature and my own experience as an actor. I used this typology of practice to guide the selection of participants and the formative analysis. The following passage explains each of the factors in more detail, showing how they relate to one another.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance site</td>
<td>Theatres, outdoor public space, community arts studios, schools etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorship</td>
<td>Devised/written by actors or devised/written by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational structure</td>
<td>Self-employed actors or actors working as employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of participating children</td>
<td>Babies, preschool aged children, children aged 5-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre form</td>
<td>Physical theatre, comedy, circus, puppetry, dance theatre etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of participation by children</td>
<td>Audience members or co-devisors and/or performers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Typology of practice

Performance site

The site in which a performance takes place is closely linked to the theatrical form of the work and the type of participation involved. For example, street theatre often involves clowning and a great deal of direct interaction with the audience, whereas an actor performing a scripted work on a conventional stage with a darkened auditorium is likely
to have a more removed relationship with the audience. This study explores the impact that diverse spaces have on the relationship between actors and children.

**Authorship**

In the early stages of this research, informal consideration of theatre with and for children in Australia identified that a large proportion of scripts are written or devised by the actors who perform the work. This is especially the case for shows that draw on non-verbal forms such as physical theatre and circus, and for actors who work in independent, unfunded collectives. This study sought to determine what, if any, relationship authorship has with how practice is shaped by working with children.

**Organisational structure**

Actors’ lives are shaped by social, industrial and artistic factors (Crawford, 2015b; Moore, 2004; Van den Eynde, Fisher, & Sonn, 2015), so the organisational structures within which actors work are connected to their creative experiences. For example, whether they are being paid as employees or are financing and producing theatre themselves may influence how much creative input, or authorship, they are afforded. How this relates to the presence of children is not clear and will be explored throughout this thesis.

**Audience age**

This research focuses on children from birth to twelve years, an age bracket that contains several distinct developmental stages. Just as teaching children of different ages requires specific skills and results in different relationships, so too creating theatre with and for children of different ages may shape actor practice in different ways by emphasising certain technical skills and modes of interaction. To investigate this possibility, this study included participants who work with children of a range of ages. Actors who create theatre with and for teenagers were not invited to participate in this research for two reasons. Firstly, I have little professional experience or knowledge about this age group. Secondly, teenagers may not yet be adults, but they are not children either. A discussion of how this stage of development may relate to actor practice was beyond the scope of this study. While the Actors were not asked about their experiences with teenagers, some of them volunteered comments about this work and their reflections are included where relevant.
Theatre form

The affinity of theatre with and for children with so-called popular theatre forms has been noted (Hunter & Bourke, 2013; Travers, 1984, Richards, 2003). These forms include genres with an emphasis on visual, physical and non-text based modes such as such as puppetry, circus, dance, magic, clowning and improvised theatre. They are often, although not exclusively, associated with independent and devised theatre and are found in a range of theatre venues. The high proportion of theatre for children using these modes warrants further investigation, as does their connection to actor practice. For example, it is possible that actors are drawn to work with children partly because of the theatre forms they are likely to encounter in that part of the theatre industry.

Participation

The nature and purpose of participation is a contested issue in children’s theatre, as it is in the wider realm of theatre studies, with some authors questioning the political and aesthetic values conventionally ascribed to different kinds of audience involvement in theatrical experiences (Bishop, 2012; Fletcher-Watson, 2015). As Rancière (2011) explains, hierarchies of participation are especially problematic because they create an artificial binary of active versus passive audiences. His observation resonates with Dewey’s comment, made many decades ago, that “receptivity is not passivity: (Dewey, 1934, p. 52). In response to this debate, attempts have been made to identify the subtleties of arts participation. For example, Fletcher-Watson (2015), Novak-Leonard & Brown (2011) and White (2006) all offer detailed analyses of participation. The Australia Council for the Arts’ Theatre Sector Plan 2012-2014 takes a simple approach, characterising the arts as inviting either receptive or creative audience participation (Australia Council for the Arts, 2012). These two categories align with Schonmann’s characterisation of theatrical engagement as either “reception” or “participation” (Schonmann, 2006, p. 52). This thesis draws on these last two models, describing children’s theatre as that which is made for children to experience as audience members and that which children create themselves, in collaboration with adult actors. The Australia Council refers to receptive and creative participation as two separate realms, while Schonmann (2006) views her analogous categories of reception and participation as “two elements on the same scale of the reaction process” (p. 52). Aligned with Schonmann’s work, this study conceptualises theatre with and for children as overlapping.
spheres of activity. It acknowledges and describes the types of participation involved in theatrical events but ascribes no intrinsic value to any of them. As a key factor influencing practice, participation is carefully considered in this thesis, in order to understand how it contextualises the work actors undertake with children.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the broad context in which Australian actors creating theatre with and for children work. It has discussed existing models used to categorise Australian theatre practice and, drawing on my own professional experience and a mapping of the sector, offers a new typology of practice better suited to the investigation of theatre with and for children. The nine participating Actors and the relationship of their work to the typology of practice is shown in Table 4.3 (p.69). The chapter that follows that table discusses the survey results and presents individual case stories and a multiple case analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Specialist theatre form (if any)</th>
<th>Audience Age</th>
<th>Authorship</th>
<th>Type of participation</th>
<th>Performance Site</th>
<th>Funding Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn Hanna</td>
<td>Physical improvisation Clowning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Brouwer</td>
<td>Youth theatre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x X x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Goronszy</td>
<td>Participatory theatre Puppetry</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x X x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Kelly</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Pinder</td>
<td>Mime Clowning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn Bechervaise</td>
<td></td>
<td>x x x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x x x x x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Noonan</td>
<td>Dance Puppetry Physical theatre Street theatre</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x x x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jens Altheimer</td>
<td>Puppetry Visual Theatre Street theatre</td>
<td>x x x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Steele</td>
<td></td>
<td>x x x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: The Actors’ relationship to the pre-analysis typology of practice
Chapter 5  Participant Case Stories

This chapter introduces the nine Actors as a group and as individuals. It begins by reporting on the findings of the survey that was completed by the Actors before they participated in semi-structured interviews. The quantitative survey data offer a broad-brush view of their collective practice while the qualitative data point to individual orientations to practice. Both are discussed further in Chapters 6-8. The presentation of survey findings is followed by nine case stories, which are presented in three groups of three, reflecting different degrees of child participation: theatre with children, theatre with/for children and theatre for children. The case stories aim to capture salient characteristics of individual practitioners, to acknowledge their uniqueness and to facilitate an understanding of how their personal history and circumstances influence their practice. These stories are followed by a multiple case analysis in Chapters 6-8 that considers the patterns and themes emerging from the Actors’ collective experiences of working with children.

5.1 Survey Results

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the purpose of the survey was to generate background information about the Actors’ practice which could inform, confirm or contextualise the other data sets. It was designed early in the study so some of the quantitative questions, such as the ones asking about the Actors’ ages and countries of birth (see Appendix B), were not relevant to the final research questions and are therefore not reported here. Other quantitative questions, such as the proportion of work the Actors had undertaken with different age groups and in different settings, helped to guide the later stages of participant selection and inform the interviews by enriching my knowledge of each Actor’s practice. The qualitative survey questions offered the Actors an opportunity to reflect on their practice before the interviews, during which I used some of their responses as prompts for discussion.

A summary of the survey results is presented here, with reflective comments about the findings and methodology. Where a survey question allowed the participants to give multiple responses and to rank these responses in order of importance, I have calculated the results in two ways: by number and by weight. The number scores reflect the total number of participants who chose each response. The weighted totals reflect the
importance of those responses to the participants. They were calculated by giving each response a score. This meant that in a question which allowed for six ranked responses a ‘1st’ response (meaning it was the most important response for that Actor) received a weighted score of six, while a ‘6th’ response (meaning it was the least important response for that Actor) received a weighted response of one. This dual method of scoring shows that while some responses were chosen more frequently by the participants, others were more significant to them (e.g. see responses to question 6).

1. Please note any formal training/qualifications attained, including performance and non-performance related studies and training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education or training course</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance/theatre making tertiary course (diploma or certificate)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance/theatre making tertiary course (degree)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short term theatre-related studies, including: circus; Butoh; Suzuki; clown; improvisation; Bouffon; Viewpoints; Laban; Theatre of the Oppressed; St Martins Youth Ensembles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-performance training, including: Diploma of reflexology and oriental massage; Diploma of Portuguese language; Bachelor of Science</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma or Masters of Teaching (started or completed)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate 4 in Training and Assessment (TAFE)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Actors’ formal training

Comments: Conforming to research about artists’ educational backgrounds (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2017), the Actors are well educated. All have undertaken formal theatre training and seven have completed multiple courses of study. The theatre performance courses that the Actors have completed indicate that they are oriented towards theatre forms that emphasise physical expression and improvisation. Four Actors have also engaged in teaching studies, pointing to an interest in child development and education.
2. What title(s) best describe you as a theatre professional? If listing more than one, list in order of importance, with ‘1’ being the most important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theatre maker/devisor/writer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing artist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puppeteer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circus artist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Teaching artist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Clown/physical comedian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramaturg</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre actor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Actors’ professional titles

Comments: The three equally preferred terms that the Actors use to describe themselves as practitioners are: actor, performing artist and theatre maker. Multiple responses were available to the Actors and, of these, the most common term by number and weight that they use to describe themselves is theatre maker. This is followed by the term performing artist, and then actor. These results are consistent with the Actors’ relationship to the pre-analysis typology of practice (see Table 4.3, p. 69) and show that more than half of them have devised or performed original theatre work with and for children. In taking on the multiple tasks involved in creating original work, they may identify more strongly as theatre makers than as actors. Table 4.3 also shows that the Actors perform in multiple theatrical forms, including circus, puppetry, physical theatre, dance theatre and mime. In my professional life, I have observed that it is common for practitioners working in these contexts to refer to themselves as performers or performing artists, and to reserve the word ‘actor’ for text-based theatre. This issue was a lengthy topic of conversation in the interview with Matthew Kelly, but as it is beyond the scope of this study it is not discussed further here. As outlined in section 1.3, this thesis acknowledges the participants’ diverse practice and use of different professional titles but, for clarity, refers to them all as ‘the Actors’.
3. What proportion of your overall theatre work is created with or for children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than 30%</th>
<th>30-60%</th>
<th>More than 60%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.3: Proportion of actors’ work involving children*

Comments: These responses show that working with children makes up at least 30% of the Actors’ employment. This confirms the findings of the first document search conducted for this research which identified actors who were experienced in working with children.

4. Which age groups have you primarily created theatre with and/or for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth-6 years</th>
<th>7-10 years</th>
<th>11-13 years</th>
<th>14-18 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.4: Age of children with whom actors work*

Comment: The survey was designed before the typology of practice was developed (see Table 4.2, p. 65). As a result, the age categories in this question do not align perfectly with those in the typology. They do indicate, though, that while the most common age group of children the Actors work with is 7-10 years, the participant selection resulted in the recruitment of practitioners with experience working with children from birth to twelve years, the age range that formed the focus of this research.

5. What proportion of the theatre work you create with and for children (not adults) occurs in these contexts? (n=8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatrical context for theatre with children</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Less than 30%</th>
<th>30-60%</th>
<th>More than 60%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational, care or community settings</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(schools, kindergartens, childcare centres)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community settings</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. Community arts centre or libraries)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated children's arts centres</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including youth theatre studios)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main stage theatre venues</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small or non-traditional theatre venues</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street/public spaces</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.5: Contexts of theatre with children*
### Table 5.6: Contexts of theatre for children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatrical context for theatre for children</th>
<th>Percentage of practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational, care or community settings (schools, kindergartens, childcare centres)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community settings (e.g. community arts centre or libraries)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated children’s arts centres (including youth theatre studios)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main stage theatre venues</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small or non-traditional theatre venues</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street/public spaces</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comment:** Each of these questions was answered by only eight of the Actors because one of the nine only creates theatre with children and one only creates theatre for children. The results show that the Actors have worked with children in a range of formal and informal theatrical settings and confirm the findings of the first document search.
6. Why do you create theatre with children? List as many as you like, in order of importance, with ‘1’ being most important (n=8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for creating theatre with children</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to share your knowledge and skills with children</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to enhance your own theatre practice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to generate income</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to work with other artists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to connect with others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> Opportunity to learn from the age group we are creating for.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> Children have incredible ideas and see things from a different perspective than adults. Also, if the work is for them then they need to be involved in the creation of it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> Chance to test material with target audience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> Opportunity to learn from children’s direct connection to imagination and impulse.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> Opportunity to witness the exciting work that young artists generate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other:</strong> Opportunity to show others (parents, carers, educators), new perspectives on less prescriptive ways to work with children and creativity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.7: Reasons for creating theatre with children
7. Why do you create and/or perform theatre for children? List as many as you like in order of importance, with ‘1’ being most important (n=8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for creating theatre for children</th>
<th>1st 6</th>
<th>2nd 5</th>
<th>3rd 4</th>
<th>4th 3</th>
<th>5th 2</th>
<th>6th 1</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to enhance your own theatre practice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to share your knowledge and skills with children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to generate income</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to connect with others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to connect/work with other artists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Children are the best audience. It’s real. They tell you if its shit. They are the next generation and are about to be responsible for the world. If they can maintain their sense of play and wonder then we are, as a community, going to be ok.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Opportunity to create the type of theatre I think children should have available to them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Opportunity to showcase to the public, children’s direct connection to imagination and impulse and acknowledge how important those qualities are to nurture.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Opportunity to show others (parents, carers, educators, audience), new perspectives on less prescriptive ways to work with children and creativity in a performative context.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.8: Reasons for creating theatre for children

Comments: The Actors were given the licence to offer multiple responses to questions 6 and 7. Fifteen of the sixteen multiple responses indicated three or more motivations for creating theatre with or for children. Significant motivations for the Actors to work with children are the opportunity to enhance their practice, the opportunity to share their knowledge and skills with children, and the opportunity to generate income. The relational nature of theatre is reflected by the high number of Actors indicating that they are motivated by the opportunities it presents to connect with others. The Actors also offered six reasons of their own (i.e. as ‘other’) for creating theatre with children, and
four for creating theatre for children. This points to the personalised nature of their practice and its connection to individual experience.

8. Note three key roles (in order of importance from 1 to 3) that you give emphasis to when creating work with children (n=8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles emphasised when creating theatre with children</th>
<th>Order of importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity-generator</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-learner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-player</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborator</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social enabler</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role model</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Facilitator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.9: Roles of actors creating theatre with children

Comments: The role that is most significant by weight to the Actors when creating theatre with children is creativity generator. This role resonates with the results of question 6 and shows the emphasis they place on sharing their knowledge and skills with children. The roles most favoured by the Actors after creativity generator all emphasise co-creation (i.e. co-learner, co-player and collaborator). This orientation towards a shared experience with children also aligns with the responses to question 6 and points to the Actors’ desire to connect with others. Further, this orientation suggests a willingness to view children as equal partners in the creative process, an issue that will be explored further in chapter section 6.5.1.
9. Note three key roles (in order of importance from 1 to 3) that you give emphasis to when creating work for children (n=8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles emphasised when creating theatre for children</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity-generator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social enabler</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-player</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.10: Roles of actors creating theatre for children

Comments: The responses to this and the previous question align with the literature that shows that artists take on multiple roles when working with children (Brown, 2014; Jeanneret & Brown, 2013; Pringle, 2002). Unsurprisingly, the most common role the Actors adopt when creating theatre for children is performer but being creativity generators or inspirers is also important to them. This suggests a belief that children can have a creatively enhancing experience by participating in theatre as audience members. This belief was elaborated upon in three of the Actors’ interviews and is discussed in more detail in chapter sections 6.4.2 and 6.4.3.

10. To what degree does working with children inform your creative practice? (Please circle one number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Not at all)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 1/2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 3/4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 3/4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (A lot)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.11: Degree to which working with children informs the Actors’ practice
Comments: The practice of all the Actors is influenced by working with children to a moderate or a great degree. Three Actors chose to mark points between the five Likert scale points offered, suggesting that they considered this question carefully.

11. Are there any specific aspects of your creative practice that are informed or developed by working with young people? If yes, please explain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Aspects of practice informed or developed by working with children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan Goronszy</td>
<td>New ways of seeing things. I’m freer. I take more risks. I’m simpler.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Noonan</td>
<td>Children’s sense of play informs and is informed by improvisatory, responsive theatre techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn Bechervaise</td>
<td>When creating theatre we try to PLAY and WONDER throughout the development process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Steele</td>
<td>Children are a discerning audience. The need to make intelligent, entertaining, dramatically strong, honest work for children informs devising work and acting in non-devised work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jens Altheimer</td>
<td>Sometimes I launch material I’m interested to work in a more technical way as a try out and see what they come up with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Kelly</td>
<td>Prop and set making, writing and directing. Clowning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Pinder</td>
<td>Clowning. Commedia dell’arte.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn Hanna</td>
<td>Their reactions and surprising actions fill my thoughts and the way I look at the world. Ideas flow when we just do things, try things, test things and this is how kids often operate. Working with and for children has encouraged in my practise a letting go of having to make work that makes rational sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Brouwer</td>
<td>Watching them think and imagine, watching them navigate that collaborative space—the way in which they approach the work has shifted many aspects of my practice. My approach to theatre making has become more collaborative, open, less defined by constructs and increasingly distanced from the foundations of my traditional theatre training.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.12: How actor practice is informed by working with children

Comments: The responses to question 10 show that the Actors’ practice has been shaped to a significant degree by working with children, but the responses to this question suggest that this shaping is influenced by the Actors’ personal experiences. Amongst the individualised responses, two themes do emerge, though: an increased emphasis on play and on open-ended devising processes. These orientations are explored in more detail in chapter sections 8.2.2 and 8.2.3.
5.1.1 Reflection

The survey results offered this study useful background information about the Actors’ practice. Their responses to questions about their professional training and the contexts in which they work confirmed the findings of the first document search and were augmented by the second document search and the interviews. The Actors’ responses to questions about their motivations, goals and roles contributed to a formative theory about the characteristics of their practice and informed the subsequent interviews and performance observations. The final two questions, which centred on how actor practice is shaped by creating theatre with and for children, provided prompts for the interviews and results that were compared with the other data sets.

As noted, there were some problems with design of the survey which were caused by it being developed early in the research process. These issues did not, however, impact in a negative or significant way on the research.

The following section builds on the survey data with individual case stories of the Actors. It begins with an explanation of the three categories that I used to group the stories and a discussion of the literary content and styles used in this section.

5.2 Participant Case Story Categories

Section 1.4 outlined a rationale for using the terms ‘theatre with children’ and ‘theatre for children’, explaining that they aimed to describe the two main types of participation experienced by children in this field. In Chapter 3, I explained that the formative analysis suggested that these two terms are inadequate to describe the nuances of participatory experience available to children in the work discussed in this study. This view was prompted by the case of Matthew Kelly. I initially placed his work in the category of theatre for children because it is wholly devised by himself and his creative partner and is performed to children in large theatres. This was also how Matthew described the work himself in the survey, which only allowed the Actors to define their practice as being either theatre with children or theatre for children. When Matthew’s performances were compared with the other participants’ work, though, it became evident that the high level of audience participation in his shows made them more suitable for placement in a new middle category, theatre with/for children. With participation acting as a key
contextualising factor in actor practice, the three categories then offered an organising framework for analysing and representing the data.

As Table 4.3 (p. 69) shows, many of the Actors create theatre in multiple and diverse settings so their experiences could have justified their placement in any of the three categories of participation. Their selection and placement in a single category was influenced by the need to represent actor practice with illustrative examples. It is important to note, therefore, that the three categories of creative participation into which the Actors are sorted are not necessarily the ones they would choose to describe their own practice. I did, however, place participants in the category that seemed to best align with the greater part of their current work, as identified through the two document searches. For example, although Jens Altheimer has a background in street theatre and often works with children in community arts settings, an important part of his current practice is performing theatre for children, so I have placed him in the theatre for children group.

5.3 Case Story Style and Content

The personalised nature of practice called for a biographical approach to representing the Actors and their work. This view was prompted by the nine participants themselves, who spontaneously offered biographical information to contextualise their practice. That information included their professional and personal experiences, and reflections about how these experiences intersected with their beliefs, goals, values and working methods. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to introduce the participants with concise, holistic case stories that reference relevant aspects of their lives, drawing on data from the interviews, surveys and observations. The stories also outline my relationship to the participants, some of whom I have worked with or know socially.

The word ‘story’ has complex and multiple meanings. Simons uses it to describe the “underlying, narrative structure by which we make sense of the case” (Simons, 2009, p. 147). Within this larger story, other literary forms can be used, such as anecdotes, narratives and case stories. All these forms involve the selection and ordering of information but where anecdotes are illustrative texts and narratives are representations of analysis and interpretation, case stories serve, in this thesis, as contextualising profiles of participants.
Each set of three stories is preceded by a narrative of a performance by one of the Actors. These narratives offer interpretive portrayals of practice and act as prompts for the subsequent analysis in Chapters 6 and 7. They add to the holistic nature of the profiles by describing the lived experience of the Actors’ practice from the audience’s perspective. Key features arising from each single case analysis are used as interpretive headings for the case stories and are explored within the subsequent text. They are summarised in Table 5.13 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Key features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn Hanna</td>
<td>“Tuning in” to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Brouwer</td>
<td>Love, care and worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Goronszy</td>
<td>Playing with risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Kelly</td>
<td>The art of being seriously stupid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Pinder</td>
<td>Helping children to find their place in the theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn Bechervaise</td>
<td>Trusting in children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephan Noonan</td>
<td>Sensing, feeling, listening and looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jens Altheimer</td>
<td>Doing what comes naturally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Steele</td>
<td>Honesty and integrity</td>
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Table 5.13: Key features of the Actors’ practice

### 5.4 Actors Creating Theatre With Children

Theatre with children offers children opportunities to participate in theatrical experiences as performers, devisors, writers or stage technicians, allowing them to have a direct influence on the creative direction of the work. Some of these encounters are short term, such as the street theatre performance described in the narrative below, while others, such as youth theatre workshops and school residencies, involve long-term relationships between children and actors. Brief experiences typically have a strong theatrical framework within which children can create alongside actors. For example, Carolyn Hanna’s work *The Curious Game*, discussed below, uses a floor mat painted like a chess
board to clearly establish the premise that the children are chess pieces who can be knocked out of the game by the performers. Longer theatrical projects accommodate a more emergent creative process, but as Jeanneret and Brown (2013) show, in both contexts actors may take on multiple roles, including model, facilitator, collaborator and co-player. The Curious Game is an outdoor participatory theatre work created by Born in a Taxi in which company member Carolyn Hanna plays the dramaturgically and socially pivotal role of the Queen. The performance I observed in July 2015 is represented here through my imagined perspective of one young audience member.

The Curious Game

It is a cold night on the Melbourne Docklands foreshore. Jessica, a small, shy-looking ten-year-old girl, and her family are part of a large crowd gathered to watch a fireworks display. As the last sparkles fade, Jessica hears music, a whistle and shouting. She runs towards the sounds and catches the beginning of The Curious Game, a semi-improvised performance by Born in a Taxi. “Bow to the Queen!” announces a flamboyantly dressed courtier. Along with the other children in the crowd, Jessica dutifully obliges as the Queen, played by Carolyn Hanna, rates their efforts. “Not bad … Good … Lower! I’m the Queen, you know!” she proclaims. Jessica giggles—this queen is funny! She is dressed in old-fashioned clothes and, what’s that? Yes, she has metal vegetable strainers over her ears!

Jessica jumps out of the way as two courtiers run past, trying to escape a beating on their bottoms from the Queen’s foam baton. A boy standing nearby is handed the baton and is encouraged to chase the courtiers himself. Jessica wishes she could have a turn too but— even better— the Queen asks, “Who wants to play a game?” Jessica isn’t sure if it is going to be fun or scary but she joins the other children on the chess-board mat that forms the stage, eager to begin.

The Queen sits on her throne overlooking the stage and holds up a black card. Delighted that she knows straight away what to do, Jessica jumps onto a black square on the check-board. The Queen holds up a white and a black card and Jessica places one foot on a white check and one on a black. The cues get trickier, and Jessica concentrates hard on interpreting them in the best way she can. Suddenly a whistle blows and the Queen descends from her throne to inspect her subjects. It looks like someone has to go! Jessica freezes in position, fervently hoping that it won’t be her. Finally, the decision falls on someone else, but instead of shouting, “Off with his head!” as Jessica expects, the Queen laments the necessary sacrifice with a mournful, “Aaaawww!” Everyone laughs, including the banished child, and the game continues.

25 Born in a Taxi is a collective of performers who specialise in collaborative improvised performance in public spaces (http://www.borninataxi.com.au/)
Jessica knows she is good at this game but she is still surprised to find that there are soon only two children left on the board—herself and an older boy. The final card is raised. It is a single black dot on a white card. Jessica isn’t interested in sport, and she’s usually not very competitive but for some reason she really, really wants to win this. She jumps onto a white square and crouches down into a ball, with her head tucked tightly between her knees. The opposition wavers, not wanting to copy Jessica but uncertain how else to interpret the picture. The Queen approaches him slowly and, after a moment’s agonizing silence, delivers her verdict: “Aaaawww!” He laughs and joins his friends on the edge of the stage. Jessica is filled with happiness. She wonders, “Will I get a prize?” She will—in fact, she is anointed as the new Queen! Bursting with pride, she walks slowly around the stage, arm held aloft by the old Queen, who is encouraging everyone to cheer. Jessica imitates her predecessor’s solemn expression, and slowly blows kisses to the adoring crowd. A bubble of joy threatens to rise up and crack her regal mask, but then the courtiers break out into a silly dance and Queen Jessica can join them, jiving and smiling to her heart’s content.

5.4.1 Carolyn Hanna: “Tuning in” to children.

In the small, intersecting worlds of Australian street, improvised and children’s theatre I have seen Carolyn Hanna perform many times over the past twenty-five years. I had never met her, though, until several years before I began this research, when she worked on a project with children at ArtPlay. I was deeply impressed with Blanc, in which Carolyn and her colleagues collaboratively devised physical theatre performances with children. The project was joyful, sophisticated and original, and I wondered what had led an actor whose company is not primarily known for making theatre with and for children to create such a work.

Our first interview for this research took place in a quiet, anonymous looking university meeting room that seemed far removed from the subject matter at hand. In contrast, Carolyn made time for our second interview at the Royal Melbourne Children’s Hospital after a shift as a clown doctor. I met her in the sunny, colourful foyer of this newly opened building, which is designed to feel as unlike a medical facility as possible. She took me on a guided tour of the clown doctors’ dressing room and the new children’s ‘hang-out’ lounge, offering an informal critique of how this strange theatrical domain serves the needs of young patients. Although we spoke about Carolyn’s practice as a clown doctor, we were mainly there to discuss the outdoor semi-improvised participatory performance of The Curious Game that I had seen a few days earlier. A theme that emerged strongly from this and our first interview was the delight that Carolyn takes in children’s theatrical
explorations and discoveries. We discussed this in relation to the girl who had won the improvised game that is the foundation of the show. She initially appeared to be quite introverted and her surprising transformation throughout the experience is exactly the sort of creative agency that Carolyn aims to achieve with her work. The previous narrative imagines what that transformation may have felt like from the child’s point of view.

As an actor creating theatre in public spaces, Carolyn has always encountered children in her work but she says she has only consciously “tuned into” them since becoming a parent. This heightened awareness of children has led her to adjust the content of her work and continues to influence her values, beliefs and approach to theatre. By paying closer attention to children, Carolyn has been made aware of the degree to which they are willing to be challenged. Their courage prompts her to take more risks and to offer children experiences that extend them. Carolyn aims to empower children through theatre and does this through listening to them so she can engage with who they are rather than trying to impress them with her own skills. Allowing children to take the lead within the boundaries of the performance context has taken Carolyn to new places creatively. She says working with children has made her more playful, hopeful and responsive, amplifying qualities that, as a collaborative improviser, she has been concerned with for many years. The theatrical context of each work shapes these exchanges. Intimate settings such as the hospital bedside offer more scope for individualised interactions than public street theatre shows, which involve many people, a loose script and, in the case of The Curious Game, a fixed time limit.

5.4.2 Naomi Brouwer: Love, care and worry.

Naomi Brouwer is a stylish, capable-looking woman with a wry, self-deprecating manner. I first met her when we were both participating in a play reading and when I learned that she runs a youth theatre company I was slightly in awe of the energy and optimism I knew she must have to coordinate such an enterprise. Looking at the company’s website, I was further intrigued by the Surrealist tone of the posts. They reminded me strongly of my own formative experiences of youth theatre as a teenager which gave me a tantalising sense of alternative creative paths to those previously suggested by school musicals. Knowing from this personal experience the impact that youth theatre can have on young people, I was keen to interview someone who has devoted much of her career to it. Aware also of the everyday difficulties of running a youth theatre, I wondered what motivates
Naomi to do this work and what sustains her practice. In answering these questions, Naomi explained that her work as an actor creating theatre with children is intimately connected to her personal history and beliefs about theatre and children. She felt that for me to understand the complexities of her practice, she needed to share parts of her life story and as we made ourselves comfortable on her cozy lounge room couches she did just that.

Naomi’s practice as an actor creating theatre with children has been inspired by children’s creativity and collaborative ways of working, which she says have “freed up [her] imaginative world”, made her a more enthusiastic collaborator and changed her aesthetic preferences. Since she began working in this field her practice has evolved from an adult-led, product-oriented approach to one that aspires to process-based experiences guided by children’s interests. Naomi is acutely aware, though, of the limitations that various theatrical contexts place on children’s agency and is sensitive to their perceptions of the kinds of autonomy they are afforded. This interest in children’s points of view springs from a strong sense of love and concern for their wellbeing and is reflected in her choice to examine children’s views on democratic processes in youth theatre for her Masters of Teaching thesis (Brouwer, 2015).

Naomi’s interview responses illustrate the close interplay between actors’ biographies and their professional practice. Her work with children has been affected by employment opportunities, financial pressures, relationships, personal experiences and emotional orientations. For example, highly aware of the importance of creativity to her own sense of identity and happiness, Naomi recognises that some children have a similar need to express themselves through the arts. She therefore tries to offer children authentic opportunities to “grasp the seeds” of their creativity through theatre. The methods she employs to do this take her ever further away from what she calls her “traditional actor training”, which focused on the interpretation of texts and on refining performance skills.

5.4.3 Dan Goronszy: Playing with risk.

With her cheeky smile, loud laugh and mane of long black hair, Dan Goronszy stands out in a crowd. This is a useful characteristic in the public theatre events that she frequently performs in, where she acts as both a prompter of, and anchor in, the complex activity swirling around her. One moment she is initiating a game in a maze of cardboard boxes,
and the next she is kneeling down to reassure a lost child. With no two shows ever alike, she has to be highly present and responsive—not to mention energetic. This is the professional side of Dan that thousands of children have seen in her tours with Polyglot Theatre’s public play events. When reading about her work in another research report (Imms, Jeanneret & Stevens-Ballenger, 2011), I was touched by the description of her caring interactions with students, and I subsequently learned through her website that she has undertaken several long-term artist residencies in communities and schools. Having worked with Dan on a children’s theatre creative development project, I was keen to interview her, someone who seemed to be such a natural fit for this audience. I was surprised, then, to learn that she did not originally want to work with children.

After graduating from a Small Companies and Community Theatre course, Dan was “up for some serious theatre”, which she equated with working with adults. Nevertheless, she sought out work with children as a way of supplementing her income. Around the same time, she was employed on a project creating theatre with at-risk young people, which consolidated her personal experience of the arts as having “the really important potential to shift the way people think about themselves in the world”. These experiences led her to view her practice in social terms, defined by what she is “giving back” to others.

Dan now rates earning an income as her least important motivation for creating theatre with and for children. Instead, she is driven by a desire to share her knowledge and skills with children, to give them opportunities to express themselves, and to promote their “sense of play and wonder”. Working with children has developed Dan’s respect for children’s ideas, allowing her to trust them and herself to take more risks in the creative process. She now defines “serious theatre” as that which is meaningful to audiences of any age, involves humour and risk, and facilitates a genuine exchange between herself and participants.

5.4.4 Reflection

The three Actors introduced in this section work in a range of settings that can be described as theatre with children, including youth theatre, interactive street theatre and community arts residencies. Despite the differences between the theatrical forms and processes involved in these settings, the Actors share some orientations towards practice. These orientations have evolved over the course of their careers as they have engaged
more with children. As actors who now regularly create theatre with children, Carolyn, Naomi and Dan share a strong belief in children’s creative capacities and in their right to express themselves. They are committed to following children’s creative leads but acknowledge that the process and outcome of their exchanges are strongly shaped by contextualising factors such as time constraints. These factors will be discussed in more detail throughout the multiple case analysis (Chapters 6 and 7).

5.5 Actors Creating Theatre With/For Children

Theatre in the middle category of with/for children is characterised by a moderate level of creative participation by children: it is strongly led by the performance skills of the actors but involves children in curated moments of co-creation. While these moments do not substantially change the outcome of the performance, they are designed to be pleasurable and meaningful to both the participating children and the actors. The narrative below describes a performance of *The Listies Make you LOL* by Matthew Kelly. Although he says that the interactive scenes in this show are highly crafted and less spontaneous than they seem, the children in the audience have a strong feeling that they are contributing to the performance. My narrative charts how children’s feeling of ownership of Matthew’s work extends to their behaviour in the theatre foyer.

*The Listies Make You LOL*

In the foyer of a modern suburban theatre in Melbourne, a boy of about seven is diving bomb one of many beanbags scattered around the floor. Each time he throws himself forward his older brother tries to yank the beanbag away before he lands. The potential for shattered teeth or a bruised face is quite high, but the younger boy willingly repeats the dive countless times, clearly having the time of his life. Another child stands nearby, gazing into space with a finger planted up his nostril. He seems to have forgotten that he placed it there. Meanwhile, on the other side of the foyer, there’s a flurry of activity as children notice that a pug dog has been led inside. There is an air of happy anticipation in the crowd and once the doors open children quickly fill the auditorium with noisy energy, eating, wriggling and compulsively flipping the moveable seats up and down.

The opening sound cue starts and two actors run onto the stage which is strewn with a collection of objects that have no aesthetic relationship to one other except for the fact that they all look second-hand, homemade or perhaps even broken. Dressed in the universal male outfit of shorts, T-shirt and runners, Matthew Kelly launches into a series of curtsies to the audience. He continues even though his performance partner is clearly ready to begin the show and is beginning to get frustrated with the hold-up. The audience laughs loudly and applauds Matthew, which only encourages
him further. He grins delightfully and continues to curtsy madly until his partner is finally forced to shout at him to stop. Matthew beams at the audience and cheekily offers us one more quick bob. And so, the scene is set and the characters are established for this madcap show, which has us breathless with laughter for its entire seventy minutes.

This is a theatrical production that is centred firmly on the performances of its two actors. Matthew plays the fool to his partner’s straight man, always getting the instructions wrong or following an inappropriate impulse. His character is a mix of innocence and wiliness, embodying the class clown, the puppy dog and the Road Runner. In the long tradition of clowns, Matthew’s character is a wildly exaggerated version of himself who tries enthusiastically to follow instructions but whose apparent stupidity, literal-mindedness and impulsiveness frequently derail his best intentions. While his partner’s character grows increasingly frustrated, Matthew smiles sweetly at the audience, giggles at his mistakes, and merrily proceeds to create ever more mayhem. The audience warms to him because his errors are mostly well-meaning—he is just confounded by his limited understanding of a baffling world. The comedy arises because although he is clearly an adult who should know better, he does, in fact, know less than the young audience. This reversal of conventional power relationships is hugely attractive to the children. The audience does not merely sympathise with Matthew’s character, though; they are also complicit with him. Despite his cheerful demeanour, there is a subversive, naughty streak to him that greatly appeals to children, who relish the gleeful way he breaks the rules of the proper adult world, always taking the joke just a bit too far.

The show has ended and a long line has formed in the foyer for the performers to sign CDs and posters. Seated at a table, Matthew’s flushed and sweaty face reflects the enormous energy he has expended in this second show for the day. As he draws funny doodles for the children, he engages in low-key, humorous banter with them. He has turned down the volume to match the intimacy of this encounter, engaging with children in a warm and personalised manner. They can see from this relaxed interaction that Matthew is an ordinary person who is interested in them, rather than an inaccessible creature with miraculous powers of performance. Finally, the last child in line offers the performers a present: a pair of socks—to share. Matthew bursts out laughing at what is a fitting response to a show that aims to inspire children to embrace stupidity in all its joy and creativity.

5.5.1 Matthew Kelly: The art of being seriously stupid.

I have been following Matthew Kelly’s work for children since I saw The Listies’ first show for children in 2009. I am drawn to the company’s work for its joyful and intelligent celebration of children’s culture. I also enjoy watching theatre that is driven by the actors’ performances rather than complex production elements or plots derived from other

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26 Originally called The List Operators, The Listies is a children’s theatre company founded by Matthew and his creative partner, Richard Higgins (http://www.thelisties.com/).
artforms, such as children’s books. When I eventually met Matthew in person, at an industry function in 2014, I discovered a quiet, thoughtful person behind the explosive stage presence. He generously fitted two lengthy interviews into meal times at cafes, in between engagements to do with the publication of The Listies’ first book for children.

Matthew’s work as one half of a comedy duo is driven by a deep love of silliness. “Being stupid” is a key part of his creative practice, both for the joy it gives him and his audiences, and for the way that it reflects and validates children’s lives. These twin threads of entertaining and caring for children are woven throughout Matthew’s work, shaping the content of his shows and the way he interacts with young audiences. Together, they serve his overarching goal to prove that the theatre is “a fun live place to be” and that it can be “a shared experience between families”.

Matthew says that he “deeply cares” what sort of theatre is available to children and he is highly critical of theatre that “ignores” child audiences either through content that does not interest them or through performances that lack any sense of dialogue with them. His work is characterised by constant direct and indirect exchanges with the audience. Both the exuberant, silly material and the audience interaction let children know that they have been seen and judged worthy of being included in the performance. Although Matthew defines his work as theatre for children, audience participation is intrinsic to the shows.

In contrast to the beautiful sets and costumes used by some theatre companies, Matthew cultivates a shambolic, improvised aesthetic. This is a deliberate act: to set children at ease and to encourage their own creative expression by making theatre seem like part of everyday life. It points to the underlying complexity of Matthew’s practice in which simplicity and accessibility are achieved through hard work, careful thought and long experience. Matthew’s care for children and love of theatre have provided the motivation for him to pursue this physically demanding but creatively rewarding path.

5.5.2 Alex Pinder: Helping children to find their place in the theatre.

Alex Pinder is an energetic and accomplished actor in his late fifties. Versatile and multi-skilled, his professional experience encompasses acting for film, television and the stage, teaching, directing and devising. I have been friends with him for over twenty years and
have seen his work as an actor and director many times. Aware of his extensive experience, which, from the start of his career included creating theatre with and for children, I hoped he would be able to offer this study an historical perspective of the subject. I was also interested in some specific details of his practice. In theatre foyers and over a glass of wine at dinner, Alex can offer entertaining commentary about the precarious nature of the actor’s life, joking that he sometimes has mercenary motives for taking on certain roles. In reality, though, he approaches every job with passion and professionalism, reflecting a dedication to craft. Further complicating this picture, every year Alex engages in poorly paid time-consuming work with children in disadvantaged communities in Nepal and India. Looking at photos of Alex laughing with children in the salt pans of India I wanted to know more about what led a ‘jobbing actor’ to this place. To undertake this interview, we met in a place far from the world of the Indian salt pans—a bustling café in Melbourne.

Alex’s approach to acting is a mixture of pragmatism and idealism, reflecting the practical, creative and emotional demands of sustaining a long-term career in the arts in Australia. Although motivated to work with children because of his determination to earn a living as an actor, his practice is also informed by social justice principles that include a desire to give children enjoyable, high quality arts experiences. Driven by a strong desire to share his abiding love of theatre with audiences of all ages, Alex’s practice has shifted from a position where he was “looking for something better” than working in children’s theatre to one that is characterised by the lack of distinction he makes between children and adults. He jokes, “If you’re under five I can’t really work with you and if you’re over ninety I want a medical certificate, but that’s about it really.” This sense of inclusiveness reflects his commitment to a statement by acting teacher Jacques Lecoq that Alex quotes on his website: “Everyone has a place in the theatre. It is up to you to find where you belong.”

27 Alex and his wife, visual artist Anne Riggs, undertake this work as Artists in Community International https://artistsincommunity.me
28 ‘Jobbing actor’ is a colloquial industry expression for someone who works from casual contract to casual contract. While this describes nearly all actors, it also has connotations of someone who is not fussy or ‘precious’ about their work and who will therefore accept any paid acting job. Depending on the context and the speaker’s point of view, it can be an admiring or a mildly disparaging term. I use it with the former sense.
Alex’s perspective has also been shaped by the professional benefits he has experienced creating theatre with and for children. These include an income, the opportunity to work in an ensemble and hone his craft, and enjoyment. Reflecting on his ability to make children laugh, Alex says that creating theatre for children feels like “a nice way to earn a living”. For him, it has been a place where his professionalism, love of theatre, and sense of equity have come together.

5.5.3 Carolyn Bechervaise: Trusting in children.

Carolyn Bechervaise is a tall, graceful actor and dancer whose stately looks belie her love of the ridiculous. In performance, she moves seamlessly between gentle, inviting glances at the audience and clownish buffoonery. We met several years before this research through our common interest in devised theatre and in early childhood education and have had many informal discussions about these topics. We also have a shared history of attending the same drama school. Although we graduated twelve years apart, it has always felt to me that we come from the same theatre world that emphasises the social dimension of the arts as much as acting technique.

Carolyn has created theatre both with and for children in a wide range of contexts. These include performances taking place in school settings, family shows staged in public theatres, and a show for babies and their carers which takes place in a custom-made installation. Concurrent with her work as an actor, Carolyn has an ongoing practice as an early primary years dance and drama teacher, and I was interested in how these two professional arenas intersect for her. I interviewed Carolyn at her inner-city apartment at a pivotal time of her life: she had just begun maternity leave from her teaching position in preparation for the immanent birth of her first child.

Drawn to working children since the start of her career, Carolyn’s practice is shaped by a dialogue between the key settings in which she creates theatre with and for children. Specifically, her training and experience as an early childhood teacher reinforce her belief in children’s creative capacities and right to expression, and influence her subsequent interactions with them. Positioning herself as a “prompter”, “facilitator” and “co-learner” rather than an instructor, Carolyn notes that her responsibility is to offer children a framework within which they can explore their ideas. In her theatre work for children, she aims to present performances invested with “play and wonder” that resonate beyond
the moment of reception. Carolyn is motivated by the reciprocal pleasure of her work. She delights in what she can offer children and what they give in return. She believes that these theatrical exchanges have made her a better artistic collaborator who is more open to new ideas. Over the course of her career her practice has increasingly emphasised non-text based theatrical techniques and the creation of original devised work. Surrounded by a supportive community of artists who create theatre with and for children, she has discovered a satisfying and enjoyable creative niche.

5.5.4 Reflection

A glance at the curricula vitae of the three actors in this section suggests more differences than commonalities. Matthew mostly performs self-devised comedies in large theatres; Alex frequently works as a teaching artist in schools and communities; and Carolyn is a teacher whose concurrent practice has recently focused on creating immersive theatrical environments for children and families. Although the settings of their work are diverse, the three Actors share a passion for live theatre that drives their desire to create playful spaces that enable children to discover their own creativity and their place in the theatre. A sense of belonging is key to these Actors’ practice. Matthew aims to communicate to children that attending and making theatre is available to them. His sense of partnership with the audience is reflected in his characterisation of their reactions to his shows as “offers” rather than responses. Alex’s stories about working with disadvantaged children focus on inclusion and celebration of their own ideas, and Carolyn says of inviting children’s input into the theatrical process: “Why shouldn’t they have that credibility?” These beliefs and goals will be discussed further in Chapter 6, to show how they shape and have been shaped by these actors’ experiences of working with children.

5.6 Actors Creating Theatre For Children

Theatre for children is characterised by the presentation of crafted theatrical worlds to young audiences. As spectators, children may be emotionally, cognitively and imaginatively drawn into fictional spaces and narratives, but their responses do not significantly change what happens on stage. Their relationship to the work is often enhanced by their understanding that the performance is live (O’Toole, Adams, Anderson, Burton, & Ewing, 2014). Certainly, this was the case in the performance of *The Moon’s a Balloon*, described in the narrative below, where the adult actors’ playful
romping and physical acrobatics were as entrancing to the children as the impressive visual effects.

All theatrical contexts circumscribe the relationships and interactions between children and actors in some way, and the challenge for actors creating theatre for children is to find, within those parameters, authentic ways of communicating with audiences that do not disrupt the dramaturgy of the work. The following narrative focuses on how this endeavour creates its own compelling story within the tightly choreographed performance.

*The Moon's a Balloon*

*The Moon's a Balloon*, a non-verbal theatre performance for three to eight-year-old children, is a swirling dance of light and movement that uses sophisticated technical wizardry to bring inanimate objects and empty space to life. Sitting in the darkened auditorium, with no chance to affect the show in any tangible way, should feel to the audience like we are watching a movie, but it doesn’t. From the moment Stephen Noonan steps on to the stage an invisible current of energy flows between him and us. He enters tentatively, mirroring our own uncertainty about this strange environment. Turning towards us with a look of puzzlement he seems to ask, “What *is* this place?” echoing and validating our own thoughts. For a quiet instant, this question lying between us is all there is in the room, but then the other performer taps Stephen on the shoulder and before long he is leaping and running around the stage, manipulating balloons and playing games with her. The energy is being tossed between them now and although we can’t catch it, we bask in its warmth. Suddenly, a giant balloon knocks Stephen to the ground, detonating an explosion of laughter. For a moment, there is no stage and no auditorium—we are all swimming in the same ocean of joy. Lying on the ground as the laughter dies away, Stephen turns his face towards us, showing us a clownish expression of surprise. I know he can’t see us out here in the dark but his gaze seems inclusive of us all, giving us time to catch up with the character’s emotions. This briefest of moments gathers up the scattered energy and re-settles it like a rope between us. Then Stephen takes up one end and pulls us into the next passage of play.

We need Stephen to guide us now because so much is happening: balloons are being moved all over the stage, lights are being triggered on and off, and the performers are very, *very* busy. With each complicated piece of stage craft that Stephen executes, the connection between us is stretched thinner and we hope we haven’t been forgotten. Suddenly, a balloon breaks free from its designated place and Stephen lurches to grab it. Fully absorbed by this technical emergency, he lets go of the fragile thread that tethers us to him and we are cut loose. The performance has stopped being with us or for us; it’s just going on in front of us. In the void that follows, Stephen senses that we are lost. Listening to the restless shifting in the auditorium seats, he can tell that we’re no longer helping to create the show with him and he moves to reestablish contact. The quality of his attention shifts, he slows
down, and he glances at the audience. “I know you’re still there,” he seems to say, “Let’s go back into this story together.” Fortunately, the script also shifts at this point and the authentic, lively play between the actors resumes. Recognising ourselves in their shenanigans, we lean forward in our seats radiating energy and understanding back towards the stage.

*The Moon’s a Balloon* is reaching its climax and after Stephen executes a particularly tricky manoeuvre with a balloon, the audience bursts into applause. It is not appropriate for Stephen to overtly register the audience here, given that the ‘fourth wall’\(^{29}\) is firmly in place throughout the rest of the show and, without his acknowledgement, the clapping quickly dies away. At the end of *The Moon’s a Balloon* the performers sing the show’s theme song, accompanied by the audience, who have learned the song in their kindergartens in preparation for today’s performance. Stephen steps to the edge of the stage and sings directly to the audience. His unfocused gaze suggests that he still cannot see individuals but his open arms and smile acknowledges our presence and encourages us all to join in, not dispensing completely with the fourth wall, but at least making it more permeable. The moment encapsulates the invitational yet slightly distant demeanor that Stephen maintains throughout the performance as he juggles the demands of the theatrical form with his need for a relationship with the live audience.

### 5.6.1 Stephen Noonan: Sensing, feeling, listening and looking.

I first encountered Stephen Noonan’s work when he was performing in a show for babies\(^{30}\) at ArtPlay, the children’s arts centre where I work. I was deeply impressed by the warmth, skill and sheer nerve of his performance which invited interaction with the tiny audience members but did not depend on it for its success. We conducted the first interview for this research at ArtPlay a few years later, when we were both working on a show for toddlers by the same company.\(^{31}\) The second interview took place in the dressing rooms of the Adelaide theatre where Stephen was performing in the production of *The Moon’s a Balloon* described above. It is a measure of his dedication to his practice that he participated enthusiastically in both ninety-minute interviews despite being very tired from the demands of his job and his young family.

Stephen describes himself as a theatre maker, performer and teaching artist, three professional strands that are connected by his desire for genuine creative exchanges with children. With a stated preference for performances that embrace chance and direct

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\(^{29}\) A naturalistic theatre convention in which the proscenium arch represents an invisible fourth side of the stage area where the action takes place. This creates a space that allows the actors to behave as if the audience were not there (Taylor, 1970).

\(^{30}\) *This (Baby) Life* by Sally Chance Dance

\(^{31}\) *Touch and Go*. 
human interactions, he gravitates towards theatrical forms that dispense with the metaphorical fourth wall that prevents actors from directly acknowledging the audience. *The Moon’s a Balloon* is a production where that wall would seem to be firmly in place. The audience is in the dark, so the actors cannot make direct eye contact, and the action is tightly choreographed, leaving no room for improvisation. How, then, can Stephen realise his goals as an actor working with children in this context? The answer lies in the intense whole-body sensitivity he directs towards the young audience and their reactions to the work. Stephen draws on his non-visual senses and his ongoing informal studies in child development to understand how children are experiencing the event. He says children’s own complete investment in the theatrical experience has created a great sense of responsibility in him to honour every moment with his full attention.

Another significant element of Stephen’s work is play, and he relishes the opportunities for playfulness that working with children affords. Through play he can experience reciprocal and enriching creative exchanges with children, even when they are only three months old or when he can’t see them.

**5.6.2 Jens Altheimer: Doing what comes naturally.**

Tall, wiry and dishevelled, German-born Jens Altheimer seems born for the stage. With his humorous, slightly bemused demeanour, he is a natural comic with a formidable arsenal of performance and scenography skills. When I first saw Jens’s show for families, *Squaring the Wheel*, I sensed a kindred feeling between the audience and the Actor. The children’s concentration and amusement demonstrated that they recognised and sympathised with Jens’s innocent, lonely, bumbling character and his optimistic, wacky attempts to improve the world. I wondered how much of their interest in the character’s experiments is consciously cultivated by Jens, and how much it is a serendipitous coming together of like minds across the generations. The interview with Jens suggested that both factors are at play. Jens is highly motivated by the pleasure and quirky results of open-ended creative exploration. His theatre making process involves devising scripts, teaching himself new skills and tinkering with objects and materials over a long period of time. Indeed, the long halting conversation we had in my kitchen reflects his willingness to mull over and rework ideas. One of his main goals when working with children is to share his problem-solving approach to making theatre so, in post-show workshops or in community projects, he encourages children to work things out for themselves. Their
willingness to do so reflects an affinity with his theatre practice and Jens says he is often inspired by the results of their efforts.

Jens’s practice has always involved children and aligned with their interests, so he says it is difficult for him to identify if or how it has been shaped by working with children. Other factors, such as the restrictions his age have placed on his ability to do strenuous circus tricks, have played a more obvious role in changing the direction of his practice. Children have, though, provided him with ideal collaborators and audiences. Rather than changing Jens’s practice, then, children have allowed him to do what comes naturally—sharing with others an exploration of the human condition through theatre.

### 5.6.3 Ellen Steele: Honesty and integrity.

It was Ellen Steele’s star turn as a cow that sold me. Touring Australia in Patch Theatre’s production of *Mr McGee and the Biting Flea*[^32], she perfectly captured a sense of bovine belligerence as Belinda, who refused to be milked. The inner-city children watching the show may well never have seen a live cow, but Ellen’s performance struck them hard on the funny bone and they were soon sliding off their oversized theatre seats, incapacitated with laughter. I had never met Ellen or seen her perform before but I was captured by the electric connection she established with the children in the distant, darkened auditorium. I wondered if she was drawing on beliefs and techniques similar to actors who perform in more intimate settings. Because she had attended the same drama school as Carolyn Bechervaise and me, I was also interested in what role her training had had on her practice as a theatre maker working with children. While Ellen has worked extensively with Adelaide’s three large government-funded children’s theatre companies, she also regularly performs in theatre for adults and devises theatre as part of the theatre collective *isthisyours*?

We conducted a brief but informative interview during a break in rehearsals for her role in a South Australian State Theatre Company production for adults. Discussing how the various aspects of her career relate to each other, Ellen explained that her early creative experiences, rather than formal training, were key to her vision of children and theatre. She also has a sophisticated knowledge of theatre making and a critical eye. Turning that

[^32]: This production is based on several illustrated children’s books by Pamela Allen but takes its title from just one: *Mr McGee and the biting flea* (Allen, 1999).
eye on herself, she reflects that if she had never worked in children’s theatre, her performances would be “constricted” and she would “perform at children a little more” instead of to them, because she would assume that the work would be very different to performing to adults. Instead, her experience as an actor creating theatre for children has positively influenced her work with adults. The overt responses of children have honed her improvisation skills and highlighted the importance of “honest” performances that communicate clearly with audiences.

Long tours have given Ellen a new perspective on Australian theatre and made her “less precious” about making the necessary changes to engage children. Testing material with audiences is a common device when making theatre with children and this has been incorporated into her personal practice as a deviser of theatre for adults. As an Actor working primarily in traditional theatre spaces, Ellen expresses similar beliefs about children and actor practice to her peers who create theatre in more intimate settings. Although she notes that it is easier to connect with children when she is performing physically “at their level”, the qualities for shaping practice she emphasises most strongly are playfulness, honesty and respect.

5.6.4 Reflection

The three Actors in this category have all worked with children since the start of their careers but their professional experiences are diverse. Jens and Stephen both come from circus backgrounds which emphasise performer-devised work, while Ellen comes from a more classical Western acting tradition which is oriented towards texts scripted by playwrights. These differences are reflected in the theatrical sites in which they have worked. Jens and Stephen have had extensive experience as street performers, and Ellen’s performances for children have mainly taken place in mainstage theatres. Although the contexts in which they work in are different, all three Actors share a love of the ridiculous and demonstrate sensitivity towards, and respect for, children’s emotions. This suggests that theatrical form and site do not significantly influence the intention of their work.

The content and form of Ellen, Jens and Stephen’s performances are based on both an instinctive and a planned understanding of children’s interests, but they do not just hold up a mirror to their lives. They also aim to offer children theatre that, as Jens says,
“Take[s] them somewhere they haven’t been before”. The enthusiastic responses that the Actors’ work elicits from children reflect the success of this approach.

5.7 Summary Comment

The nine Actors introduced in the profiles above create theatre that offers children different types of participation. Although they work in a range of theatrical genres and form, their practice shares some common characteristics, including:

- a love of the ridiculous and of play,
- a belief in children’s right to creative expression and place in the theatre,
- a belief in the importance of being attentive to children,
- sensitivity to children’s feelings, and
- a desire to share a personal passion for the theatre.

The next three chapters form a multiple case analysis that discusses the Actors’ individual and shared orientations towards practice in more detail. Guided by Ewing and Smith’s framework of practice—doing, knowing, being and becoming (Ewing & Smith, 2001)—it begins with an analysis of the Actors’ ways of being.
Chapter 6  Characteristics of Practice: Being

6.1 Introduction to Multiple Case Analysis

The nine participant profiles in the previous chapter introduce the Actors as individuals whose practice is shaped by their personal experiences, beliefs about children, theatrical interests and professional opportunities. In addition to consideration of the stories of each participant’s life and practice, this study also sought to compare the experiences of the cohort of Actors. The Actors’ responses were prompted by the common questions asked in the surveys and semi-structured interviews. They offer a composite picture of actor practice and how it is shaped by creating theatre with and for children.

The goal of these chapters is not to demonstrate that a certain number of participants behave in the same ways, hold the same beliefs, or have the same goals for children. Rather, their aim is to understand how different elements of practice are experienced or expressed by individual Actors. The instruments of an orchestra respond to musical instructions in different ways. A short, sharp sound can be produced by plucking the strings of the violin or by a quick, expulsion of breath into a French horn, but the textures of the sounds are different. The Actors in this study are playing a common tune, but through different, individual ‘instruments’. At times, some veer off to play a counter melody, or fall silent for a while, but resonating together they play a complex score. These chapters try to identify and appreciate the different tones that make up that song.

As noted earlier, the chapters are structured around Ewing and Smith’s framework of practice as well as the two main research questions. This resulted in two lines of analysis:

1. The characteristics of practice of actors who create theatre with and for children.
2. The ways that working with children shapes actor practice.

Throughout the analysis process, new themes emerged and were added. The final themes of the multiple case analysis are summarised in Figure 6.1, below (p. 101). The analysis opens with a discussion of the Actors’ responses to the term ‘creative practice’, which serves as a point of reference for the subsequent discussion of being, doing, knowing and becoming.
Figure 6.1: Multiple case analysis themes
6.2 Opening The Conversation: Creative Practice

This thesis used the term ‘creative practice’ as a prompt to investigate actor practice, following a line of inquiry that emerged during the first participant interview. The original interview questions did not ask the participants to define practice but during this first conversation it became evident that to discuss how the Actors’ practice had been shaped by working with children it was necessary to explore what practice means to them.

Creative practice has multiple and contested meanings and not all practice is creative but, precisely because it is open to broad interpretation, this term served as a useful stimulus for discussion with the Actors. An alternative and more explicit term, ‘actor practice’, while familiar to them, may not have resonated with the wide range of professional activities that they engage in, such as devising or clowning. This section of the thesis shows how the Actors interpret creative practice, and their responses are used as a springboard for the subsequent multiple case analysis of their practice.

Initially, the term ‘creative practice’ elicited uncertainty or scepticism from some of the Actors, who indicated by their verbal responses and facial expressions that it was difficult to define or that to do so was a redundant exercise. Subsequent discussion, though, elicited layered and considered interpretations. Over the course of the interviews, a picture began to emerge of creative practice as the way the Actors make theatre, characterised as an evolving process that is linked to all aspects of their lives, including their personal histories.

Stephen’s33 definition of creative practice is straightforward and can serve as a baseline. He says, “Creative practice is that skill level that you come with, married with your process of how you make work.” His succinct definition is augmented and complicated by each participant in this study, as they highlight aspects of creative practice that are important to them. Alex, whose long experience as an actor has exposed him to many such terms as they have come in and out of fashion, initially dismissed creative practice as an “academic” expression, implying that it has little to do with the day-to-day work of acting. When asked for his own definition, though, he said,

33 From this point in the thesis I will refer to most of the Actors by their first names. I will refer to Carolyn Hanna and Carolyn Bechervaise by their full names to distinguish between them.
It’s what I do. It’s just what I do. It’s how I practice, how I create my work, how I work in a rehearsal studio, how I approach a performance, whether it be on TV or stage, doesn’t matter. It’s how I approach my work.

Alex’s definition is pragmatic but with its reference to his “approach” to work, it is broad enough to encompass the ‘why’, or motivations and goals of practice, as well as the more tangible aspects of ‘what’ and ‘how’. For other Actors, a significant ‘why’ is the desire to develop as an artist, a goal that Ellen says distinguishes creative practice from other types of work. She explains,

Oh, creative practice—that for me is a very positive terminology. I think if you are creatively practicing, you’re doing more than just working. I think it means you’re continuing to extend yourself as an artist, which I think always has to be the goal, otherwise it becomes like any other job.

Naomi, a youth theatre facilitator, agrees with this sentiment. She characterises the process of extending herself creatively as a duty to approach the work with the rigour it requires. She says, “I think it’s about not letting things pass by. I think that that’s the responsibility you have if you are pursuing a creative practice. That’s your work.” Ellen says that this conscious approach to skill development helps to build “the arsenal that you bring to each new job”. The arsenal of skills that Matthew brings to his comic theatre for children demands a high degree of diligence. He explains,

You can’t just sit around and decide that you’re creative … it benefits from being worked on. It benefits from being questioned and redefined and pumped and the more skills you have the more creative you can be.

These views are supported by the Actors’ survey responses which showed that the opportunity to enhance their practice was the highest motivation by number for creating theatre with children and the second highest for creating theatre for children (see Table 5.7, p. 75 & Table 5.8, p. 76).³⁴

³⁴ The weighted scores for these questions reverse this result i.e. ‘Opportunity to enhance your theatre practice’ was the highest weighted motivation for actors when creating theatre for children and the second highest weighted motivation for actors when creating theatre with children.
By actively developing ideas and competencies, the Actors experience creative practice as a process of change. Reflecting on how her company’s work has developed over the years, Carolyn Bechervaise says that creative practice is “ever-evolving”. She attributes some of that evolution to her collaborations with children and other adult artists, saying that creative practice is “not something you can do alone”. Carolyn Hanna, who has collaborated for two decades with a core group of other artists, agrees. Although she and her collaborators have a set of skills and methods that they draw on, their practice is underpinned by the shared nature of their work. She says, “I think my creative practice sits probably more with the people that I work with than a methodology. I feel like we are the methodology.” Not all the Actors share this commitment to collaborative process in all aspects of their work, though. Although Jens works with other adults and children in his community workshops, he describes his “Robinson Crusoe life” of solitary theatre making as being fulfilling and pleasurable.

Creative practice is intrinsically connected to all aspects of the Actors’ lives. Carolyn Hanna says it is difficult for her to separate the different aspects of the professional and private realms and writes in the survey: “As a mother and clown doctor I’m constantly being influenced by my interactions with young people. Their reactions and surprising actions fill my thoughts and the way I look at the world.” Concurring with this experience, Carolyn Bechervaise describes the interconnectedness of creative practice as the means by which she makes sense of the different aspects of her life as a teacher, actor and audience member. She explains,

It doesn’t happen in one area of my life. There’s connections firing all the time, so I’ll be at work and I’ll make a connection with something I’ve done with Drop Bear or I’ll be watching a performance and make a connection with school or I’ll be reading an article and I just go, “Oh! I have to make a note about something.”

The almost involuntary impulse to make connections between different parts of their lives that Carolyn describes here emphasises the personal nature of creative practice, linking what actors do with why they do it and how it shapes them. Instead of being primarily a set of skills, for these Actors creative practice is also a way of being. Naomi illustrates this by making an explicit link between what she does and how she feels. She says that she ignores her creative practice at her “own peril” because to do so makes her very
unhappy. Palmer’s writing about teaching practice goes to the heart of this matter with his pithy declaration that, “We teach who we are” (Palmer, 1998, p. 2). His argument that teaching “emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse” (p. 2) could equally describe the interconnected and personal nature of creative practice that the Actors in this research express in different ways.

The definitions of creative practice given by the Actors in this study align with Ewing and Smith’s framework of practice (Ewing & Smith, 2001). For these Actors, creative practice involves doing and knowing, in the form of the skills, techniques and methods that they employ to create their performances. Creative practice also refers to their values, beliefs and motivations, or what Ewing and Smith call the being part of professional practice. Most significantly, the Actors define creative practice as becoming. They view creative practice not as a static state that they may achieve after a period of training and professional experience, but as a process that continues to develop throughout their lives.

The next section will explore how each aspect of creative practice intersects with the Actors’ work creating theatre with and for children. It begins with the being part of their practice, explaining why they create theatre with and for children. Chapter 7 then moves onto how Actors work with children; what they do and know. It is followed by a discussion of how their practice is shaped by this work.

6.3 Being: Personal Motivations

The Actors are motivated to create theatre with and for children by a range of personal, professional and social factors. These include opportunities for enjoyable paid work in their chosen art form, professional satisfaction and growth, and the desire to advocate for, and contribute to, children’s well-being. For some Actors, working with children allows them to pursue an artistic path that does not readily exist in theatre for adults. It also offers opportunities to collaborate with and learn from children. Such exchanges are driven by a sense of care for children and a desire to give young people opportunities to express themselves through theatre.

Few actor training courses include units on making theatre with and for children so it is not surprising that early career actors may not be motivated to do this work. As Prior (2015) notes, though, even when this training is available, actors themselves may be resistant to alternative versions of their visions of an acting career. Many actors do,
however, create theatre with or for children at some stage of their career. The literature review showed that the motivations of artists creating art with children in all disciplines are well documented, and the findings of this study broadly concur with that body of research.

6.3.1 Opportunities to generate income.

The Actors’ survey responses indicate that earning an income is a moderate to high motivation for them to create theatre with and for children. In their interviews, some of the Actors said that while they did not originally value working with children, money was the prompt that initiated their involvement in this field. As Alex says of his attitude towards Theatre in Education in the 1980s, “You just wanted to work as an actor. That’s it. And working with children was kind of put down a bit but I figured it was better than working as a waiter.” Despite Dan’s early reluctance to work with children, she was drawn to the pragmatic solution of earning a living by facilitating puppetry workshops in schools. Jens has performed to children since the start of his career, but his discovery that his European style of clowning was difficult to sell in Australia led him to consciously pursue a family market here. Noting that, “It is much easier here to sell a family show that has bit of an original approach to things than to sell an adult show that has the same attributes”, he says there is no financial incentive for him to market his work to an exclusively adult audience.

Financial concerns intersect with the Actors’ practice on multiple levels, not all of them positive. For example, Naomi says weekly youth theatre classes were a valuable source of her “bread and butter money”, so she continued to offer them even when she had ceased to enjoy them. Matthew observes that the type of theatres The Listies perform in is influenced by the economies of scale. While he prefers small venues that “crackle” and allow him to connect more readily with children, he notes that “commercially, to have a sustainable career in the arts, as an adult who wants a mortgage”, he needs to perform in large theatres.

In addition to being well below the average Australian wage, only 45% of the income of artists is derived from creative work, the balance being supplemented by other employment (Cunningham, Higgs, Freebody, & Anderson, 2010). In this financially precarious climate, it is not surprising that money influences the types of work artists
undertake. However, conversations with the participating Actors about what other issues drive them to create theatre with and for children suggest that income is not the most significant factor. Two recurring motives are their love of theatre and dedication to craft.

6.3.2 Opportunities to realise one’s vocation.

The Actors are united by their passion for theatre and their desire to share the artform with others. Having maintained his enthusiasm for theatre over many years, Alex says, “I love theatre. I love the work, so you want to create the audiences. You want to get people to like it. You want people to understand it and appreciate it.” Alex is drawn to the shared experience of theatre which he describes as “communal dreaming”. Matthew explains his feelings about his profession in similar terms, saying, “I love theatre. I think that it’s a really strange and beautiful thing that we do where we kind of sit in a dark room together and pretend together.”

The live, co-constructed nature of theatre is also a powerful motivation for Carolyn Bechervaise. Reflecting on her love of live performance, with its “instant response, good or bad”, she says “it feels really selfish because I get so much from it.” In his passionate argument for the centrality of the self in professional life, Palmer (1998) addresses Carolyn’s faint feelings of guilt. He writes, “In a culture that equates work with suffering, it is revolutionary to suggest that the best inward sign of vocation is deep gladness” (p.30).

While Palmer’s statement is concerned with teaching, it is equally applicable to other relational professions such as acting. The Actors in this study describe their work in emotional terms, using words such as ‘joy’, ‘happiness’ and ‘love’. These emotions are all suggestive of deep gladness, making it an appropriate term to describe a key motivation for actors to work with children.

The pleasure and satisfaction that the Actors derive from creating theatre with and for children can be placed into two overlapping categories: that which comes from performing and that which comes from giving children a positive experience. The Actors love performing and working with children gives them opportunities to exercise their craft. In a 2013 media interview, Matthew said,

It’s not achievable for many to be sustainable in the arts without a day job so we consider ourselves very lucky. It is the greatest job in the world. Just
count how many people get to spend as much time as we do standing in front of people and making them laugh. We consider it a privilege. (Adelaide Festival Centre, 2013)

Reflecting on the performance of The Listies Make You LOL I observed for this research, Matthew said that while on stage that day he was suddenly struck by the sheer joy of performing a sketch in which he cheekily steals a banana from his colleague. He marvelled, “What an extraordinary thing that’s happened in my life that I’m sitting on stage in front of 800 people getting to do that.” This sense of happy fulfilment is an important ingredient for sustaining Matthew through several hundred performances of the same production which, he notes, can be creatively and physically exhausting.

Matthew is also grateful to children’s theatre for the permission the form gives him to be as “stupid” as he pleases. He says that children’s openness to new forms, love of silliness, and willingness to be involved in direct interactions with the performers allow him to explore and enjoy the theatre forms that interest him. As he explains, “You don’t really have to justify things as much. The kids will just go with it and we’re not ever really burdened with the responsibility of having to make our show about something.” This last statement belies the serious intent behind The Listies’ shows that will be discussed further in the following section on the Actors’ goals.

Although Stephen’s largely non-verbal work has a different aesthetic to Matthew’s comic theatre practice, he also values children’s inherently playful nature. He says, “I think that adults are just as capable of [it] but children are maybe just more willing to go with that sense of play.” This willingness allows Stephen to explore improvisation and chance in his work, aspects of performance that he finds stimulating and enjoyable. Dan agrees, saying that the opportunity to improvise in the interactive formats of children’s theatre keeps her “really alive” in her performance, which “feels amazing”. She adds, “I think just as a person that’s exciting. That’s what’s made me want to chase that.” Personal and professional pleasure can therefore be seen to be strong motivations for these Actors to create theatre with and for children. Their comments also point to the interplay between working with children and two factors in the typology of actor practice outlined in section 4.4: authorship and theatrical form. Matthew, Stephen and Dan all devise their own work and are oriented towards theatrical forms that include improvisation, participation and comedy. Theatre with and for children offers them opportunities to explore these interests.
The Actors aim to give children an enjoyable experience through theatre and this is discussed further in the following section on their goals for children, section 6.4. Success in this endeavour gives them much personal satisfaction, as Alex explains. He says, “I do it because I enjoy seeing the pleasure in the kids. I enjoy that. I enjoy the laughter it brings.” Alex also takes satisfaction in experiences that go beyond entertainment and give children a sense of their own creative capacity. He observes, “It’s good if you work with kids on something a bit deeper … you go a bit further with them and when they’re getting something there’s a sense of satisfaction about it.” Carolyn Bechervaise, who facilitates children’s creative experiences in schools and in youth theatre contexts, elaborates on this, saying,

When I’ve been devising a show with young people that ends up on a stage, it’s such a great feeling to know that you’ve enabled this thing to happen and they feel so proud of it. There’s a really nice sense that that’s a gift that you were able to do that.

Carolyn goes on to say that the high level of professional satisfaction she gains from helping children to realise their ideas balances the exhausting nature of the work. In doing so, she, and the other Actors, also take advantage of opportunities for professional growth.

6.3.3 Opportunities for professional growth.

Aligning with the Actors’ definition of creative practice as an evolving process, the survey responses indicate that the Actors greatly value the opportunities to improve their practice afforded to them by working with children. Alex says that the Theatre in Education work he engaged with in the 1980s was underappreciated at the time, even by actors who were working in it, because it wasn’t considered to be “a real job” compared with working for a state theatre company or in film and television. In retrospect, he views Theatre in Education as a wonderful, although short-lived, “window of opportunity” that offered actors valuable training through the experience of performing hundreds of shows per year in a paid ensemble company. He fondly recalls the enjoyment and challenge of playing a wide variety of roles and of quickly devising workshop strategies to hold the attention of bored, sceptical students.
Carolyn Bechervaise’s enjoyment stems from the fact that this work is “very fulfilling”, keeping her “fresh” through access to new and often “random” ideas. Stephen agrees, saying that he works with children as a teaching artist because “they’ve got really amazing ideas”. Reflecting on her roles as a performer and a parent, Carolyn Hanna says children’s ideas are often different to those generated by adults, and jokes that she would “just love a direct channel” into children’s brains. She writes in her survey that creating theatre with children offers her an “opportunity to learn from children’s direct communication to imagination and impulse”. In her survey, Naomi makes a similar observation, writing that she creates theatre with children because it offers her an “opportunity to witness the exciting work that young artists generate.” Dan is also motivated by the imaginative journeys children can take her on. She explains that although she is inspired to develop children’s ideas, she is equally inspired by children “to go into make-believe and go into some other world and see what’s in there.” These comments reflect the Actors’ desire to learn from children through their theatrical exchanges which, as noted in the surveys, emphasise the roles of co-learner, co-player and collaborator (see Table 5.9, p. 77 and Table 5.10, p. 78) This approach aligns with the studies of artists working in applied arts settings discussed in the literature review, which demonstrate that artists are motivated to work with children because of the professional development they experience in the work (Animarts, 2003; Ascenso, 2016; Jeanneret & Brown, 2013; Pringle, 2009; Rabkin et al, 2011). Cognisant of how much they learn by engaging with children, the Actors use their work to advocate for children’s right to culture.

6.3.4 Opportunities to advocate for children.

All the Actors believe children have a right to high quality theatre and some lament that this is often not afforded to them. In her survey, Carolyn Bechervaise writes that she is motivated to create theatre for children by the “opportunity to create the type of theatre I think children should have.” Similarly, Matthew says he and his creative partner “deeply care” about the theatre children experience. His intense dislike of thoughtless, artless commercial stage adaptations of popular television and film productions motivates him to make theatre for children that is the antithesis of those shows. Carolyn Hanna expresses the same distaste for theatre with children that is overly predetermined. She writes in her survey that she is motivated to create theatre with children by the “opportunity to show others (parents, carers, educators) new perspectives on less prescriptive ways to work
with children and creativity.” In her interview, she elaborated on this, saying that she wants to show “there’s a whole other way” of interacting with children. This “other way” is based on Carolyn’s belief in children’s creative abilities. In her work creating theatre with and for children she is motivated by a desire to “showcase to the public, children’s direct connection to imagination and impulse and acknowledge how important those qualities are to nurture.”

Seven of the nine Actors note that theatre with and for children is not well valued by the arts community. This is reflected in a significant anecdote Carolyn Hanna shared. Her company, Born in a Taxi, was invited by a major state-funded arts venue to make a roving show for families, with the proviso that they make “good theatre”, “not children’s theatre”. This sad reflection on the reputation of theatre with and for children may or may not be justified, and is not the concern of this study, but it does bring into stronger focus the question of why the Actors choose to work in this field. As has been demonstrated, their reasons are varied and intersecting. Although theatre with and for children has a low public profile, it can be financially rewarding. It has also allowed the Actors to work in the industry they love, hone their craft, learn from children and share their own skills with them. All these factors give them that sense of deep gladness, which is perhaps the strongest motivator of all. With an eye to the future of theatre and the children they work with, the Actors are also motivated by a sense of responsibility to advocate for the artform and for children’s role in it. Writing for the national youth arts magazine, *Lowdown*, Stephen summed up the importance of working as a teaching artist in schools with this observation:

> Whether through a formal or informal project, there is great potential for an artist working in schools. Through curriculum awareness, successfully liaising with teachers, and using specific artistic and communication skills, you can bring an outside energy and specialisation that becomes infectious. While extending and challenging your own personal practise [sic], you a can be a powerful example and advocate of creativity, providing artistic forms capturing student expression and ideas, and that's why I do it. (Noonan, 2008)

This quote shows that Stephen’s personal motivations are closely linked to the goals he has for children in his work. The following section explores these goals in more detail.
6.4 Being: Goals for children

This section discusses the goals that the Actors have for the children participating in their work as theatre makers or as audience members. Common to all contexts is the Actors’ desire to offer children enjoyable, engaging and transformative experiences that trigger new ideas and give them the confidence to express themselves through theatre. The Actors hope that by doing so children will have fun, learn and gain a sense of creative agency and satisfaction.

6.4.1 Learning.

Learning is a complex construct which is often naturally paired with teaching. Consistent with other studies of artists working with children (Galton, 2008; Pringle, 2002; Thornton, 2005), not all the Actors easily embrace the title of ‘teacher’. While they may feel ambivalent about the term, they acknowledge that an important goal of their practice is creating opportunities for children to learn about theatre and themselves. In doing so, they place little emphasis on acquiring skills and content knowledge, aiming instead to communicate an enthusiasm for the artform. Alex is an exception, having worked on Theatre in Education productions in the 1980s which often aimed to present specific issues to children such as Australian history, the environment and racism. In Alex’s current work with Artists in Community International, theatre is sometimes used as an enjoyable vehicle to teach simple hygiene methods such as hand washing and, in this sense, the work shares goals and methods with his early experiences of Theatre in Education that were more explicitly instructional.

In Jens’s play, *Squaring the Wheel*, the main character makes complex constructions out of unlikely combinations of found objects and junk. Jens hopes that, by watching this, children will be inspired to try building things for themselves. The workshops he leads after performances aim to give them a concrete understanding of some of the skills and scientific principles behind construction. He notes that hands-on experience is an effective way of learning, saying “I think the other big education component is when you have them do things.” Dan agrees, saying that she consciously allows children to make mistakes when building with cardboard boxes in Polyglot Theatre’s outdoor play production *We Built This City* so they have a chance to learn from their mistakes. She also discourages parents from intervening for the same reason. She says it is important that “if
kids are building and they put that box there and you can see it’s going to fall over, that you don’t save it; that you just let them choose the boxes and it falls over and then they learn something.” The practical learning that results from these experiences is obvious but the learning the Actors aim for in other theatrical contexts may be less overt.

When working as a teaching artist in schools, Stephen aims to stimulate children’s curiosity so they are motivated to “take something a bit further”. He says he knows he has been successful when they voluntarily use the concepts he offers them at school to develop their own ideas at home. This is an example of the goal that he articulated in the previous quote of acting as a “powerful example and advocate of creativity” (p. 111).

The publicity for Matthew’s shows is flamboyantly anti-educational. In publicity interviews it is common to hear him compare The Listies’ work to other theatre for children by saying, “We are absolutely 100% guaranteed education-free”. Matthew admits that this statement is largely a marketing ploy to distinguish the company’s work from theatre that aims to instruct children about specific issues such as bullying or the environment. He acknowledges that, while the work is ostensibly “not about anything”, the experience of attending one of his shows is educational. Motivated by his own love of theatre, his goal is to teach families about the possibilities and pleasures of the artform. Alex shares this goal and notes that, increasingly, children from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds alike have few experiences of theatre. He therefore aims to show them what theatre can be. In the following quote, he describes the effect his demonstrations of physical clowning have on children:

I do a lot of mime with them, and very ‘non-techno’ theatre, and it kind of really beguiles them. They kind of haven’t seen it. They’re expecting a screen in front of me and them. And they are just amazed or delighted.

Matthew’s shows also aim to help children distinguish between the live nature of theatre and the recorded mediums of film and television. Reflecting on The Listies’ body of work, he says the company wants to convey to children that “the theatre is a fun, live place to be”. A key element of this shared experience is that it is enjoyable and interactive, as Matthew explains:

The experience of going to the theatre can be playful. It can be live. It can be silly. And within that space we are giving you permission to come with
us and do the same. You don’t have to sit there quietly. You don’t have to only speak when you’re spoken to.

Fun, pleasure, play, laughter and enjoyment are all words that recur many times in the Actors’ interviews and are valued because they can help children to have a transformative experience in the theatre.

6.4.2 Transformation.

Transformation is an ambitious goal of any activity and, in striving for it, the Actors in this study are aiming for what Carolyn Bechervaise calls the “high ideals” of her practice. The Actors hope to effect positive change in children by engaging them emotionally and creatively in theatrical experiences that are moving, funny or fascinating. These “high ideals” resonate with the principles of quality arts experiences for children advocated by Lord et al. (2012), which include “providing a sense of personal progression” and “being exciting, inspiring and engaging” (p. i). In doing so, the Actors aim to make children aware of their own creative capacities, to take them on an emotional journey or to inspire new thoughts.

Influenced by her own positive childhood experiences with the performing arts, Ellen says that involvement in the arts “translates to every other facet of your life when you are at that particular age.” Her goal is therefore to give children a “transformative experience rather than just keeping them busy for thirty minutes.” She aims to capture the audience’s attention for the entire duration of shows which, she says, should be made with the same care and attention to detail as theatre for adults. Carolyn Bechervaise agrees, saying that she is always striving to make theatre that children recognise as a “gift” for them. She elaborates: “I want them to come out of a theatre experience I’ve created for them feeling that something special has been made for them.” Matthew’s inclusion of popular culture in The Listies’ shows is a strategy for achieving this. He says that when children recognise material from their own lives, “it feels like that show is for them and about them”, which strengthens their engagement.

Engagement and a sense of the extraordinary are also Stephen’s goals when creating theatre for babies. His work includes moments where he matches babies’ actions and he says that although babies are not aware of the role he is playing, he hopes they are “swept
up” in his performance and “are engaged in that moment by moment interaction”. He also hopes that, through the quality of these interactions with actors, babies can feel a difference between performance and everyday life. He explains:

I hope they get that sense of “This is all about me and how I can just have that quality, intimate moment of where I can lead. I can initiate and someone will have a conversation with me and it will be a different conversation to, “Go goo goo, ga ga ga.”

Stephen says that one of his goals when performing for children is to let them know that “there’s no single definition of what they’re seeing and that it is open for interpretation”. When performing an open-ended show like The Moon’s a Balloon he sees his task as making sure the audience understands the arc of the piece. He also wants “to enable their own perspective and their own social interaction as they make sense with the person next to them about what they’re seeing out there.” In this quote, Stephen emphasises the intent of The Moon’s a Balloon rather than its very impressive physical form. Although Ellen has also performed in many shows for children that have high production design values, she too focuses on the intent of the work, insisting that the most important goal when creating theatre is to make it with integrity. ‘Integrity’ is a word that resonates with descriptors of quality theatre such as ‘excellence’ which are, however, not always clearly defined. The review of theatre for young people in Australia (Australia Council for the Arts & NSW Ministry for the Arts, 2003) mentioned in Chapter 2 emphasised the need for high production standards in theatre with and for children but did not explain if this referred to the actors’ performances or just to the theatrical design. One of the reasons given by Australian theatre companies for transitioning from schools touring to in-theatre productions in the early 1990s was to offer children theatrical experiences with high production values (Milne, 1998) but the relationship of this goal to the actors’ performances was largely ignored.

Schonmann (2006) notes that many children’s theatre companies embrace what Polish director Jerzy Grotowski called ‘poor theatre’ (Grotowski, 1968), where the actor is at the centre of the production. She suggests that they do so out of financial necessity rather than aesthetic conviction, but the Actors in this study challenge that view. Matthew admits that The Listies’ chaotic aesthetic originally “arrived out of poverty” but is adamant that it is important for children to “see the stuff that goes into the sausage” so they feel that
making theatre is within their reach. He explains: “The number one thing about our aesthetic is it needs to look like you could do this show in your lounge room.” Matthew’s highly crafted actor-centred work is designed to create an exuberant and authentic connection between himself and the audience, rather than to bedazzle the audience with beautiful visuals. This goal has a long lineage in theatre with and for children. In her historical analysis of education, theatre and performance, Nicholson notes that ‘poor theatre’ has often been a deliberate political statement, an expression of solidarity with audiences and a rejection of the disempowering “commodification of culture and childhood” that suggests creativity is a specialised skill for the privileged few, rather than a human impulse (Nicholson, 2001, p. 99).

Although Carolyn Bechervaise’s work has included some exquisite production designs, she concurs with the other Actors, saying, “I don’t think it has to be beautiful but I just feel like the audiences need to be given more credit so they come out having had a really engaging or moving experience that carries on.” For some Actors, that ongoing resonance takes the form of children’s confidence to explore their own creative impulses. For others, transformation may be manifested in the happiness children can experience from theatre.

Fun, play and enjoyment are woven throughout the Actors’ work with children. While only four of them specifically identify fun as a goal in their work, others acknowledge that humour and a sense of play are important parts of childhood and actor practice. For some, like street theatre performers Jens, Dan, Stephen and Carolyn Hanna, play is what attracts them to work with children, as it aligns with the improvisation techniques that are a crucial part of their practice. For others, like Ellen, whose comic rendition of a cow was described in her case study story, fun and laughter are tools for engagement. For Alex, who has worked with disadvantaged communities in Australia and internationally, they are a human right. Naomi has several goals for the children she works with in her youth theatre company, including offering them meaningful experiences, and the opportunity to create something themselves, but her overriding aim is pleasure. She explains, “I think to be really honest, the main thing that I hope they get out of any work that they do with me or with Flag [Inc.] is some joy.” Joy is also a major goal for Matthew, who says that The Listies Make You LOL was designed to make the audience laugh as many times as possible. This goal is reflected in the form of the work which resembles a sketch comedy.
Matthew values laughter as an end in itself and for its power to bring people together, as he describes with the following anecdote:

My friend came up to me after the show and she said she and her husband had been blueing for the past four days and they brought their kids along. She wasn’t going to come. He was going to take them, so they’d just have a bit of breathing space from each other and they all decided to go together and she was like, “It’s the first time as a family we’ve laughed together in months.” It was like [Matthew pretends to wipe away a tear] you know, that’s an extraordinary thing.

Alex has a similar goal and relishes the “wonderful feeling of getting people in a room laughing together”. He says that children from all backgrounds are united by their desire to laugh and he considers it his responsibility to honour this. In the following extract from his website describing Artists in Community International’s work in India and Nepal, he discusses the wider purpose of comedy:

I bring clowning to the workshops as it gives so much pleasure and laughter to the children. Many of them have had such difficult lives; it seems only right that they have a chance for a good laugh and some fun. (Pinder, n.d.)

Touring the world with Polyglot Theatre’s large-scale participatory outdoor productions, Dan has also been witness to children’s universal love of play, which she uses as a tool for engagement. She says, “The aim is generally to have a good time and to try things and to take risks with the trying.” This statement indicates the twin services of play: enjoyment for its own sake, and as a tool to build children’s confidence. Dan observes that some children can be reluctant to be silly in front of others, so she uses humour and fun to overcome this and to encourage children “to follow their thoughts or follow their own inspiration”.

Fun, play, enjoyment and engagement are frequently associated with one another, but they are not synonymous. Carolyn Bechervaise touches on the nuanced relationships between these concepts when she says that she places a higher value on nurturing children’s creative capacities than on entertaining them. In this regard, she belongs to a tradition of children’s theatre that seeks to explore the full range of children’s emotions and experiences. Her work is, in fact, highly entertaining, but the function of fun in her
shows is to foster children’s creativity. While Dan, Matthew and Alex explicitly name fun as a goal of their work with and for children, further discussion reveals that for them too it serves a deeper purpose of engaging children in a transformative experience. That experience frequently involves creative expression.

### 6.4.3 Creative expression.

In the survey, the Actors were asked to identify what roles they take on in their practice with children. For those creating theatre with children, ‘creativity generator’ was the highest rated role by number and weight (see Table 5.9, p.77). For Actors creating theatre for children, it was the highest rating role by number and the second highest by weight (see Table 5.10, p. 78). ‘Inspirer’ was the third highest rated role by number and weight for Actors creating theatre for children. These findings resonate with the discussions of goals in the Actors’ interviews, in which they expressed the hope that their work will inspire children in various ways, including to explore their own creativity. In doing so, they are aiming for more than a moment of audience participation, exciting though that can be. Actors want their work to have a lasting effect on children that goes beyond the enjoyment of the event itself. Carolyn Bechervaise says the different cognitive skills involved in drama helps children to discover new ways of thinking or doing things. Like poor theatre, this goal was central to early Theatre in Education practitioners who aimed to “develop a vigorous theatre of ideas that would encourage young people to learn actively and think dialectically” (Nicholson, 2011, p. 67). Carrying forward this tradition, Stephen wants the teaching artist work he does with school students to “prick their own curiosity or imagination” so “they want to take something a bit further”. He says he knows he has been successful when the children are inspired to do more work than is required. Stephen says that the combination of watching him perform and then participating in a workshop gives children the inspiration and then the skills to try something new.

Jens analyses the effect the work he does in schools in a similar way. The character in his play *Squaring the Wheel* builds a friend and a playground out of junk. Jens says that he hopes this story of dogged ingenuity will inspire children to “tinker a bit with stuff they find”, be persistent and “think around the corner a little bit”. Learning and transformation combine in his workshops with children, where he identifies primarily as a creativity generator. He says that he tries to gradually build up their confidence and skills, “to encourage them to do things that they haven’t done before”. Just as Jens enjoys being
surprised by the results of his own “pottering along” in the rehearsal room, he is also delighted by children’s intense focus and unexpected discoveries in theatre and construction workshops, which he says always give him “the shivers”. He emphasises, though, that this approach is sometimes hard work because children may be resistant to unfamiliar ideas, requiring him to “trick them into unconsciously releasing stuff” through playful activities and then to draw their attention to what they have created. Jens makes a clear distinction between this process, which offers children opportunities to discover “stuff that might be important for them”, and one that is based on tasks that, while enjoyable, have predetermined outcomes. He illustrates this with his critique of a large kinetic sculpture he made with children at ArtPlay, mentioned in section 3.4.5. Time constraints and the complexity of the final spectacular product required Jens and his adult collaborators to pre-fabricate all the components. Although children were wholly engaged by the assemblage process, Jens says that because this activity was not open ended, it “wasn’t actually a creative concept for them”. He notes that he would like to facilitate workshops in the future that could offer children a more independent role in the design stage.

The process of “thinking outside the box” that Jens aims for is also important to Carolyn Hanna, in her workshops with children. Her admiration for children’s creative thinking is tempered by frustration with the barriers and rules she sees placed around their opportunities to express themselves. She says her goal for children is therefore “imaginative freedom”. Reflecting on The Curious Game, where children are asked to respond physically to visual images, she says Born in a Taxi’s goals are about “accessing that space inside your mind which is not about language, which is about impulse and creativity”. It is important to Carolyn that children know there is not one correct response to these theatrical prompts, but that each person’s creativity is valued. Working from a background in ensemble improvisation, she aims for children to express their individuality. She says,

The goal is to give kids tools to create their own work that comes from within themselves as opposed to a play or something that someone else has thought up that is not necessarily relevant to them—something that expresses their own essence—who they are.
Not all projects offer children equal opportunities to “express their own essence”, but actors can help to mediate these experiences. Dan worked as an artist-in-residence in a multi-disciplinary school-based arts project. The students made lanterns for a spring-themed parade and a student asked her if he could draw a skull on his instead of a flower. Dan’s willingness to accept this deviation from the theme reflects her goal of giving children a chance to express themselves. She says,

I don’t really want to see a hundred flowers. Yeah, so that’s exciting, trying to find even in the really prescriptive stuff where people can be their own person and then you get this really awesome outcome.

This anecdote refers to an arts project created with children in a school. In formal education settings, students do not choose to participate and may therefore have a range of responses to offers to express themselves creatively, some positive and some negative. In contrast, Naomi works with children who have self-selected to participate in her youth theatre company and she is conscious that they have a particularly high need for creative expression. She tries to honour that need in the work she does with them and says that she wants them to “feel like they’ve created something rather than they’ve interpreted something that someone else has given them”. She acknowledges that this is not important for all children, some of whom want “to learn lines and project their voice and burst into song”. Naomi says that while these are perfectly acceptable goals, she feels a responsibility to offer the other children, who “have a creative drive that is unquenchable”, an avenue to express themselves. Reflecting on her own personal experience, she observes that if such people do not find a suitable outlet for their creativity, “the consequences can be catastrophic”.

Matthew’s interest in encouraging children to express themselves is fuelled by his childhood memories but, unlike Ellen’s positive experiences of drama as a child which drive her to offer children transformative experiences in the theatre, his goals for children are, in part, a reaction against having his creativity repressed. He was frequently told by adults to stop being stupid and reflects that restricting children’s natural exuberance is “heartbreaking”. He says of his work: “What I want kids to get out of it is: being stupid is actually really excellent and don’t listen when they tell you to not be stupid.” The delightful presentation to The Listies of a pair of socks to share, mentioned in the narrative of section 5.5, shows that children take Matthew’s message to be stupid to heart. They
see in his performance that he understands, respects and enjoys their interests and sense of humour and they feel strongly connected to him.

When the Actors discuss their creative goals for children they say they want children to feel comfortable, be confident, take risks and have fun. This suggests that, for them, an overriding goal is to empower children and to give them a sense of agency.

### 6.4.4 Empowerment.

Consistent with a trend in children’s arts over recent decades, a key goal for the Actors when creating theatre with and for children is empowerment. Led partly by a growing international awareness of children’s rights (UNESCO, 1989), this goal is expressed as “developing a sense of ownership and belonging” (Lord et al., 2012, p.i), encouraging cultural citizenship (Brown, 2014; Jeanneret & Brown, 2013) and helping children to find their voice (Mages, 2007; Rabkin et al. 2011). The link between self-efficacy and creative expression is captured in the study of actors working with an inner-city drama school discussed in Chapter 2 (Mages, 2007). The more experienced actor said that he wanted children to use the skills and confidence they gain in the classes to make informed decisions outside the classroom. Thornton (2005) notes that the value teaching artists place on artistic autonomy, for themselves and children, is derived from long-standing historical perspectives of art making reaching back to the sixteenth century. Artistic autonomy may be in opposition to the group experience of much modern education and this tension is evident in the stories the Actors tell about their goals for children.

Naomi’s early work in youth theatre was guided by the highly structured style of the company she worked for and by what she privately thought of as “correct theatre making”, informed by her own actor training. Working for St Martins Youth Theatre, which positioned children as capable artists and gave tutors more freedom to experiment, she discovered that children were most engaged when they were given the chance to improvise, “make up their own stuff” and “do things on the fly”. Naomi has reflected deeply on the tension created by her desire to simultaneously meet these needs and satisfy her own creative drive. Her Masters of Teaching thesis explores participants’ perceptions of democratic processes in a school holiday theatre making project. In it she concludes that the adult drama tutors and the children held distinctly different views about how power and creative agency were exercised in this project (Brouwer, 2015). Naomi is
aware from her research that children are likely to view her as a teacher and may associate this term with unequal creative relationships but she indicated in her survey responses that she still prefers to think of herself as a co-learner, collaborator or facilitator. This preference reflects her commitment to empowering children through her work with them. Naomi also struggles with the idea that resulting art work is ‘by’ the children, saying, “Obviously, I’m following some kind of creative urge within myself to make some kind of art and then put them in it.” This is a dilemma shared by other artists working in school and community settings who aim for “a pragmatic balance between claiming a space for their own practice whilst enabling the participants to develop their own knowledge and capabilities” (Pringle, 2002, p. 102).

The tension between empowering children and honouring the theatrical imperatives of the work is a recurring theme in these case studies. Carolyn Hanna says that in her role as the Queen in *The Curious Game*, she is always trying to find the balance between allowing children to make real decisions that affect the outcome of the work and maintaining the structure of the show. She says, “It’s good you bring the audience in. They can have a say in what happens but then if you do that too much, the show can just kind of fall in on itself.” Matthew recalls similar experiences in The Listies’ shows and says that children sometimes interpret an invitation to interact with the actors in one moment as an offer to do so throughout the performance. He explains that he never wants to “shush” children, but that “at some point you’ve got to go on with the show”.

Pringle’s studies of artists working in schools and community contexts further complicate the issue of children’s creative agency (Pringle, 2002). One artist told her that collaboration can be challenging with younger children, who need more direction than older participants. Another said that in one project she intervened in the process because she was highly aware of the need for the art to stand up to the scrutiny of a public outcome. In an investigation into the pedagogy of five artists working in Tate Modern’s community program, Pringle (2009) found that, although the artists saw themselves as facilitators and co-learners, there were times when they had to direct the process because the open-ended model of discovery that they were committed to was not working. In one of the incidents described in the study, a change in strategy was employed not to repress the participants’ ideas but to stimulate them by offering a more challenging task. Artists’ ongoing struggle with this issue is summed up in Naomi’s research, which concludes that while the tension
between children’s empowerment and the production of a satisfying artistic product may remain unresolved, children’s feelings about the power they are afforded are real and complex and should be given greater attention.

The Actors in this study recognise that a sense of control and confidence is important to all children, no matter what their circumstances. This resonates with Galton’s finding that artists offer children ownership of the creative process in order to nurture their artistic and personal confidence (Galton, 2008). Jens says that one of his main goals is to engender in children a feeling of “Yes, I can!” and for them to realise that there is no single correct way to do something. In her role as a clown doctor, Carolyn Hanna works with emotionally and physically vulnerable children who have very little control over their immediate circumstances. She explains that the work aims to “see the well part of the child” and to give them the sense that “finally, for this stretch of time, they know what’s going on. Not only that but, my god, there’s some real idiots around!” Describing how his clown workshops aim to take children “out of themselves”, Alex emphasises that giving children a sense of confidence about themselves is more important than steering them towards a professional career in the arts.

While Dan is not aiming for children to become professional artists either, she does want them to see themselves as artists in the broad sense of being creative people. She explains that children often have misconceptions about artistry and what it means to be a professional artist and therefore rarely apply the word ‘artist’ to themselves. She says that after working with her for a while, “most kids will shift their opinion” about their relationship to art. Part of the reason for this is the sense of pride that her work engenders in them. Dan’s interaction with a disengaged student was described earlier in this chapter. She allowed this child to draw a skull on his spring-themed lantern despite a teacher’s disappointed comment that, “Oh, that’s not very spring, really.” After the lantern parade, the teacher commented that this boy, who is usually not interested in the arts, was the only grade six student to go to the event and that he was so proud of his work that he asked his brother to take photos of his lantern. Dan considers this acknowledgement of, and pride in, achievement to be very important for children. She remembers being reprimanded as a child for saying that she was good at netball and reflects that “we’re not allowed to be amazing”. She adds, “I just think that’s a horrific thing for children to learn. And that’s why I work with kids.” Dan’s goal, then, is to give children the confidence to
express themselves so when they are adults they will encourage the next generation of children to do the same.

In her interactive theatre performances, Carolyn Hanna has a similar goal to Dan. She wants her work to offer children a sense of their “own internal strength and power and imagination” and says “I guess my goal would be to honour all of those things in children and show what they’re capable of. I think they’re underestimated.” Carolyn’s work aims to redress that underestimation of children’s abilities by leaving “space for the brilliance of children to be witnessed” (Born in a Taxi, 2015b). She observes that sometimes that brilliance is seen most clearly when compared with adults’ abilities. Describing adults’ attempts to play *The Curious Game*, she says, “The adults aren’t very good at it so the kids look really good.” This points to another aspect of children’s empowerment, which is challenging conventional power relationships between adults and children.

Dan says a key question informing Polyglot Theatre’s interactive play experiences is “What is the child and adult relationship in this space?”, and through her work she strives to “shift who’s the boss”. Her willingness to let children’s constructions fall over in *We Built This City*, mentioned earlier, is partly to let them learn from their own experiences and partly to challenge the usual power dynamic between generations which, she says, “may or may not carry through to other ways that they play together”. Stephen’s performances with babies also offer new ways for adults to relate to children through the matching sequences in which the babies can experience the actors responding to their vocalisations and movements. Stephen’s primary goal is to give babies a “sense of themselves and their agency and autonomy”. He does this by being as responsive as possible to them, hoping they can feel that the usual “balance of power is shifted” and that they are initiating a conversation that is different in quality to the babble of everyday interactions.

Carolyn Bechervaise has thought deeply about the balance of power in her work with children and has been inspired by the work of Canadian theatre company Mammalian Diving Reflex35, whose artists empower children through disruptive public theatre interventions. Carolyn says of one such event, where children reviewed Melbourne International Arts Festival shows, “It felt like it gave them so much credibility and why

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35 http://www.mammalian.ca/
shouldn’t they have that credibility? That’s something that we took from that—to try and make the experience empowering, not condescending.” This observation is one example of how the beliefs of actors creating theatre with and for children inform their goals. This is the aspect of practice that will be discussed next.

6.5 Being: Beliefs and values

Carolyn Bechervaise observes that her vision of children determines the kind of theatre she creates with and for them. For example, her belief in the value of their creative input leads her to seek ways to collaborate with them. Thus, the outer manifestations of practice can be seen to be informed by the inner life of the actor. Explaining this phenomenon in their analysis of professional practice, Ewing and Smith write that “it is impossible for us to separate out who we are from what we do: we bring our beliefs and our already acquired knowing and understanding to our practice” (Ewing & Smith, 2001, p. 16). Nicholson agrees, emphasising that “all theatre for children is delineated by a specific set of ideologies, principles and aesthetic values, whether or not they are explicitly declared” (Nicholson, 2011, p. 55). A goal of this research was to make explicit the values and beliefs held by the Actors. Some of these have been alluded to in the previous sections but they are summarised here to inform the later discussion of how the being part of actor practice is shaped by creating theatre with and for children.

The Actors believe that children are capable and creative people who have a right to high-quality cultural experiences as audiences and as creators. They believe that children have good ideas and that they can be valuable artistic collaborators with adults. Their beliefs about theatre are both personal and inclusive: they believe that the actor is at the centre of the theatrical experience, but also that there is a place in the theatre for everyone. They place a high value on the transformative potential of the arts and believe that theatre can offer people a positive shared experience.

6.5.1 Beliefs about children.

Children have a right to play and culture

Actors who work with children believe strongly in children’s right to culture, as creators and audiences. Linked to this, is their belief in children’s right to play. The relationship between these two beliefs is summarised in an artistic statement by Alex in a funding
pitch which reads, “We believe that children have a right to play and to learn through fun and creativity ... We believe entrenched disadvantage should not impede children from experiencing what we know to be good for a child’s wellbeing and future.” (Pinder & Riggs, 2014). Alex explains this further in a paper about his work, writing that it is important that children with difficult lives are given opportunities for play and fun (Pinder, n.d). Alex noted in his interview that he uses clowning because children everywhere are united by their desire to laugh, an observation confirmed by Stephen. Reflecting on the boisterous quality of school and kindergarten audiences, Stephen says, “All kids are sort of waiting to laugh when they’re in a group.” He explains that this is because play is “one of their first languages that they understand in a social context”. The social importance of children’s play is taken further by Dan, who maintains that it is necessary for society as a whole. She writes in the survey, “They are the next generation and are about to be responsible for the world. If they can maintain their sense of play and wonder then we are, as a community, going to be OK.” These beliefs about play reflect these Actors’ sense of fairness and social responsibility which is accompanied by a belief in children’s right to high quality cultural experiences.

The Actors in this study are angered and saddened by the suggestion that it is acceptable for theatre for children to be of a lower quality than theatre for adults as this view contradicts their own firmly held beliefs about children’s cultural rights. Ellen says, “I get really angry when people assume that children’s theatre is a dumbed-down version or a simplified version: [she imitates a dismissive attitude] ‘Get rid of the complexities that you’d have in adult theatre because it’s just children.’” This anger is due to her belief in children’s right to high quality creative experiences and to her knowledge that because children themselves do not tolerate mediocrity, “if anything, you have to work harder”. She writes in the survey, “I feel that work that is made for children should be made with the same intent as when creating work for adults. It mustn’t talk down to the audience, it must be intelligent, and entertaining and be dramaturgically strong.” This is a view shared by all the other actors. Alex’s experience working with musical educator Nehama Patkin36 reminded him that it is not acceptable to think “Oh, it’s just kids. No-one’s going to see.” Rather, he says, “It’s got to be great. It’s got to be really good.” Matthew says that he and his creative partner “deeply care” about the quality of theatre children are afforded and

36 Nehama Patkin (1939-2010) was one of the pioneers of the Suzuki Music method in Australia. Alex performed in several of her public classical music concerts for children and families.
he strenuously defends against the view that children’s theatre is a “lesser culture” than theatre for adults. He is scathing in his criticism of work that does not strive for a high standard. He says, “Those shows aren’t good. I’ll say that with the loudest voice I can. They’re not good. They’re not good. They’re not good. And they’re damaging.”

The belief that children have a right to high-quality cultural experiences is reflected in the Actors’ view that children should be trusted with genuine creative opportunities that involve experimentation and allow them to make mistakes. When Dan allows children’s cardboard box constructions to fall in Polyglot Theatre’s participatory We Built This City, she is showing that she has respect for their ability to solve problems and cope with disappointment. Carolyn Hanna’s show The Curious Game demonstrates a similar belief in children’s resilience because each participant is gradually evicted from the game until there is only one person left. This belief is vindicated by the good grace with which children leave the game when they are dismissed. Carolyn says that making The Curious Game was a reaction against theatre that had a limited view of children’s capabilities. She observes that while society challenges children in “some really terrible ways”, prescriptive children’s theatre does not respect children’s abilities enough. The Curious Game addresses this frustration by offering children a genuine social and creative task.

The Actors believe that giving children opportunities to express themselves and feel pride in the outcome are more important than the ultimate product. Working within parameters of school arts residencies, Stephen must often make decisions about process and product. The following extract from an article he wrote about working as a teaching artist explains how his beliefs inform these decisions:

> With the ongoing challenge of balancing the inextricably linked process and product, in this environment, I often favour the process. In the area of arts education I believe this is vital. The process and journey that the students undertake are rich social and educational learning opportunities. (Noonan, 2007)

The social and learning outcomes of process are also valued highly by Jens when he works on community theatre projects. He says that the projects he has most enjoyed have been the ones in which “It was not so much based on the importance of the outcome but more on how everybody felt about the outcome”. Dan, Jens and Stephen all note that, while
desirable, a focus on process is not always possible. As Dan ruefully exclaims, “Everyone wants an outcome!” Naomi’s struggle to reconcile children’s right to “truly democratic” youth theatre experiences with the time required to facilitate them, mentioned in the previous section, demonstrates the high value that she places on children’s right to cultural expression. It also points to the ways in which the context of the theatrical encounter mediates the realisation of this right.

**Children are capable and creative**

Actors’ belief in children’s right to express themselves is accompanied by a belief and trust in children’s creative capacities. Andresen and Fredericks (2001) reject the notion that creativity amounts a sequential series of events and competencies. They conceive of artistry not as a destination, arrived at through the mastery of skills, but as an element twinned with expertise at all stages of practice. They write that, “perhaps artistry may be a possible (even highly desirable) quality to be cultivated in practice from the ground up, starting with the work of even the naïve beginner” (p. 80).

Andresen and Fredricks’ view of artistry resonates with the Actors’ attitudes towards the artistry of children. They try to draw on children’s inherent creativity rather than believing that they are teaching children how to be creative. They do not aim to correct an artistic deficit in young people because they believe that children are already creative, capable beings who can be competent artistic collaborators with adults. Like the artist teachers in Thornton’s study, they also respect children’s “personal languages, cultures and interests” (Thornton, 2005, p. 169). Those of them who create theatre for children genuinely admire children’s theatrical judgement and unguarded responses. Ellen has performed to thousands of young people in Australia and overseas, and she writes in her survey, “Children, particularly the very young, are wonderful at discerning what good theatre is and will be very vocal when it does not meet their standards.” She notes that it therefore benefits actors to pay attention to children’s reactions so they can improve their performances. Ellen believes that young audiences are not distracted by fancy production values, preferring authentic performances from actors instead.

Matthew appreciates children’s imaginative flexibility which allows them to accept non-naturalistic, lateral theatrical concepts. He says, “They don’t care. They’re not sitting there going, ‘This is a show about the movies—what does this have to do about movies?’”
The sophistication of The Listies’ scripts, which have a strong internal logic but chaotic surface narrative, reflects this trust in children’s creative understandings. Related to this, Alex’s ability to leap straight to work in rehearsals has been inspired partly by the example set by children, whose performances are uncomplicated, spontaneous and “just there”.

Dan regularly witnesses children’s flair for creative expression in her participatory public performances and in her work as an artist in schools. She writes in the survey, “Children have incredible ideas and see things from a different perspective than adults.” Dan also says that “Kids go off on these tangents that are really excellent” and that she enjoys seeing where this takes her work. Like Dan, Stephen works as a teaching artist in schools and as a street theatre performer, contexts that have given him a similar view of children. He says, “I work with young people because I think they’ve got really amazing ideas.”

Carolyn Hanna attributes these ideas to what she calls “the innate qualities of children” which she observes in her varied practice as a workshop facilitator, street performer and clown doctor. These qualities include being “masters of learning by doing” and being playful, generous collaborators. She writes in her survey response that it is wonderful to observe how “kids play together, the beautiful acceptance of offers and making sense and meaning out of random additions and contributions to the whole”. Matthew agrees, saying that the “random stuff that comes out of kids’ brains” when they are given opportunities for improvised audience participation is joyful and invigorating.

Because Ellen primarily performs in main stage theatre productions, she has had fewer opportunities to interact directly with children than the Actors mentioned above, but those that she has had have given her an appreciation of the creative aspects of children’s play. Early in her career the company she was working with researched concepts for a show in a childcare centre. She remembers that when she observed the children’s own play, she thought, “Oh, that’s so much better than what we were doing!” This revelation resonates with Carolyn Bechervaise’s experiences as an early childhood performing arts teacher and theatre maker, which have led her to believe that she and her fellow professional artists are “not the holders of all the knowledge”. She says that the high value the Drop Bear Theatre company members place on children’s imagination and creativity leads them to believe that “they’re really capable of being co-collaborators”. Carolyn Hanna agrees, and adds that interactive shows like The Curious Game function as public
demonstrations that children can be effective co-creators of theatre alongside professional actors.

Although the Actors believe strongly in young people’s creative capacities, they do not have an unrealistic or romantic view of childhood. They acknowledge that children can be shy, vulnerable, fearful, resistant to new ideas or attention-seeking but this awareness does not dilute the value they place on children’s right to culture. Instead, they believe that these normal human emotions and behaviours are additional factors with which their work must contend. Dan has heard many children dismiss each other’s ideas by saying things like “That’s silly” or “That’s a stupid question” and believes that “kids are taught to block things quite early”. She says it is her job to “open that out and add something else”. Jens believes that all children are creative so when he worked with members of a small rural community who were resistant to the first experiences he offered, he did not give up but tried a new approach. He says, “I had to find ways of how to kind of trick them into unconsciously releasing stuff and then make them actually conscious of what they unconsciously just started to do.” These comments illustrate a belief that children should be met on their own terms instead of being rejected if they do not fit the actor’s agenda. The skills involved in doing this will be explored in Chapter 7. The following section continues to discuss actors’ values and beliefs, focusing now on their views about theatre.

6.5.2 Beliefs about theatre and the arts.

The Actors have a deep passion for theatre, which they believe is a communal, shared experience that has potential to transform people’s lives. They place a high value on the actor’s place in the theatre, but they also believe that theatre should be accessible to anyone as audience members or as performers.

The essence of theatre

The Actors in this study believe that the live nature of theatre is one of its most important attributes. Matthew says he was fortunate to work with a director early in his career whose productions set the tone for his future work with The Listies. He remembers,
I’d never seen a kids’ show like the ones that Lynn\textsuperscript{37} puts together. I was like, “This is what going to the theatre should be. It should be touching, it should be yelling, it should be talking to the people next to you, it should be getting on stage, it should be, yeah, really live!

Just as this experience was a revelation to Matthew as a young actor, so too can audiences be engaged by the live nature of theatre. Alex has conducted workshops with children from a very wide range of social and educational backgrounds and he has noticed that because many of them have never been to the theatre they are entranced by the fact that the performance is taking place in real time and space. He says that when their expectations of seeing a screen are disrupted by the physical presence of the actor they are “just amazed or delighted”. This observation is supported by O’Toole et al. (2014) whose interviews with 14 to 30-year-old audience members reveal young people’s surprise and pleasure in live theatre. Reflecting on very young children’s experience of live theatre, Stephen says that although they cannot articulate the source of their new emotions, it is the actor’s responsibility to maintain the special nature of theatre by being “present” and attentive to each lived instant. He explains, “Being in the moment: it’s essential for us but it helps them realise that this is live.” Matthew illustrates his responsibility as a theatre maker to have a live exchange with the audience with a story about taking his goddaughter to a stage adaptation of a television show. His goddaughter was very excited to see one particular character. Because the production was choreographed to a recorded sound track, the performers were not able to respond to the audience in any way. He remembers,

\textquote{The character walked on stage, and my goddaughter yelled out, “Hello!” and the show just went on without her. And for me, that should never happen. The more that that happens, the more that theatre is like television, the less interested people are going to be in it.}

Matthew enhances the live aspect of theatre in his own shows by greeting audience members individually and maintaining as much eye contact with them as possible. These

\textsuperscript{37} Lynne Ellis is an Australian director who created school holiday children’s theatre productions for many years. Matthew began his career as a children’s theatre performer in her adaptations of Roald Dahl’s children’s novels.
techniques relate to another belief that the actors in this study hold about theatre: that it is a communal experience.

The Actors place a high value on the social interactions of theatre. Matthew says he enjoys creating a “shared experience between families” and illustrates this with what he describes as a “peak Listies” sketch involving the whole audience pretending to be on a car trip. He says,

There’s a real nice sense of togetherness and live theatre about that scene …
Everyone is doing exactly the same thing and the children get to turn and look at their parents being silly, live participants as well.

The Actors believe that although they have most of the responsibility for presenting the performance, it is co-created with the audience. Stephen explains that in a non-verbal production such as *The Moon’s a Balloon*, although the performers are “physically in the world” of the play, the audience members are making their own story by “observing it, commenting on it and sort of narrating it.”

Theatrical performers interviewed for other studies echo these Actors’ love of theatre’s shared experience. As a participant in LeBank and Bridel’s study of clowns, Bill Irwin observes that the enduring attraction of live performance in a technological age can be explained by the fact that “Things change, but people still gather together to witness things” (LeBank & Bridel, 2015, p. 173). A strong theme emerging from that study was the “circle of love” (p. 85) that clowns seek to foster between themselves and live audiences, a theme that is also prominent in O’Kane’s interviews with actors (O’Kane, 2012). In one of those interviews, Selina Cadell movingly describes this reciprocal exchange as “the movement between the audience and the actor, the relationship that we’ve kind of risked together” (O’Kane, 2012, p. 212).

Jens describes community theatre as a shared experience between himself and the participants. He says,

Those projects are in collaboration with others, so I’ve been there always as the director but it’s important that we have quite a bit of exchange going on so that other people have a building-it-up-together experience.
This statement hints at the democratic beliefs that Jens and the other Actors have about theatre. They believe that theatre should be available to everyone, regardless of age, and that everyone has a place in the theatre. This is illustrated most obviously by the fact that they do not consider their work with children to be in any way inferior to their work with adults. It is also reflected in their confidence in children’s creative capacities, discussed earlier in this chapter. Alex has worked in a wide range of communities and believes that theatre can and should be appreciated by anyone. He says, “It doesn’t matter what economic background they’re from. If they’re the rich kids from Carey Grammar or they’re the kids in the desert, they’re all equal in front of the clown, really.” That sense of equality is also expressed by Stephen in an article documenting his experience working as an artist in schools. He writes, “CARGO was a great arts education experience for students, artists and teachers. It reminded us that regardless of age, background or ability we all have stories to tell.” (Noonan, 2007). This is a belief shared by all the Actors, who look for opportunities to facilitate the expression of these stories.

Although the Actors have sophisticated stage craft skills, they believe that the fundamentals of theatre are more important than production values. These fundamentals include strong intentions, genuine performances and a focus on the actor. Summarising this belief, Ellen says, “I don’t think it is important that it has high production values, but I think the work must overall be honest.” This echoes Carolyn Bechervaise’s comment that beautiful sets are less important than offering audiences engaging, respectful experiences that resonate with them beyond the moment of performance. Matthew offers another perspective on this topic, saying that high production values can potentially alienate audiences by reinforcing the theatrical fourth wall. He believes that the “rubbish props” in his shows help children to relate to the work, and give them the confidence to make theatre themselves. This is the same message that Jens’s “junk” aesthetic and Alex’s minimalist clowning convey. Influenced by his Lecoq training, Alex believes that “the actors are at the centre of the work”, and he tries to pass this on to the children with whom he works. He explains that by going into a workshop with no props, he says to children, “We’re here. We’ve got nothing. We’re going to create.” The purpose of such a statement is empowerment, which reflects one of the Actors’ goals for children as seen earlier (see section 6.4.4).
The value of theatre

The Actors believe that theatre can be personally and socially transformative. This is based on their own experiences of theatre and on their observations of the children they work with. Ellen’s positive childhood experiences of theatre had a strong influence on her life. She explains,

Theatrical expression was such an important part of creativity and play as a child, and it was something that was really fostered, and I think it’s great because it translates to every other facet of your life when you are at that particular age.

Some of the Actors believe that one facet of life that the arts can influence is children’s learning. Carolyn Bechervaise experiences as a teacher and an actor have made her “a really big believer in the importance of the arts” which she believes can influence children’s understanding of other elements of the school curriculum. She says,

You’re using a different part of your brain when you’re being creative and I don’t think that has to be limited to just drama or just to dance … [children] could tap into that part of the brain in a maths class or in a literacy class.

Alex’s work with Artists in Community International makes another connection between the arts and education, suggesting that the arts can prepare children for learning. A fund-raising pitch for this program states, “We believe that art and drama is a stepping stone into education in countries where education can be informal and non-school based.” (Pinder and Riggs, 2014). Alex explains on his personal website that the arts provide this stepping stone by developing children’s sense of well-being through the pleasure of participation (Pinder, n.d.). This is an outcome that some of the Actors have experienced themselves.

Unlike Ellen, Dan had few experiences of theatre as a child, positive or otherwise, but her first encounters with circus as an adult made her feel “extraordinary”. Her belief in the transformative potential of the arts has been influenced by the “very, very strong impact” theatre had on her own life and by the changes she has witnessed in other people participating in the arts. She explains,
I started working with youth at risk. And that kind of opened my eyes up as well and I started really seeing how the arts have a really important potential to shift the way people think about themselves in the world.

While Dan also acknowledges that the work she does with children and families may, at times, only result in “a subtle shift in people”, she believes that the ultimate impact may have wider significance. Outlining this vision, she says,

If we can offer our kids ways of expressing themselves then we develop this community of adults who encourage their own children to express themselves. You know? It’s like this growing of community.

This comment reflects an optimistic view of the arts and children and of the value of both to society.

6.6 Reflection: Being an actor who works with children

This chapter has explored the elements that make up the ‘being’ of actor practice. It began with an analysis of what motivates the Actors to create theatre with and for children, and what goals they have for children. The discussion then turned to the beliefs the Actors have about children and about theatre. The stereotype of artists choosing to work with children as a fall-back position (Thornton, 2005) seems at first to be supported by the Actors’ acknowledgement that money is a strong motivation for engaging in this work. This fact is outweighed, though, by their other, equally strong motivations, including: the opportunity to practice and develop their craft; the chance to collaborate with others; and the opportunity to advocate for and improve the creative lives of children. These findings resonate with the literature about teaching artists working in all artforms. For example, although several studies concur that money does motivate artists to work with children (Ascenso, 2016; Kim, 2015; Waldorf, 2002), Rabkin et al. (2011) conclude that it is far from the most important reason. Indeed, they conclude that because rates of teaching artist pay are typically low, artists who wish to earn high incomes are much more likely to leave the arts altogether than to take on this work.

Thornton (2005) says that artists who persist with teaching artist practice in the face of negative perceptions about their motivations have a particularly strong sense of identity and vocation. Rabkin et al. (2011) go further, suggesting that a passion for and deep
commitment to their arts practice may be the most important prerequisite for teaching artists to share their work with children. The Actors in this research demonstrate passion and commitment to their practice by the high value they place on theatre and their belief that it can offer children opportunities to exercise their creative and social rights through enjoyable, transformative experiences.

The main difference between the findings of this study and those investigating the motivations, goals and beliefs of artists working with children in other artforms is the particular emphasis the Actors place on collaboration with children and with other professional artists. This emphasis perhaps arises from the fact that theatre is a relational artform that is usually created by more than one artist, and which only exists in the presence of others. Theatre actors are always in a live relationship with audiences or participants and this distinctive way of being is connected to what they do and know in their work with children. These two elements of practice will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter 7  Characteristics of Practice: Doing and Knowing

Is there such a thing as a children’s theatre actor? The Actors were ambivalent when I posed this question in the interviews. While they are not convinced that audiences of different ages require specialised acting skills, discussions about and observations of their practice reveal distinct patterns of what they do and the knowledge they bring to theatre with and for children.

This section will focus on how the Actors work with children and what they know about them. It will draw on the Actors’ own words and my researcher observations of three performances: by Matthew Kelly (The Listies Make You LOL), Stephen Noonan (The Moon’s a Balloon) and Carolyn Hanna (The Curious Game).

7.1 Knowing: Knowing Children

An axiom of the entertainment industry is that it is important to know your audience and this view is a topic of discussion in studies of children’s arts experiences. In the NFER Report for Arts Council England about raising the standard of arts experiences with, for and by children and young people, Lord et al. (2012) found that artists creating theatre performances for children drew on a thorough knowledge of child development. Some practitioners challenge this approach, though. One theatre maker, interviewed for the review of Australian theatre for young people mentioned earlier, said that although familiarity with theories of learning and an “articulated philosophy” about youth culture may help theatre makers to create work that “resonates on a number of levels” it may also restrict or inhibit creative possibilities (Australia Council for the Arts and NSW Ministry for the Arts, 2003, p. 38).

In relation to these two reports, Radvan’s detailed study of Imaginary Theatre’s practice resonates more with the NFER findings (Radvan, 2012). He explains that Imaginary Theatre’s dramatic style grew out of the company’s deep commitment to researching their audience. This research involved: learning about child development; informal interactions with children before and after performances; and testing new work with trial audiences. Imaginary Theatre’s research-based approach to creating theatre for children was based on the company’s belief that actors cannot assume they understand contemporary
children’s lives simply because they were once children (Radvan, 2012). The Actors in this research concur with Ravdan that testing material with audiences can be useful because the world of the child is, as Stephen says, not their world. However, they also demonstrate great confidence in their ability to imaginatively engage and empathise with the more fundamental human aspects of the child’s world. For example, reflecting on her role as an awkward teenager in *Girl Asleep*, Ellen says that she had to find empathy for the part, to avoid making fun of the character and, by extension, the young audience. In doing so, she drew on her own experience as a teenager which, although not like a contemporary young person’s life in cultural details, had the same emotional dimensions.

The Actors are curious about children, and the style and content of their work are informed by their understanding of children’s social, developmental and cultural lives. For some, this understanding seems to occur naturally because they have an easy affinity with children. Jens is one such actor, making his first show for children based on the perhaps naïve but correct belief that they would enjoy the same subject matter as him. Matthew is another. He says that his goal of making theatre for children as “fun, live and stupid” as possible is a natural consequence of his personality. He explains, “That’s just me as a human and that’s what I do when I’m on stage.” While an instinctive affinity with children’s interests is valuable, further discussion with the participants reveals that it can be usefully supplemented by formal and informal efforts to better understand young people. For example, Carolyn Hanna had always engaged with children in her street theatre performances but says she did not consciously consider them until she had her own family. Her current sophisticated understanding of children has been gained largely through what she calls “learning by doing”. In addition to on-the-job training and life experiences, Carolyn and the other Actors learn about children through observation and listening, testing new work with trial audiences and undertaking teaching studies.

### 7.1.1 Knowing children through formal study.

I noted in the literature review that actors working with children are often ambivalent about their relationship to teaching. Despite this, four of the Actors in this research have trained to become teachers. Naomi and Carolyn Bechervaise are currently employed in the profession and, although Stephen does not work as a teacher he often collaborates

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38 *Girl Asleep*, by Matthew Whittet was produced by Windmill Theatre Company in 2014.
with teachers as an artist in schools. At the time of writing Matthew had deferred his teaching studies to concentrate on his career with The Listies. His decision to study teaching intrigued me because it seemed at odds with The Listies’ publicity, which proclaims that the shows are “100% education free”. However, as discussed earlier, this publicity tag is designed to emphasise the comic nature of the work, which Matthew acknowledges has a serious intention to teach children about theatre. When Matthew discusses teaching, though, he does not refer to the content he is helping children to learn but focuses instead on the understanding teaching has given him about children’s emotional and social development. As an example, he explains that learning about the reasons why children seek attention has helped him to make decisions about how to respond to them during the performances. This resonates with James’s study in which Canadian actor David Craig revealed that his teaching degree taught him a “language which was going to be invaluable” in his subsequent career as a creator of theatre for children (James, 2006).

Like Matthew, Stephen’s ongoing interest in, and formal studies of, child development informs his theatre practice. He says, “Learning those milestones, whether it’s speech or movement, or emotional intelligence, or separation and security, has furthered my interest and made me want to stay within this area.” Carolyn Bechervaise’s understanding of child development began when she participated in Purple Patch, Patch Theatre Company’s professional development program. This program gave participating actors valuable access to visiting experts on child development, education and children’s theatre, and opportunities to participate in creative workshops with children at schools. Several years later, Carolyn completed a Graduate Diploma of Primary Education with the aim of doing relief teaching to financially support her theatre work. Instead, her employment as an early childhood and primary school drama/dance teacher has led to a rich, symbiotic relationship with her actor practice.

Carolyn credits her teacher training for her deep understanding of the importance of play to children and for her ability to “look and recognise and see what a child is really interested in”. This ability is also evident in the work of the Actors who don’t have formal educational qualifications, though, which suggests that it can be obtained through a range of other experiences.
7.1.2 Knowing children by looking, listening and responding.

One of the skills that Stephen brings to working with children is, in his words, “an acute awareness of the ever-changing dynamic between the work and young people”. This awareness is realised in the ways he connects with children. Most tangibly the long experience he has had working in this field has taught him, to “really, really, really look into the eyes of the child and totally be comfortable in talking to them in the performance”. He is aware that not all performers have this skill and observes that contemporary dancers in particular, “just look over the tops of the heads of the children” as if they are not there. Looking in to the eyes of the child is not just a literal action for Stephen, though, because the phrase also encapsulates his conception of all theatre as the “back and forth of non-verbal conversation”. In *The Moon’s a Balloon*, Stephen cannot, however, see the audience and is not able to change the show’s very strictly timed choreography. He explains that, instead, his main task in this type of performance is to “just be in the moment and see exactly what’s happening on every breath”. To do this, he must rely on his other senses: listening to and feeling the audience’s responses. Stephen believes that children can sense the quality of his attention and that his heightened sense of awareness creates a “really thrilling” experience for them.

Stephen’s emphasis on being attentive to children is shared by all the participating Actors and is expressed variously as listening, observing or researching. Carolyn Hanna says that when working as a clown doctor it is important to listen to children, to discover who they are, what they find funny and if they are ready to engage. Describing the initial interaction between herself and a child, she says she has to read all the child’s signals, so she can determine if she can “even go through the door”. In the very different setting of school workshops, Alex also tries to discover “What are these kids into?” While working on a project involving very shy newly arrived Sudanese students, he says he was able to find a role they were comfortable with when he discovered that they were enthusiastic dancers.

Jens’s early experience as a street performer developed his skills in provoking and responding to audiences and he tries to do this even in large theatres where he and the audience are physically more distant. He illustrates this with a story about a performance for high school students who, in his experience, are “actually the worst age group” for *Squaring the Wheel*. Knowing that theatre is “just not cool enough for them anymore” Jens quickly reworked parts of the show before the performance began. The hall in which...
he performed was not blacked out, so he was able to make further spontaneous adjustments throughout the performance, in response to the reactions he observed. The show was a great success thanks to Jens’s belief that, “That’s what you do. You adapt the way you perform to your audiences a little bit.”

Dan observes that the theatrical contexts of her encounters with children influence how she can observe and respond to them. Working with children affected by the 2009 Victorian Black Saturday bushfires, Dan began by chatting with them as they engaged in simple, open-ended drawing tasks. She explains that these conversations revealed more about the children’s personalities and interests than would have been possible by starting the project with a preconceived plan. Reflecting on the pride the children felt in the resulting idiosyncratic shadow-puppet play that they made, Dan says, “That’s probably the crux of working with children—you’ve got to know ‘Who are they?’ Otherwise it’s just my work and they’re making it for me!” Dan notes that one-off events in public spaces cannot accommodate these sorts of deep exchanges and therefore place a “lot of responsibility” on her to make decisions about children based on fleeting impressions and little information.

Knowledge about children can also inform the theatre experiences actors create for children by ensuring the subject matter and style will engage them. After every show Matthew and his creative partner sit at a table, sign merchandise, tickets and flyers, and talk to the audience in a relaxed manner reminiscent of the casual conversations initiated by actors performing in Imaginary Theatre’s Tashi shows, mentioned earlier (Radvan, 2012). Engaging with children in a warm, interested and personalised manner, Matthew uses these conversations to keep abreast of popular culture trends, observe children’s behaviour and develop new comic material. For example, a child’s inability to tell the duo a Knock-Knock joke properly inspired them to write a whole new sketch based on that idea. This informal research results in theatre that resonates powerfully with children because it reminds them of their own lives.

Informal and formal research practices have a long history in children’s theatre. Drawing on her experiences as a producer of theatre for young audiences, Beauchamp (1993) identifies research as a key characteristic of the children’s theatre artist. She recalls that

39 The Black Saturday bushfires on February 7, 2009 were a series of catastrophic fires in Victoria that resulted in a devastating loss of life, property and natural habitat.
artists in Québec conducted workshops with children to learn more about them and to use this knowledge to inform their work.

Another research technique is to test material with audiences during the development of a show. Klein (1992) recommends doing this to ease actors’ fears about how children will respond, but it can also be used to inform the script, staging and performance of the work (Radvan, 2012). Four of the actors in this study systematically test their work with trial audiences. Carolyn Bechervaise developed her adaptation of The Magic Hat over several years, testing material in schools and in after-school care centres to discover, “what parts of the story they really picked up”. Jens uses his workshops with children in a similar way: to gauge children’s interest in various concepts. He says these discoveries sometimes surprise him, prompting him to think, “Well, maybe that’s interesting to explore a little bit further in a different creative context”. He also closely observes how children approach tasks, and “scavenges” some of their responses, which he says are often elegantly simple because they “can’t be bothered to spend time on it”. Stephen’s extensive testing at all stages of the creative development process began when he was devising a show for babies, an age group he knew little about at that time. He notes that he is more likely to test theatre for children than theatre for adults because of the unavoidable gulf between generations. He explains, “I love being in that world, but it’s not my world.” Trialling material and ideas with children has become a valuable part of Stephen’s practice when making new work and he advises actors to “get your audience in early” in the process, to benefit from the insights children’s feedback can offer.

Schonmann (2006) believes that “most of the artists in theatre (such as the actors, directors, designer, playwrights) are not educators or psychologists and they know almost nothing about young people’s needs” (p. 14). This view may be influenced by the quality of the work observed, but it is challenged by my study, which shows that the Actors, who work with children in a wide range of contexts, have a strong knowledge of children’s needs that is reached through intuition, observation and experience. What the Actors know about children informs and is informed by what they do in their theatrical practice.

7.2 Doing: Play

The Actors say that play is important to their practice of creating theatre with and for children. They refer to play in relation to improvisation techniques, devising processes...
and their relationships with children. They link play with humour and fun, theatrical exploration, and an attitude of openness. These associations resonate with the strong thread of play in Western theatre actor practice, which is linked with fun, spontaneity, responsiveness and creativity. They also connect with the broad body of literature about play, which examines it from developmental (Brown, 2009), creative (Ewing, 2013) and social (Ginsburg, 2007) perspectives. The following quote from Stephen’s survey shows how some of these perspectives are realised in actor practice:

A sense of ‘play’ is strongly informed by working with young people in regard to my creative practice. In play there is often an objective, a social interaction and the zany joy of moving between spontaneity and structure. I aim to incorporate these elements into my practice as young people use and engage these principles with ready acceptance.

This sentiment is echoed by other Actors in this study but is nuanced by the context in which they work.

Much of Alex’s work with children involves clowning, echoing a long tradition in theatre with children of using games, play and humour as tools of engagement. Alex’s clowning usually emphasises the humorous aspects of play, and one of his main motives for working with children is to make them laugh. He typically starts workshops by “playing the clown”, which he says “breaks down the barriers” and positions him as an adult who is not a parent or teacher but “who’s something else”. Although Dan does not describe her practice as clowning, she says she increasingly aims for “lightness” when creating theatre with children and that this work has taught her “the value of humour and the ridiculous”. She also values other intrinsic characteristics of play, such as collaboration and risk, which she uses to jolt children out of their habit of trying to get things right so that they can explore their creative impulses more fully.

Ellen’s work creating theatre for children with main stage theatre companies involves less direct audience interaction than Dan’s work with Polyglot Theatre’s participatory productions, or Alex’s clowning workshops, but it also draws on the “ability to be a bit silly”. She explains that “children’s theatre is great for that kind of wild creativity”. This is a view shared by Carolyn Bechervaise who says that she enjoys “tapping into absurd things” in her work with children.
Absurdity, humour and a sense of play were common characteristics of practice that emerged from the performances observed for this research. *The Moon’s a Balloon* follows the story of two people playing with each other in a world of balloons. Stephen says that it resonates with children because play is one of the “first languages that they understand in a social context”. The young audience at the observed performance of this production responded well to its impressive visual effects but they were particularly affected by the playful interactions between the two performers. This was demonstrated by the first very big laugh which came when Stephen and his co-performer knocked each other over with a huge balloon. Stephen says that it is important for him to maintain a sense of play throughout this show because it can easily become overwhelmed by its complex technical requirements, as when he lost his grip on the balloon string (see narrative in section 5.6). Being able to quickly recapture the “joy of discovery” in play, he has found that minor mistakes like this can “open up new doors” in his performance. Play therefore operates on more than one level in his work, enriching the experience for himself and for children.

Carolyn Hanna’s performance in *The Curious Game* was also very playful. Her ridiculous costume and mock regal authority enticed children to play the game and led them joyfully through the performance. Born in a Taxi’s website explains that the company’s street performances are structured for “responding to what arises in the moment” and to create “situations where playfulness can be expressed”, making the experience “satisfying for audience and performer alike” (Born in a Taxi, 2015a). The links expressed here between improvisation, play and the actors’ relationship with the audience were clear in Carolyn’s performance, especially when she gleefully challenged the participants with increasingly difficult tasks, or when she dismissed them from the game with an exaggerated sympathetic groan.

Play was central to Matthew’s energetic and very funny performance in *The Listies Make You LOL*. Inspired by classic comedy duos such as Eric Morcambe and Ernie Wise, the madcap banter between him and his creative partner was hugely appealing to the children in the audience who laughed delightedly for the entire show. A sense of play was particularly important during the moments of audience interaction, which, like Carolyn Hanna’s role in *The Curious Game*, required Matthew to be responsive to the moment. Although he acknowledges that his long experience has prepared him for most offers from
the audience, his sense of play ensured that every response appeared fresh and spontaneous.

While play was evident in the three performances discussed above, it also informed the creative development of the shows. Other Actors also use play to create new work. Jens says play is important to the devising process because it gives him scope to freely explore ideas, and he describes the creative development of his theatre works for children as “tinkering” and “playing around” with concepts and materials. Matthew uses the playful qualities of improvisation, or what he calls “mucking about”, to devise The Listies’ shows, saying, “Play is where everything comes from for us.” Explaining that being silly and willing to make mistakes helps to generate theatrical ideas, he says, “Giving yourself permission to look stupid or say something stupid unlocks creativity for me.”

Like Matthew, Carolyn Hanna works collaboratively with other artists, with a practice grounded in play and improvisation. She says of her company’s open-ended devising process, “Our creative practice is to play, find the thing of interest and then create a piece from it.” Although much of Carolyn’s work creating theatre with children involves more improvisation than Matthew Kelly’s The Listies Make You LOL, she also notes the need for an overarching “score” that she can “play with, experiment with, expand and contract”. This observation is echoed by other Actors’ discussions of the mechanisms of play in theatre such as Stephen’s earlier observation that it moves between “spontaneity and structure”. Carolyn Bechervaise says that her use and understanding of play has developed throughout her career, beginning with her drama school training, which taught her that effective theatrical play requires a framework. She explains, “We don’t just go in and play. We need to set up an environment to play within, or set up a provocation to play with.” After graduation Carolyn Bechervaise, worked at the Seattle Children’s Museum, where she says improvising as historical characters taught her about the reciprocal, collaborative qualities of play by “picking up on what the children said and running with it”. Carolyn says this experience resonated strongly with her subsequent early childhood teacher training which taught her to follow children’s interests and about “the importance of play developmentally”.

This section has shown that actors view play in positive terms, but Klein (1992) offers another perspective on this characteristic of practice. She warns that actors are inclined to enjoy children’s laughter too much and, in seeking the warm approval of laughter, may
therefore play ‘for’ them, rather than ‘with’ each other. She says actors who chase cheap laughs from young audiences simultaneously undermine the meaning and integrity of the script and patronise children by suggesting that they are not worthy of theatrical depth and complexity. Noting that this occurs when actors have little understanding of children’s needs and their stages of development, Klein recommends that directors make it a priority to better inform actors about this issue. While it is not certain that directors are any better informed than actors about children or how to use play in sensitive, creative ways, the experience of the Actors in this study does support Klein’s contention because, as section 7.1 shows, attaining knowledge about children is a significant characteristic of their practice.

Play can be a solitary affair and, as Jens explains, playing on one’s own can be immensely satisfying. Play is, however, often social. This points to another significant characteristic of the Actors’ practice, which is collaboration.

7.3 Doing: Collaboration

Reason (2010) notes that children do not choose to attend theatre that is created for them but are brought to it by well-meaning adults who are also usually in control of all stages of the creative encounter. The inherent tension in Reason’s observation is echoed by Schonmann (2006) who poses the following dilemma: “So here we face a complicated situation in which the world of the young will always be constructed through the eyes of adults and their perceptions. Is there a way to change this complicated situation?” (p. 20). Schonmann proposes that the answer lies in configuring the relationship between actors and children as a mutual and dynamic exchange, where children’s responses shape the performance as much as the actors’ actions prompt the audience’s reactions. This is what Wartemann (2009) argues for too, urging performers “to trust, to be brave, to give in just a little more to the reactions of the children” (p. 14). The Actors in this study exemplify Wartemann’s argument by positioning themselves as keen collaborators with children. Their practice is characterised by trusting, playful exchanges with children within creative frameworks. The survey for this study asked participants to indicate the roles they identify with when creating theatre with and for children. Co-player was the second highest preferred role by weight for actors creating theatre with children, and the equal third highest for those creating theatre for children (see Table 5.9, p. 77 and Table 5.10, p. 78). The actors elaborated on this topic in the interviews, revealing that the nature of their
collaborations with children is influenced by their personal goals and the theatrical context of the work.

As a youth theatre tutor, Naomi aims to facilitate genuine and equal creative exchanges between herself, the other adult artists and children. She acknowledges, though, that her own research suggests that children may view their relationship differently. She explains,

I would like to think I was purely a collaborator with them and that I was also a co-learner. I learn all the time from them, so I am a co-learner. Again, they might have a totally different opinion of that. They might think that I am some of those other things, like a director.

Naomi’s vision of herself as a collaborator with children developed over many years. When she first began to facilitate youth theatre sessions at Canberra Youth Theatre, she led structured workshops that prepared children for public performances. Given licence to develop her own method at St Martins Youth Arts Centre, Naomi began to follow the children’s interests. She discovered that the children were most engaged when they could “make up their own stuff and do things on the fly”. Naomi says that this way of working not only exposed her to ideas that “you could never in your wildest dreams imagine”, but that she was also forced to reconsider the habitual restrictions she placed on her way of working.

Despite wanting to identify as a collaborator with children, Naomi acknowledges that the practical parameters of each project, such as the need to shape the final publicly-viewed outcome, sometimes force her into the role of a director. She says that by placing any kind of framework around children’s theatrical explorations, “obviously I’m following some kind of creative urge within myself to make some kind of art and then put them in it”. Although she expresses a yearning for child-led theatre, she says with scrupulous intellectual honesty, “I think if you’re going to use them as your canvas then you have to own it. You have say, ‘I’ve made this piece of art and there’s kids in it.’ Not, ‘These kids made this art.’” The tension between her yearning to give children more artistic agency and the reality of her practice is ever-present.

The previous discussion about beliefs and values (section 6.5) noted that the Actors believe children have wonderful ideas. An important characteristic of their practice is incorporating these ideas into their own work. Carolyn Bechervaise says that one of the
joys of creating theatre with children is that it “gives you this random idea and you go, ‘We should just do that. We should make that our next show.’” She believes that children are “really capable of being co-collaborators”, and therefore tries to take on the role of a “facilitator or a provoker of ideas” in workshops. She says that with this approach, “you get so much more and you learn so much more”. These experiences have also coloured the way she works with adults, including her teaching colleagues, who sometimes find her democratic approach “baffling” but are “grateful to be given a voice and not just be told what they have to do”.

Jens’s community theatre projects involve complex interpersonal exchanges with children. He says these exchanges can be “very emotional” and he is “always very quickly touched by the human impact” the work has on children. Although Jens facilitates these projects and often takes on the role of theatre director, as noted earlier, he says that it is important that these experiences involve collaboration. Jens says he prefers projects that allow for exploration and exchange to those that emphasise a final performance. He explains, “The ones I enjoyed most were the ones where it was not so much based on the importance of the outcome but more on how everybody felt about the outcome.”

Responding to an observation I made in the interview that this demonstrates his interest in artistic process and in relationships, he said, “That’s what it all is in the end, isn’t it? For me.”

Working on Polyglot Theatre’s participatory play productions, Dan Goronszy says that “performance becomes quite a loose term”, because she is less concerned with presenting a rehearsed character than “being open to the children’s ideas and then as a performer running with those ideas”. Dan explains that this collaborative exchange is mutually inspiring for actors and children:

a. I’m inspired by the kids to go into make-believe and go into some other world and see what’s in there and b, to inspire kids to follow their thoughts or follow their own inspiration, their own impulse.

Dan describes this exchange as an interplay of spontaneous offers and responses that keep her “really alive” in her performance.

The theatre Carolyn Hanna creates with children, such as *The Curious Game*, also involves an exchange of ideas between actors and children, but she notes that this has to
occur within the limits of the dramaturgy. In section 3.4.5 I referred to British actor Tim Crouch’s characterisation of the exchange between audiences and actors as a “structured conversation” (O’Kane, 2012, p. 105). This term acknowledges that, even in shows or workshops involving improvisation, the exchange is always shaped by a theatrical framework. This framework includes the form of the work, the number of children present, and the time involved. Reflecting on the tension between structure and collaboration in youth theatre, Naomi says that, ideally, she would have enough time to work with children that they “get to the point where they decide what needs to stay and what needs to go”. She says this would be a “truly democratic” collaboration.

Alex’s commitment to making theatre out of children’s own interests sometimes requires him to put aside his own theatrical ideas. In his work with Artists in Community International, he has facilitated arts projects with disadvantaged children in India and Nepal including with a group of former street children who were fascinated with the story of Cinderella. Although Alex’s long-term goal was to encourage them to tell their own stories, he recognised the power this fairy tale held for these children who had been given an opportunity to leave a very harsh life and he was therefore willing to use it as a starting point for their explorations.

Matthew notes that a major difference between theatre for adults and theatre for children is the audience’s willingness to be involved in the performance. He actively encourages involvement by acknowledging everyone in the room and says, “I always make an effort to make as much eye contact with people as I can. I smile at people. You know, if someone’s wearing a cool shirt you tell them!” He is very critical of what he calls automated theatre for children that ignores the audience and says children become restless in these shows because “they don’t know what to do or what the people on stage expect them to do”. Although Matthew considers everything children say to be an offer, he admits that as audiences become accustomed to playing a real role in the work, they sometimes overstep theatrical boundaries, requiring him to put up a metaphorical wall to maintain control of the theatrical conversation.

Collaboration takes on different forms in the Actors’ work with children depending on the context. In theatre with children, the Actors try to offer children opportunities to contribute and develop their own ideas. In theatre for children, they consider the children’s responses to be an integral part of the performance. This sense of collaboration
is mutually beneficial, as the Actors are inspired by what children bring to the work. They note, though, that collaborations with children are limited by external factors. In theatre with children these factors include the time available for the project and if it is culminating in a public performance. In theatre for children, a significant limiting factor is the theatrical form of the work. Working with these constraints, the Actors strive to make their encounters with children genuine structured conversations.

### 7.4 Reflection: Doing and Knowing in Context

In describing the Actors’ ways of being, doing and knowing, this analysis has drawn attention to the fact that the characteristics of actor practice are invariably influenced by context. An ambition of this research was to investigate the relationship between theatrical context and the practice of actors who create theatre with and for children. The first step in doing so was to develop a typology of practice, as outlined in Chapter 4 (see Table 4.2, p. 65).

Working in diverse contexts, the Actors’ common beliefs, values and goals reflect their shared orientations towards being, as highlighted in Chapter 6. They also share orientations towards knowing, in that they seek to understand children’s lives and experiences of theatre through formal studies, informal research and in-situ observations. The Actors’ practice differs most in their ways of doing, which is influenced by four of the factors in the typology of practice: performance site; the age of the participating children; the theatre form; and the type of participation offered to children. The effect of these four factors can be illustrated by considering the different ways the Actors realise their goal of empowering children in diverse contexts. When Stephen performs a dance theatre piece for babies on an intimate studio set he matches their actions and vocalisations, to give them a sense that they can influence the outside world. When Dan is devising a theatre work in a primary school, she allows children plenty of time to discuss their ideas, which she then weaves into a collaborative script. In his community theatre workshops, Jens offers children opportunities to work out problems for themselves, giving them a sense of “Yes, I can!” Working as a clown doctor, Carolyn Hanna takes her cues from the children, so if they do not feel well enough to engage with her, she may not even enter the hospital room. Although the Actors’ ways of empowering children in these different theatrical settings are outwardly different, they all aim to give
children opportunities to make decisions or to contribute to the work in a meaningful way. In each case, too, the Actors listen and respond to the children’s offers.

The analysis of the characteristics of the Actors’ practice suggest that the other two factors in the typology—authorship and organisational structure—have little direct influence on what the Actors do when they work with children. These factors may, however, have an indirect effect on their practice because the Actors who devise their own work and/or are self-employed may be able to create the theatrical conditions that they believe optimize their interactions with children. For example, many venue managers want to seat children attending The Listies’ shows on floor cushions but, as an independent producer, Matthew has the authority to reject this, knowing that this arrangement will result in chaos.

The qualities, skills and approaches that characterise the Actors’ work with children and are nuanced by factors in the typology of practice challenge the declaration that I have often heard from practitioners that there is no difference between their work for adults and their work for children. I was therefore keen to ask the Actors about this issue. Their responses reflect the difficulty of separating different elements of practice and, perhaps, their wariness of theatre with and for children being marginalized as a result of any perceived difference from theatre with and for adults.

All the Actors in this study have created theatre with and for both adults and children, so they are well positioned to say if the characteristics of practice of actors creating theatre with and for children are unique, or if they are shared by actors working with adults. This was the interview topic that elicited the most tentative responses from the research participants, though. The interview audio recordings reflect their uncertainty with pauses, stutters and trailing-off sentences as the Actors, who had no trouble describing in detail their practice with children, considered whether the children’s theatre actor is different to the adult theatre actor. Their initial responses were often that they make no distinction between adult and child audiences, but this was modified during further discussion, indicating that different age groups draw on and emphasise different acting skills.

Jens has always assumed that children would share his interests and sense of humour, and he describes his performances as “family shows” because they appeal equally across generations. Other Actors make some distinctions between their theatre for adults and their work with and for children but are quick to add that children have a right to theatre
experiences that are of equally high quality to those offered to adults. They are highly aware of negative attitudes towards theatre for children in the wider community, which Ellen says often views it as “a dumbed-down version or a simplified version” of theatre for adults. The claim that there is no difference between the practice of actors working with adults and children is an understandable defence against both the attitude Ellen describes and the unfortunate fact that a great deal of children’s theatre is poorly executed. As alluded to earlier, Carolyn Hanna’s company, Born in a Taxi, was commissioned to make their first children’s theatre work specifically because, at that time, they had not made theatre for children. She remembers they were told by the commissioning producer, “We actually don’t want performers who perform to children. We want you to just make that same intelligent theatre for a younger demographic.” The clear implication expressed here is that children’s theatre can be considered second-rate, so it is not surprising that actors working in this field would choose to focus on what their work shares with adult theatre rather than emphasising the differences. Nevertheless, Carolyn’s own observations indicate how her practice has evolved since she began to consciously develop her work with children and contradict the initial suggestion made by herself and the other Actors that being a children’s theatre actor is not a specialised practice.

Although most of the Actors identify some distinct factors that distinguish their work with and for children from that which they create with and for adults, they indicate that emphasis and degree are more important than difference. They explain that although they use the same skills and bring the same set of beliefs to theatre with and for adults and children, these elements of practice are amplified or muted depending on the audience. Some claim, for example, that creating theatre for children demands a more rigorous acting practice to that which is required for performing to adults. They attribute this to the fact that children’s responses are immediate, overt and unguarded. As Carolyn Bechervaise says, adults’ feedback can be constrained by their desire to be “polite” to artists, whereas,

Children are such an honest audience. If they don’t like something or if they don’t understand something a child will tell you straight away and if they love it, they’ll tell it and tell it and tell it and tell it and tell it to you.

Ellen says that this instant feedback encourages her to work harder because, “if you don’t hold their attention immediately they’re not going to engage.” Naomi agrees and,
remembering her early career employment as a Theatre in Education actor, she says “You step it up somehow, without even realising it. You want their attention. You’re more sensitive to the audience probably.”

The Actors identify play as a key characteristic of their practice working with children, but play is also frequently associated with genres, styles and techniques of performance that are used in theatre with and for adults, such as improvisation and clowning. Although this could suggest that the Actors associate play with children’s theatre because of the theatrical styles that it commonly uses, eight of them also note that play is emphasised in their practice creating theatre with and for children because it is important for children’s development. For example, Stephen says that although play has always been central to his practice as a street theatre performer, he is drawn to children’s natural affinity for it.

One clearly observable difference between the Actors’ adult and children’s theatre practice is the content of the work. For example, Alex says that he rarely swears when working with children, but admits to swearing “like a trooper” when making theatre with adults. Matthew observes that “kids don’t get irony” and that children can be scared if the content is not age appropriate. Dan notes that while she is increasingly drawn to humour in all her theatre work, she is particularly wary of “going dark” in her practice with children. Carolyn Hanna says that until she performed one of her street theatre shows to an exclusively children’s audience she was unaware how adult oriented the content of the work was. Although this revelation did not change the foundation of her practice, which is based on playful collaborative improvisation, the content of her recent work with children is more age-appropriate. Carolyn also says that although all the works are open-ended and involve much improvisation and audience participation, when she creates theatre for children “it’s definitely clearer what the expectation is if we invite someone to come in”. Despite this, in a recent project sharing her collaborative improvisation practice with children, she was surprised to discover how little of the company’s workshop they needed to change. She says, “We loosened it up a bit of course and that was all we had to do, actually. And it was very exciting to take our work and go, ‘Wow, they get it. They really get it!’”

Like Carolyn, Alex says he provides children with a “strong framework to work within” but notes that he offers the same format to adults inexperienced in performance who attend his workshops. Similarly, he engages children by identifying and including their
interests in the work, a strategy that he also employs with novice adult participants. In these examples, it is theatrical experience not age that seems to influence the Actors’ ways of working with non-professional actors.

Another significant difference the Actors identify between working with adults or with children is children’s willingness to accept new ideas. Matthew says this gives him licence to explore the type of theatre that interests him, which is non-linear, cross-genre and anarchic. Matthew can present his idiosyncratic content to adults through their role as parents. He speculates that adults enjoy The Listies’ work because the “framing of it being a kids’ show” gives them “permission not to care about” whether the work conforms to their preconceptions of what theatre should be. This idea is echoed by Jens who observes that although it is difficult to market his work to an exclusively adult audience, adults who accompany children to his performances enjoy them immensely.

The Actors feel ambivalent about distinguishing between their work with and for adults and children because although they tailor some of the structure and content of their work to suit children, the core beliefs and values of their practice remains the same. This is illustrated by Matthew’s analysis of audience participation. He notes that children are much keener than adults to join in because adults are often scared of looking foolish. He speculates that this is because audience participation in adult theatre often “comes from a place of humiliation for the person who volunteers”. Matthew therefore aims to make audience participation enjoyable for all ages, believing that actors should “never make fun of people”. This quote reflects the level of concern that Matthew and the other Actors have for both adults and children.

An exchange with Naomi, in which she reflects carefully on the difference between her artistic collaborations with adults and children, adds another layer to this discussion. It points to how engaging with adults or children may call on different ways of actors’ being as well as their ways of doing and knowing. She says adult actors usually feel connected to each other by the work and their “developing relationship” but that collaborations with children have an extra dimension. I quote her musings in full here, to give a sense of how she tentatively explored this idea:

I don’t know if this is because I am a mother—I suspect everyone who works with children and enjoys it feels this to a certain extent—but I do feel a sense
of responsibility for the children, not just in a practical sense. Obviously, you have to make sure they don’t get hurt and don’t split their heads open, but I feel … [pause] … yeah, I kind of love them in a way that I wouldn’t necessarily love [an adult] that I was collaborating with. I actually have a really strong sense of love for them. I want them to be OK in a stronger way than I would just for another actor or collaborator. I’m certainly hyper-aware of “Are they OK? Are they OK? Are they OK, emotionally and physically?”

When Naomi works with unaccompanied children as a youth theatre facilitator she inevitably takes on the role of the responsible adult, which places her in a pedagogical relationship with them. Although she and the other Actors approach their work with rigour and passion, no matter who it is for, this pedagogical relationship results in a heightened awareness and increased sense of responsibility to do so when working with children. This idea will be explored further in Chapter 9 by considering the findings through the lens of pedagogical practice. Before then, the multiple case analysis continues with a focus on how working with children shapes actor practice.
Chapter 8  Shaping Practice: Becoming

The final question of the participant survey asked the Actors to what degree their practice is informed by working with children. Their responses ranged from three to five on the scale offered, with three Actors marking the highest rating of five. Asked to explain their answers further, they offered a range of responses, including skill development, orientations towards certain attitudes, and changes in professional circumstances. The subsequent interviews allowed them to elaborate on these responses and constructed a complex picture of the interplay between the Actors’ experiences, goals, values and skills. This chapter explores that interplay, focusing first on the Actors’ changing professional circumstances and then on the ways that working with children shapes other aspects of their practice. This analysis of the data reflects my belief, held by others (Crawford, 2015a; Moore, 2004), that the personal, artistic, social and industrial circumstances of actors’ lives are connected and are manifested in their practice.

Some actors seem destined to create theatre with and for children. They favour theatrical forms that resonate with children, such as comedy, improvisation and clowning, and they enjoy and value children and their culture. Others come to theatre with and for children more reluctantly, drawn to it for financial reasons or for the desire to practice their craft. In this study, it was the Actors who had originally held utilitarian motives for creating theatre with and for children who were most aware of the ways in which this work has shaped their practice, turning them from performers who were, in Dan’s words, “up for some serious theatre” to champions of the artform. As I explained in Chapter 1, though, ‘shaping’ is a term with multiple and nuanced meanings, suggesting many degrees and types of change. A gentle reorientation towards different ways of being with children or a slightly greater emphasis on a certain goal may be no less significant to actor practice than more overt changes such as the decision to focus one’s entire career on theatre with and for children. This thesis therefore argues that all the ways that actor practice is shaped by working with children are important.
8.1 Becoming: Professional Lives

8.1.1 Financial and creative autonomy.

Three of the Actors were initially drawn to create theatre with and for children for financial reasons and although this was later joined or superseded by other motivations, the work continues to offer them, and the other six Actors, an important source of paid employment. In an industry that is notorious for financial and employment insecurity, it is notable that these Actors have sustained long careers in theatre. Describing his early employment as a Theatre in Education actor, Alex says that although it wasn’t “big money” it was good to be paid the Actors’ Equity minimum wage and preferable to working in jobs unrelated to theatre. His experience in Theatre in Education gave him valuable skills, such as the ability to facilitate workshops, which have continued to sustain his career. Working in youth theatre, Naomi also generated a dependable source of income from running weekly youth theatre workshops and says that this motivated her to offer them for a period after they had ceased to offer her creative satisfaction. Matthew’s work with The Listies has created a loyal audience and he values the rare opportunity this has given him to maintain a sustainable career in the arts. He notes that many families have seen more than one of his shows, and that their eager anticipation of his new work is immensely gratifying.

Like Matthew, Jens tours his work extensively throughout Australia and says that, having created a strong family following, there is “no reason why suddenly I would swap my market and start with something different”. His decision to target a family audience was originally inspired by the difficulty he experienced selling his idiosyncratic work to Australian adult audiences. He has discovered that adults are more willing to try his work if they attend in the role of parents. Working with children has therefore offered him creative autonomy, allowing him to continue to make and perform theatre that interests him.

Eight of the Actors devise their own work with or for children, following a historical trend in theatre with and for children (Beauchamp, 1993; Butler, 2003), which offers actors a high level of artistic and industrial control over their practice (Hennessey, 1998; James, 2006). Many actors do, of course, devise theatre for adults too, but Carolyn Bechervaise notes that the scarcity of good children’s theatre scripts, coupled with exposure to
children’s own creatively inspiring ideas, has motivated her, at least, to develop her own work for young audiences. Carolyn highly values the creative and personal rewards she has experienced from devising theatre with and for children. While she acknowledges the extra responsibility, energy and hours that this entails compared with performing a role in an existing play, she wonders if she would be as satisfied with a traditional acting job now.

The Actors’ interest in the theatre making aspect of their craft challenges the current trend of positioning actors as interpreters of the vision of the ‘creatives’ i.e. directors, writers, set designers and composers (Crawford, 2015a). This adds another dimension to their passion for theatre, mentioned earlier (see section 6.3.2), and points to the intersection between the artistic, social and industrial elements of practice. These elements also come together when creating theatre with and for children through the development of a community of practice.

8.1.2 Community of practice.

Alex remembers that one of the most significant aspects of Theatre in Education work was the opportunity to work in an acting ensemble with its shared artistic and social landscape. He says, “It was great. I really miss it … everyone was really close.” He agrees with a former colleague’s comment that their early experiences in Theatre in Education “were the best days of our careers” but these sentiments are not merely nostalgia for the days of long union-rate contracts. They also express the sense of common creative purpose that flourished in these ensembles. Carolyn Bechervaise has also experienced this closeness, having worked for the past ten years in an ensemble with her company Drop Bear Theatre. Off-stage she has enjoyed being part of a professionally supportive group of children’s theatre practitioners, which she contrasts with what she perceives to be the “closed community” of makers of theatre for adults. Carolyn Hanna says that her long-term collaboration with the other Born in a Taxi members is the core of her methodology as a theatre maker.

These Actors’ experiences highlight the social dimensions of actor practice. Spatz (2015) notes that “Supposedly people join theatre and dance companies to perform in front of paying audiences, but practitioners know this is an inadequate explanation of the phenomena.” (p. 6). He suggests that the desire to belong to a community of practice or
to engage in a research-culture of performance is, in fact, more powerful. The term ‘community of practice’ was coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), to describe the impact of relationships on professional practice. More than a group of people with common interests, a community of practice shares techniques and, significantly, a culture of practice which includes the beliefs, values and dispositions of the people involved. Actors working in many different contexts comment on the importance of ensemble, or community. Simon Callow wistfully calls it an unrealised dream, while Ian Richardson says that the Royal Shakespeare Company’s successful ensemble style under director Peter Hall was due to his unusual decision to give actors three-year contracts, during which they could develop a shared language of performance (Zucker, 1999).

Lengthy Theatre in Education contracts have not been available to actors in Australia for several decades, but the Actors in this study seek out opportunities to make work with like-minded collaborators through other means. While participation in communities of practice is not exclusive to theatre with and for children, it is strongly represented in this sector, offering actors opportunities to develop and refine their acting skills. The next section discusses how it does so.

8.2 Becoming: Shaping Skills, Processes and Values

Alex says that, in addition to the chance to participate in a community of practice, working in Theatre in Education gave him the rare opportunity to take on a range of challenging and exciting roles that stretched him as an actor. Although Theatre in Education did not flourish beyond the early 1990s, other theatrical forms and organisations share some of its aims and practices. These include school-based artist-in-residency programs, youth theatre companies and community arts studio programs. These professional opportunities continue to shape the Actors’ practice. The following passage explores the specific ways they do so, revealing that, like athletes training at high altitude, the Actors creating theatre with and for children are presented with productively challenging situations that develop new skills and strengthen old ones.

8.2.1 Refining skills.

In the 1980s Alex developed and refined his emerging practice by performing up to 300 shows per year with Theatre in Education companies. Several decades later, other Actors
in this study also benefit from the opportunities to repeat performances and workshops that working with children typically offers. Reflecting on the long tours she has undertaken with main stage children’s theatre companies, Ellen says, “You can continue to test and press and see what works.” Working as an artist in schools, Stephen Noonan is also able to use repetition to improve his practice because “every hour there’s a new class coming in.” Matthew Kelly’s experience complicates this view though. Although his seamless improvisation skills have been honed by long tours, he warns that performing the same show too many times has also occasionally caused him to lose his sense of fun and spontaneity. He remembers, “We did More Fun than a Wii, our first show, 400 times or something crazy like that and it just got locked … because we weren’t playing on stage anymore.” The duo had to eventually retire the show.

The extensive international touring that is often part of theatre for children has had another benefit for Ellen, allowing her to experience theatre by other practitioners and giving her a fresh perspective of her own work. She says, for example, that American audiences have brought to her attention the “very readily contactable” and “liberating” theatrical language that is characteristic of much Australian theatre, in which the actors take on the role of performers leading the audience through an experience rather than pretending to be characters. This observation resonates with Radvan’s description of the acting technique of “show you are showing” that actors adopted in Imaginary Theatre’s Tashi productions (see section 2.3.3). Radvan (2012) says this method, where actors clearly signal that they are representing a character rather than being one, reassures young children, who do not always understand that a character is not a real person. Ellen has continued to explore the performance possibilities offered by this insight in her theatre for children and in the work she makes with her theatre collective isthisyours?

In the introduction to this thesis I noted that a common observation made by actors interviewed in the media is that children give very honest responses to theatre. Supported by the literature (Butler, 2003; Radvan, 2012; Wood, 1997), six of the Actors in this study concur with this view. Ellen writes in her survey that children are a “discerning audience”, Naomi says that children can be “brutally honest” and Dan writes in her survey, “Children are the best audience. It’s real. They tell you if it’s shit.” These Actors say that children’s frankness helps to refine their work. For example, Ellen says that theatre for children demands more of actors than theatre for adults because young audiences will not sit
quietly when they are bored, disturbed or confused. Matthew agrees, saying, “If they don’t feel like this is worth their attention then you’ll lose them.” He adds that this has taught The Listies to “clearly communicate what’s going on” in their shows. While the Actors were keen to point out that they want to engage people of all ages with high quality work, they note that children’s responses help them to identify if they are achieving this goal.

8.2.2 Emphasising play.

The Actors identify play as a key quality of theatre with and for children (see section 7.2). They note that their own interest in, and use of, play has been strengthened by working with children, and that it is closely connected with their skills as improvisers and devisors of theatre. In her survey, Carolyn Hanna writes that children’s “innate qualities”, which include their “beautiful acceptance of offers” whilst playing, act in “creative synergy” with her long practice as a collaborative improviser. Imagining what her practice would be like had she never worked with children Carolyn says she would not be as playful or “responsive to the moment”. She elaborates on this theme in her survey response:

Just being with children allows you to learn from the masters of ‘learning by doing’. Taking the cerebral out of my practice (the hows & whys) and focusing on the making in the moment is such a wonderful and productive tool for creating work. Ideas flow when we just do things, try things, test things and this is how kids often operate. I think that working with and for children has encouraged in my practice a letting-go of having to make work that makes rational sense. Instead, looking for more interesting pathways than logic, where instinct and subconscious are the masters.

Working in the very different context of main stage theatre, Ellen has also improved her skills as an improviser. She says,

I used to have a lot of anxiety about my improvisational abilities … Now I feel very confident thinking on the floor, making lots of offers in rehearsal and not being precious and I think that has definitely come as a result of working with children.

Ellen attributes this change to her growing capacity to “be a bit silly” and says, “Children’s theatre is great for that.” Dan agrees, saying that children have shown her
“the value of humour and the ridiculous”. From her experiences facilitating large scale participatory public theatre events, she says she is now “way more interested in finding humour to address serious issues” in all her work.

Play, improvisation and the ability to be silly are inherently risky activities that require the Actors to trust themselves and others. This is another skill they have developed through working with children.

8.2.3 Developing trust and risk.

Trust and risk are central to all theatre work. Actors need to trust themselves, each other, the audience and the work itself if they are to have the confidence to perform at all, because creative ventures always risk failure or rejection. Trust and risk are recurring motifs in the interviews with the Actors, who say that working with children has made them more trusting and more willing to take creative risks, largely because of the example set by children themselves. For example, Matthew credits his experiences performing for children with the realisation that theatre does not need to justify big leaps of logic if it is driven by a strong dramatic intention. He says, “If you’re committed to it then as long as it’s true to you the kids will just go with you and that’s a really good thing to learn.”

Dan characterises risk as the ability to accept and adapt to children’s ideas and notes that when she first began working collaboratively with children she was “more directive” than she is now. She says, “I didn’t allow so much open risk or possibility when I first started working with children because I didn’t trust them as much, or myself.” Reflecting further on this, Dan says that her “fear of the outcome being crap” made her over-determine the result. Her experiences with the way children “go off on these tangents that are really excellent” has encouraged her to invite more of their ideas into the process and built her trust that “something will happen”. It should be noted here that not all theatrical contexts involving children support a high degree of trust and risk. As Pringle (2002) found in her study of artists working in ‘sites for learning’, the age of the children or the demands of a public outcome may influence how much choice and exploration artists can offer participants. Dan has led many artist-in-residence programs, two of which have been mentioned previously in this thesis. The predetermined form and content of the project involving a spring-themed lantern parade implicitly discouraged individual or improvised input. In contrast, the open-ended structure of Dan’s workshops with children who had
survived the Black Saturday bushfires accommodated many more changes of creative direction and Dan’s position was less that of a gatekeeper than a trusted and trusting facilitator of the children’s ideas.

The tension between trust and control is also articulated by Naomi, whose practice has changed significantly since she first began working in youth theatre. She recounts her development as a youth theatre practitioner with humour and insight. Early in her career she led very structured drama sessions, modelling them on her own classical theatre training and the creative framework of the youth theatre company for which she worked. Her main motivation at this time was to produce work that would be judged to be high quality by an adult audience. She comments wryly,

If I think of my early work with kids, it’s all about my own agenda, and “They’re going to make a show that looks like this. And they’re all going to know their lines perfectly. And everyone’s going to tell me what a great job I’ve done.” Honestly, I think that’s how it was!

She began by closely directing the participants but gradually moved towards trusting children to take control. Like Dan, she is aware of the risks this poses when a project is planned to culminate in a performance.

Carolyn Hanna’s practice has been shaped by children’s own ability to act in the moment, and to take risks. She notes that when children improvise, “They’re just thinking about what’s exciting. They’re not thinking about five stages beyond that.” Reflecting on the performance of The Curious Game that I observed for this research, Carolyn remembers that she was worried that the enthusiastic but quiet child who became the new Queen was not going to be comfortable in the role. Delighted by the aplomb and creativity that the child ultimately demonstrated, Carolyn says, “I’m constantly surprised by kids and what they’re capable of and what they want to do and how they want to challenge themselves.” She says experiences like this inspire her to take more risks her own performance and in what she offers children. She explains, “I can make decisions influenced by how brave kids are.” Importantly, this trust is mutual. Observing The Curious Game, I sensed that one of the reasons children were willing to take risks was because they trusted Carolyn. Her warm comic performance reassured them that although there were clearly winners and losers in the game, no one would be hurt or humiliated.
Stephen Noonan also establishes a high level of trust with children, largely through non-verbal means. He says working with children and babies has developed his skill of being able to maintain eye contact with children. He adds, “I am comfortable to give them my weight or to take their hand and guide them whereas I can see that isn’t the case for a lot of performers.” He notes that, “it’s really advantageous if you’ve got that skill” and says that, because of his extensive experience with children, he takes for granted his ability to connect with audiences of all ages.

**8.2.4 Valuing theatre with and for children.**

Chapter 6 discussed the values and beliefs the Actors have about theatre and children. While some have held consistent views throughout their careers, others have changed their beliefs about the value of theatre with and for children. Dan originally did not want to work with children but working with at-risk youth shaped her thinking and showed her how “the arts has a really important potential to shift the way people think about themselves in the world.” Like Dan, Alex did not originally value working with children. He admits that he and his Theatre in Education peers thought, “There must be better work than this.” Looking back on his experience, he can now appreciate many aspects of Theatre in Education and how it shaped his practice. This has been accompanied by a correspondingly strengthened belief that children deserve high quality theatre experiences.

**8.2.5 Learning from children.**

Working in a range of contexts, the Actors’ practice is shaped by what they learn directly from children, with most saying they are inspired by children’s ideas. For example, Carolyn Bechervaise observes that, as an early childhood dance and drama teacher, her practice has been shaped by children’s “random” offers, so she is “not as frightened to try a very strange suggestion anymore.”

In addition to the inspiration they gain from children’s ideas, the Actors also learn from the free and generative way that children work. For example, Carolyn Hanna says that she would like a “direct channel” into the brain of a child because she thinks they allow access to “all the good things about performing” such as the “letting go of logic” mentioned earlier. By observing how children work in a youth theatre context, Naomi
learns about theatre making processes and doubts if her “creative life or mind space would be as rich” without this challenge to her practice. She writes in her survey,

Watching them think and imagine, watching them navigate that collaborative space - the way in which they work has shifted many aspects of my practice … my approach to theatre making has become more collaborative, open, less defined by constructs, and increasingly distanced from the foundations of my traditional theatre training.

Carolyn Bechervaise echoes this sentiment as she muses on what her practice would be like had she never worked with children. She wonders if she would be as open-minded about how theatre can be made and says that her mind has been “opened to possibilities now.”

For some of the Actors, children offer elegant, simple approaches to performance that their own intensive training may prevent them from accessing. As Stephen says,

If you study contemporary dance, then you can do contemporary dance but also you forget how to simply roll on the ground and stand back up. You stand back up in a position that looks very—not robotic—but just very organised.

He goes on to explain how children can help with this:

Young people have a way of just knowing ergonomically how to do something very efficiently, whether it’s a jump, a turn, a twist, a splat on the floor … they’ve got their own technique and it’s not trying to mimic or not trying to be the child but—you know, it’s a cliché—we’re trying to find the child within.

Ellen had a similar realisation when workshopping ideas for a new show in a preschool setting, saying that when the actors stood back to observe the children they thought, “Oh, that’s so much better than what we were doing!” Jens says that children often come up with simple and inspiring ways of doing things because they do not want to spend time refining an idea. He adds that their hasty experiments sometimes fortuitously offer him material worth using in his own practice.
In the instances quoted above, Stephen, Jens and Ellen describe how actors can develop their practice through observing how children move and play. Another way they can do so is by trialling works-in-progress with children. For example, Jens uses his workshops with children to see if embryonic ideas for his theatre shows resonate with his target audience. Stephen first began testing new material when working with babies, who were a new and unknown audience for him at that time. The success of this process has meant that he is now more inclined to test his work for adults too. He says, “Probably ten years ago there wasn’t really any thinking about that in my practice. You know, you’d talk to people after the show and that was maybe as much as you engaged.” Ellen has had a similar experience and since she began to trial new work with children, this practice has become an established feature of her work with adults. She says, “A huge part of our process now is to test material as it devises itself.”

**8.2.6 Focusing on the audience.**

Working with babies has had another impact on Stephen’s practice, making him less attached to his own performance agenda and more attuned to the needs of the audience. He says that babies’ complete lack of concern with theatrical rules has given him the ability to “let go and just move on” if they momentarily disengage during performances. This attitude is shared by other performers who work with very young children (Young, 2004) and can be contrasted with actors working with older children who sometimes interpret anything less than complete attention as a dramaturgical failure (Radvan, 2012). Stephen says he now takes the sense of “happy, active detachment” he cultivates in theatre for babies to other theatrical contexts in which audiences encounter the performance not by choice but by chance e.g. street theatre and corporate entertainment. In these settings, actors cannot insist they must finish a performance sequence if the audience is not interested and can, in fact, walk away. Stephen’s acknowledgment and acceptance of the audience’s agency allows him to engage in a responsive exchange, stepping forward or back as needed. He speculates that if he had never worked with children he would be more interested in “show and presentation” and less in the “open-endedness of what something could be”.

Working as a clown doctor, Carolyn Hanna notes that resisting the temptation to perform ‘at’ children by “filling their bedroom” with pre-rehearsed routines requires courage because nothing may occur and, even if it does, it may not be overtly funny. This situation
may look like a failure to outsiders, but Carolyn says the rewards are greater for both her and the children when she starts by listening and responding to the child’s interests. She explains,

You surprise yourself. You don’t know how you end up getting to such a ridiculous scenario. You went that way, and then you went around there, and you discovered that they laughed when you scrunched the plastic bag … and they will tell that story over and over again to their parents and their aunties. [There’s] something different in that, that I’m really interested in.

Taking an “expansive approach” to working with children emphasises Carolyn’s exploration of “the unknown” instead of striving to make rational sense. She says this has aligned with her existing improvisation practice with Born in a Taxi and encouraged her to be more playful, hopeful and responsive to the moment.

Ellen’s extensive touring experience has taught her to focus on the audience and to trust that if, in successive performances, they do not respond as intended, then the work obviously needs to change. She says, “I think children’s theatre is great for that. Get rid of it. Keep adjusting. Keep moulding because it’s not working.” Echoing Ellen’s experience, Alex observes that the need to capture and keep the attention of bored or reluctant school students in Theatre in Education sessions stopped him “being a bit too precious” about his performance and taught him to “get to the point” in his later work with adults. He now has little patience for actors who focus too much on themselves, as he explains: “I get a bit bored with adults saying, “I’m trying to find the truth of this character.” I’m going, ‘For crying out loud, can you just do it? Can you just get on with it?’”

Naomi says that, early in her work in youth theatre, children’s “brutally honest” responses took her down “a peg or ten” forcing her to abandon her preconceived plans, and to focus instead on following and learning from children. Over the years, her attention has shifted from her own achievements to a deep concern for their creative and emotional well-being. She identifies strongly with children who have an “unquenchable” creative drive, and readily accepts the ongoing challenge to offer them authentic opportunities to express themselves. By allowing children to lead the creative process, and by observing how they work, Naomi’s own ideas about theatre making have evolved and she has become an
‘other-centred actor’. To explain this concept, I will now return to a discussion of Ewing and Smith’s framework of practice (Ewing & Smith, 2001).

8.3 Reflection: Becoming an ‘Other-Centred’ Actor

The concept of becoming put forth by Ewing and Smith (2001) points to a development of practice that is recursive and iterative. In Chapter 1, I outlined the three stages of professional development described by the authors. The first is the self-focused survival stage, where the practitioner wonders if they can do the job they are being asked to do. The second stage of self-centred concerns involves the development of specific skills relevant to the job, shaping the craft of professional practice. In the final, other-centred stage the practitioner asks what effect their work is having on the non-practitioner participants. For actors working with children, these stages are marked by a shift from a focus on “survival by not drowning, by just doing it”, as Alex describes his early experiences of running Theatre in Education workshops, to becoming actors who are more ‘tuned into’ children.

The previous four chapters have outlined the many ways that an other-centred orientation towards practice is manifested in the Actors’ work. To note just a few examples: Matthew, Dan and Carolyn Hanna say that paying attention to children’s responses has led them to change some of the content in their work; Stephen, Ellen and Naomi have become more concerned with what children need than what they themselves want to express; Alex has come to believe that theatre with and for children has to be of the highest quality; and Dan has come to picture her work with children as part of a wider social justice project. These examples, while true, can be misleading because they suggest a monodirectional trajectory of actor development but, as I noted in Chapter 1, Ewing and Smith’s stages of practice are connected in a recursive rather than a linear way. Every job that the experienced practitioner undertakes involves elements of all three stages, as they work out what is required of them and then learn or refine the relevant skills. This focus on continual learning was, in fact, a central feature of the Actors’ own definition of creative practice (see section 6.2). Their work is informed by previous experience and they continually learn about and from children.

Few studies consider the development of actor practice from the relational perspective that Ewing and Smith’s framework is based on, focusing instead on the mastery of
technical skills. One exception was noted in the literature review. In this study, Mages (2007) used a psychosocial paradigm to analyse the development of two teaching artists with different levels of experience who worked with children at an inner-city drama school. Resonating with Ewing and Smith’s ideas, Mages showed that the actor who was more experienced in working with children had developed an other-centred practice that linked his personal development with that of the students. Both actors were dedicated to the craft of acting, but the older one was more invested in student outcomes and in the future of the drama school. Another key difference was that although both actors clearly articulated the importance of meeting children’s emotional and creative needs, the older actor connected children’s participation and empowerment to a wider benefit to all of society. Mages’ study is confined to two actors working in the same applied theatre context, but it is consistent with the findings of this research which compares actors working in a range of other settings.

Creating theatre in a range of contexts, the Actors in this study are all oriented towards what children need. Their concern for children is summed up by Naomi’s reflection that she is constantly wondering, “are they OK, emotionally and physically” (see section 7.4). This other-centred focus, characterised by a sense of care and responsibility, suggests that the Actors develop pedagogical relationships with children. To further explore this idea, the next chapter first returns to the discussion of creative practice begun in section 6.2, highlighting the intersections between doing, knowing, being and becoming. The Actors are then positioned as pedagogues and their work with children is analysed through the lens of pedagogical actor practice.
Chapter 9  The Pedagogical Actor

9.1 Understanding Practice

An emergent goal of this study was to better understand the nature of practice. The key dimensions of doing, knowing, being and becoming in Ewing and Smith’s framework of practice (Ewing & Smith, 2001) resonated with the research questions and offered a useful structure for analysing the participants’ responses. This was a reciprocal process, with the analysis deepening my understanding of Ewing and Smith’s framework. Their three stages of practice also helped me to articulate how the Actors’ social orientations have developed through their work with children. For clarity, doing, knowing, being and becoming were considered separately but the analysis confirms Ewing and Smith’s contention that they are interconnected parts of practice. It shows that the Actors bring to their work with children their whole developing selves. What they do in their encounters with children is influenced by their beliefs, intentions, hopes, passions, preferences, fears, skills and knowledge, which are, in turn, shaped by these encounters. This conclusion was drawn from the Actors’ own definitions of creative practice, from discussions about their personal experiences and from my observations of their performances.

In seeking to represent these ideas, I have been drawn to Quay’s discussion of Dewey’s concept of ‘occupations’ (Quay, 2015). An occupation is a purposeful, continuous activity and, as an activity rather than a professional title, it can be expressed as intersecting ‘ways of’ being, doing and knowing. Quay argues that although we are all fundamentally concerned with who we are in any given situation (ways of being), we most often consciously focus on how we do things (ways of doing) and on what things mean (ways of knowing). He represents the relationship between them by nesting ways of doing and knowing within ways of being. To emphasise the interconnected and evolving nature of this relationship, which is central to this research, I have included the additional aspect of becoming (Figure 9.1).
There are many ways of being an actor who creates theatre with and for children, all of which involve certain ways of doing and knowing. The following section theorises the creative practice of the nine Actors in relation to pedagogy, positioning their occupation as a way of being pedagogical actors. It begins by considering the concept of child-centred acting and then discusses the pedagogical orientations, skills and development of actors who create theatre with and for children. This discussion draws on the work of Max Van Manen, focusing on his concept of ‘pedagogical tact’ (Van Manen, 2015). I argue that actors who create successful child-centred work with and for children demonstrate key pedagogical characteristics that enhance positive, respectful and creative interactions with young people while simultaneously contributing to fulfilling and successful actor practice.

### 9.2 Pedagogy and Pedagogical Tact

The term, ‘child-centred theatre’ was introduced in Chapter 2 as a descriptor of quality theatre with and for children. Although it is not always explicitly defined, child-centred theatre generally refers to work that offers children age-appropriate, empowering creative experiences centred around content that interests them. This definition implies that children have different cultural rights and needs to adults and that actors have a special responsibility towards them. A child-centred theatrical exchange therefore takes into consideration what is good or appropriate for the children involved. It includes an aspect of care for them that Thornton (2005), in his study of teaching artists, describes as “maternal or paternal” (p. 168). The Actors in this study demonstrate a high sense of responsibility for children. That responsibility is manifested in the ways they interact with children and in the thoughtful way they reflect on those interactions. The Actors aim to
do what is best for children in any given circumstance, a goal summed up by Naomi’s
declaration, discussed at the end of Chapter 7—that she is always “hyper-aware” of their
well-being, constantly asking herself, “Are they OK? Are they OK? Are they OK?” This
orientation towards care colours her interactions with children with what Van Manen
(2015) calls ‘pedagogical tact.’ A complex and evocative term, pedagogical tact is the
ability to act in the best interests of the child, based on experience, critical reflection and
care. While Van Manen discusses the concept primarily in relation to teaching and
parenting, he stresses that it has relevance to all situations where adults act in loco
parentis to children. Actors’ relationships with children place them in this category and
their practice can therefore be understood through the lens of pedagogical tact.

Van Manen defines pedagogy as “distinguishing what is good or right from what is bad
or wrong … in our ways of acting and interacting with children” (2015, p. 33). This
resonates with Galton’s definition of pedagogy, cited in the literature review, in which
teaching artist practitioners “make judgements about the fitness for purpose of particular
actions within a particular context” (Galton’s emphasis) (2008, p. 8). These definitions of
pedagogy help to clarify the call for child-centred theatre practice that I noted in the
literature review (Chapter 2). Although pedagogy involves skills, it is primarily a
personalised and ethical practice made up of contextualised encounters between children
and adults. Pedagogical tact can be distinguished from instruction in that it has no
“external goal” other than “the caring action itself” which is concerned with what is right
for the child in the moment of the encounter (Van Manen, 2015, p. 43). Pedagogical tact
is thus defined as the sensitive and improvised actions that adults initiate in the moments
when children require a response. For parents, this may be when a tired child sits down
in a supermarket aisle and refuses to move or asks to hear their favourite book for the
thirteenth time in a row. For actors, it may be when a child calls out a witty remark in the
middle of a performance or asks if they can make something different to the rest of the
workshop group, or when they don’t have the strength to return a wave to a clown doctor.

It is therefore “a matter of dealing with ethically charged situations that are contingent in
the here and now” (Van Manen, 2015, p. 44). The connection made here between practice
and ethics is also noted by Ewing and Smith. As outlined in Chapter 1, they define
practice as, “doing things with and for other people within a purposeful, informed, ethical
and aesthetic framework” (Ewing & Smith, 2001, p. 16). With these definitions, Van
Manen, and Ewing and Smith acknowledge that pedagogy and practice are holistic, relational and situated undertakings.

The situational nature of pedagogy means that actors are often called upon to improvise in the moment their interactions with children. For example, Dan Goronszy must make instant decisions about how to relate to children in Polyglot Theatre’s public participatory play events, based on her immediate impressions and past experiences. Van Manen explains that the “doubt and uncertainty” (p. 33) pedagogues may feel about their actions in such encounters reflect the ethical dimension of pedagogy and are essential parts of the process of relating to children in more sensitive ways. In section 8.2.3 Dan described the risk and trust involved in such situations. Pedagogical tact encompasses risk and trust and these qualities are captured in the subtitle of Van Manen’s book: Knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do.

Pedagogues see children in a distinct light, attentive to their present needs but with an understanding of their present and future development. They have what he calls “child-sense” (p. 77), which includes a generalised knowledge of children’s lives, development, interests, and emotions, combined with an awareness that “each child is a unique person” (p. 77). As this research shows, each pedagogue is also unique, shaped by their experience, personality and ethical and philosophical beliefs. Just as teaching “emerges from one’s inwardness” (Palmer, 1998, p. 2), so too do pedagogically tactful actors’ interactions with children reflect their whole selves, bringing together the doing and knowing, being and becoming aspects of their practice.

9.3 Being a Pedagogically Tactful Actor: Characteristics of Practice

This section explores what it means to be a pedagogically tactful actor. It begins by summarising the goals, motivations and beliefs of the Actors as outlined in Chapter 6 and identifies four key qualities of pedagogically tactful actor practice: listening, reciprocating, imagining and empathising. It then discusses how these qualities are developed and what significance they have for actor practice more generally.

Working across diverse contexts, pedagogically tactful actors care for children is expressed in shared beliefs, motivations and goals. The Actors in this study have strong
beliefs about children, positioning them as competent individuals who have a right to high quality cultural experiences and creative expression. They believe that both children and theatre are enriched by children’s participation in the artform as audiences and creators. They are personally motivated by a desire to share their love and enjoyment of theatre with children, and by the opportunity to advocate for children’s rights, needs and capabilities. These Actors want children to learn from their encounters but are wary of associating their work with words like ‘education’, ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’, an ambivalence consistent with Van Manen’s distinction between instruction and pedagogy mentioned earlier (Van Manen, 2015). They do not primarily aim for children to absorb facts, master technical skills or become professional actors, but for them to have engaging experiences that contribute in positive ways to their personal development. Theatrical context influences the nature of these experiences, with some settings offering the Actors and children long-term encounters during which they can build complex relationships, and others allowing only fleeting interactions that may restrict the breadth—although not necessarily the significance—of the exchange. The pedagogical goals are similar in both, though, because they are based on concern for children’s well-being.

Being a pedagogically tactful actor means that one’s practice is suffused with care for children. This links pedagogically tactful actor practice to professions that strive for the well-being of others, a connection that has been noted elsewhere in the literature. For example, the Animarts report, cited earlier, described some of the qualities of artists working in educational settings. It drew on and added to a “person-centred” model of care for health professionals working with dementia patients (Animarts, 2003, p. 40). The framework of professional practice informing my research was developed to explore the work of practitioners in health care, education and the creative arts (Ewing and Smith, 2001). As relational professions, health, education and the creative arts emphasise sensitive relationships with others and this is particularly clear when they involve children. The following section explores the qualities that characterise these relationships.

Guided by care, pedagogical actors’ encounters with children emphasise four key qualities of practice: listening, reciprocating, imagining and empathising. The close connection between ways of doing and knowing, and ways of being is revealed by turning these four words into adjectives: The sentence, A pedagogical actor empathises with children focuses on a way of doing and knowing, but A pedagogical actor is an
empathetic actor shifts that focus to the actor’s way of being. Both statements are equally true, so to categorise a quality as a way of doing, knowing, or being would hinder a holistic understanding of practice. The following discussion therefore positions these four qualities as interconnected and significant to all aspects of pedagogically tactful actor practice. It considers how the qualities are developed and used in actors’ caring encounters with children. Section 9.4 explores how actors acquire these qualities and their significance to actor practice in a broader sense.

![Figure 9.2: The qualities of pedagogically tactful actor practice](image)

### 9.3.1 Listening.

Listening is a skill commonly associated with acting. Children’s theatre director Suzanne Osten says, “Actors are the inheritors of the tradition of listening. They constantly keep one ear—figuratively speaking—to the audience and the other toward themselves and their fellow actors” (Osten, 2009, p. 48). Just as Osten emphasises her figurative use of the term, so too is it used here in the broad sense of being present, echoing Nancy’s definition of listening as curiosity and “caring for the open materiality of experience” (Nancy, cited in Ely, 2015, p. 28). As Osten’s quote suggests, though, listening and being present are not ethics-free states of openness but are activities that are purposefully directed towards others.

Van Manen writes that, “To be tactful with another person, one must “hear”, “feel” and “respect” the uniqueness of this person” (Van Manen, 2015, p. 97). Before actors can respond to children in a pedagogically tactful way, they must know what children need
and they do this by paying attention to children through noticing, sensing and seeing them both as a group and as individuals. In the literature review, I noted that the actors in Imaginary Theatre’s *Tashi* shows engaged children in informal conversations before and after the performance and during the interval (Radvan, 2012). Matthew Kelly initiates a similar form of relaxed banter with children after *The Listies’* performances, and during the shows he smiles directly at as many children in the audience as possible. Radvan says that when children are ‘seen’ during encounters like these, they know that they are recognised as individuals and can engage in more authentic relationships with the work, but he does not explain how the children who are not smiled at or spoken to experience it. This is a problem encountered by actors creating theatre for children in large theatres, where the actors cannot engage individually with every child. Ellen and Matthew both say they prefer small theatres for this reason, but the economics of their work dictates the size of the theatres they perform in. Van Manen resolves this dilemma, saying that the child who is noticed by other children to have been seen acts as a stand-in for the group. Although not every child can have a conversation with the actors, by witnessing another child engaging in a respectful, personalised interaction, they feel confident that they are all acknowledged and valued as individuals.

The attention paid to children by pedagogically tactful actors has a special caring quality that is shaped by curiosity and a desire to understand their world. Van Manen notes that not all attention is equal: eye-contact can objectify or subjectify; be judgmental or sympathetic; maintain distance or seek contact. The “tactful eye” represents more than the act of looking. It also denotes listening and sensing with the whole body and mind in “an attentive attunement of one’s whole being to the child’s experience of the world” (Van Manen, 2015, p. 83). This attunement can happen in myriad ways: from the vibrating whole-body awareness that Stephen demonstrated in his performance of *The Moon’s a Balloon*, where he strained hear and feel the audience’s connection to each moment; to the sensitive way Alex kept alert for signs of what was interesting to a group of shy, newly arrived migrant students. In the following quote, Alex describes the tactful way he approaches situations like this one:

> Intensely with kids, I’m always looking: “What are these kids into?” They don’t have to tell me. In fact, it’s best if they don’t tell me because they’re probably not going to tell me the truth anyway—they’re going to tell me
something that they think will be good. If you kind of hunt around: “What are they doing? What music are they listening to? What are they grooving to?” then you get it.

Alex’s comments suggest that holding back is as significant to pedagogical tact as action. Carolyn Hanna’s work as a clown doctor confirms this. It is built upon developing an accurate, individualised understanding of the participating—often very sick—children, through close observation and receptive listening. Describing this delicate process, she says,

So, it’s all of the reading and the signals and then taking those signals on board and making a game out of it ‘til they feel comfortable enough to be part of the game. It doesn’t take long to kind of walk into a room and go, “Oh, they’re really into this. We can go somewhere directly.” Or, you know, “We can’t even go through the door.”

Carolyn defines listening as being open to possibilities rather than predetermining outcomes. She reflects,

There’s a very different space when you start an interaction with a child, completely non-verbally with space. You know, there’s just space. You’re not running and filling the air or their bedroom with stuff. You’re just waiting to find.

This heightened sense of awareness is sometimes referred to by actors as being present or, as director Ariane Mnouchkine says, being “in the present” (Féral, Mnouchkine and Husemoller 1989, p. 93). Barry Lubin, a performer interviewed for LeBank and Bridel’s study of clowns, explicitly links this state to his relationship with the audience, saying that his job as a performer is “paying attention to the audience on that particular day. Not the New York Times. The audience; today’s audience. They’re the only ones” (LeBank & Bridel 2015, p. 85). As mentioned earlier, Matthew temporarily lost this live, authentic connection with the audience after a long and exhausting tour with The Listies. Through too much repetition, the experience had ceased to become personal, which he says, “wasn’t fair” to the audience, competence being no substitute for presence. Sherman (2016) notes that presence, attention and care are linked when the actor turns their attention away from themselves and towards another. He writes, “Attention thematizes
perception and moves it away from its source. To attend is to care for” (Sherman, 2016, p. 15).

Carolyn Hanna attributes her listening skills to her experience with collaborative physical improvisation, which requires spontaneous responses to unrehearsed prompts. This is a view shared by Stephen, Jens and Dan, all of whom work in theatrical contexts that involve improvisation and unpredictability. As Richards (2003) says, though, mainstream acting courses, that focus more on the interpretation of texts, also teach actors to listen to each other. Carolyn Bechervaise confirms this, saying “I’d like to think that I came out of acting school knowing how to listen to the people I was performing with.” The best actors also listen to the audience and are instinctively attuned to the audience’s responses (Jenkins 1995).

Interpreting the audience’s reactions can be easier in settings where the audience is close and visible, which explains why actors performing to children often like to perform in intimate venues or to keep the auditorium lights on. Even when they cannot see audience members in a darkened auditorium, though, actors rarely misinterpret the quality of their silence, which may indicate a range of emotions including “boredom, disapproval or disbelief” (Heim 2015, p. 33).

Although all actors are sensitive to the responses of their fellow performers and the audience, this research shows that those who work with children listen with the additional pedagogical goal of enhancing children’s well-being. Earlier in this section I quoted Matthew’s feeling that his lack of presence “wasn’t fair” to the audience. He may well have come to the same conclusion if he had been performing in a long season to adults but his sensitivity to the situation may have been coloured by the additional sense of responsibility towards children that pedagogically tactful actors feel.

In some contexts, children’s uninhibited responses are easily interpreted but in others, such as in theatre for babies, actors are challenged to work with more subtle cues. In her work as a clown doctor, Carolyn Hanna closely observes and listens to individual children to discover what each of them find funny. As she explains in the earlier quote, she and the children are rewarded for this patience by being taken to unique imaginative places. Although she can draw on many performance skills and clown routines, she listens to and observes the children to determine which, if any, of them are needed in each encounter.
This reveals a selfless attitude to performance, which places her commitment to a genuine human exchange and to the child’s well-being above her desire for approval. It also illustrates the importance of listening to reciprocity.

9.3.2 Reciprocating.

The reciprocal relationship between actors and audiences is widely regarded as fundamental to theatre (Heim, 2015; Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Schonmann, 2006; Wartemann, 2009), and the actor’s skill is seen by many as, “the art of not just invention but response” (Ely, 2015, p. 15). As a relational, temporal artform, theatre is a creative process that, Găveanu (2011) suggests, “is not taking place ‘in the mind’ of the artist, according to her intentions and plans, but actually is being played out in interactions with a physical and social world” (p. 127). These social interactions may be more overt in participatory theatre than in presentational forms of theatre where the audience plays a more receptive role (Sherman, 2016), but they exist in all theatrical contexts. In his discussion of the structured conversation of theatre (see sections 3.4.5 and 7.3), Tim Crouch says that although the actors are usually given greater authority to speak, there is a “shared responsibility” with the audience for what occurs (O’Kane, 2012, p. 105). To emphasise the reciprocal relationships between actors and audiences is not to devalue actors’ skills and planning, but to recognise that this preparation is in the service of the precise moment of interaction in a performance or workshop.

This research shows that actors who work with children emphasise reciprocity on several levels. Children’s uninhibited reactions as audience members offer direct and honest feedback about their performances, which actors contrast with adults’ polite but potentially misleading responses. The discussion of collaboration in section 7.3 indicates that the Actors in this study also value the exchange of ideas they experience when creating theatre with children. Carolyn Bechervaise says that when actors listen to children and engage in reciprocal relationships with them “you get so much more, and you learn so much more.” She contrasts this with the less tactful approach of “imparting knowledge” to children which does not allow them to give anything back to the adults they work with. Referring to Merleau-Ponty’s famous philosophical observation, Van Manen compares tactful exchanges between adults and children to the mutual experience of touch in which a person cannot touch another without feeling that touch themselves. He writes, “To help children grow up is a constant dynamic and reversible process of
touching and being touched” (Van Manen, 2015, pp. 103-104). When Stephen says that he feels comfortable taking the hand of a child, he is not just describing his ease with leading, but with following too. As children take on new tasks and ideas, the adult is “reminded of the possibilities still open” to themselves (Van Manen, 2015, p. 36). They are reminded in two ways: by the many ideas that children have and by their willingness to take creative risks. Carolyn Hanna says that children’s creative courage inspires her to offer them more challenges and to take on more herself. Dan further explains the relationship between reciprocity, risk and pedagogy by saying that when she first began working with children she did not allow much risk because she did not trust the children or herself. Over the years, she has learned to become less prescriptive and to follow children’s impulses, resulting in more interesting work for the children and creative growth for herself.

The reciprocal exchanges described by the Actors resonate strongly with constructivist pedagogical practices associated with early childhood education in Reggio Emilia, in Italy. One of the founders of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, Loris Malaguzzi, imagined interactions between teachers and children as a ping-pong match in which questions are posed, answers are offered and accepted, and new propositions are made (Edwards, Gandini and Forman 2014, p. 68). Malaguzzi says this relationship calls for teachers who have a “critical style of research and continually updated knowledge of children” based on their exchanges with them (Edwards et al., 2014, p. 69). By engaging in a reciprocal dialogue with children, pedagogically tactful actors also respond to what they are offered at each moment and incorporate what is learned from these interactions into their practice.

The reciprocal relationship between pedagogically tactful actors and children is therefore a two-way process with benefits for both parties but it is not a mirrored one because although adults are responsible for children, children do not have a corresponding responsibility for adults (Van Manen, 2015). The term ‘pedagogically tactful actor practice’ acknowledges actors’ responsibility towards children and describes reciprocal and sensitive interactions between generations rather than equal ones. It may therefore encompass, and help practitioners to articulate, the value of theatrical experiences that offer children different types of agency, participation and control that may not be accurately described by the more commonly used term, ‘child-centred’ practice.
To fulfil their responsibility to engage in sensitive and meaningful reciprocal exchanges with children, pedagogically tactful actors need to understand them. They do this by listening, as already outlined, and by imagining, two characteristics that are central to all actor practice.

### 9.3.3 Imagining.

All actors have an existing image of children that can restrict or enable their theatrical interactions. These images, which include an idea of what it is like to be a child and the importance of imagination to children, are consciously and unconsciously shaped over time and through experience. Radvan’s view that actors cannot rely on their own memories of childhood to understand the lives of contemporary children (Radvan, 2012) suggests that not only do today’s adults have different cultural references to modern children but they have also outgrown a crucial essence of childhood. The Actors in this study complicate this view. Like the musicians working with children in Ascenso’s research (Ascenso, 2016), some of them draw productively on their memories of their own childhood, both good and bad, to imagine how the children they are working with might feel. The Actors also make a conscious effort to learn about children’s emotional and cultural lives, thereby responding to Van Manen’s exhortation to “do our utmost to understand what it is like to be in the world as a child” (Van Manen, 2015, p. 36). In addition to formal and informal research, these pedagogically tactful actors use imagination to enhance their knowledge and understanding of children.

Imagination is commonly associated with the arts. Craft (2002) distinguishes between imaging, imagination and imagining and explores their relationship to creativity. Imaging is the process of mentally recreating an experience or object, such as when an actor visualises the best way to present an action on stage so the entire audience can see it. Imagination is the structured organisation of new thoughts, connections and possibilities, and is necessary for the generation of original work. Much emphasis is placed on the value of developing children’s imaginations, so that they may understand and care about other people, events and issues (Greene, 1995; Rabin, 2009) and to equip them with the thinking tools considered important for the twenty-first century (Robinson, 1998; Robson & Jaaniste, 2010). Pedagogically tactful actors prompt children to use their imagination by creating performances that draw children into fictional worlds, with the aim of triggering new thoughts. They also offer workshop experiences that encourage children...
to find new ways of doing things or what Jens describes as “thinking around the corner a little bit”.

Imagining is associated with hypothesising, which considers situations and people with an attitude of ‘as if’ (Craft, 2002; Greene, 1995). It is a practiced part of the actor’s tool kit, especially in relation to characterisation, where he or she behaves as if he or she were someone else (Hennessy 1998), and was a key element of Konstantin Stanislavski’s influential acting system (Carnicke 2009). It is also a way to connect with the audience, as the actor imagines how the performance is being received and shapes it accordingly. This process is common to all creative endeavours, as Dewey explains:

> The work is there in progress, and the artist has to become vicariously the receiving audience. He can speak only as his work appeals to him as one spoken to through what he perceived. He observes and understands as a third person might note and interpret. (Dewey 1934, p. 106)

The findings of this study suggest that this form of imagining may be an especially active and conscious process for adult actors who create theatre with and for children because of the inescapable distance between the stages of their lives that Radvan identifies. For example, Stephen says that he trials new material with test audiences to compensate for the fact that, while he loves being in the world of the child, it is not his world any more. Imagining is the bridge that he uses to walk between them.

The introductory narrative of *The Curious Game* in Chapter 5 imagines what the observed performance was like for the child who won the role of the Queen. In doing so, it also attempts to represent the pedagogy of the actor, Carolyn Hanna, who must continually imagine the inner lives of the children she encounters in her performances. In the messy, fleeting arena of live street performance there is no time to construct a connected, coherent narrative like the one referred to above, but the impulse to imagine how each moment is being received by children is central to pedagogically tactful actor practice. When Carolyn chooses to dismiss the first child at each performance of *The Curious Game*, she must imagine how they will cope with the disappointment, based on her observations of them up until that point. Choosing Jessica as the Queen at the performance I observed, Carolyn wavered momentarily as she imagined what it would be like to be a shy person thrust into that role. She notes that her conclusions may not always be accurate,
but her impulse to imagine children’s feelings and potential responses is what makes her a pedagogically tactful actor. She uses the resources available to her at each moment to sensitively negotiate interactions with children, so that she does not disappoint, scare or embarrass them.

A failure to put oneself in the audience’s shoes in this way can result in theatre that does not speak to the other participant in the theatrical conversation. In the same interview with O’Kane, referred to earlier, British actor and theatre maker Tim Crouch says,

> I feel sometimes, as an audience member, that I have been very badly imagined, that there has been an act of imagination on the part of the production to make a play for an audience that aren’t actually there because no one has genuinely acknowledged who we are and I find that deeply frustrating. (O’Kane 2012, p. 96)

This is an uncomfortable experience for adult audience members and may be even more confusing and alienating for children, as Matthew describes in an anecdote about taking his goddaughter to a stage adaptation of a television show. The producers of that show did not imagine how young children, who are known to feel a deep and personal connection to the characters they see on television, would react to seeing them in real life. The show was precisely timed to a pre-recorded backing track which prevented the actors from reacting to the children’s inevitable greetings. It therefore failed the audience at the basic pedagogical level of acknowledging their existence. It also confused and disappointed them.

The participants in this research concur with the literature indicating that effort and skill are required to imagine children accurately, no matter what the context (Klein 1992; Radvan 2012; Young 2004). Alex says it takes “a lot of practice” and admits that even with experience, “sometimes it doesn’t work.” Although some of the Actors attribute their understanding of children partly to formal teaching studies that included units on child development, others say theirs has developed out of what Carolyn Hanna calls “experience on the ground”. They identify gaps between how they imagine children and how the children’s responses reveal who they really are. This commitment to learning by doing involves paying attention to what is happening in each theatrical exchange, which,
in terms of a structured conversation, parallels the interpretation of listening discussed earlier.

Listening, reciprocating and imagining are linked by empathy. Empathy is a vital instrument in the actor’s toolkit because it helps them to create believable characters. For actors who work with children, empathy is also connected to their desire to do what is right for them.

**9.3.4 Empathising.**

Whereas imagining is an intellectual process with an orientation towards creativity, and listening and reciprocating are forms of conscious, attentive engagement, empathy is an embodied emotional response to the audience and to the character being played. It is, however, closely connected to the other qualities. Noticing how someone perceives the world, imagining how they feel, and then crafting a sensitive response to them are driven by and result in empathy towards others. This is an observation that has been made with regards to teaching (Greene, 1995), and to acting, where actors must imagine and establish an emotional connection with their characters’ inner lives and fictional life circumstances (Crawford, 2011). Empathy has additional importance for pedagogically tactful actors, though, as it enables them to create believable characters that resonate with children. Ellen’s efforts to find empathy for her character in *Girl Asleep* (see section 7.1, p. 138) was prompted by her care for the young audience which prevented her from trivialising their struggles, however funny they may have appeared from the safe side of adolescence.

Ellen’s approach to characterisation points to an important distinction between empathy and imagining. Although these two qualities are closely linked for actors, particularly in the creation of convincing characters, they are not the same. This is illustrated by an anecdote Matthew recounted in his second interview. Early in the history of the company, The Listies created a comic-horror puppet show that upset some children. Noticing the children’s apprehension, Matthew would have imagined how they felt: confused about the reality of the puppets and frightened of the potential danger to themselves. He then faced a choice between continuing with a show that he and his partner found funny, or ending it. Their decision to retire the show, and their regret that they had scared some children, would have been motivated by the empathy they felt for their audiences.
Empathy therefore contains a sense of care for children and is what drives actors to do what is right for them in each theatrical encounter. Sherman (2016) explains this connection between imagination, empathy and care with his statement that, “The caring imagination not only allows me to reflect critically on possible consequences of caring action, it supposedly allows me to think about action and context from another’s place” (p. 17).

Pedagogically tactful actors’ high levels of empathy for children and responsiveness to their needs are especially evident in their goals for young people. Stephen’s comment that he wants babies to feel empowered for the duration of the performance shows that he acknowledges the existence and importance of their feelings. Carolyn Bechervaise’s desire to make children to feel that a performance has been made “just for them” has the same effect. Naomi has a special concern for children who have an “unquenchable” creative drive because she can empathise with their struggle to express themselves. The highly amusing audience participation in Matthew’s shows is a consciously crafted, caring alternative to what he calls the all-too-common “bullying” experience of audience participation in theatre for adults. Carolyn Hanna’s efforts to imagine children’s likely responses to either being excluded or given a starring role in *The Curious Game* are driven by empathy for their feelings. These examples resonate with Ascenso’s study of musicians working in community programs who say that exposure to children’s struggles and the need to respond to them in a caring way increases their capacity for tolerance and empathy (Ascenso, 2016).

Although empathy is important for recognising the vulnerability of children, it also helps actors to see the whole child and their potential (Van Manen, 2015). As a clown doctor, Carolyn Hanna empathises with the child’s immediate situation and his or her long-term need to be recognised as more than a patient. She explains that her aim is to redress the disempowerment that accompanies illness, pain and medical treatment and “to see the well part of the child”. An orientation towards pedagogy, rather than just entertainment, allows her to empathise with the child and to see him or her as a whole person, with present and future needs.

Empathy shapes the interplay between actors and audiences just as it also plays a role in other professions that involve social participation (Lave & Wenger; 1991) such as teaching. Palmer (1998) argues that it is only by noticing, acknowledging and
empathising with students’ fears that teachers can overcome their own anxieties and engage in productive mutual exchanges. For some actors, that exchange is facilitated by an inversion of the expected hierarchy between adults and children, and between performers and audiences. For example, in an interview exploring his practice as a clown, Bill Irwin says that his intuitive understanding of children’s feelings of powerlessness led him to develop a character who is frightened of young audience members. He says, “They need to be put at ease and my being afraid of them is actually going to bring us to an equal starting point” (LeBank & Bridel, 2015, p. 171). The Actors in this study adopt variations of this approach. Matthew says that the chaotic aesthetic of his shows serves to break down the idea that he is a special person with magical powers of performance; it also makes children comfortable to talk to him after the show. Alex often pretends to be more ignorant of contemporary music than he is (“I tell them I’m still upset the Beatles split up.”) so students, empowered as experts, will share their knowledge with him. Jens’s misfit characters ease their loneliness and boredom by playing with junk and he hopes that, by identifying with their vulnerability and ingenuity, children will trust their own creative capacities. In all these situations, pedagogically tactful actors are motivated to acknowledge, inspire or set children at their ease by their empathy for the children’s situations and their desire to do what is right for them.

Although they have been discussed separately here, listening, reciprocating, imagining and empathising are dynamic, interconnected qualities of pedagogically tactful actor practice. For example, when engaging children in reciprocal theatrical relationships, pedagogically tactful actors listen to children and pay close attention to their responses. The decisions they make in rehearsals, performances and workshops are shaped by empathy, as they imagine what the experience is like for children, and how it can contribute to their well-being. Contingent upon theatrical context and children’s individual needs, actors make decisions in the moment about which of the pedagogically tactful qualities to emphasise at any given time.
9.4 Conclusion

The holistic conceptualisations of practice and pedagogy put forth by Ewing and Smith, and Van Manen are highly relevant to, and resonate with, the dynamic professional experiences of actors working with children. What these frameworks have in common is that they acknowledge that practice and pedagogy are layered, relational, personalised and influenced by context. They emphasise the ethical and social dimensions of practice and pedagogy and show how they are shaped by an iterative process of practical experience and reflection. Drawing from these theories, this thesis has set out to understand and make visible the complex phenomena of actors’ pedagogical relationships with children in diverse theatrical settings.

The research posed two main questions: What characterises the practice of actors who create theatre with and for children? and How is actor practice shaped by working with children? The Actors characterised practice as their continually evolving approach to making theatre. This definition facilitated a discussion of their motivations for creating theatre with and for children, revealing that they are driven by opportunities to generate income, realise their vocation and advocate for children. Their deep love of theatre was also evident in their goals for children, which emphasise access to transformative, enjoyable creative experiences.

Confirming other studies that show that artists who engage successfully with children draw upon more than natural ability (Galton, 2008), this study shows that the Actors consciously learn about children’s lives, interests and cultures. Informed by this knowledge, and drawing on their experiences with children, their work is characterised by four qualities of pedagogically tactful actor practice: listening, reciprocating, imagining and empathising. Although the Actors draw on these qualities in all their work, and with audiences of all ages, they give them increased emphasis when they work with children.

The Actors’ encounters with children are shaped by theatrical circumstances. Factors such as the physical site, the time frame of the work, the number and age of the children involved and whether the project is to result in a performance all affect how actors enact the four qualities of pedagogically tactful actor practice. This does not, however, mean that context changes the importance the Actors place on these qualities. As the narrative
about Stephen’s performance in *The Moon’s a Balloon* shows, if an actor values listening to children, they will do their utmost to do so under any circumstances (see section 5.6, pp. 94-95).

In becoming pedagogically tactful actors, the participants’ practice has been shaped in numerous ways. Primarily, engaging in creative exchanges with children has invigorated their work and reinforced for them the value of theatre with and for children. Some of the Actors have experienced increased professional and financial autonomy and have found a productive and supportive community of practice. Further, they have all refined their acting skills, and developed their capacity for, and interest in, theatre that emphasises play, collaboration, risk, trust and care.

The relationship between pedagogy and acting resonates throughout the practice of actors working with children. In the introduction to this thesis, I quoted Spatz’s observation that, more than a set of decontextualised skills, acting influences, and is influenced by, the different “epistemic fields” that make up the world, such as race, class and gender (Spatz, 2015, p. 153). Influenced by Spatz’s expansive vision of actor practice, this research sought to understand how the epistemic field of age—focusing on the presence of children—intersects with acting. The picture of actor practice highlighted by this study resonates with Spatz’s view by confirming that actors’ ways of being, doing, knowing and becoming are intertwined. It also shows that actors’ encounters with children emphasise qualities that are important both for being with children and for actor practice. For example, when an actor says that working with children encourages her to take more theatrical risks, this is because she is listening to children and responding to them in a sensitive manner, which is the job of both actors and pedagogues.

Van Manen’s observation that pedagogy is practiced by anyone who is in a position of care of children challenges us to think of pedagogy beyond the classroom. It is also practiced in the home, on the netball court, in the hospital and in the theatre. Throughout this thesis I have noted that many actors are wary of having their craft conflated with teaching when they work with children, fearing that their skills as performers may be obscured by an instrumental focus on what children learn. Viewing actor practice through the lenses of pedagogical tact (Van Manen, 2015) and the three stages of professional practice (Ewing & Smith, 2001) offers a different way of thinking about how actors engage successfully with children that is not confined to concepts of formal learning.
The relationship between pedagogy and actor practice goes two ways. Just as I have used Van Manen’s theory of pedagogical tact to understand how actor practice is shaped by working with children, so too does this research add to a wider discussion of pedagogy. The concept of pedagogically tactful actor practice offers actors a way to reflect upon, and explain to others, the richness and complexity of their interactions with children, enriching our understanding of how adults care for, interact with, and learn from children in any context.
Epilogue

When I began this project as a novice researcher I was motivated by a mixture of passion, curiosity and indignation. I have created theatre with and for children for many years because this work gives me much joy, intellectual stimulation and creative satisfaction. I was therefore interested to know about the experiences of other actors. I wanted to know how they approach their work with children, how that engagement shapes their practice and how the answers to these questions were nuanced by the different theatrical contexts in which they work. My curiosity was partly driven by a belief that the skills of these practitioners were undervalued and poorly understood. Somewhat simplistically, I thought that if I could articulate the sophisticated practices of these actors and demonstrate that they enjoy professional and personal benefits from working with children, then I could help redress two areas of injustice that I perceived: the first being the persistent reputation of theatre with and for children as “second class theatre” (Butler, 2003) and the second being the historically low status within the wider theatre industry of actors who work with children. With these two aims in mind, I set out to document the practice of nine Actors who work with children.

My initial efforts confirmed my impression that there has been little research undertaken about actors who create theatre with and for children in Australia, and the interviews and surveys fulfilled my goal of giving the Actors an opportunity to articulate what they do and what is meaningful to them about their practice. The data emerging from these methods created a picture of thoughtful and skilled practitioners. The participants generously shared their opinions, memories and performances, and their insights revealed that actors are a rich source of information about theatre performance, pedagogical practice and theatre making. At this point, I was pleased that my formative thoughts and feelings about my research topic had been validated, but I had a nagging feeling that this was not enough. I also wanted to be challenged by the inquiry.

The opportunity to observe three Actors’ performances signaled a shift in methodology and in my understanding of research practice. Immersed in the lived experience of the Actors’ work, I was struck by the significance of the embodied qualities of their practice. In the moment of performance, these qualities consolidated the individual elements of practice that I had identified earlier. This experience alerted me to the value of phenomenological research, which allowed me to feel and know the research data in an
emotional, aesthetic and intellectual way. The process drew on my own tacit knowledge of creating theatre with and for children and resulted in a deeper understanding of the material. The subsequent written analysis synthesised the different ways knowing that emerged from the multiple data sets. Consideration of ‘becoming’ and ‘shaping’ was central to this process. The idea, expressed by Ewing and Smith (2001) and the Actors, that practice is continually evolving rather than leading towards an ideal end-point made me think about what connected and developed actors’ ways of doing, knowing and being. By viewing actor practice through a pedagogical lens, I identified four qualities of practice that shape, and are shaped, by what actors do and know, and who they are: listening, reciprocating, imagining, and empathising. This ultimately led to a more holistic understanding of the Actors’ work and lives, formulated as pedagogically tactful actor practice.

The journey of this research has therefore been from explanation to understanding. I began by wanting to convince others of what I knew or could easily find out, but ended by experiencing and understanding actor practice in a new way. My focus was always on the Actors but it was not until I became immersed in the lived experience of their practice that I considered pedagogy as the bridge that connects them with children. It was also not until I let go of what I knew about the conditions and mechanics of creating theatre with and for children, and drew on my tacit knowledge about actor practice that I could satisfy that nagging wish to be taken to a new place by the research. In the end, this process resulted in a deeper understanding of both research practice and the practice of actors who work with children, including my own. Appropriately, I first had this realisation in the theatre, while watching Matthew Kelly perform.
Matthew Kelly’s theatre productions for children are everything that mine are not. They are wordy and loud. They are full of scatological jokes and up-to-the-minute popular culture references. They are performed in large theatres seating up to 500 people. They draw on stand-up comedy and improvisation techniques. And they invite children to throw things at the stage. I enjoy and admire Matthew’s work, but I did wonder, when I began this research, how I would be able to faithfully describe these energy-filled, anarchic performances that seem to burst over the stage, into the auditorium and out into the foyer. There would be so much happening! When the day of the observation arrived, I steeled myself for an intense few hours of note-taking. At the end of the show, I sat in a quiet spot and reviewed my work. To my surprise, I’d written very little about the complex script or staging. Although Matthew’s performance skills are formidable, neither had I noted much about his slick timing or flair for physical comedy. Instead, the moments I had recorded were nearly all to do with the interactions between Matthew and the children: the slyly complicit glances, the casual asides to the front row, the moment when he laughingly responded to a young heckler and the sheer pleasure that he expressed in being in a room filled with rowdy, excited children. Despite the stylistic differences in the theatre that we make, when drawing on my intuitive responses to Matthew’s work, I could easily recognise the qualities underpinning his warm and stimulating interactions with children. I could do so because these are qualities that are shared by actors who create theatre with and for children in its myriad forms.
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Appendixes

Appendix A: Australian Companies and Individuals Creating Theatre With and For Children (2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of theatre organisation or individual</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>New South Wales</th>
<th>South Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arena Theatre Company</td>
<td></td>
<td>Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People</td>
<td>Windmill Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polyglot Theatre</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kim Carpenter’s Theatre of Image</td>
<td>Patch Theatre Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garry Ginivan Attractions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Erth Visual and Physical Inc.</td>
<td>Slingsby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking for Trouble</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zeal Theatre</td>
<td>Splash Theatre Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drop Bear Theatre</td>
<td></td>
<td>Australian Theatre for Young People</td>
<td>Sally Chance Dance</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Listies</td>
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<td>Flying Fruit Fly Circus</td>
<td>Gaia Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pocketfool</td>
<td></td>
<td>Outback Theatre for Young People</td>
<td>SAY Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Real TV</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tantrum Theatre</td>
<td>Southern Youth Theatre Ensemble</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jens Altheimer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Powerhouse Youth Theatre</td>
<td>Riverland Youth Theatre</td>
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<td>Jump Leads</td>
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<td>D’Faces of Youth Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dream Puppets</td>
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<td>Cirkidz Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men of Steel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Barking Gecko Youth Theatre for Young People</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circus Oz</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Hills Youth Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Little Wing Puppets</td>
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<td>True North Youth Theatre</td>
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<td>Such as They Are</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purple Capsicum Puppets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barking Spider Visual Theatre</td>
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<td>Born in a Taxi</td>
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<td>Australian Classical Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alpha Shows</td>
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<td>Westside Circus</td>
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<td>Platform Youth Theatre</td>
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<td>St Martins Youth Arts Centre</td>
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<td>Western Edge Youth Arts</td>
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<td>ArtPlay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barking Gecko Theatre Company</td>
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<td>Jally Entertainment Imaginary Theatre</td>
<td>Corrugated Iron Youth Arts Backbone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spare Parts Puppet Theatre</td>
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<td>deBase Productions Shake and Stir Theatre Company</td>
<td>InCite Youth Arts Inc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yirra Yaakin Aboriginal Corporation</td>
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<td>Full Throttle Theatre Backbone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barking Gecko</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contact Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Edge Youth Performance</td>
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<td>Empire Youth Arts Impact Ensemble</td>
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<td>Propel Youth Arts WA</td>
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<td>WA Youth Theatre Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
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<td>ACT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terrapin Puppet Theatre Big</td>
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<td>Jigsaw Theatre Company Canberra Youth Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monkey Theatre Transistor Youth Arts</td>
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</table>
Appendix B: Participant Survey

Name: ________________________________________________________________

1. **Formal training:** Please note any formal training/qualifications attained, including performance and non-performance related studies and training.
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

2. **What title(s) best describe you as a theatre professional?** If listing more than one, list in order of importance, with ‘1’ being the most important.
   ○ Actor
   ○ Musician
   ○ Puppeteer
   ○ Dramaturg
   ○ Director
   ○ Theatre maker/devisor/writer
   ○ Circus artist
   ○ Performing artist
   ○ Dancer
   ○ Theatre actor
   ○ Other (please specify):

3. **Adult actors may create and present theatre in collaboration with children in schools, arts workshops, public events or youth theatre settings. They also create theatre for children, where children are audience members.**

   **What proportion of your OVERALL theatre work is created with or for children?**
   ○ Less than 30%
   ○ 30-60%
   ○ more than 60%

4. **Which age groups have you primarily created theatre with and/or for?**
   ○ Birth-6 years
   ○ 7-10 years
   ○ 11-13 years
   ○ 14-18 years
5. What proportion of the theatre work you create with and for CHILDREN (not adults) occurs in these contexts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre with children (e.g. workshops, public events, youth theatre programs)</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Less than 30%</th>
<th>30-60%</th>
<th>More than 60%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational, care or community settings (schools, kindergartens, childcare centres)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community settings (e.g. Community arts centre or libraries)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dedicated children’s arts centres (including youth theatre studios)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Main stage theatre venues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small, or non-traditional theatre venues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Street/public spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre for children (adult actors performing to child audiences)</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Less than 30%</th>
<th>30-60%</th>
<th>More than 60%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational, community or care settings (schools, kindergartens, childcare centres)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community arts settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

6. Why do you create theatre WITH children? List as many as you like, in order of importance, with ‘1’ being most important.

- Opportunity to enhance your own theatre practice
- Opportunity to share your knowledge and skills with children
- Opportunity to generate income
- Opportunity to work with other artists
- Opportunity to connect with others
- Other (please specify):
7. Why do you create and/or perform theatre FOR children? List as many as you like in order of importance, with ‘1’ being most important.

- Opportunity to enhance your own theatre practice
- Opportunity to share your knowledge and skills with children
- Opportunity to generate income
- Opportunity to work with other artists
- Opportunity to connect with others
- Other (please specify):

8. Note three key roles (in order of importance from 1 to 3) that you give emphasis to when creating work WITH children.

- Mentor
- Teacher
- Carer
- Co-learner
- Creativity-generator
- Dramaturg
- Other (please specify):

9. Note three key roles (in order of importance from 1 to 3) that you give emphasis to when creating work FOR children.

- Mentor
- Teacher
- Carer
- Co-learner
- Creativity-generator
- Dramaturg
- Other (please specify):
10. In this study, creative practice refers to actors’ values, motivations, skills and the development of ideas and techniques. **To what degree does working with children inform your creative practice?** (Please circle one number)

Not at all 2 3 4 5 A lot

11. Are there any specific aspects of your creative practice that are informed or developed by working with young people? If yes, please explain.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

12. Gender ○ Male ○ Female

13. Age ○ 18-25 ○ 26-35 ○ 36-45 ○ 46 or above

14. In what country were you born?
○ Australia ○ Other (please specify):
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Author/s:
Andersen, Jennifer

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Acting with care: how actor practice is shaped by creating theatre with and for children

Date:
2017

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