

The Directorial Process and Aesthetics: An Integrated Pedagogy in Theatre in Education

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ABSTRACT

Theatre in Education (TIE) offers a dynamic and creative approach to engaging students in the learning process. Emerging in the mid-20th century, TIE combines live theatre with interactive teaching techniques to deal with academic curricula as well as social, cultural, and didactic topics. At the heart of this approach is the director (commonly referred to in TIE as the actor-teacher or facilitator), whose role is to effortlessly integrate storytelling, performance, and audience engagement. This article first examines the role of directors and their creative processes in Theatre in Education, focusing on how they blend teaching methods with the artistry of theatre. By incorporating inclusive teaching practices into the directorial process, theatre evolves beyond performance to become a shared space where individuals, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or circumstances, can actively participate and thrive. By merging educational objectives with creative expression, TIE becomes a powerful tool for nurturing critical thinking, empathy, and active engagement. Secondly, this study explores how directors balance their artistic vision with educational goals, highlighting techniques that enhance both learning outcomes and artistic impact. Key themes include collaboration within the creative process, the use of aesthetics to deepen understanding, and the adaptation of directing strategies to accommodate diverse educational settings and curricula.

Introduction

Theatre in Education (TIE) stands out as a unique form of applied theatre designed to educate through performance. Unlike traditional theatre, which focuses on entertainment or provoking thought, TIE actively involves audiences, encouraging them to engage critically with social, cultural, and personal issues. *Theatre in Education* is the intentional and well-planned use of drama techniques to enhance learning. Through theatre, subjects and life-related topics are presented to students in a simple, engaging, and enjoyable way. In the theatre process, teaching is achieved by sparking students' interest and breaking their inertia through interactive play. It is said that—

“Essentially TIE seeks to harness techniques and imaginative potency of theatre in the service of education. The aim is to provide an experience for children that will be intensely absorbing, challenging, and an unrivalled stimulus for further work on the chosen subject in and out of school”.¹

Theatre in education can be organized as a project or program, where students actively participate in creating and performing dramatic scenes through role-play. Moreover, ‘Theatre in Education developed as a hybrid of these new theatrical and educational undercurrents and created a methodology that offered a child-centred approach to learning within a theatrical context.’² Directors in TIE take on a multifaceted role, blending artistic creativity with an understanding of teaching methods and audience interaction. This article explores how directors balance aesthetics with educational objectives, crafting performances that not only evoke emotional responses but also promote intellectual and personal growth. It is an effective learning with the basis followed by—‘[...] (1) active and dramatic approaches; (2) aesthetic, academic, and affective learning; and (3) dialogic meaning-making, focusing on the Describe– Analyze– Relate reaction process.’³

Background

Theatre in Education (TIE) represents a distinctive and transformative approach to theatre. It emerged in 1965 at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, where initial school-based pilot projects demonstrated the powerful role theatre could play as an educational tool. These early successes led to the formation of a dedicated TIE unit, funded jointly by the Belgrade Theatre and the local authority. This pioneering model in school curricula with theatre soon inspired similar initiatives nationwide.⁴

The emergence of Theatre in Education (TIE) was not an isolated event but the culmination of several interrelated developments in theatre and education during the twentieth century. In theatre, there was a growing effort to reconnect with its community roots, broadening its social relevance. This shift was evident after World War II with the resurgence of regional theatre and the rapid expansion of community, alternative, and children's theatre.

At the same time, theatre was being redefined as a tool for education and social transformation. Innovators such as Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and Augusto Boal (1931-2009) explored its potential to challenge societal structures and inspire critical thinking. In the field of education, the 1960s to 1980s marked a growing appreciation for the arts, particularly drama, as an essential part of the school curriculum.⁵ There was increasing emphasis on the role of the arts in helping children understand and interact with the world, encouragement creativity, empathy, and critical skills.⁶ Within these broader movements, TIE established itself as a distinctive form. It brought together the artistic and educational potential of theatre to create a unique and impactful medium for learning and social engagement.

The most significant innovation in Theatre in Education (TIE) has been the development of the TIE 'program,' a feature that sets it apart from other forms of theatre for young audiences. David Pammenter said—

[...] it seeks to liberate understanding and not impose order; as long as it seeks to make sense of the of the chaos of the real world and by doing so allow children to perceive and understand the changes and contradictions going on around them[...]⁷

Unlike traditional school performances of standalone plays, which are fleeting events with little lasting engagement, a TIE program is a carefully designed and structured series of activities. These programs are usually devised and systematically researched by the company, focusing on topics that are both relevant to the school curriculum and meaningful to the children's lives.⁸

Presented in schools by the TIE programmers' actively involve children, immersing them in experiences that explore the situations and challenges posed by the chosen topic. There is no rigid formula for a TIE program, '[...] the shape, style and length of the program will vary enormously depending upon the subject tackled and the age range catered for'⁹ of the participants.

In Theatre in Education (TIE), the theatrical performance itself is not the end goal, but rather the central stimulus for a deeper, more inspiring educational experience. Unlike a single play or traditional teaching methods, TIE programs are carefully structured to promote continued learning long after the performance is over.

Principles of TIE

According to Jim Mirrione, the major principles of TIE are as follows:

2. TIE has always sought to be a combination, in some manner, of theatre and education.
3. While the disciplines of theatre and education are usually thought of as separate, they are in key respects very similar especially in their primary aims of promoting cognition and imparting comprehension.
4. TIE utilizes the resources of the educational system it serves, and is cognizant of the needs of educators when exploring a particular topic for a play.
5. A TIE play will usually be preceded by some form of preparation such as the workshop component and followed by the post-performance discussion (or other forms of follow-up

6. The content of TIE, i.e. the social, political topical and curricular issues of society, are the staples of TIE plays. Pure entertainment alone is not TIE; however, pure pedagogy or political orthodoxy also fails to constitute a valid TIE play.
7. All theatre genres, forms and styles are possible in TIE plays. Although realism is the most utilized style, TIE can also incorporate allegory, historical incidents, science fiction, music hall, comedy, melodrama and any other element to convey its message.
8. A TIE play has enough content to support the various workshops that will accompany it, as well as such ancillary materials as the teacher and student follow-up packets.¹⁰

Although the features listed above aren't a complete list, they are key points for a TIE director to keep in mind when tackling the task at hand.

Most Commonly Adopted Processes in TIE

The journey begins with a preparatory workshop for the teachers. Before the program even reaches the students, TIE teams invite all participating teachers to an introductory session. This workshop is designed to explain the aims and methods of the project in detail, ensuring that teachers understand their roles and are prepared to guide their students through the experience.

Next, teachers receive a project pack or set of notes. These materials contain valuable research, background information on the subject matter, and suggestions for follow-up activities that will help teachers integrate the program's themes into their classroom.

Then comes the TIE program visit, where the students engage directly with the performance. This is the heart of the program, where the theatrical event sparks discussion, reflection, and deeper engagement with the material. But even after the performance, the learning doesn't stop. To assess the impact of the program and gain insights for future improvements, a feedback mechanism is implemented. Teachers are often asked to fill out a questionnaire or participate in an open forum where they can offer constructive criticism.

Throughout this entire process, close communication between the TIE team and the teachers is essential. It ensures that the program remains responsive to the needs of the students and teachers, creating a collaborative environment that encourages both learning and growth. Through this ongoing partnership, the TIE program becomes more than just a performance.¹¹

Qualities of a TIE Director

First and foremost, the TIE director must be someone with a deep sensitivity to children and must strictly adhere to Child Protection Policies. Then, the TIE Director stands out not just because of their authority, but because of their sharp mind and deep commitment to the cause. They're the kind of leader who commands respect without having to shout or intimidate — their presence alone is enough to make others fall in line. Known for their tactical genius, they know how to read a situation quickly and make decisions under pressure, no matter how high the stakes. There's a cold efficiency to them, but it's not just about getting the job done; it's about believing in the mission with every fiber of their being. As per Dennis Lawson (1975)—

[...] it is necessary for the devising team in TIE to be part of this educational debate and for its theory and practice to be clear in relation to it, as it will inevitably have a direct influence on content selection, aims, relationship to schools, teachers and children.¹²

Furthermore, director's leadership style isn't one of blind force, but a careful balance of control and understanding. They know the value of maintaining order, not just in their troops, but in the front line itself. Every mission they lead is executed with precision, with one goal in mind: the success of their cause.

Directing Process in Theatre in Education (TIE)

The directing process in Theatre in Education (TIE) is a thoughtful blend of artistic creativity and educational goals. Unlike traditional theatre, where the primary focus is on creating an attractive performance, TIE directors/facilitator place equal emphasis on engaging the audience, achieving learning outcomes, and addressing social issues. This approach requires directors to balance creative vision with teaching objectives and practical considerations, ensuring the production is

both artistically impactful and educationally meaningful. There is no rigid forms and style to create a TIE production or program. TIE direction patterns connected to Augusto Boal's theatrical influences and likely Peter Brook's 'rough theatre' process. But the TIE directors may take a look at the key stages and techniques involved in the TIE directing process:

1. **Script as an Educational Framework:** In TIE, directors carefully select or create scripts with clear educational goals in mind. The script serves as a platform for students to explore. Directors guide this exploration, shaping the material to align with curriculum objectives and desired learning outcomes.
2. **Character Exploration for Self-Reflection:** Directors encourage students to explore into characters' motivations, perspectives, and promote deeper self-reflection. By embodying characters facing moral dilemmas, students are invited to navigate complex emotional experiences, promoting empathy and critical thinking.
3. **Facilitating Student Participation:** Directors use interactive methods like role-playing, forum theatre, and improvisation to actively involve students in the narrative. Director should inviting students to shape the story; directors empower them to make decisions within the play, reinforcing the idea that they have the power to influence outcomes in both the performance and real life.
4. **Spontaneity and Fluidity:** Spontaneity and fluidity are central to Theatre in Education (TIE). They allow performers to stay flexible and responsive, adjusting the performance in real-time based on the audience's reactions. This creates an interactive, ever-changing environment where learning feels natural and engaging, encouraging creativity and exploration. Each TIE performance is unique, making the experience more impactful and relatable for everyone involved.
5. **Improvisation, Role-play and Simulation:** In Theatre in Education (TIE), techniques like improvisation, role-play, and simulation help make learning more interactive and creative. Improvisation allows everyone to think on their feet, while role-play lets participants try out different characters and viewpoints. Simulation creates real-life situations for problem-solving, making the experience both engaging and hands-on.
6. **Guided Reflection and Discussion:** After each performance, directors lead discussions that allow students to reflect on their experiences and share their insights. This reflective practice is central to TIE's pedagogy, helping students to process and internalize the lessons learned through the performance.¹³

Theatrical Aesthetics as a Pedagogical Tool

In education, aesthetics is about bringing beautiful act, epistemological curiosity, and sensory experiences into the learning process to help students connect with ideas on a deeper level.¹⁴ When teachers incorporate visual arts, music, literature, and other creative forms of expression into lessons, they create a richer and more engaging environment. This approach allows students to experience learning not just with their minds, but with their emotions and senses as well. It sparks curiosity, encourages creative thinking, and helps students become more thoughtful, well-rounded individuals. By making learning more vivid and personal, aesthetics can inspire students to engage with the world in new and meaningful ways. TIE directors may follow these proceedings to create aesthetical endeavor:

1. **Minimalist, Symbolic Set Design:** TIE often embraces a minimalist aesthetic, using simple props and set pieces that can represent multiple ideas or environments. This simplicity allows students to focus on the core themes of the story without distractions, while sparking their imagination.
2. **Flexible Use of Props and Costumes:** Directors use adaptable props and costumes to strengthen key educational messages. A single item might shift in meaning throughout the play, encouraging students to reconsider its purpose and deepen their interpretive skills. This approach also highlights the symbolic power of theatre and allows for creativity within practical constraints, such as school budgets.

3. **Spatial Arrangement for Immersion:** In TIE, the audience is often seated close to the performance or may even become part of the stage. This immersive setup breaks down the traditional barriers between performers and audience, drawing students directly into the action.
4. **Use of Multi-Sensory Elements:** Directors may use light, sound, and movement in creative ways to engage students' senses and evoke emotions.¹⁵

By blending directorial process and aesthetics with pedagogy, Theatre in Education (TIE) turns learning into an active, reflective, and deeply engaging experience. Students aren't just absorbing information—they're feeling, imagining, and questioning, developing skills that reach beyond the classroom.

Directorial Process and Aesthetics: Creating an Integrated Pedagogy

In Theatre in Education (TIE), the director's choices and the aesthetic elements come together to create a deeply integrated learning experience, where content, form, and interaction blend seamlessly. In this dynamic environment, students aren't just passive receivers of knowledge—they become active co-creators, engaging with the story, grappling with ethical dilemmas, and reflecting on their own values. David Pammenter said—

[...] its best, is the communication and exploration of human experience; it is a forum for our values, political, moral and ethical. It is connected with the interaction of these values at a philosophical, emotional and intellectual level.¹⁶

This integration allows students to connect with the subject matter on a personal level, gaining not just facts but a deeper understanding of the feelings and consequences tied to those facts.

Transforming Theatre into Education

When guided by a skilled director, the simplicity of the set, the interactive nature of the performance, and the thoughtful themes of Theatre in Education (TIE) become a powerful tool for learning that goes beyond traditional classroom methods. TIE isn't about memorizing lines or perfecting a performance—it's about diving deep into the human experience, grappling with complexity, and gaining a broader understanding of the world.

In TIE, students don't just portray characters; they discover more about themselves, build empathy for others, and reflect on their role in society. The process is not just about acting—it's about connecting with real-life issues, exploring emotional landscapes, and making sense of the world around them.¹⁷

The ideas of 'child-centered' education and 'self-discovery,' originally inspired by Rousseau's *Emile* and expanded by thinkers like Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Dewey, started to take root in educational curricula. Finlay-Johnson seemed to echo Rousseau when she suggested that childhood should be a time to soak up the 'big stores of sunshine' that would help children through darker times later in life.¹⁸ Through the director's creative choices and the aesthetic elements of TIE, the performance becomes more than just a play. It evolves into a shared journey, a safe space to explore tough questions, and a mirror that reflects both the beauty and challenges of life. When students step off the 'stage,' they don't just leave with the memory of a great story—they take with them deep, lasting lessons that shape the way they think, feel, and act in their own lives.

Conclusion

The directing process in Theatre in Education (TIE) is a unique blend of creativity, teamwork, and teaching. Directors (actor-teacher or facilitator) are key in balancing artistic expression with educational goals, which makes TIE such a powerful way to inspire social change and personal growth. After engaging in a TIE experience, students don't simply walk away with facts to memorize—they carry with them a deeper emotional awareness, enhanced critical thinking, and a broader perspective on the world. By carefully planning, using innovative techniques, and keeping the audience engaged, the director ensures that every production is not just meaningful, but also transformative for everyone involved.

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