Abstract

Live performance designed for under 6s offers an out-of-the-ordinary aesthetic experience for very young children and the adults who bring them. This research draws on our knowledge of how children develop within the context of their closest relationships and brings a focus to how parents experience attending theatre for early years (TEY) with a child aged 12-36 months. Interviews and observations were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, which was found to be a supportive method to meeting the study aims. The digital context, necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, offered unique insights into a new form of presentation. The findings show that Zoom theatre offers some mitigation to much missed live performance whilst also highlighting the irreplicable qualities of live, in-person events for families with very young children. There was potential for parent-child bonding found in sharing valued time together, opportunities for empathy, and in connecting to others. In piloting the subject area for PhD, this study found the parent experience of the TEY performance space to be varied, meaningful and rich for further exploration. Further research could include the perspectives of performers and children and investigate relationships at live, in-person events.

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Missed Connections and Silver Linings: researching Theatre for Early Years audience experience during the COVID-19 pandemic

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MPhil

2021

‘This thesis is the result of the author’s original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.’

Signed: Date:

FIGURES

TABLES

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale and Aims

Theatre for Early Years (TEY) – also known by other titles as discussed in 2.2 Terminology – is still a relatively young and little-researched art from. Two key attributes of TEY that differentiate it from theatre for older children are: a form of expression that tends towards the abstract, immersive and multi-modal; and a high proportion of adults in the audience. It is this second attribute that this study is particularly interested in exploring, with the 'accompanying adult' being brought into focus. The importance of the early bond between a child and their primary care-giver is well established but research into how this bond meets live performance has not taken place. Through listening to and observing parents, supported by observations of parent-child interaction, this study aims to gain insight into how parents experience and make sense of attending TEY with their child. Understanding how the early parent-child bond can be supported within an artistic context is important for improving offers made for families. The content and nature of interactions between adults and children is of key interest to early years pedagogy, the exploratory nature of this study provides opportunities for discussion into how TEY offers a potential arena for development and learning.

The study also has two methodological aims. Though not a true pilot, as methods will alter substantially with access to in-person theatre, this study is exploratory with the intention of feeding into a PhD. Detailed attention was given to the potential usefulness of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for further study. This is also valuable for building a record of the widening application, successes and limitations of IPA in fields outside of psychology and sociology.

The use of a digital performance as the stimulus event for data collection provided an opportunity to research something completely new and offer timely insights into on-screen communication with young children. Digital research methods are also reflected upon to help inform future research projects both on and off-line.

Research Aims

- To investigate the parent and child audience experience of Theatre for Early Years
- To offer reflection on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as a tool for accessing and sharing a full account of the Theatre for Early Years audience experience.
- To reflect upon the strengths and limitations of researching audience experience at digital performance.

1.2 COVID-19

The data collection for this research took place in Scotland in June 2021 when many restrictions on social gathering were still in place with no live, in-person theatre or other performance events available. The theatre performance *Up and Down* which participants attended as part of this research study was presented on the video communication platform, Zoom. *Up and Down* was not an adaptation but an original work designed for online performance, made in response to the impact of lockdown on isolated families with young children.

Though not setting out to explore the impact of the pandemic, this research is of this point in time; the methodology adapted to a digital context and the interpretations of participants and researcher informed by not only what has been experienced, but what is missing.

1.3 Researcher Positioning

Trustworthiness and credibility are important markers of successful qualitative study and as the key research instrument (Creswell, 2018) a transparent description of what I bring is offered to that aim. My personal and professional position on Theatre for Early Years is that it is a good thing and worth doing, an assumption that I bring to this study from proposal to analysis. However, this study does not seek to 'prove' the value of TEY by gathering positive feedback; the success of this research does not rest on the success of the show *Up and Down. Up and Down* was commissioned by Starcatchers (Scotland's Early Years Arts Organisation) from my theatre company, Ipdip Theatre, in 2020, independent of this research study. It was a pragmatic choice to use my own work as the stimulus event for data collection; *Up and Down* had already been successfully performed during the pandemic with artistic and organisational evaluations taking place during earlier runs of shows. I needed to be alive throughout the research process to the potential impact this closeness could have, notably on my interpretations during analysis and the power dynamic with adult participants during interviews. These are discussed in 3.1 philosophical framework, and 3.6 ethics, as part of the methodology chapter, and 6.3 in the discussuion.

For the past ten years I have been professionally engaged in the creation, performance and production of TEY. My curiosity was first ignited in 2011 when attending a seminar for theatre makers, where Dr Suzanne Zeedyk spoke to us about the importance of human connection for early brain development. In puzzling over how a thirty-minute experience could hold relevance for a system that thrived on repetition I began to explore the power of play, and consider the relationship between the adult and child attending a performance. As is the case for many artists who move into TEY I was excited by the possibilities of a form that breaks many of the established norms of theatre and foregrounds the connection between performer and audience (Fletcher-Watson, 2016). Ipdip Theatre is the company I formed to present my TEY work, which has toured in Scotland and beyond and had several successful Edinburgh Fringe runs – the audience appetite for work designed for the very young always being strong. With each piece I continued to explore my initial puzzlement of how to best engage not just the child, but their accompanying adult, in such a way that they too felt included and potentially moved.

Though using my own work for the stimulus event, I did not respond artistically or reflect on my artistic choices as a part of this thesis. Research as practice (Finley & Knowles, 1995) underpins a lot of the scholarship in TEY whereas there is comparatively little on the perspective of the audience, and the choice to explore this gap is a choice to move away from the role of artist and take a more observatory stance. Bracketing is an important principle in qualitative research and discussed in detail as to its specific application in IPA (Smith, 2009). Unlike some phenomenology which aims to describe a potentially universal essence of a thing, removing as much as possible that surrounds it, IPA welcomes the feelings and knowledge of the researcher as tools for the unfolding of meaning. An ongoing awareness of bias is expected however, reflecting at each stage, and layer, of analysis on what preconceptions need to be acknowledged at any given point.

Though not framed as an ethnographic study, my personal relationship to the data and the participants was close and direct therefore the concept of insider/outsider status is still useful to reflect upon (Creswell, 2018; Milligan, 2016). I share a number of characteristics with the 'typical' Scottish TEY adult audience member (Starcatchers, 2020) in that I am a parent, female, white, and live in a postcode low on the index of multiple deprivations (Scottish Government, 2020). These are wide categories, but it does mean that attendance at TEY with my own children was potentially accessible to me in a way that is not the case for those outside of these demographics. My insider status as a TEY artist brings experience as an unaccompanied adult audience member where I am often able to observe the audience as much as the action on stage. This position of observing the observers is now formalised in the role of the researcher, where this existing professional knowledge informs my interpretations as I seek to foreground the experiences of participants.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

After an overview of relevant terminology (2.2), I begin with an exploration of the literature on Theatre for Early Years and the genre's historical and dramaturgical context (2.3). Section (2.4) draws on literature from education, philosophy and psychology to consider how approaches to early childhood inform expectations and rationale for artistic engagement at this age. The crucial adult-child relationship is then discussed (2.5) followed by an exploration of the communal properties of a theatre experience (2.6). The conclusion brings these influences together and introduces the research questions (2.7). Literature on IPA, and screens and young children is reviewed at the beginning of Chapter 3: Methodology.

2.2 Terminology

Theatre for Early Years (TEY) as a discrete theatrical form is relatively new, taking shape from the late 1970s onward (Goldfinger, 2011), and as such there is not a widely understood agreement of terminology. The term *Theatre for the Very Young* is more commonly used in the USA (van de Water 2012b), with *Theatre for Babies*, and *Baby Theatre* also popular English language terms. *Early Years Performance* or *Performance for Early Years* are becoming more prevalent in use, for example by Small Size, and describing current doctoral research taking place in NUI Galway. The word performance is potentially more inclusive, encompassing work where music or dance are foregrounded and thereby clearing up confusion where using the word 'theatre' might imply a form that sits alongside, for example Opera for Early Years, rather than including it. In practice, Theatre for Early years frequently mixes and incorporates many established forms and styles drawing on expertise across performing and visual arts, delivering post-dramatic theatre and performance art as readily as puppetry or traditional dance (Fletcher-Watson, 2016). It is this broader concept of theatre that this study assumes: defining Theatre in this context as a live, performed event, delivered with artistic intention. Though *Performance* for Early Years fits the same definition, and the terms are usually interchangeable, I chose to retain the word theatre. *Theatre* for Early Years aligns more closely to the notion of an exceptional 'staged' event with a live audience, an aspect that holds relevance for the relational and communal experience that this study is concerned with. Where I use the term 'artist' this should be understood as a professional working within any artistic field or fields including but not limited to dance, music, theatre direction, design and visual art.

Age ranges describing the intended audience are a feature of children's theatre and a regular point of debate. Work for the very young is often promoted with a specific range, and with an audience at such a rapid stage in development these can sometimes be as narrow as, for example, 12-18 months old (Fletcher-Watson, 2016). *Small Size*, the international network for the promotion of performing arts for early years, define TEY as having a target age range of 0-6 (Small Size, online). This is two years younger than the international definition of Early Years within education as 0-8 and reflects the emergence of

TEY as fitting underneath an established genre that had long been presenting theatre to children from the age of around 6 (Fabretti, 2009). In describing the background to this study where the age is not specified it can be assumed as 0-6 years. When using the words *baby* and *toddler* these are intended to convey overlapping stages rather than discrete age ranges but can be thought of as roughly 0-2 and 1-3 respectively.

2.3 TEY history and aesthetic

Oily Cart in England, Roberto Fabretti in Italy and Joëlle Rouland in France made productions in the 1980s which are commonly cited as the earliest examples of what came to be defined as TEY (Schneider, 2009; Fletcher-Watson et al., 2014; Kapstein & Goldstein, 2019). Growing initially from the established children's theatre scene, TEY quickly became recognised as an exciting and distinct form. With growth occurring mainly in Europe during the 1990s (Goldfinger, 2011) it was at the beginning of this century that TEY became "globally in vogue" (van de Water, 2012a, p. 121) with the first Scottish productions being presented at the Edinburgh International Children's Festival in 2007. In 2009 Wolfgang Schneider edited an international collection of essays entitled *Theatre for Early Years: Research in performing arts for children from birth to three* (Schneider, 2009) which provides a range of observations and reflections from experienced practitioners. In her 2012 book *Theatre, Youth and Culture* Manon van de Water described TEY as "perhaps the fastest growing aspect of [Theatre for Young Audiences] in research and practice today" (van de Water, 2012b, p. 8), an exciting place to be for researchers and artists as it ignites in us the very drives to discover and to share that we are often observing and eliciting in our young audiences. Small Size, a network of TEY artists, researchers and companies, currently has 91 members across 5 continents and 35 countries (Small Size, 2020). During the summer of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to theatre as we knew it, Small Size produced an online brochure detailing the innovative and joyful projects and practices created by members around the world (Small Size 2020). These included digital offers in various forms as well as outdoor, window and doorstep performances. Before 2020 there was no impetus or audience for online theatre for early years, in using such a performance for data collection this study is researching something completely new.

Many adults describe an initial incredulity at the very idea of theatre for babies – "I never would have believed that theatre like this works if I hadn't seen it with my own two eyes" (Schneider, 2009, p. 80). When this person is an artist, surprise may beget fascination and desire to create, a phenomenon Ben Fletcher-Watson identified as a "conversion narrative" (Fletcher-Watson, 2016, p. 180). This enthusiasm on the part of the artists has been a powerful motor in the growth of the genre, fueled in part by the creative freedom that TEY offers (Pinkert, 2009; Novák, 2009). Babies do not yet have an encultured notion of what theatre should be, and though older audiences and promoters have a reference point in the form of established theatre traditions and forms, TEY may yet be something new. TEY can push the boundaries of what theatre can be, particularly when it comes to the relationships between spectator, performer and space (Fletcher-Watson, 2013). Though direct communication with the audience in TEY seems universal, the extent to which a performance is 'participatory' varies a great deal. Many TEY productions maintain a divide between performance and audience that is broken once the scripted element is completed, and free play is invited (Fletcher-Watson, 2015). Some regularly step in and out of this divide during performance and others dispense with it entirely. The designed environment of a TEY

performance usually goes beyond background scenery to include choices on where the audience are placed and how interaction is invited or discouraged.

The relationship with developmental psychology is a feature of TEY that continues to inspire artists and intrigue researchers. Artists conduct research into the capacities and interests of particular age groups in order to best target their work, to inspire new modes of performance and to enter as fully as possible into an empathetic space with their young spectators (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2014). In 2017 the first interdisciplinary module at a University was delivered combining expertise from early years theatre and psychology (Kapstein & Goldstein, 2019). Developmental science certainly informs a great deal of TEY with the work of Colwyn Trevarthen validating the playful and creative communication with babies from the very beginning (Smidt, 2017). Led by artists led by the capacities of babies (Drury & Fletcher-Watson, 2017) productions frequently employ a multi-modal immersive aesthetic with senses in a fresh hierarchy, foregrounding touch for example, and communication not being "reduced to the language of words" (Taube, 2009, p. 21).

Theatre for babies would be unachievable if we insisted on a definition of theatre as representational (Fabretti, 2009), a common thread in practice. The Europe-wide project *Mapping,* initiated to share discoveries and practice in how young children engage with live performance emphasises experience and interaction over content (Mapping, Online). This can be a challenge to the adult audience members not accustomed to this approach (van de Water, 2012b). Whereas babies themselves may be entirely competent at engaging with the avant-garde, the adults who act as gatekeepers to the audience and to resources for artistic creation, will all carry some culturally informed notions of what TEY might, or perhaps ought, to be (Alrutz, 2009). As well as expected modes of presentation, social hierarchies may be questioned; giving babies space to respond asks, who leads within a family? Who, in this theatre space, is permitted to command attention? (Fletcher-Watson, 2015) Artists and researchers Lise Hovik and Elena Pérez take this questioning further, challenging our status as animals within an ecosystem, decentering human supremacy (Hovik & Pérez, 2020). Under the banner of 'for babies' an invitation is made to the adult spectator to engage in the challenging and unexpected, with potentially enriching results.

Within TEY literature the focus tends to be on evaluating the success of the work as a piece of theatre rather than its ability to deliver planned outcomes (Branner & Poblete, 2019; Fletcher-Watson et al., 2014). For an emergent art form, taking a non-utilitarian stance is an existential statement (Alrutz, 2009), with many artists keen to be recognised as such and not as pedagogues (Belloli, 2009). Using theatre as a medium for knowledge transfer, frequently found in Theatre in Education for school-age children is rarely seen in TEY. This is largely due to the learning modes prioritised in school education, companies which have embedded relationships with Early Years education such as La Baracca and Starcatchers make explicit their commitment to experiential, child-led approaches to learning that privilege process over product (van de Water, 2012b; Starcatchers, 2019). Similarly, pedagogic approaches such as that of Reggio Emilia which embed artistic exploration into the pre-school learning environment, are dynamic and open; drama is seen as one of the 'hundred languages' a child learns to use to meet the world, not a tool for adults to transfer information (Edwards et al., 2011).

TEY is currently in an uncertain position, still young and building understanding and acceptance within theatre scholarship and wider society. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, the abundance of the 2000s (van de Water, 2012a) was beginning to grow thin. The journey of UK

consultancy network EarlyArts illustrates this well. Founded in 2002 and closed in 2020, they suffered financial setbacks after UK government policy changes in 2010 which affected Early Years provision and arts funding in England, the impact of the 2020 lockdown proved “the final straw” (Churchill-Dower in Redmond, 2020, p. 1). Founder and director Ruth Churchill Dower retains some optimism in the boundless imaginations of artists, though states, "The creative opportunities that could emerge on these new horizons cannot be grasped unless time and space is made available for them." (Churchill-Dower in Redmond 2020, p. 1). The legacy of the 2008 financial crisis and these new uncertain times add additional pressure to an artform that draws little income, relying on funders and promoters who agree that the work has non-monetary value, as an artwork and/or an aid to healthy and fulfilled future lives. At a time when artists of all varieties are being asked to justify their persistence and prove ‘viability’ those making work for an audience who cannot write a review face a particularly difficult task. By providing insights into the experience of this audience, backed by an established scholarship on the capacities and needs of young children, this study aims to add weight to the argument that TEY does have value, and a place in our culture. For a generation of young children who missed out on a significant portion of life experiences as they were confined to their homes and immediate family, the performing arts has the potential to support connection and re-connection with society.

2.4 Concepts of Early Childhood

How we view children influences how we value art made for them and the two approaches of ‘beings’ and ‘becomings’ offer different answers to the question – “why make theatre for early years?” Is there benefit in the moment of encounter or later, perhaps years afterwards?

A child as future consumer, or someone who will one day talk, or sustain a useful occupation, is a ‘human becoming’, and it is from this view of the child that TEY’s potential developmental benefits are usually framed (Dunlop et al., 2011). This aligns with arguments made for the value of creativity and imagination being embedded within educational curriculums (Duffy, 2006; James et al., 2019). The Scottish Government has an ambition for Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up with the importance of creative and exploratory play and the role of the adult in supporting it considered vital (Crichton et al., 2020). Research has established that an enriched home learning environment is an insulating factor against the negative effects of poverty and on developmental outcomes such as vocabulary (Scottish Government, 2019). Knowledge that underpins investment in national early years engagement programmes such as Book Bug. TEY may play a role in such enrichment, particularly, as this study describes, it engages both the parent and child.

Emphasis on the parent-child bond as important not only for the present but the future is found in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), which provides a framework to describe the connection between the first significant relationship and the subsequent journey through life. A secure attachment, developed in the first year, provides the quality walking boots to set you striding out on that journey with confidence. Secure attachment at a young age is associated with positive outcomes in later cognitive and social development (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2019), the driving force of which is understood to be a capacity for emotional regulation (Siegel & Bryson, 2012). The potential for TEY to

positively influence attachment bonds is the potential to positively influence the lives of audience members well beyond the performance space. This is expanded further in the following section 2.5

Based on this understanding of the significance of early childhood experiences to later developmental outcomes, TEY offers to benefit future wellbeing and mental health (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2014). Caution must be exercised with 'claims' in this area however, not only to ensure the delivery of robust research but to avoid contributing to a message of deterministic interventionism (Macvarish, 2016). The balance between over-promising and discounting influence is met well by Sophia Marinopoulos. In her 2019 report to the French government she sets out a strategy for cultural health, framing the 'cultural awakening' of a young child in the context of their bond with their parent as comparable to their need for healthy, sustaining food (Marinopoulos, 2019). The healthy diet metaphor is helpful for communicating the value of arts experiences for the very young; setting a contrast to a model of arts as medicine, where they are only called upon to 'fix' specific problems. Marinopoulos' notion of "cultural malnutrition" communicates the essential value of access to the arts from an early age (Marinopoulos, 2019, p. 37).

The alternative view of the child, one of 'being' is central to the offer of TEY not as a stepping-stone to the next level but as an invitation to experience the extraordinary in the present moment. As a 'being' the baby is recognised for not only what they may become later but who they are now, a fellow citizen with a right to "participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (UNCRC Article 31, 1989). Viewing very young children as an audience of now, not the future (Creative Scotland, 2021) chimes with a view of them holding radically different consciousness and not being merely "imperfect adults" (Rojcewicz, 1987). This perspective is also seen in education contexts, notably when arguing against the limitations of utilitarian neoliberalism (Sims, 2017). Concept of agency and the self are important to the idea of 'being' and supported by the detailed understanding of the capacity of babies that has increased rapidly in recent decades. Innate curiosity and action with intention can be observed prenatally (Castiello et al., 2010), a sense of self that develops in the womb though movement and sensory feedback then becomes "actively interpersonal at birth" (Trevarthen & Fresquez, 2015, p. 5). From a perception of self rooted in the body, a sense of agency grows from action in the material and human world that is the creative motor of our life force (Delafield-Butt, 2021). With a receptive and responsive communication partner we are able to build an understanding of our selves and the world around us that is intersubjective, modified and held through connection (Stern, 1985).

Experiencing theatre together invites an audience into a shared 'now'. A potential mechanism for TEY supporting bonding between parents and children is that it offers the adult an experience in living moment-to-moment at a similar pace, and understanding of time, as their child. The uncovering of which is sought through fully exploring the parent experience. As well as supporting such empathy, the practice of mindfulness has been shown in itself to support secure attachments in parents and children (Zhang et al., 2019). To experience 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), the "simultaneity of creative living – of being and becoming" (Custodero, 2009, p. 514), is to be freed, for as long as it lasts, from the mechanistic demands of a material world. How much a peak experience, such as flow, was felt by the adult participants of this study is investigated, alongside their self-reflective observations on how they experience shared aesthetic moments with their child.

The suggestion that TEY holds value as an introduction to theatre can involve the notion of developing a theatre literacy of spectatorship (Meiners et al., 2006; Goldfinger, 2011), and learning the behavioural

expectations of being part of an audience. Though future-oriented, contained within this 'introduction' argument is the assumption that theatre later, as well as theatre now, is a good thing to have access to. When Myrto Dimitriadou describes her desire to "win small children for art and for the theatre", (Dimitriadou, 2009, p. 14) wishing to support "the inner unfolding of the soul " (ibid), there is an understanding that access to the arts enriches a life. There is a bringing together of the 'being' and 'becoming' in the word 'unfolding' that illustrates well how TEY can hold both of these concepts. For parents who share Dimiriadou's valuing of the arts, TEY has the potential to be an important 'first' as they offer their child a cultural experience they hope will "launch a theatre-going habit" (Davies, 2016).

2.5 The parent-child bond

Artists have recorded how they continue to learn from the children they perform for (Hovik, 2019), how lucky they are to work in this field (Argent & Lewis, 2009), and how entering into a shared communicative space with pre-verbal children offers an expansive experience of being human (Fabretti, 2009). Audience members describing soul moving encounters of shared art is harder to find as the critical and academic literature of the form is still quite thin. The following reflection by Mark Branner, Associate Professor of Theatre at the University of Hawai'i, is a familiar story anecdotally but rare to find in a published journal. He writes movingly of his experience of attending Oily Cart's *Tube* with his two-year-old daughter:

> *"Seeing the show with her—almost literally through her eyes as I engaged in the immersive show alongside her for the duration of the performance—opened the possibilities of the form experientially… Collectively, [the] dramaturgical elements created a truly aesthetic experience, enthralling both my daughter and myself… Attending Tube allowed for me as a parent to enjoy the reality of my daughter's life at age two, bonding us in a way that few other experiences in my life have been able to do." (Branner & Poblete, 2019, p. 87-88)*

Attending TEY with a child, or attending as an additional adult observer, are qualitatively different experiences. Branner's immersion depended on watching not only with his own eyes; sharing was an engine for a heightened experience that delivered aesthetic pleasure and an increased bond with his daughter. This study seeks to gain greater insight into such experiences, supplementing the reported experiences of the parent with observations of parent-child interaction during an event.

An understanding of the significance of early relationships adds extra weight to the meaning and narrative that a parent places on their relationship with their child, weight that may not always be comfortable. As with discussing attachment styles (Ainsworth, 1973), we must be careful not to overstate risk, as Annie Woods explains, "the most that can be said at the present state of knowledge is that attachment insecurity may be a risk factor for psychopathology, while security may act as a protective factor" (Woods, 2017, p. 163). The current public discussion around the application of 'ACE scores' – listing Adverse Childhood Experiences to provide an individual's risk factor for a variety of negative outcomes – initiates some very strong feelings with some seeing it as a useful method for supporting the most vulnerable and others as a discriminatory form of labelling. This study contributes to the discussion on Positive Childhood Experiences, or 'counter-ACEs' (Crandall et al., 2019), offering TEY as a site for the strengthening of the parent-child bond. How parents position themselves within

public discussions on childhood and parenting is of interest to this study in how it informs their approach to TEY, building on existing studies considering bonding though family leisure time (Goodenough et al., 2015).

TEY seeking explicitly to support attachment bonds can be seen in projects that offer modelling and opportunity for playful interactions (Monks, 2012; Katsadouros, 2018). One of the characteristics of a supportive environment for infant development is the presence of adults who enjoy the job of playing (Stephen, 2003). When Colwyn Trevarthen states that humans arrive with "a powerful motivation for sharing discovery of meaning in joyful companionship" (Trevarthen & Fresquez, 2015, p.3) that joy is not one-sided, the pleasure of the adult not a jolly side effect but an instrumental part of the process of communication. Emotion has an important function in the brain's learning processes (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007) and research with depressed mothers shows the impact an altered state of enthusiasm has on the developing communicative capacities of her baby (Marwick & Murray, 2010). The role of TEY in 'teaching' parents how to play with their children however is questioned by Susan Young, particularly as it relates to cultural norms of parenting styles – she expresses discomfort in a group of white middle class artists seeming to imply parents are 'getting it wrong' if they do not engage in the public expressive play with their children that the performance seems to require (Young, 2004). This relates to Fletcher-Watson's warning against 'participation as tyranny' (Fletcher-Watson, 2015). Instructions disguised as invitations could undermine valuable connections as shame and anxiety work directly against playful creativity. Studying the perspective of the parent is important in understanding how offers are perceived.

The quote from Mark Branner at the start of this section identified bonding being supported through the stimulation of empathy, seeing 'through her eyes' and enjoying the reality of 'her life' (Branner & Poblete, 2019, p. 87). Common anecdotes shared by artists such as, "Parents tell us they learned a lot about their children" (Höjer, 2009, p. 92), touch on this as there is space, in a new environment, to see the child in a new way. This demonstrates the cognitive, imaginative form of empathy (Breyer, 2020) associated with Theory of Mind (Gallagher, 2012) and may be particularly noticeable, as with Branner's experience, during toddlerhood when the independent character of a child finds increasingly active expression. Going beyond the cognitive, writing on the embodied, affective form of empathy is also relevant to this study (De Jaegher, 2015), as the sharing of an aesthetic experience is felt as much as it is understood. Of particular importance is Malloch and Trevarthen's theory of Communicative Musicality which was born from close observation of early conversations between parents and their babies and describes, with the terms "pulse, quality and narrative" (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2010, p. 4) the when, how and why of a moment of co-creative interaction. Though 'music' was chosen as the ''best fit'' (ibid, p. 4) to describe the rhythmic and tonal interplay observed, the body is also essential to the process with embodiment of meaning a key concept, and interaction frequently described as 'dance'. Narratives are also a core element, the creation of which, in their increasing complexity, are made possible by our innate musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2010). Though not seeking the detail of Trevarthen's work on communication, his theories provide a good basis for this study in asserting the validity in a shared, felt sense of understanding that can take place in an aesthetic context.

A perceptive and responsive adult is required to enact the Vygotskian pedagogy of identifying the "zone of proximal development" where a child is ready to gain a new skill and the adult supports them to "close the gap of knowledge"(Malaguzzi in Edwards et al., 2011, p. 58). This sensitivity is influenced and influenced by a positive, caring relationship with the child, the 'professional love' that forms part of a

nurturing early years practice (Page, 2017; Rouse & Hadley, 2018). In TEY there is an observable and particular skill in the communication between the performers and very young children that various writers recognise (Branner & Poblete, 2019; Young, 2004). Described as being able to "See with whole body" (Argent & Lewis, 2009, p. 174), it is a responsiveness to the often subtle shifts in attention and affect of the young audience and is what enables communication to flow. The honesty and direct presence of performers is important, and ties into considerations of poetic reality and illusion. In accepting that babies only inhabit the real world, no matter how it is dressed up, the actors learn to meet them in this current moment, to "find the same breath" as the children (Rabl, 2009, p. 108). With reference to the work of Stern (Stern, 2010), this skill could be termed *professional attunement* and is generally understood to be necessary for successful TEY. Further research with live audiences could include interactions with performing artists in more detail, with potential insights for early years pedagogy.

As discussed in the analysis, the digital format limited engagement with the embodied experience as well as the aesthetic impact of the performance offered. Mapping the shared journey taken by parent and child through the performance experience would be a valuable approach in future study, this is supported by the findings where parents discussed the value of attending live performances in the past.

2.6 Audience as community

Agnés Desfosses is credited with coining the term 'triangular audience' (Desfosses, 2009, p. 103) to help describe the dynamic that exists during a TEY performance between performers, children and their accompanying adults. How artists choose to acknowledge and relate to this dynamic is varied; the adults may be explicitly encouraged to join in with playful activity (Young, 2004), subtly ignored with all focus on the artist-child relationship (Taube, 2009), or foregrounded as part of the performance itself (Rodrigues et al., 2009). The perspective of the accompanying adults on these varied interactions is the least explored corner of the triangle, a gap this study aims to address.

The placing of the precious parent-baby dyad within a theatre audience creates an opportunity for it to reflect within and outwards, positioned within a community. An opportunity that is rarer than it once was, intent participation learning having been "displaced into sport and leisure" (Bannan & Woodward, 2009, p. 485). János Novák asserts that only children's theatre offers "real liminal ritual experience, where adults form a community with children, the actors with the audience" (Novák, 2009, p. 70). Temporal art is essentially unrepeatable and this, 'only us, now', feeling heightens the sense of community arranged around a unique happening. When Colwyn Trevarthen writes, "Every meaningful thing we know is 'made up' in a conspiracy of actions and explanations that feels like it has a fitting place in 'common sense'" (Trevarthen, 2009, p. 509) he is reminding us that our entire reality is an agreed, shared and negotiated one. Our "disembedded consciousness" (Trevarthen, 2008, p. 16) allows us to share meaning that does not need to be anchored in a physical objective reality; "alluding to reality but free of it too" (Trevarthen, 2008, p. 30), we left the gold standard of that restricted consciousness somewhere back in pre-history when we started singing. In considering the evolutionary purpose of music, recent neuroscience supports a group selection hypothesis that musicality was an important capacity that allowed our ancestors to communicate their shared hopes, aspirations and confidences –

to bond (Crandall et al., 2019). The multi-modal nature of how we create and respond to music also reflects its deep roots (Cross & Morley, 2010). In small scale societies "co-operation and reciprocity are not optional" (Dissanayake, 2009a, p. 536) and anything that supported the growth of these capacities was adaptive. Implicit empathetic communication is not only what made humans successful but what makes a successful human.

Children have been categorised and treated variously as free spirits, blank slates, future workers, gifts from God and autonomous beings; what they always are on arrival is an increase by one member to the community they are born into. It is the community, in nested layers (Woods, 2017) which provides the backdrop to the child's daily experiences and engenders a sense of belonging (Gratier & Apter-Danon, 2009). Participating in cultural experiences is a human right that begins in the family, by taking part in an extraordinary, aesthetic experience together with a trusted adult a child can experience cultural belonging in the temporary community created by the shared spectatorship. The extent to which distanced, Zoom theatre is able to offer such connection is limited as the closeness and subtle interactions that often characterise TEY performance (Rabl, 2009) are unavailable beyond the immediate parent-child dyad. The findings reveal an awareness in the parents of what is missing, what is possible and why it matters.

2.7 Summary and research questions

The metaphor of construction is commonly used in child development and education. We lay foundations then build knowledge and capacities as we move up through levels. A fine three-dimensional concept to visualise, but potentially limited by its blocky fixedness, as well as the fear of collapse from wobbly foundations. An alternative metaphor, and one which is more suited to the temporal art of theatre, is that of the journey – the adventure.

Malaguzzi uses it to describe how his pedagogy aims to "Help children climb their own mountains, as high as possible!" (Malaguzzi in Edwards et al., 2011, p. 52) and theatre makers also look to "recover the delirium of the beginnings in the human adventure, of facing the unknown and uncertain" (Faria & Richter, 2009, p. 32). Rather than firm foundations that must be laid correctly or suffer the consequences, the adventure metaphor offers us a good pair of boots, that will allow us to walk the terrain with greater confidence. If we are lucky, a stronger and wiser companion will join us for a time and cut away the underbrush ahead or point out the safest route. When someone joins us, through open, responsive communication we travel for a time together in fellowship as our paths converge in "common creaturehood" (Sheets-Johnstone in Trevarthen & Fresquez, 2015, p. 12).

Time really does only move in one direction, and as much as our powerful imaginations may long for this to be otherwise, "every process of communication is irreversible" (Fröhlich, 2009, p. 497). Dynamic art is lived through in real time, with everyone present converging for the duration, a liminal space temporarily created where embodied knowing is shared. To attempt to capture this experience for description, especially from preverbal participants, is a formidable quest; but the path to it lies, I believe in this notion of fellowship. By inviting the reflection of the adult member of the dyad, and observing both, light can be shone on the unusual 'triangular' experience of TEY spectatorship to illuminate the impact on the adult-child relationship.

This study focuses on the parent's interactions with, interpretation of, and thoughts about their child and their relationship in a TEY context. The first two research questions connect to the aim "to investigate the parent and child audience experience of Theatre for Early Years"

1. How do adults, bringing a child to TEY, make sense of the experience in the context of their relationship?
2. In what way does the intersubjectivity within TEY spectatorship support parental attachment and bonding?

The second two questions are methodological in nature and connect in a straightforward way to the 2nd and 3rd aims. Literature on IPA and screen use in young children is discussed in the following chapter (3.1 Philosophical framework and 3.2 Screens and young children)

3. To what extent is Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) an effective tool in seeking to understand the TEY audience experience?
4. What was gained and what was lost in the adoption of the digital communication tools that enabled the research study to go ahead despite lockdown restrictions?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Philosophical Framework

Experiencing theatre, the phenomenon at the heart of this research, is dynamic, interpersonal and highly subjective, qualities that naturally point towards the qualitative (Creswell, 2013). My ontological position is constructivist, a philosophy reflected in the nature of live performance where the event, the happening itself, is a unique temporal co-creation by all those present. Having been professionally involved TEY for the past two decades I have experience that, framed appropriately, can benefit the research (see 1.3 Researcher Positioning). As a performer, director and parent attendee of TEY I have observed or participated in hundreds of events - not all easy - and have a broad and curious perspective on the wide variety of audience experience. This high level of subject knowledge to an unexplored phenomenon is considered a benefit in IPA (Katie et al., 2005).

Developed within the field of psychology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is ideographic, and as such supports a specificity of subject matter, and positioning of participants as experts in their own experiences (Larkin et al., 2006). As a method of analysis concerned with psychological experiences, including the embodied (Amos, 2016), IPA supports the exploration of the social emotions of interest to this study. Proponents of IPA suggest its potential usefulness in fields beyond psychology, including education and the arts (Katie et al., 2005). Whether such an ideographic approach was best placed to support analysis that also included observation of a dyad is explored in the discussion (6.3), as well as reflection on the appropriate level of interpretation given to best support the overall research aims.

The philosophical basis of IPA, drawn from the phenomenological philosophies of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, provides an epistemology that values the relational. The 'Dasein' of phenomenology is the being-there or there-being that is central to the consideration of what matters – persons are considered as always in relation to their contexts and relationships (Larkin et al., 2006). This supports an analysis of curiosity, though the novice researcher is warned not to stray into an analysis of suspicion (Larkin et al., 2006). An iterative process, driven by the application of the hermeneutic circle, IPA allows for layers of interaction and interpretation which for me offered the potential to include the perspective of the child participants. As co-creator of the work used to generate data, I had an instigating influence on the phenomenon under study. Though I put effort and experience into making an offer that would

elicit a response this was able to be left as a background assumption of 'broadly positive', with no evaluation into whether a particular reaction was the one 'I wanted' as the maker of the work. This was supported by the nature of the work itself which is designed to be adaptive and open, with space built in to allow for a variety of responses. In this regard the analysis of curiosity was maintained.

In addition to Heidegger's insights into the relational construction of meaning (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016), the theories on embodied knowing explored by Merleau-Ponty connect to the embodied art form presented and the pre-verbal nature of some of the participants (Boden & Eatough, 2014). None of us can remember what it was like being a baby or any of the ephemeral art we may have been exposed to, interacted with, or created during that time. A positive affirmation of the power of theatre for young children such as "the first experience of theatre is one that a child never forgets" (Kirkham, 2019) rests on an assumption that the memorable is valuable. Baby theatre is unable to make such claims. And even on the day, audience appreciation and engagement is felt moment to moment, there will be no written review or critical analysis, perhaps not even applause (Schulman, 2016). To assume such evaluation necessary would be to misunderstand how TEY is experienced by its audience as a participatory, time-sensitive, whole-body event, where the familiar tools of episodic memory and language are not appropriate to conduct evaluations. The aim of this study is to frame a description of the lived experience of audience members within a developmental, relational context (Stern, 1985). Research into the origins and development of intersubjective communication offers insight into both the mechanisms at play during the attendance of a performance (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2010), and the implications for the life of the parent-child dyad during and beyond participation.

As a niche art form, TEY lacks an established position within our culture, with the expectations of those choosing to attend therefore being hard to predict and influence. Research into audience expectation of TEY would be of benefit to the industry and would support studies such as this by establishing context within which to present more specific, personal reflection. Such wider research would suit a survey based quantitative study and could include factors such as gender, home location and level of education. Such an approach however would not yield the detailed description of the interpersonal experience of attending TEY that this study seeks. I chose in this study to focus on the details available through direct observation and interviews shortly following attendance of an event. This enabled me to also include some experiences of the child through observation and collected responses. Aspects of the digital medium used for stimulus and data collection further weighted the dual perspective of this study towards the experience of the parent. This is addressed in the discussion (6.3 and 6.4) and recommendations (7.5)

3.2 Screens and young children

> *I've come up with a set of rules that describe our reactions to technologies: 1. Anything that is in the world when you're born is normal and ordinary and is just a natural part of the way the world works. 2. Anything that's invented between when you're fifteen and thirty-five is new and exciting and revolutionary and you can probably get a career in it. 3. Anything invented after you're thirty-five is against the natural order of things. (Adams, 2002)*

As a great science fiction writer Douglas Adams communicated the shared wonder and fear felt by many at the pace of technological change in the late twentieth century. Questions around digital access for very young children are subject to this fear-awe tension with opinions being split along lines of protecting naturalness and innocence on the one hand, and supporting skills in future technologies on the other (O'Connor & Fotakopoulou, 2016). In supporting technological literacies (Harrison & McTavish, 2018) there is an interesting challenge to parents and practitioners, as traditional sharing of established skills, honed during their own childhoods, is not available. The adults must learn with the children as they grow, and are challenged by research into technologies in nursery settings to embrace this participation (Arnott & Yelland, 2020; Plowman & Stephen, 2007). Research with families suggest that the familiar story of moral panic around young children and screens is felt more acutely by the press than parents themselves (Plowman & McPake, 2013), with a common approach seeking balance and a consideration given to how technology is used (Arnott & Yelland, 2020). What is clear is that access to digital technology for under 3s in the UK and US was very common before 2020 (Harrison & McTavish, 2018; O'Connor & Fotakopoulou, 2016) and is likely only to have increased.

Most relevant to this study is research into video call communication. Busch found the involvement of the adult present with the child vital in supporting successful interactions with distant relatives (Busch, 2018). The parents in Busch's study used various tactics to mitigate the difficulties of the medium such as the limited frame, lag or disconnection. McLure and Barr also found families making creative responses to limitations such as performing actions 'for' the distant relative thereby simulating physical closeness (McClure & Barr, 2017). Such approaches can be seen in the performance *Up and Down* where audiences gave hugs and shared food through the screen. As well as the lack of real physical connection, direct eye contact was missed and this was considered a particular problem for the pre-verbal (McClure & Barr, 2017). This lack of eye contact impacts on how connected the young audience may feel to the on-screen performers, even when engaging in moments of direct verbal or physical conversation. Babies from 12-24 weeks old are sensitive to contingency within a conversation, able to tell the difference between a recorded or interactive video of their mothers (Murray & Trevarthen, 1986; Nadel et al., 1999). These experiments also demonstrate that very young children do have the capacity to communicate via video link. Mothers have also been shown to be sensitive to lag or stillness when communicating through video with their babies (Braarud & Stormark, 2008). It is these moments where interactive flow is disrupted that remind us we are not truly with the person in front of us.

Though a Zoom chat is not like real life, it is further away still from TV. In work on language learning, toddlers acquired vocabulary almost as well over video chat as real life, whereas pre-recorded videos didn't come close (Roseberry et al., 2014). The title of McClure's 2015 paper, *Facetime doesn't count,* (McClure et al., 2015) accurately reflects the stance taken by many parents (O'Connor & Fotakopoulou, 2016). Video chat was valued as a tool for connecting with distanced family or friends before the pandemic (McClure et al., 2015), and since March 2020 has enabled many to maintain connections, sometimes even building new ones (Williams et al., 2021). Research on parent-child dyads watching TV together found high level scaffolding increased child engagement (Barr et al., 2008). Where video communication risks losing its vital contingency, a focus on shared attention on an object was found to support engagement (McClure & Barr, 2017). Adult involvement and shared focus were written into *Up and Down,* which sought to exploit the possibilities of the medium as much as possible to deliver the multi-sensory, shared experience that TEY is known for.

Where increased screen use during lockdown was found to have a negative impact on toddlers this was linked to lowered physical activity (Jáuregui et al., 2021). Where technology replaces time spent on something potentially healthier it is considered problematic. There are occasions however when new tools offer insight and opportunities to connect with very young children in new ways (Marsh et al., 2018). This can be exciting for researchers as touch screens in particular are accessible in a way that even a crayon on paper is not, becoming a "vehicle on which to express their often underestimated capabilities" (Harrison & McTavish, 2018, p. 169). Involving young children in the research process becomes increasingly possible (Arnott et al., 2016), and could be explored in further study. *White* the app was created in 2014 to supplement the TEY show of the same name, inviting the user to play freely within the pale eggy world of Cotton and Wrinkle (Fletcher-Watson, 2014). When offering an online performance, play through an app could be a way to open up into the sort of free play that often follows TEY events. Particularly if, as with the White app, it was designed to encourage parent-child interaction (Fletcher-Watson, 2014).

The multi-modal lifeworlds of many young children include technology of various kinds integrated into their daily lives (Arnott & Yelland, 2020). We now have more toddlers than ever who have, for example, only met their grandparents online. The way we use these technologies can support connection, including connection which is framed around an aesthetic experience.

3.3 Study Design

Aims

1. To investigate the parent and child audience experience of Theatre for Early Years
2. To offer reflection on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as a tool for accessing and sharing a full account of the Theatre for Early Years audience experience.
3. To reflect upon the strengths and limitations of researching audience experience in digital performance.

This study has a qualitative, multiple case design following the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach. To enable methodological reflection on IPA to have wider use, and in keeping with my status as a novice researcher, it was important to follow closely the steps of IPA as it is laid out (Smith, 2009).

As a study concerned with lived experience, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic runs through from design to conclusion, it is the backdrop to which everything has taken place. In respect to design, turning to digital methods not only altered the data collection (such as it has for many studies where interviews that were expected to take place in person for example have been moved online), it also fundamentally impacted the stimulus event that informed the findings. The Zoom performance event used to generate data, *Up and Down* by Ipdip Theatre*,* was commissioned by Starcatchers in May 2020 as a response to the difficulties faced by extended families trying to communicate virtually with their youngest members. Online TEY did not exist two years ago and the unusual nature of the theatre offer could not be ignored; the opportunity for adult participants to compare and describe their own digital and live experiences delivered useful insights. The reflection on the benefits and limitations of digital methods will inform further study, including those framed around in-person events.

Data collection

Data collection took place over the three-phase timeline as laid out in *Figure 1* below.

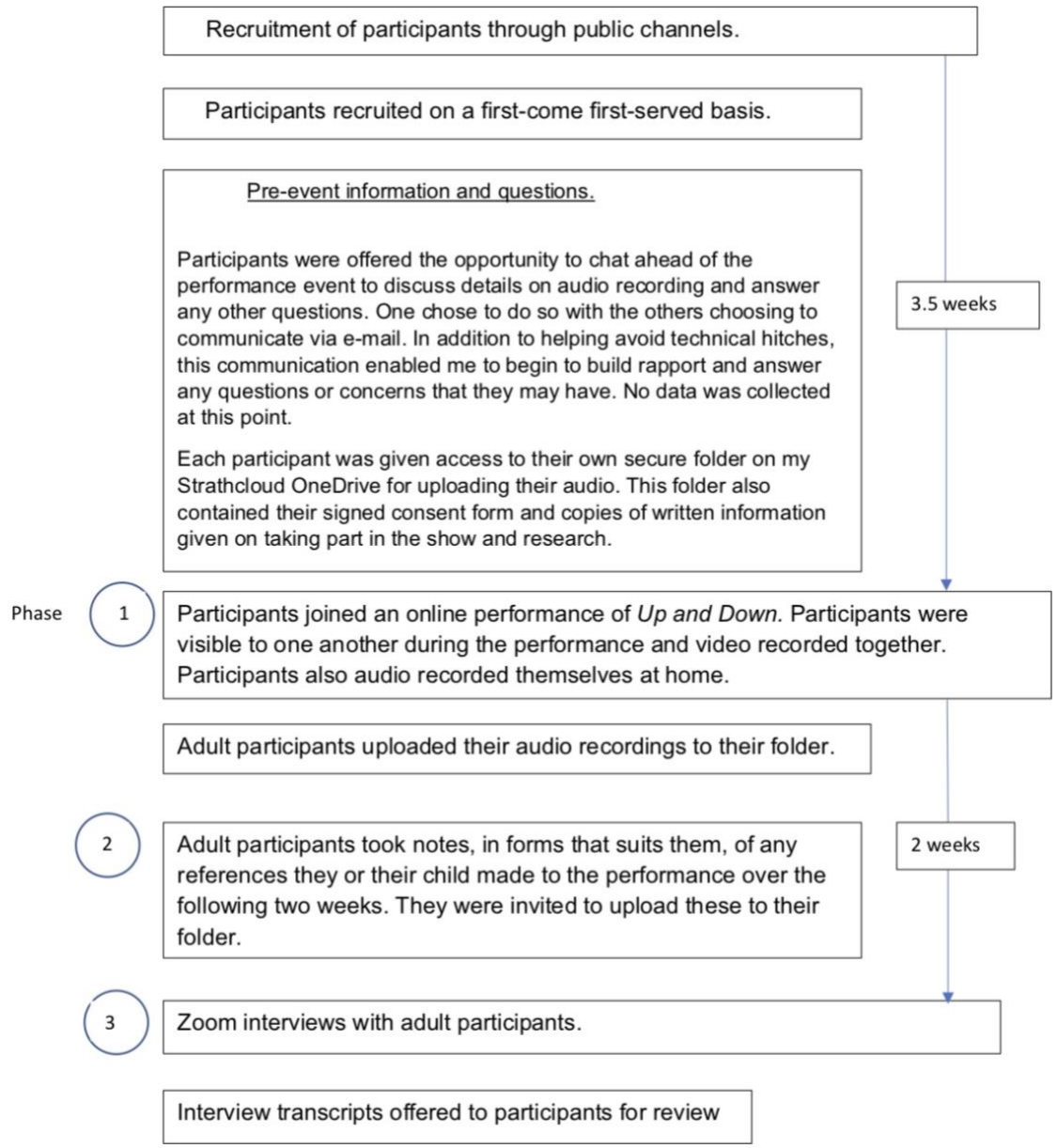

Figure 1 - Data collection procedure

Phase One – The Show

The performance event and interviews took place on Zoom, the software platform that also enabled the recording of performance and participants. Zoom could not capture the audio of the participants while they were muted during the performance, so this was recorded and uploaded to the secure university server by the adult participants using their own technology (voice memo app on phones).

The full script of *Up and Down* is attached as an appendix. A descriptive summary is given here to provide context:

Up and Down

Before the event adult participants are asked via e-mail to prepare something yellow, a snack, and a small piece of scrunched up tinfoil. When they first arrive into the Zoom meeting they are met by Sarah (Fig 2) who introduces herself, explains how things will go, and makes sure everyone has the name(s) they wish to be called displayed.

Figure 2 - Screen shot of Sarah, Stage Manager

As everyone is testing out 'Gallery View' Troggle (Fig 3) arrives. Sarah greets Troggle then mutes and hides her video. She 'spotlights' different screens throughout the show and returns at the end to say thank you and goodbye.

Figure 3 - Screenshot of Troggle, who lives underground

Troggle greets the audience and shows them some of her collections. She finds something yellow and asks for help to dig. The audience bring out and show the yellow things they have found. Troggle calls Mira (Fig 4) on her tin-can phone and sends her up a yellow flower.

Figure 4 - Screenshot of Mira, who lives in the sky

Mira sings about the things the audience have and introduces snack time. Hoppity (Fig 5) arrives during the snack song but has missed the food. The audience share some of what they have with her.

Figure 5 - Screenshot of Hoppity, Troggle's rabbit friend

Mira tells a story of clouds with her shadow puppetry box. Hoppity asks for a hug which everyone shares. Troggle is sad when Hoppity leaves, Mira gives her a piece of silver from the lining of her cloud. Mira drops more silver which 'magically' appears in the children's outstretched hands. Mira and Troggle sing a song about long distance friendship with an invitation to boogie, then say goodbye.

Phase Two - Diaries

The adults were invited to take note in any format of any references they or their child made to the performance after the event. Adult participants were asked to upload as much or as little as they wished to share.

Phase Three - Interviews

Two weeks following the performance, adult participants took part in interviews over Zoom. The experience of the performance and the diary notes were shared. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Analysis

The application of IPA involves circling back through the layers of interpretation of the phenomenon in question (Smith, 2009). In this study an additional interpretive layer was included as both parent and researcher sought to give meaning to the responses and actions of the child. Noted observation of the

video and audio from Phase One supported triangulation. Data from Phase Two also held this function as well as informing the interview. Phase Three data, transcribed interviews, were the core data on which thematic analysis was conducted.

All data collection, and any other necessary communication between researcher and adult participants, took place remotely via Zoom video conferencing and e-mail.

3.4 Participants

Sample

As appropriate for IPA a small number of research participants, in my case the three adults, were invited to talk in detail about their experience of the phenomenon under study (Smith, 2009). These interviewees only represent half the study participants however, each adult attended the performance with a child aged 12-36 months. The three-phase design of the study was planned to make time, and space, for the young participants to also contribute to the findings, both directly and via their parents.

Given the low level of common knowledge held about what is still for most a novel idea, there is no 'typical' or 'average' adult TEY audience member as each person brings their own prior experiences and understandings, as well as their personality. For a small sample size, a degree of homogeneity is advised (Smith, 2009), particularly around demographic factors that might impact the study. Although, in Scotland, TEY audiences tend to be majority white, middle class, and in the case of the adults, female (Starcatchers, 2020), it was inappropriate to select participants based on such criteria as I have no cause to believe, anecdotally or otherwise, that they would impact the aims of this study.

As detailed below (Table 1), selection criteria for participants were made with consideration to how they would impact the specificity of the data.

Table 1 - Rationale for selection criteria of participants

Criteria	Rationale
A two person adult-child dyad	In making observations of interpersonal behaviour (eye contact, gestures etc.) bringing in more people adds additional dynamics beyond the scope if this study.
The relationship of the adult to the child should be parent or guardian	For the level of insight required and the capacity to keep notes on references made after the event, the adult should have an existing close relationship and be present and caring for the child day-to-day. They should also be in a position to give consent to participation on behalf of their child.
The child aged 12 – 36 months	From 12 months children tend to be able to share common understanding with their adults about shared objects or events. Beyond 36 months, children bring an increased independence and communication comes to increasingly rely upon language.

Participants were recruited using public channels, with an advertisement summarising the study shared through social media. After an initial burst of interest on publication of the advertisement, communication slowed, and I was only able to recruit 3 dyads and not the planned 4. Although an additional 6 expressed interest, they could not make the specific time and date of the performance. As 3 was the optimal number for this level of research (Smith, 2009) this was not too great a concern, as the fourth participant pair were included in the design as a contingency. However, as one of the participant children slept thought the performance, this resulted in only two dyads completing the research as it was initially planned.

The dyads (all names are pseudonyms) recruited were:

Coral (and Gracie)

Coral, mother of Gracie, works in arts and education and has specialised knowledge in performance for the very young. Gracie is 17 months old and has no siblings, she slept through *Up and Down*.

Ella and Finn

Ella, mother of Finn, works in learning and engagement in theatre. Her favourite things are theatre and books. Finn is 19 months old and has an older, nursery aged, brother. Finn likes diggers, dancing, and exploring the world physically.

Brigitte and Nora

Brigitte, mother of Nora, is an English teacher, musician, and participates in the creative world of Live Action Role Play[1]. Nora is 29 months old and she has an older, nursery aged, brother. Nora likes animals and imaginative play.

3.5 Materials

Data collection materials were interviews, observations of recorded video, and the open offer of diary notes. They are detailed here in chronological order, as per the data collection procedure laid out in 3.3 Study Design (Fig 1).

Observations

Observations were made from integrated video and audio taken during the performance. The responses of the participants to the performance and each other were recorded through Zoom, the online platform used for the presentation, with additional audio captured on their own devices at their home location. The Zoom software provided 'gallery' and 'speaker' view versions of the event; it was the 'gallery view' version that was used for observations where all participants could be seen together on screen. The home-recorded audio provided utterances made between the dyad or directed towards the

[1] Live Action Role Play, or Larping, is similar to table-top role play games such as Dungeons and Dragons where players take on characters and quests within a fantasy setting. Unlike D+D however Larpers meet to play out their games at life-size with detailed costumes, storylines and imagined worlds all adding to the fun.

performers during the performance. For categorisation the video and audio were played together and not treated as separate data sources. The recording length was 32 minutes therefore 96 minutes of video was observed across the three groups. This included participants arriving, and their interactions with the stage manager who greeted them and introduced the event. In the case where the child participant slept through the performance, the audio was not shared. The home recorded audio in one case included conversation that took place before the family logged on to Zoom, and in both cases continued for a short time after they had left the meeting.

Methods in close observation of young children offer opportunities to analyse their responses to situations, and provide insight unavailable through reflective interview (Bentzen, 2009). The observations made from video taken during the performance captured behavioural action that demonstrated connection and engagement with the performance, interpersonal connection between adult and child, and the affective states of both. Categorisation drew on methods used to observe play engagement (Laevers et al., 2005) and work observing young children as audience members (Dunlop et al., 2011). Additionally, as the interpersonal is under study, the behavioural actions of the adults were also categorised. Studying synchrony and attunement is inherently difficult due to interactions being fleeting and complicated (Leclère et al., 2014). It is not the intention from these observations to quantify or assess the interactions between the adults and children, but to give a useful, additional view of the experience as reported in the interviews.

A table (see Fig. 6 for sample) was made with the transcription of the performance in the first column, including non-verbal action descriptions and moments where participants could all be heard by each other. Observations were then noted for each dyad individually. The categories were: vocalisations, gestures and movements, emotion (as interpreted by researcher), with an additional column for notes for analysis.

The parent or child was identified against their action or speech, as well as where any communication was directed if discernible. Moments of shared emotion and attention were able to be highlighted as episodes of interaction with connection to the performance moment using time stamps supporting the contextualising function of the observations.

Tables with performance transcript were printed off and observations and notes made by hand. This sample has been typed up for illustration:

Time	Performance	Vocalisations	Gestures/ movement	Emotions	Notes (analysis)
13:04 13:06 13:11	Troggle: Not here yet she usually comes along at snack time yeah	B – Oh dear N – She might be in her hole B – yes she might be in her hole N – she is in her hole B – is she? N - yeah			*Confirming shared understanding of unsaid and unseen. Child led expansion.*
13:14 13:17	Troggle: Oh that's new. (pulls out scarf, holds it up, blows on it)	B – what's that? What's that?	N sucking fingers	B smiles at scarf billowing. N watching	
13:41 13:46 13:48	There's more. (pulls out rubber glove)	 N – a glove B – (inaudible)		N smiles B sees N smile and smiles	*Pleasure of recognition, of naming* *B enjoys N's engagement*
13:49 13:54 13:55	I think it might be (pulls out ball) I think it might be some kind of seam…	N – a ball			
13:57 14:00 14:05	Maybe, maybe, maybe you could help with some digging, would you be able to help with some dig, dig, dig, dig, dig	 B – Shall we dig? Shall we dig? B – you dig, dig, dig, dig, dig, dig	 N nods B leans forward to get item		 *Repetition later taken on by N, only voiced here by B*

Figure 6 - Sample of noted transcript for observations made of audience during Up and Down

Diaries

It is commonly discussed and reported anecdotally to those working in TEY that young children will respond to a performance in their own time, for example drawing a picture a week later that relates to imagery seen during a show (Marinopoulos, 2019). This delayed response is something I have heard from audience members and experienced with my own children, which alongside the difficulty of managing a feedback form and a toddler, contributed to the design of the evaluation process for Ipdip Theatre's 2019 tour of *Calvinball* (Allan, 2019).

Between the performance and the interview, a period of two weeks, adult participants were invited to keep a record of any references they or their child made to having been at *Up and Down*. An open offer of recording methods was suggested, intended to allow freedom of expression and making space to capture the voice of the child in whatever mode it arose. Respecting the busy lives of parents with young children was also important. Drawing can be a useful tool for an audience feedback researcher as it is easily documented and more inclusive that relying on words alone (Roerig & Evers, 2017) and could be requested of children who use this form of expression. For the very young children in this study however no specific instruction was given to provide a response, with reliance instead on parents observing and recording any references to the performance made during play, or day to day activity.

The diary as a data collection method has its own large literature and usage (Hyers, 2018), their use here was relatively narrow, taking only a modified event sample (Bentzen, 2009). Their function was not to quantify observations made by the parent, or to encourage regular reflection or detailed description, but to make a space available for the child. No data were recorded or submitted, however the parents were able to remember and verbally recount the references made by their children. In this way the diaries, even in the form of mental notes, fulfilled their function as prompts for discussion during the interview.

Interviews

As appropriate for IPA the main form of data collection was the in-depth, semi-structured interview (Smith, 2009). These were recorded and held with the adult participants over Zoom. The generated transcription was edited for accuracy and notes added on relevant non-verbal communication. The video of the interviews was not itself observed for categorisation and visuals of the interview were not retained. A personal, expansive discussion was invited on the experience had with their child, how it felt for them and what they know and imagine their child to have experienced. The one-sidedness of the quantity of information extractable from the dyad informs the structure of this whole project. By inviting the adult to interview I drew on their relative strengths in memory and language, by asking them to remember and to speak on behalf of their child. Though they were necessarily making assumptions and hunches, as we all do when imagining the inner world of another (Gallagher, 2012), they have a large resource of experience and connection to draw on that gives them access to the 'insider knowledge' sought (Larkin et al., 2006). The adult participants were open and generous, with a good rapport throughout. As my confidence increased as an interviewer I found I became better at allowing silences to sit, though I could perhaps have probed adult participants a little further in areas where words were difficult (Amos, 2016). Detailed descriptions of emotions were sought from interviewees, including those around their relationship with their child. Although the expectation was that these emotions would be positive the subject remains sensitive and highly personal, it is for this reason, as well as the study aim to explore hard to describe feelings that enough time was taken. Each interview was just over an hour long with a total of 201 minutes of discussion transcribed.

The full interview schedule is attached as an appendix. The interviews began with friendly chat that opened the conversation to discussions around emotions and engaging the imagination, then aimed to cover the following key themes:

- Remembering the performance to pick out what was considered most important, surprising, or impactful.
- Imagining how the experience felt for the child, what they might have related to and why.
- Valuing of the experience for both adult and child in the context of other experiences had together, artistic and otherwise.

3.6 Ethics

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the University of Strathclyde Education Ethics Board and procedures were followed based on the EECERA Ethical Code for Early Childhood Researchers. Steps were taken to ensure data security with a data management plan in place. Written, informed consent from adults was obtained at the outset and verbally re-confirmed during the process. Written consent was also obtained from parents on behalf of their children. Ongoing assent was monitored on the part of the children, with parents, as the conduits for the necessary sensitivity (Arnott et al., 2020), supported in communicating the needs of their child to the researcher.

Names were pseudonymised and image specific consent sought for the use of images. In addition to these standards, the following considerations were made in more detail:

Seeing the child

Part of the ethical intent underpinning this study is a belief that upholding the rights of the child (UNCRC, 1989) can be supported by encouraging the recognition of a child's autonomous personhood. In research involving young children this includes actively seeking opportunities to engage the child in the research process (Minnis et al., 2019) and create conditions for the expression and listening to of the child's voice - verbal or otherwise. In this study I was able to observe the responses of the children during the videoed performance and interpret their movements and vocalisations for emotion and intent. The credibility of this interpretation was supported by the later interviews with the parents, recollecting the experience, where I was able to clarify points of uncertainty. I chose not to directly share the recording with the parents as this could affect their interpretation of their experience, increase self-consciousness at the point of recording, and present an ethical issue in the watching back of other child-parent dyads. This Video-Stimulated Review, usefully employed in education in developing creative learning practices (Burnard et al., 2006; Fumoto et al., 2012) could be worth considering in future research taking place in live contexts. The diaries available to adult participants in the weeks following the stimulus event presented an opportunity for children to have their thoughts and feelings relating to the performance recorded and included in the study.

Zooming in the home environment

Taking part in an online event and interview from home had to potential to be uncomfortably intrusive. A good rapport to enable honesty was important in mitigating this, as well as advanced advice on camera positioning to avoid recording elements of the home that did not need to be included. On the plus side the home is a physically safe environment, and participants had the power to stop the recording, change the view or leave the screen. Unlike a live theatre event, audience members are inaudible to one-another and it is possible for a young child to come and go without disrupting the flow of the performance. As adult participants recorded and uploaded their own at-home audio they had control over what was submitted – including the sharing of conversation before and after the performance for inclusion in the data.

Artistic work as stimulus event

I share artistic ownership of *Up and Down* with EmmaClaire Brightlyn. We gave permission to film and make reference to the work and use performance imagery in publication and dissemination. Consent was given by the theatre company members for their participation with additional consent sought for use of chosen screen shots of the performance. Ipdip Theatre is a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) that makes work for under 5s and their accompanying adults and has a child protection policy and code of conduct in place.

The parent-child relationship

It was important to communicate to the parents that the quality of their relationship with their child was not being measured and that their parenting choices were not being judged or scrutinised. This was made explicit in the information given ahead of the study. The online performance setup situated the parents as fully responsible for the safety and well-being of their child, with the researcher primed to stop the event only in the observation or disclosure of serious harm. Intervening on day-to-day discomfort such as boredom, fussiness, disinterest or dislike was at the discretion of the parents.

Researcher-participant relationship

A good rapport between researcher and participants was integral in maintaining good ethical practice. Positive communication mitigated risks of harm from parents feeling judged, or stuck in a situation they did not wish to continue. Speaking to one of the artists who performed in the show had the potential to inhibit discussion on anything that was difficult or disappointing, again mitigated by developing an atmosphere of honesty and curiosity. Communicating with adult participants ahead of the research allowed time for questions or worries to be discussed, and by offering a variety of ways this could be done introduced the principle of participant choice being welcome. Empowering parents to make the choices they felt right for their child enabled ongoing assent of the child's participation to be monitored. Although the children were not the primary study participants, their inclusion and involvement was important, and their assent necessary. The ethos of the performance piece, that participation (including spectatorship) was invited and not instructed, aligned with the ethical principles of the research.

3.7 Challenges met

The difficulties faced in recruitment and in take up of the invitation to record diaries both highlight the flexibility and understanding needed when working with parents of young children. It is not unusual or unreasonable to request parents to keep diaries for a study, the aims of this research however mean that the reframing of an invitation as a request would be a significant decision to make. That participants felt free and empowered to respond in a personal and genuine way was a priority in seeking an honest description of experience. The most important aspect of Phase Two was that it gave time for response and reflection, this study supports two weeks being a fruitful and practical length to use in a design.

An ethical challenge was posed by one of the adult participants being professionally involved in TEY; she risked being identifiable through discussion of her work and, TEY being the small world that it is, we had a professional acquaintance that could have prejudiced the research. These challenges were met by redacting a section of the interview that did not pertain to the research questions and exercising caution with her description and quotes used. Given the focus on her personal experience during the interview, an awareness of each other's TEY work did not in fact impact in any negative way on the data.

As detailed in the findings, one of the child participants joined her mother at both the pre-project chat (which wasn't recorded) and briefly during the recorded interview. Assent was given by her mother remarking upon her presence being beneficial to the research, and the child's words were included in the transcript.

What could have been considered a major limitation, the move online, was an integral element of the project. This single-year project existed entirely within the 'new normal' of the pandemic. The availability of a performance that was designed to be presented online supported the project aims by providing a platform for discussion around the shared experience of spectatorship. The home recordings were an important addition necessitated by participants being on mute in the Zoom meeting. What these provided were intimate moments between parents and children that would be hard to capture at a live event.

Chapter 4: Process of Analysis

In IPA each case is analysed separately before master themes are sought across the dataset (Smith, 2009). This is different to the standard coding process of Thematic Analysis (Braun, 2013). This chapter lays out the procedure followed for analysis and introduces the case-level themes. Ongoing notes and reflections whilst engaging with the data were made. Early reflections were particularly useful in highlighting the existing assumptions I brought, in the form of themes or connections that I either expected to find, or was surprised when I didn't (Braun, 2013).

1 Observing video with home-recorded audio

The first action taken with the data was to transcribe the Phase One video of the performance into a tabled format with space for notes. The home-recorded participant audio was then aligned with the video and observed for vocalisations, gestures and emotional responses. This was done for the two recordings with children present. The adult who watched alone did not share her audio and I made observations of her reactions in a simple list format, with references to the show.

2 Transcribing interviews

Following the Phase Three interviews these were transcribed and shared with adult participants who were asked to confirm their use and offer any corrections. A section of one interview was redacted as it did not pertain to the research questions and included information that could identify the interviewee through her work. The Zoom platform provided a transcription for the performance and the interviews, powered by Otter software. These transcriptions were useful as a base to work from, but very inaccurate with frequent omissions and errors.

3 Initial noting

Interview transcripts were printed in table form with space to the right and left for initial noting and highlighting emergent themes, as coding is referred to in IPA (Smith, 2009). This was done by hand with different coloured pens used to add underlines, connectors and symbols as themes began to emerge. Time was spent with each interview in detail, reading and re-reading, noting my questions and curiosities as they arose and seeking the descriptive, conceptual, and linguistic patterns in the data. As the video observations were an extra ingredient that sat outside the IPA recipe (Smith, 2009), I had to decide when and how they should be included in the analysis. As their main function was triangulation, it was towards the end of the initial noting that the video observations were brought into the analysis process to add further depth and insight to the meaning discerned from the interview data.

4 Emergent themes

Emergent themes were noted in large numbers, with the research questions used to guide the grouping and hierarchies that lead towards finding the superordinate themes. This involved writing up emergent themes on post-it notes which could be moved around on large pieces of paper to explore connections and create maps (Fig. 7). Three superordinate themes for each case were identified through this grouping process.

Figure 7 - Arranging emergent themes: photograph of many post-it notes on a large sheet of paper.

5 Superordinate Themes

Each case produced its own superordinate themes, to which I assigned relevant quotes with page numbers lifted from the transcript and listed by theme. Where data from the video observation was used this also included a description of action if needed. The following tables (Tables 2-4) present the superordinate themes for each case. They are listed in the chronological order in which the interviews took place.

Coral (and Gracie)

Table 2 - Superordinate themes of Coral (and Gracie)

Theme	Description	Sample quote
Autonomous child	Making space for the voice of the child, imagining their inner life, seeing through their eyes	[*I don't know a lot] of what's going on inside her head because she's an independent being, or that that's how I look at things, that's what I believe.* p.12
Expectations	Thoughts on how people will behave, experience informing response to show, critically comparing art forms and works	*it felt like a really nice hybrid. That we could almost look at your screen, as though it were a picture book.* P.17
Personal and family values	Priorities for expending time and effort, family connections and events	*because I work within the world of culture and education that experience is important to me, it is important to me that Gracie has that experience.* P.12

Ella and Finn

Table 3 - Superordinate themes of Ella and Finn

Theme	Description	Sample quote
Where the child is at	Meeting the child in the moment, adapting for different needs, seeing the individual	*the bits that he could get like he totally got* p.3
Valuing connection	Priority of time spent communally, making choices to benefit relationships, meaningful shared experience	*I think all of it is shared, it's shared experiences isn't it, I think that's for me like, yeah it's just about that shared experience and being in.* p.10
Opportunities	Access to arts experiences for self and others, social responsibility, recognising own privilege	*And it's awe, and it's wonder, and it's joy… that sense of wow. It's really important for all of us isn't it.* P.7

Brigitte and Nora

Table 4 - Superordinate themes of Brigitte and Nora

Unfiltered response	The audience expressing freely, the role of the parent in the child's experience, interpreting the child's reactions	*I think it's also a really important vehicle, to show our children that like, strong reactions and emotions are okay.* P11
Time together	Valuing one-on-one time, meaningful connective experiences,	*Nora's older brother was in nursery so it's always nice for her, I think, to get, days, where she gets to, decide what's happening and what's going on.* P.2
Live better than digital	Communal experience of live performance, limitations of screens, embodied communication and experience	*when there isn't the sort of, proprioceptive feedback, I guess, of people in the same room.* P.4

6 Master Themes

Master themes were then identified across the dataset, using visual mapping (Braun, 2013) by hand and returning frequently to the data as a source for metaphors and key phrases. The relationships between the superordinate case themes tabled above and the master themes presented in the findings chapter can be seen in the following diagram (Fig. 8). A Venn diagram is a truer representation than a table or list as the themes are not nested in a neat hierarchy. Relative proximity to the centre of the master theme circles represents how elements of a superordinate case theme fed into them.

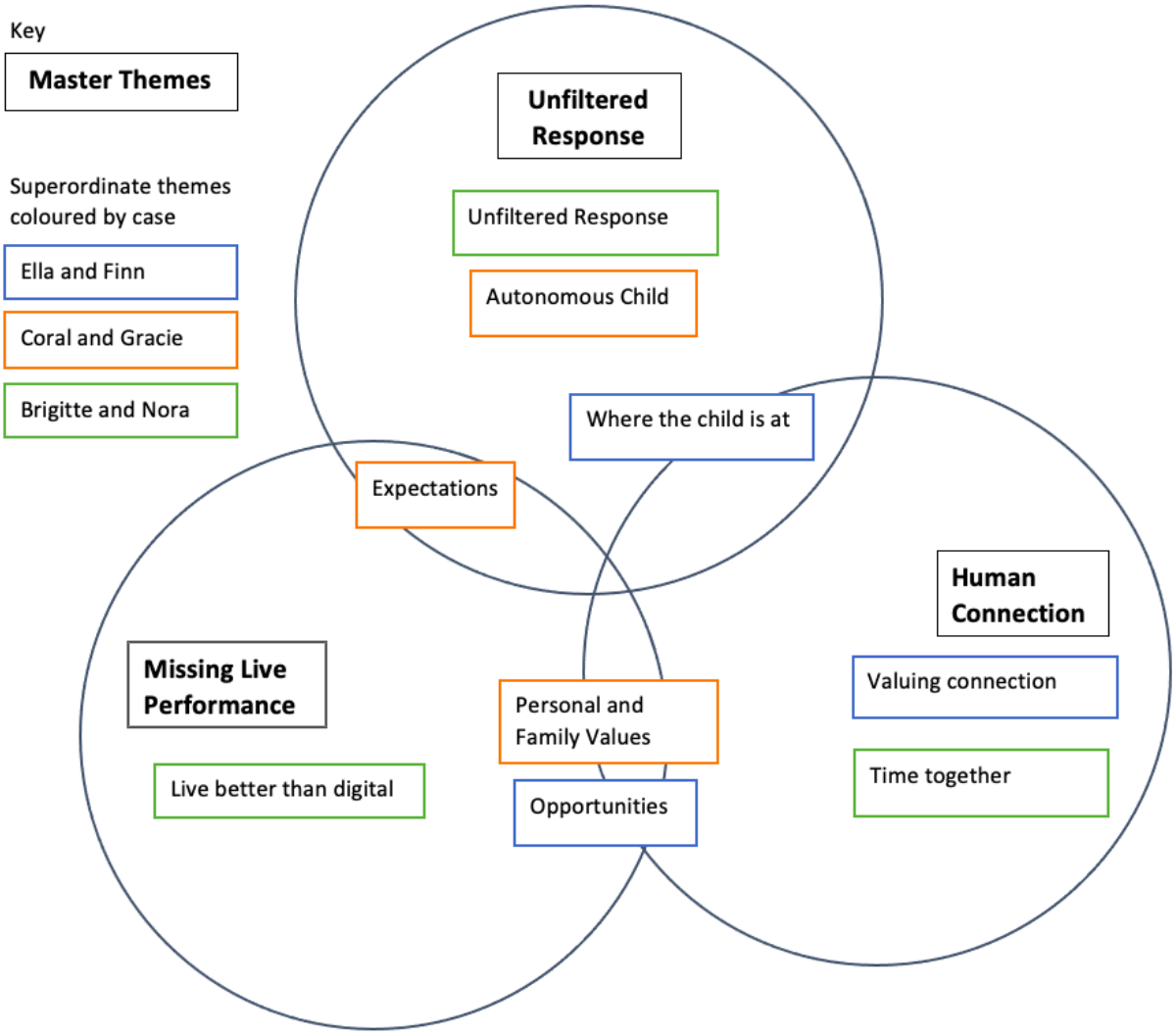

Figure 8 - Venn diagram showing how superordinate case themes relate to master themes

7 Writing up

Analysis continued during the process of writing up findings with a greater emphasis on researcher interpretation in second and subsequent drafts (Smith, 2009). To support connection between the findings and the answering of the research questions I looked for categories and metaphors, for example the parental 'roles' in 6.1, that would help communicate the experience of the participants. As my personal knowledge of the stimulus event was so thorough I was mindful to find the appropriate level of information necessary to contextualise the process and findings.

For referencing the video observations I used a playscript format. This enabled the vignette/episode nature of the observation to be seen whilst maintaining the structure of time ordering of actions and responses, which was often relevant. Quotes from interview transcripts are labelled by page number of

the case transcript. For example, “tp.2” stands for transcript page 2. Quotes or descriptions taken from the video and audio recordings are labelled by the time stamp on the video recording at the beginning of the quoted section.

All participant names are pseudonyms. Members of the Ipdip Theatre company are referred to by their real names when out of character and their character names otherwise.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction to findings

This chapter presents the themes and accompanying analysis that emerged from the data. Further analysis, connecting the findings to the research aims and existing literature is contained within the discussion, Chapter 6.

Three master themes were identified in the data: *Missing Live Performance*, *Unfiltered Response* and *Human Connection*. These are each presented as a section in this chapter with examples from the data as to how they were represented within each case. *Missing Live Performance* addresses the strong sense of loss or lack felt by the participants having lived through a year where events and gatherings were all cancelled. All the adult participants had strong positive associations with previous attendance of live performance, including TEY; experience which influenced their choice to take part in the study. In comparing these experiences to the more recent digital event, the adult participants were able to expand upon the comparison and consider what makes in-person performance meaningful. *Unfiltered Response* is where most of the interpretations of the children's experiences are contained. All adult participants had self-reflective views on their role in supporting or hindering how their child met, and responded to, the performance. Where the child was present for the show these could be triangulated with the video data. *Human Connection* explores the placement of value in emotion, relationships and community. Arts experiences were seen to have a role not only in supporting connection between individuals present but in bringing the individual into contact with their culture and wider society.

5.2 Missing Live Performance

Lockdown loss leading to a renewed appreciation or sense of gratitude was expressed by all three, most explicitly by Ella when describing her unexpectedly emotional reaction to her first post-lockdown in-person toddler group singing session:

> *and I literally was in tears, because I was like this is so nice, you know it's that, shared, and I, and I wouldn't have reacted that, like you know before covid…*
>
> *It was, it's a standard, you know it should be a standard thing to be able to take the kids to theatre, it should be a standard thing to like sit, sit in a room with kids and sing 'If You're Happy And You Know It', like that. But suddenly it just has so much more, gravitas, I suppose, because it's something that we haven't been able to do. (Ella tp.10)*

This appreciation also supported an increased understanding of what was so valuable about these missed experiences. The embodied sense of shared environment and purpose, expanded upon further in *Human Connection* is critical. Awe and wonder were also highlighted, with respect given to the skill needed in delivering high quality work. *Up and Down* offered to step in to the theatre shaped hole in people's lives and succeeded to a limited extent. Though it was enjoyed and appreciated the limitations

of the format became a fruitful contrast point to expand upon the better, and much missed, 'real life' experience.

Opportunities - Ella and Finn

Ella's superordinate case theme, Opportunities, contained an awareness of loss as well as a recognition of the privilege that comes with being able to access offers.

As detailed in the introduction 1.2, the recorded performance of *Up and Down* took place in June 2021, 15 months after the beginning of the first national lockdown that included the cancellation of all live performance and communal arts events. This sense of lack was a motivating factor for taking part in the project, as described by Ella:

> *One of the things that has devastated me this last year is I haven't been able to take him to the theatre. Do you know what I mean like [Finn's older brother] went at such a young age, and then, like every opportunity I would take him to something else, so the fact that Finn hasn't been to anything. I find really upsetting, which is why I was like - yes let's do this (Ella, on Finn 19m/o tp.2)*

The importance of theatre experience is emphasised by her use of the specific and strongly emotional term 'devastated', albeit 'one of the things', a nod towards the varied challenges of the pandemic. One role of the parent is to seek out the necessary resources to meet their child's needs and it is 'really upsetting' when those resources are unavailable. Ella's previous attendance with her older child shows her understanding of what is missing, experience she later describes as significant for their bond:

> *I think it's always just been a massive part of, of our relationship I suppose has been going to the theatre (Ella, on Finn's older brother. tp.14)*

A risk is implied to her relationship with Finn as this 'massive part' has been missing. Although *Up and Down* was a digital offer, and she questions if it 'makes sense' to include it as such, Ella believes it did play some part in filling this gap:

> *I think it was a special moment in like my like in our, journey, I suppose, because it was our first time that we sat down and watched theatre together, in that sense, if that makes sense. (Ella, on Finn 19m/o tp.9)*

Expectations / Personal and Family Values - Coral (and Gracie)

Coral had a nuanced understanding and curiosity as to what different people bring to a TEY experience in terms of expectations. This included thoughts on how Gracie might have responded to *Up and Down* though she did not attend. Her superordinate case theme, *Personal and Family Values*, also influenced the master theme of *Missing Live Performance* as she had an acute understanding of the value of what was missing.

Coral was motivated to attend by her personal and professional interest in performance for the very young and had watched other work online with Gracie as well as attending the outdoor Imaginate

Family Day. Though Gracie slept through *Up and Down* Coral drew on these other experiences to imagine how she would have responded, adding to Coral's disappointment:

> *I was really disappointed because, and especially, oh probably more disappointed afterwards… I genuinely think she would have enjoyed watching it and I think it would have kept her interest, so I was disappointed from her, from her perspective that she didn't get to see that, especially given that she hasn't seen anything else. Well, live (Coral, on Gracie 17m/o tp.8)*

She touches on the potential *Up and Down* had to fill the gap left by live performance, Gracie had not been "particularly drawn to much" (Coral tp.5) at the Imaginate Family Day and Coral's sense of loss remained in stating 'she hasn't seen anything else'. Her professional background brought an acute awareness of the age specific nature of TEY offers and the time lost to lockdown:

> *she'll be eighteen months in a couple of days and that's my area of specialism is naught to eighteen months so that's my own private grief about this last year really. (Coral tp.5)*

As a 'private' grief she recognises the very specific and personal nature of this loss and protectively separates this pain from her child's experience. This bigger picture view of the pandemic, and its impact on her professional identity, differs from the more everyday 'disappointment' felt in Gracie missing out on watching *Up and Down.* 'Grief' is a strong word, but not unwarranted, referring as it does to an irreplaceable loss. We do not yet know the impact on children of spending so much of their first 18 months in lockdown isolation.

<u>Live better than digital – Brigitte and Nora</u>

Brigitte put a lot of emphasis on the differences between live and digital experiences, expanding on what only an in-person, live experience can offer.

Brigitte keenly looked forward to a return to live arts experiences, for herself and her family.

> *it's very much an experience that I, we, try to recreate in our home a little bit, but it's not the same and, it's something that's really been missing and I can't wait to go out and, get to show them again. (Brigitte tp.15)*

The at-home experiences that Brigitte and her partner can offer their children, though considered an important effort to make, do not replace what is missing, and neither for Brigitte does digital work:

> *they've all watched way too much TV in the past year and a half…*
>
> *I'm not, sure how much someone who's only two and a half can actually distinguish between, because a screen's a screen right, how much does she realise when something is live whether, when something, versus when something is not. (Brigitte tp.2)*

This assertion of 'a screen's a screen' was discussed with more nuance later in the interview, with Brigitte reflecting on the "weird space" (Brigitte tp.17) provided by an interaction that was both more intimate and more removed than in-person communication. The 'all' in Brigitte's 'they've all watched way too much TV' hints at the wider parental concern of screen use, received wisdom to which Coral

refers when reflecting on the potential benefits of lockdown digital communication, “we’ve learned to use this and not be quite so frightened of screen time” (Coral tp.7)

‘Real’ was often used to mean ‘live in person’, for example when Coral described Gracie seeing her Grandpa after lockdown and her understanding of “that’s the real person” (Coral tp.6). Realness connotes value in its opposition to falseness and by implication diminishes the ‘virtual’ world as inherently lesser. Things that are real matter. Some of the elements of *Up and Down* which were praised were the lack of “pretense about the delivery” (Coral tp.14) and the tangible interactive elements, both of which added a quality of realness. ‘Live’ was used to mean both ‘in-person’ and ‘not-recorded’, as in Brigitte’s speculation on Nora’s understanding of the screen above, the important quality being shared temporal experience.

The physical presence of others, both performers and other audience members, is an essential element of live performance for Brigitte which cannot be replicated. Describing the “proprioceptive feedback” (Brigitte tp.4) and “energy of the room” (Brigitte tp.5) she drew on past experiences of live performance to highlight what is lacking. Her anticipation of rehearsing with her choir in person describes an embodied response to a communal artistic experience:

> *[online choir is] not the same feeling as singing in a space with people… and that lack is very keenly felt. (Brigitte tp.43)*
>
> *And then the beauty of following, the beauty of following a conductor and actually seeing, feeling more than seeing, people react in sync (Brigitte tp.44)*

This ‘feeling more than seeing’ could help explain why gestures sometimes took the place of words to describe or explain the impact of live performance. Brigitte demonstrated rather than described the wide-eyed wonder she felt as an adult at a spectacular theatre show. For Ella, “I mean obviously being live in-person is, (gestures expansively) you know” (Ella tp.6) Her gesturing, with the suggestion of shared understanding, was interpreted as a short cut to listing the well-known benefits of being in-person.

5.3 Unfiltered Response

All adult participants were interested in the actions taken by adults that impact upon how a child engages with performance. There were personal reflections and wider thoughts on parent-audience behaviour in general. The term ‘unfiltered response’ is taken from Brigitte and is one of her superordinate case themes. A freedom in response that she expanded upon, using the parent audience experience of suppressing (or permitting) emotional expression as a microcosm of how we interact with one another and share our feelings in wider society.

> *We could probably learn something about how to interact with a performance from children. Because they will do it unfiltered, and straight away and, without regard of what the other people around them think about their reaction to it. And that is a very true and unfiltered response and, and an autonomous response I suppose and, that, I think we as adults struggle*

with quite often. Not just, doing it ourselves, but if our children do it because there are so many factors and situations where we're told that that's not an appropriate thing to do. (Brigitte tp.29)

Unlike a traditional theatre event, where there is an established etiquette with an assumption that those attending will be aware and comply, TEY presents an arena of discovery. As well as the young children, who are theatre illiterate, the accompanying adults and artists need to learn and lay down the new rules of the situation they find themselves in. Coral described this potentially unsettling uncertainty as an "interesting confluence between everybody's expectations" (Coral tp.21). Her superordinate theme of *Expectations* also fed into this master theme.

Brigitte and Ella were far more active during the performances than Coral. The presence of children brought verbal commentary, questions, drawing of focus through pointing, gasps and physically moving the child. Mother and child were in ongoing communication with one another, with discernable moments of adult-led and child-led drawing of focus.

Both Ella and Brigitte verbally and physically encouraged their children's interest in *Up and Down.* There was an interesting tension however between the action they took and what they felt to be a correct amount of drawing focus. As well as 'trying not to second guess' Finn's responses, Ella reflected on how she spoke to him during the show:

I suppose, in my head I automatically talk to him to try and keep him engaged, maybe a little bit more, maybe he didn't need that. (Ella on Finn 19m/o tp.7)

Brigitte was more emphatically self-critical:

I know for a fact that there were moments, where I totally directed her attention… we weren't even there with another audience and I still did it and I tried not to, and I still did it. (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.37)

The status of the child as an independent, autonomous being was a belief shared by all the adult participants. In considering the role of the parent in an audience situation it was stated by Coral and Brigitte, and implied by Ella, that any kind of 'interference' with the child's experience was to be avoided. Coral expressed a preference for seating arrangements in TEY where parents are "less likely to interpolate the experience for their babies" (Coral tp.26). Brigitte's rationale for trying to avoid directing attention was in questioning the parent's role:

Because, who am I to say what part of the performance she's to pay attention to? Why am I deciding what is worthy of the, what's the part of, the aspect of this experience that ought to have attention paid to it? (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.37)

This leaving of space for the child to respond provides the opportunity for the pleasurable surprises, but it is an effort. The responses of the parents to point, prompt, ask questions and gasp to draw attention were considered easier than consciously avoiding such things. With Brigitte and Nora, there was a shift across the timespan of the show in the lead of conversation, moving from Brigitte pointing things out, making suggestions and questions, to Nora, as she became more accustomed to the situation, initiating conversation, seeking clarification and making connections. This gradual handing over of the lead is nicely illustrated when towards the end Nora mirrors the way Brigitte verbally connected to an object on the screen: "you have one of those [rock]", (Brigitte 10:53) and "you got a ukulele" (Nora 29:09). Though

Brigitte was critical of herself, it could be argued that by initiating positive interest in *Up and Down* and drawing connections to their shared home life and Nora's existing interests, she enabled her to feel safe quickly in a new situation thereby increasing Nora's capacity to enjoy and respond creatively. When Brigitte says in a welcoming tone, "there she is!" (Brigitte 16:00) as Mira appears for the first time, she not only draws Nora's attention to what she would likely notice anyway but reassures her that this is a nice person we want to see.

Brigitte had anticipated struggling to keep Nora engaged;

> *but actually that didn't come true, and it wasn't hard work to get her to, in fact it was a bit tougher to get her to understand that you can't just constantly interject (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.7)*

These 'interjections' did not cause the interference they might have done had we all been in the same room and is an area where the unique set up of this project offers something new. During live in-person performance everything we do may be seen and heard by a large number of people, which brings in one of the biggest questions TEY artists ask themselves - what are the rules I want to place on my audience? The standard rules of theatre (sit still and listen until I tell you otherwise) may not make sense for the very young, Brigitte enjoyed the permission given during the Scottish Opera performance when very young children "were encouraged to come forward and bother the performers" (Brigitte tp.5) Her use of the word 'bother' shows how despite her enjoying and approving of this it still seems to be challenging; conflict she explained in describing how ingrained cultural norms can override even explicit permission to respond freely:

> *even if you had been told that it was okay at a performance. You, I, certainly, I think you would still feel - but what, what if the other parents judge my kid because it's the one that's constantly shouting something out and you've got like, I don't know, perfect Bearsden Mum there with her well quaffed children sitting and they're all 'sitting nice', and you know not going – (loud and quickly) what's that? Who's that? What's this? I farted. (Brigitte tp.12)*

Free from the disapproving eye of Bearsden Mum (Bearsden being well-known as a middle-class suburb of Glasgow), the at-home theatre experience enabled Nora to talk about what was happening at any point and, in another room elsewhere in Scotland, Finn to run back and forth when he chose.

Ella and Brigitte still took action to bring their children back if they wandered too far (physically or conceptually). Though Nora's comments did not risk interrupting the performance for other families, they did reveal how she was at times out of pace with the show:

(Brigitte and Nora 26:15)

Troggle:	Hoppity says that she's so full of hugs that she wants to go off now and see if she can find some worms to cuddle
Hoppity:	(Waves)
Brigitte	Oh she wants to cuddle a worm
Mira:	Oh bye Hoppity
Brigitte:	By Hoppity

Nora: (waves)

Troggle: Bye Hoppity

Hoppity: (disappears down hole)

Troggle: Oh. Bye Hoppity. Hm

Mira: Oh Troggle I know you don't like it when she goes away

Nora: What happened to Hoppity?

Brigitte: She's gone to cuddle some worms

Troggle: (shakes head)

Nora: But she maybe don't want food?

Mira: But I have something special for you today just here, in the lining of my cloud (takes out silver)

Brigitte: What's this, will we have a look?

Nora: (leans close, smiling)

Had Nora stayed with her concerns for Hoppity's diet and missed the set-up of the gift she might not have enjoyed so much it appearing for her, and then be able to tell her dad where it came from. Brigitte's gentle confirmation and redirections kept Nora within the bounds of focus that allowed her to experience, and enjoy, the show. When the parental job of 'policing' children in an audience is removed, or at least heavily reduced, there is still space for supportive guidance that can improve the experience for the child through reassurance, connection and sharing of focus.

<u>Where the child is at – Ella and Finn</u>

Ella's superordinate case theme of *Where the child is at* was more than an awareness of 'age and stage, though it included a concern with developmentally specific needs. Part of seeing and respecting the individual involves responding to them as they are in that moment, reading their current interests, mood or intentions.

Finn's responses during *Up and Down* were often physical and illustrate different ways in which he took cues from the performers and Ella:

(Ella and Finn 12:10)

Finn: (waving hands, excited, moves towards screen)

Ella: (settles Finn back on knee) What else is next?

Troggle: (shows seashells)

Ella: Oh some shells

Troggle: (claps shells together to make sound)

Finn: (taps ends of fingers together)

Here Finn's focus is supported by Ella physically and verbally bringing him back to watching Troggle. Finn spontaneously mirrors the action of Troggle in this moment, though he did not later copy the 'digging' gesture despite being encouraged by Troggle and Ella to do so. Nor did he wave goodbye when asked if he could, though he did offer food to Hoppity when encouraged. An important principle in the work of Ipdip Theatre is that interaction should be an invitation and not an instruction, the occasions where children do not follow instruction are important to highlight as they demonstrate the honesty of this, that doing nothing is valid. Finn was able to complete a requested action or not depending on if it made sense for him. This freedom was important to Ella:

> *I remember watching, watching him as we're watching it and wondering what he was taking, like seeing and taking from, and I suppose trying not to second guess. How he's going to respond to things. (Ella on Finn 17m/o tp.6)*

An element from the show which Finn immediately incorporated into his play was offering food to Hoppity. He had a short wait as Nora was feeding Hoppity first and in that time he took the food he had extended forward and 'fed' it to a dinosaur he had to hand, he then ate that piece and offered some more to Hoppity. Ella reported two weeks afterwards that he was "feeding his animals more since then" (Ella tp.3) She assigned value to this play as it involved qualities of moral importance and credited the show with encouraging them:

> *just from feeding the rabbit, you know, that teaches us sharing and compassion, you know, that's a tiny thing, a simple thing, but actually, you know it's now something that Finn has incorporated more in his play (Ella on Finn 17m/o tp.17)*

The elements that Finn went on to incorporate in his play he can be seen to engage in during the show, this contrasts with Nora who took on an action and phrase that, at the time, she only watched others perform. Nora did not join in with saying, or acting out, the "dig dig dig" which she later brought regularly into her play, "she still does actually 'dig dig dig' is like her, new thing" (Brigitte tp.24). Typically only the obvious and immediate responses are available to artists to read how a child is receiving their work, Nora's continued enjoyment of 'dig dig dig' – the only thing that "stuck" (Brigitte tp.24) – is a good example of an impression made that could not have been guessed from how she responded during the show.

<u>Autonomous child – Coral (and Gracie)</u>

Coral had a strong belief in the importance of respecting the autonomy and individual needs of the child. This was writ large in her choice to let Gracie sleep rather than potentially disturbing her out of a sense of obligation. In fully accepting her need for sleep, the principle of invitation not instruction was demonstrated in the context of the entire artistic offer. This made all the difference to Coral's experience:

> *I thought that your colleague [Sarah] in the way that she welcomed people was really lovely, I really enjoyed how she put everybody at ease, and certainly she put me at my ease saying of course sometimes babies sleep and that's fine, because I felt like I was letting you down because she was asleep, but I, I just couldn't wake her up. Just because her sleep's been so unstable. And I really, I was really grateful as a parent that she let me feel okay about that, (Coral tp.14)*

Being given permission and resources to meet their child's needs allows the parent to feel seen and understood. There is a duty of care here to be considered by everyone involved in making the TEY offer; venue staff, funders and management, as well as artists.

Nora also offered an unplanned and unpredicted response that sat outside the performance itself. She had attended the (unrecorded) preparatory Zoom chat I'd had with Brigitte and also briefly joined the interview. Nora recognised me and asked "where's the puppy" (Nora during Brigitte interview tp.32). Though Brigitte initially interpreted this as a reference to Hoppity the puppet, I was able to remind her that in the initial Zoom chat we had, five weeks previously, I had shown Nora my (real) dog. This surprised Brigitte, who had both forgotten the dog, and not expected Nora to recognise me:

> *And I love that she just came in and recognised you and remembered both your puppy and then Hoppity as a separate thing. Even though we've not really chatted about it. (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.38)*

The pleasure Brigitte experienced in being surprised by Nora's memory was similar to how Coral described a recent experience with Gracie where she remembered (though Coral didn't) a toy horse having been put in a particular bag for a trip. Remembering something the parent didn't was important as it emphasises the independence of the thought, as with Brigitte's comment that she hadn't encouraged the memory through chat. Such moments enable the parent to delight in their child, as described by Coral:

> *And that makes me excited because it's almost like her saying, look my brain just got a little bit bigger (Coral on Gracie 17m/o tp.24)*

The unusual environment of TEY offers a good opportunity for parents to be pleasantly surprised by the capacity of their child. Ella explained that Finn loves the buttons on the laptop and "likes to move, he doesn't sit still, very often" (Ella on Finn 19m/o tp.2)

> *I think that was my biggest takeaway was the fact that he just like, yeah it was just, he just really was intrigued by what was going on, more so than wanting to press buttons most of the time so that was nice. (Ella on Finn 19m/o tp.2)*

Brigitte was also surprised that Nora was as engaged as she was. Though she would have expected Nora to stay engaged with a real-life performance, she had doubts about the screen format. This experience of low expectations being pleasantly exceeded was similar to her first encounter with TEY:

> *when I took her brother when he was very young, to the Scottish Opera Baby Opera. And where I hadn't actually, expected, expected him to pay attention for 45 minutes, because he was quite young, but he did, and he loved it. (Brigitte tp.4)*

<u>Watching the watcher</u>

Two moments, one before and one during the show, where Finn did begin to press buttons were accompanied by an observable shift in Ella's expression to serious, even stressed. At other times, when Finn was watching or responding to the show her expression was smiling, relaxed or giggling. When

considering how the emotional journey was shared, it could be seen that Ella was not just influenced by Finn's feelings, but by the extent to which his interest was being held. Though fleeting, this shift demonstrates the risk parents take in choosing to attend TEY - if their child does not enjoy it or engage appropriately the parent experience is not neutral but actively unpleasant.

These high stakes can serve to increase the enjoyment of a successful experience. Coral's recalled taking Gracie to a recital given by Coral's sister, a professional musician. The experience was positive in large part due to how Gracie reacted,

> *Going to that concert was a really special experience, particularly because she responded in such a brilliant way and was enraptured (Coral on Gracie at a few weeks old tp.13)*

This contradicted the expectations of other people in the audience who were *"skeptical that she wouldn't cry" (Coral tp.13)*

All the adult participants described watching through their child's eyes. Including Coral, here commenting on the quality of stillness in the performance:

> *it let me look at your scenography. And the care there and I thought that was really brilliant, that there was such a stillness in you that from Gracie's perspective, because at the moment she's about naming everything. (Coral on Gracie 17 m/o tp.16)*

Though Gracie was not present, Coral imaginatively brought in her perspective considering her current interests. Engaging in this thoughtful, and sometimes effortful empathy parents attempt to see a new situation as their child might see it which leads to increased understanding. Where the child is present these imaginings are influenced by direct observations, as with Ella 'watching him as we're watching it and wondering' (Ella tp.6) and Brigitte's curiosity around Nora's different perspective:

> *I find it really interesting that the character she was most into was the puppet not the humans… I guess it's hard for me as an adult to understand, to me that's obviously a puppet that he was on your hand, you know. I, I have that, I struggled to suspend my disbelief enough there. (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.24)*

As well as insight into one's own child there is learning about the self which is available to the adult watching a child's unfiltered response, as suggested by Brigitte (tp.29). Expressing emotions freely was something she felt both adults and children should be able to do and that encounters with art that "moves you" (Brigitte tp.11) were platforms to normalise visible emotion, to show children that "everyone around you feels stuff, all the time" (Brigitte tp.13). The distanced "safe space" (Brigitte tp.13) of at-home watching affords greater opportunity for responding without fear of judgement, though limits the extent of the shared experience as each family is sheltered from the sounds and off-screen actions of the others.

'Seeing through their eyes' at times involved taking on the emotion of the child. Sharing emotional responses was observed frequently during the performance and is expanded upon further in *Human Connection*. There is also the possibility of taking in an experience in a fresh way, if parents are able to put themselves imaginatively into the mind of the child. As Ella describes after detailing the practical anxieties that can put parents off attending live performance with a young child:

I know it's worth that worry… I think it can be magical and I think it's magical when you see it through their eyes. (Ella tp.38)

5.4 Human Connection

Value is a key concept for this theme. All the interviewees described an aspect of human connection as underpinning their belief in the importance and value of theatre experiences for young children. Shared positive emotion was observed and described. The superordinate themes assigned to each case reflect a particular emphasis found in each dyad. In writing up the findings examples are given across the cases for each of these sub-themes as this accurately reflects the similarities found. There were interesting differences in how the adult participants understood the importance of memory and what constituted a 'shared experience'.

<u>Time together – Brigitte and Nora</u>

The audio recordings, collected by the adult participants, included a small snippet of parent-child conversation before and after the show. When Brigitte and Nora's audio was aligned with the video recording, it revealed an intriguing and sweet coincidence of conversation. The following extract is transcribed here as it was heard, with no overlaps and very much as if it was a natural, sequential conversation. Though the performers already on Zoom, and Brigitte and Nora at home and off-line, could not yet hear one-another.

(Brigitte and Nora 0:27)

EmmaClaire: Let's go do this fun thing we made! (turns off video and mutes)

Sarah: Yes please

Charlotte: Thanks guys – I love you (turns of video and mutes)

EmmaClaire: (unmutes) I love you too!

Sarah: (smiling) Get out

Nora: I love you mama

Brigitte: I love you too darling

After clarifying for Brigitte that Nora was not responding to Charlotte or EmmaClaire saying 'I love you', as she could not hear them, Brigitte offered this interpretation:

> *I guess that was her way of saying - I'm really enjoying doing something with you. Before we started doing it. So she was already you know, enjoying having some one-on-one time and doing something together. (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.36)*

People miles apart were preparing to meet in a virtual space and began that journey with positive affirmations of connection and value. Nora established at the outset that this was something she was doing together with someone important and safe. The performers, within a professional context, are prepared to match this energy by confirming their shared enjoyment of the work and appreciation of each other.

'One-on-one time' was also mentioned by Ella as something she valued having with Finn. She saw the direct communication made possible by the online, small group context as a benefit of the digital platform. Both children can be seen to enjoy their names and objects being referred to, and demonstrate understanding of the functionality of the technology as they hold things up to show Mira and Troggle. There was pleasure in being seen and included.

Brigitte made a conscious choice not to speak about, or encourage recollections of, the show with Nora in order to see what she would do unprompted, this choice was influenced by being part of a research project and implies that she might usually have spoken more. This lack of ongoing, named connection, impacted how she valued the experience:

> *I think it was a really fun thing to do together. But I think, because it was a one-off, I don't think it had that big of an impact… I don't think it had a sort of lasting, bonding effect or anything like that, beyond sort of I guess that day, and maybe the next one, when she would still occasionally refer to stuff. (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.14)*

Shared, verbal recollection is to Brigitte an important marker for bonding. Building memories together supports bonding for as long as they are referred to.

Valuing Connection – Ella and Finn

The interactive elements of *Up and Down* were highlighted as engaging for the children, memorable, and what made the performance closer to a theatre rather than a television experience. Brigitte:

> *I think the fact that there were actual interactive elements in the performance made it different because that's not something that usually happens when you watch something erm and that definitely I think was the most exciting thing for her so like immediately after the performance she ran with her, with her little scrunched up piece of aluminium, to my husband, was like - oh look Daddy Mira gave me this. (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.3)*

Ella reported a similar, immediate response from Finn with his dad.

> *he was trying to tell him about the rabbit definitely about the rabbit, and then I gave him the tin foil, and he was like oh like showing that to [his dad] as well (Ella on Finn 19m/o tp.4)*

This opportunity to go directly from the show to sharing verbally with another parent, and showing a physical element of the performance, was made possible by a digital offer augmented with pre-planned objects. Unlike the missed and anticipated real-life performances where Brigitte hopes to be "mesmerised and surprised and moved by it, and have them be too" (Brigitte tp.11), the 'magic' of the tinfoil arriving from the sky was delivered, on cue, by Brigitte herself:

> *I was complicit in the interactivity, so I wouldn't have gotten the wonder, and the, excitement, but it was enjoyable because I knew it would be enjoyable for her, it was enjoyable to be complicit in the surprise, so I think we enjoyed the same bits for different reasons. (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.10)*

As well as feeling on the side of the performers through this complicity, Brigitte observed that seeing the other audience members on the screen alongside the performers blurred that boundary further. This

was a reason given, as well as the lack of physical presence, for why she did not feel connected to other audience members

> *And I don't think Nora did either, and I don't think she really paid much attention to what other kids were doing, even though they were visible. (Brigitte on Nora 29m/o tp.6)*

This contrasts with Ella who felt that *Up and Down* delivered the 'shared experience' that she values.

> *It's just about that shared experience and being in, and even though you guys weren't in the room physically, it was still a shared experience, which I think actually is incredibly hard to, to create over Zoom… in a meaningful way. But you guys managed to do that, I don't know how. But it, but it happened, and I think that it's you know, really nice. I think it's that interaction (Ella tp.10)*

For Ella, value for the children is not dependent on conscious memory:

> *You know I remember my friend's husband once saying, watching our kids running around he's like - oh it's such a shame they're having a fun time but they won't, they won't remember it, it's almost pointless. I'm like - it's not pointless! Like they won't remember it, but it built these experiences somewhere don't they, build down and it's that connect, and it's the connection isn't… (gestures building, a tower shape) Shared experience, (Ella tp.18)*

Ella herself could not recollect the parts of *Up and Down* where she and Finn had significant shared moments, but she remembered the feeling:

> *There was definitely like things that we like, shared, I can't, I can't even picture what they are now but I definitely know I felt anyway (Ella on Finn 19m/o tp.5)*

The sense of connection was retained without the detail of what stimulated it, it was 'built down'. From the video observations there are a series of moments, with increasing amplification and confidence in the rhythm, where Finn sees and hears what Troggle is showing, smiles, turns to Ella for full face eye contact and they both smile and laugh. The shared enjoyment was very clear (figure 13).

Figure 9 - Screenshot showing Ella and Finn sharing a giggle as Troggle makes sounds with a pinecone. 12:0

(Ella and Finn 11:10)

Troggle: Oh maybe you've got one of these holes at home? (takes out sock)

Ella: What's that?

Troggle: (wiggles finger through hole) Blibble-ibble-ibble

Finn: (giggles, turns to look at Ella)

Ella: (looks at Finn, giggles, smiles)

Troggle: So that's my hole collection, I mean it's not like my whole collection it's just my collection of holes I've got others

Finn: got

Ella: Got? Are you wanting to see what she's got? (points to screen)

Troggle: like, oh these, (takes up noise collection) My noises, I'll show you this one

Ella: Have a look she'll soon show you

Finn: Leaning in

Troggle: (holds up bottle and blows over the top)

Finn: (listens, then turns to Ella)

Ella: (shares giggle with Finn)

Troggle: This is a good noise (scrapes cone with stick)

Finn: (listens, then turns, a little quicker, already giggling)

Ella: (looks to Finn, ready to share giggle)

The first turn, after the hole in the sock, appears to be Finn seeking confirmation that this new 'funny peculiar' thing is safe and therefore 'funny ha-ha'. As Ella delights in his enjoyment the turns become quicker, moving from questioning to consolidating, 'look mum here's another one of these things we like!' Ella's fully committed presence and responsiveness to both Finn and the show enabled this shared and rewarding "being in" (Ella tp.10) to occur.

The pinecone was something Finn later picked up, with Ella using their shared experience to build on his play:

> *there's pinecones on our walk to school and he's always kind of ignored them and then recently he's been picking up loads and I'm like, is it because it was shown in the thing. And the first time, he did it, I picked up a stick like you did, (Ella on Finn 19m/o tp.3)*

In considering the value of early arts experiences Coral used very similar language to Ella's description of play that would not be remembered but still mattered:

> *The more we experience at a young age, but also as a family, you're building, connections. In so many different directions. And to build those connections allows a bigger lexicon, a greater vocabulary. (Coral tp.31)*

The neural connections inside the child's brain and the relational connections out in the world are brought together in an image of them informing and representing each other. As Coral's pronoun use shifts within the sentence from 'we' to 'you' she shifts her position from inside to outside of an expanding image. The tower Ella 'built up' gesturally to illustrate "building down" offers a juxtaposition that also suggests expansion in multiple directions.

Personal and Family Values – Coral (and Gracie)

Opportunities – Ella and Finn

As people who loved theatre, bringing their child into this world had personal resonance for the adult participants, though they were each keen to stress that their child's enjoyment must be authentic "what brings you joy doesn't necessarily bring them joy" (Ella tp.16). Coral and Brigitte both described significant occasions of bringing their children to communal artistic events organsied or performed by family or friends. Participation for the child offers an opportunity to receive from and enter into their community, and their immediate cultural habitus (behavioural norms of a social group). Coral compared the experience of watching Gracie at a cultural encounter to wondering what she might be doing at nursery, seeing being present as offering a precious insight into how her child interacts with the world:

> *… to wonder what they were doing at nursery. And, or what, what they were, and how they were behaving, or, how they were interacting with other people, and in a way, watching a cultural experience feels a little bit like that, for me, is I get to share that, I get to share in, a person, becoming more aware of their cultural habitus, they're more aware of their, their cultural being. (Coral on Gracie 17m/o tp.13)*

The idea of 'being in' in a 'meaningful' way was echoed in discussions around early live performance experiences and what 'counts' as a first time. Similar to how Gracie had seen "a few things go by" at Imaginate Family Day (Coral tp.12), Ella described Finn as "floating around at things that his older brother and I watched online" (Ella tp.9). Of greater value than these vague encounters is a solid, intentional experience to which the child is drawn and remains engaged. The engaged presence of the parent was considered an important grounding factor by Ella, "I think the parent or the, person in the room, with the kids that's what makes it" (Ella tp.12).

For Ella, framing the experience as a 'first' for her and Finn gave it a particular significance. She reflected on moments where Finn was particularly engaged:

> *watching Finn at certain points during [Up and Down] it was just like, and just seeing him being like (wow) was just like, was just, lovely. Like yeah, just really special, and it's, it's those moments that you remember. Em. Yeah. It's really important, I think. For us anyway. (Ella on Finn 19m/o tp.38)*

Creating shared memories with other parents was something Ella cited as an important aspect of communal arts experiences for under-fives.

When Coral touched upon the potential benefit of TEY to language development, she added that this is of particular interest to her now due to Gracie's current burgeoning lexicon and her excitement at 'watching her brain grow' was clear. Ella and Brigitte described the benefits of TEY in terms of how it supports the development of qualities they value, personal values they emphasised at various points during the interviews. For Brigitte this was emotional honesty, a sense of wonder and the nurturing of creativity. Ella described the social importance and the need to nurture empathy:

> *I think it's like for anyone, I think it helps us look outside ourselves. I think it just shows you. Other people and different expressions of ways of doing things and seeing the world you know, and, and I think, And it's awe, and it's wonder, and it's joy… that sense of wow. It's really important for all of us isn't it. (Ella tp.17)*

In stressing that it's for 'all of us' she is including babies and toddlers in the collective human group, affording them the same respect as any other individual with a right to culture. TEY is offering a space for the youngest children to step into their culture, held within the supportive home culture of their most trusted relationship.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Here I present my interpretations of the findings as they relate to the research questions, drawing on my professional experience and pertinent literature. In 6.1 I us the ideal of roles to present different aspects of the experience of the parent at TEY. These parental roles and their associated behaviours include the varied expectations that parents feel placed upon them in the TEY setting. 6.2 sets out how TEY creates a supportive environment for bonding through attuned interaction and both cognitive and embodied empathy. In 6.3 I reflect on the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis in this study concluding that it was a useful method with further potential for working with in-person theatre audiences. The impact and implications of conducting this study online are discussed in 6.4, where the greatest benefits were found when the possibilities of the medium were creatively explored.

There is no separate section for limitations of the study as they are reflected upon throughout, most expansively in the methodological sections. Recommendations are offered in each section and summarised in the conclusion: Chapter 7. Details on how this study will feed into my PhD are summarised in 7.5.

6.1 How do parents, bringing their child to TEY, make sense of the experience in the context of their relationship?

The findings show that when encountering TEY parents experience uncertainty around the expectations placed upon them. They are responsible for their child but there is ambiguity around what this responsibility stretches to in terms of their child's behaviour or qualities of their child's experience. In representing the descriptions of these varied expectations and responses I found the concept of roles useful. Each role seeks to meet a particular need that the parents have in relation to their child. The list in this discussion is by no means exhaustive but highlights what was most prominent in the findings. This categorisation supported analysis of how parents made meaning not only through what they expect of TEY but what it expects of them. In addition to expectations, describing the roles of Educator and Biggest Fan also allowed me to present some of the intentions and feelings that parents bring to their understanding of their TEY experience. As with acting parts in a play, differences in motivation drive these roles. They are presented here with a brief description before each one is explored in turn (Fig 10).

Figure 10 - The roles parents play at TEY

Provider

In the theme *Missing Live Performance* the role of the parent as Provider was challenged as they were unable to meet their perceived duty in bringing their child to important cultural experiences. Borrowing Marinopoulos' cultural nutrition metaphor (Marinopoulos, 2019) this lack is finding empty shelves at the supermarket, at least in the fruit and veg aisle. The child will not starve, but there is not the desired access to the healthy food needed for long term growth and strength. This is a painful experience for the parent, expressed in the findings in strong terms, "devastated" (Ella, mother of Finn, tp.2) and "grief" (Coral, mother of Gracie, tp.5). The absolute lack of opportunities to engage in TEY imposed by lockdown restrictions disempowered parents. Though this removal of agency perhaps lessened parental guilt over leisure time choices (Goodenough et al., 2015), there was an acute awareness of a time-sensitive experience that was forever lost. The high value placed on live performing arts, found also in *Human Connection,* fits with the experiential and community building qualities highlighted in the AHRC cultural valuing project (Kaszynska & Crossick, 2016). That this was found more strongly in an awareness of absence rather than observed within the study demonstrates a limitation of the digital performance as a stimulus event.

The transformative shared aesthetic experience, where both adult and child are moved together (Branner & Poblete, 2019), was recognised, but not captured. Missed and much anticipated, real live theatre has qualities that cannot be replicated through a screen. Supported by literature addressing the power of the communal and embodied (Dissanayake, 2009a) this study found live performance offers a function in the life of a very young child that parents have a strong will to provide. Digital performance

may have a part in mitigating the pain of this loss, especially where there is space for direct connection between on-screen performers and audience, and the positive engagement of the live in-person adult.

Law-enforcer

The role of parent as Law-enforcer, with a specialism in restraint, is a common concern in TEY as seen in the literature (Schneider, 2009). Parents experience anxiety when anticipating having to restrain their child from the 'wrong' kind of engagement and discomfort at a child not engaging appropriately. Meeting the need for community inclusion is put at risk through not adequately understanding or enforcing the social rules. The anticipated stress around how a child will behave and what will be tolerated was considered a large barrier to parents attending TEY, included alongside practical barriers such as their unpredictable physical needs. In *Up and Down* audience families were separate and muted, concerns around 'policing' their child were lessened but not removed. As observed in the study, the role of Law-enforcer isn't a 'fun' job, when a parent expects their child will not engage they are anticipating an unpleasant experience.

Reviews in the press of TEY often focus on child behaviour during performances and how it is managed (e.g. Davies, 2016), a memorable though no longer available review of an Ipdip Theatre performance told the story of the writer's embarrassment at their own child being the dreaded "that kid". This relatable parental fear is heightened by your child, and by extension your parenting, being 'on show'- risking judgement by and comparison with others, as articulated in the findings. Where artists and agencies are seeking to support parenting practice through involvement with TEY, they should be mindful of how a public theatre context could increase this anxiety. This is not to say it should be avoided, where "that kid" is accommodated and the parent made to feel welcome the risk of attendance is rewarded. The reviewer who had this experience praised the performers and the production for how they handled a very active child. There is a strong message of inclusion available when people experience being welcomed along with their differences rather than needing to change in order to fit. Experienced TEY parents take the risk as the payoff is so great, the real conundrum is how to provide such experiential understanding for people who don't (yet) know that it is "worth that worry" (Ella tp.38).

Law-maker

The extent to which a parent must also be Law-maker depends on how expectations of behaviour are communicated, an essential component of TEY necessitated by the variety of ways performers, space and audience can interact (van de Water, 2012). Even when artists give clear 'rules' for engagement, the existing rules of society may still come out stronger. Though toddlers may need to be physically restrained else they "come forward and bother the performers" (Brigitte, on Scottish Opera performance for babies tp12), their adults must be given explicit permission to allow it, the default rules being "sitting nice" (Brigitte tp12). Though some producers present acquiring these skills as an objective in the development of 'theatre literacy' (Goldfinger, 2011) or school readiness, an awareness of these benefits was not present in this study.

In my professional practice I have explored the potential of different spaces and marking of borders, in *Calvinball* (Allan, 2019) the audience sat in a large outdoor circle with free movement permitted. During one performance I saw a toddler straining at the end of a safety rein, leaning in towards the action. When I quietly said to the adult holding the other end that it was ok for the child to come into the space she immediately let go and the child fell face forward onto the grass. Here there was physical tension in a nylon strap, the psychological tension and relief parents feel when permission is given to 'let go' can be similar. As with the work of Hovik (Hovik & Perez, 2020) and provocations from Fletcher-Watson (Fletcher-Watson, 2015), TEY can offer a space for the exploration of hold and release by inviting parents to play with their expectations of boundaries. Troubling hierarchies through altering the standard of who is allowed to draw attention permits new perspectives, which can enhance relationships as discussed in 6.2, artistic context allows this trouble to be playful and safe.

Educator

The freedom to speak to each other throughout the performance of *Up and Down* allowed parents to be the Law-makers, as well as Law-enforcers, of permissible noise. This opened up the space for observation and reflection on a more intersubjective parental role, that of Educator, expressing a need to support the child's development and learning in the best possible way. The findings revealed a shared adherence to principles of child-led learning, aligned with the pedagogical approach for Early Years in Scotland (Crichton et al., 2020), that manifested in a desire to allow an *Unfiltered Response.* The view of the child as 'being', rather than 'becoming' was dominant (see 2.4), with any discussion on the future benefits of TEY rooted in the experiential and emotional. Parent as Educator has foremost an enabling function, potentially enhancing, though there was most emphasis on trying not to get between the child and the experience. The child was seen as an autonomous audience member and the desire to let the child meet the work on their own terms was also informed by a respect for the professionals making the offer. The self-censure expressed at the appropriate giving of space (explored further in 6.2) may in part have been a product of the unusual nature of digital theatre. The functionality was closer to the shared experience of watching television, or reading a book, in the space available for scaffolding of learning (Rogoff, 2003). The questions and connections made by parents during the performance were supportive for child engagement, 'high level scaffolding' as seen with research with television and books (Barr et al., 2008). Though critical of the extent of their own actions, the level of involvement was ideal for 'the thing' that was *Up and Down;* how parents are able to scaffold the child's learning during a real-life TEY show, where conversation is restricted, would be interesting to observe. Within the theme of *Human Connection* bringing the child to TEY was seen as an action of introduction to culture, especially the culture of their own family. This fits with theories of the communal ritual purpose of theatre (Dissanayake, 2009b) as parents see the sharing of their values as needing an experiential dimension. The modelling and encouragement of socially engaged emotions and actions are activities the parent as Educators can enact within the TEY event, intent participation learning (Nutbrown, 2008) in how we respond to art.

Biggest Fan

One of the most joyous roles a parent plays is that of the Biggest Fan, cheering on the successes, mishaps and changes of their child. Delighting in the happiness of your child is a powerful form of affective resonance (Mühlhoff, 2015), and can be triggered by as many things as make your child happy. The offer TEY makes is to give space for parents to watch their children engage in new ways, exhibiting previously unseen capacities. The notion of 'surprise that it works' common in TEY literature and press (Schneider, 2009), translates for the parent into 'surprise they engaged', revealing expectations of their child being pleasantly exceeded. These findings support this surprise being a common experience, even repeated for the same parent as different offers and different children present new challenges.

Roles and expectations

The burden lies with artists and promoters to manage the expectations of their audience, the variety of presentation is such that even for those not new to TEY the roles parents are expected to play must be negotiated afresh with each production. This fits with the literature that describes a genre still establishing itself (Fletcher-Watson, 2016) and my own experience as a producer of work. On one occasion I was checking tickets for a TEY performance and turned from a family who had bought an adult but no child ticket, to another with a child but no adult ticket. Though all needed tickets (as was advertised) the neatness of the similar yet oppositive errors highlights the ambiguity around how TEY is perceived. Is it more like a theatre show with a babes-in-arms policy, or a baby and toddler activity? Greater awareness of the form will clarify an understanding of TEY as existing on its own terms, though the experimental and open aesthetic (Pinkert, 2009) constantly encourages the blurring of boundaries and bending of rules even as a common dramaturgy, the particular modes of theatrical communication being used, may seem to emerge. Presenting work online makes definition harder still, as seen when Ella during the interview refers to *Up and Down* as "the thing", (Ella, mother of Finn tp.3).

With these and all the other roles parents play perhaps we can ask are they ever free to just be themselves? A role that could be entitled 'Fellow Audience Member' did not emerge from this study, which can be attributed to the way *Up and Down* is presented. No at-home digital format can offer the kind of immersive experience that would allow parents to be carried aesthetically and imaginatively along with their child (Branner & Poblete, 2019). The interactive elements of *Up and Down* which sought to bring a little of this to the child placed the parent onside with the artists, knowingly delivering the magic rather than being potentially caught up. The extent to which parents are able to 'be themselves' in their engagement with live performance, whilst also caring for a child, would be good to ask. Would this imply a disconnection from the child, or is there 'magic' in being knowingly captivated and moved together?

6.2 In what way does the intersubjectivity within Theatre for Early Years spectatorship support parental attachment and bonding?

The triangular audience (Desfosses, 2009) of performer-child-carer is one of the defining features of TEY. A major limitation in researching a digital presentation was the altered relationship in this medium between the performer and the audience as the subtle relationship described in the literature between performer and very young child (Argent & Lewis, 2009) was not available to observe. Though the advantage of direct personal connection of video chat was recognised, the embodied, attuned responsiveness of an in-person presence was missed. *Missing Live Performance* connected this lack to a lessening of impact - the digital offer set against memories and anticipations of 'real' experiences. The children did not have live experiences for comparison, their experience of *Up and Down* was compared by parents to other screen-based activity, comparison expanded further in 6.4. Interactive elements, both through the screen and between parent and child in the room, were highlighted as the features which brought it closer to theatre than television. The findings supported the 'specialness' of a TEY event being of value (Kaszynska & Crossick, 2016), and though the digital offer did not inspire transformative awe (Chen & Mongrain, 2020), the one-on-one time spent doing something special together was valued by both adult and child participants. This particular benefit may not be something easy to replicate or promote. Intentionally offering a dyad only experience presents an ethical challenge with its exclusivity, in this study it was a methodological choice to support clarity in observation and homogeneity in the small sample (see 3.4). How families larger than two persons engage with TEY has been interesting to observe in my professional practice and a potential route for further studies.

The findings offered detail in how parent and child moderated each other's engagement with the performance, Trevarthen's secondary subjectivity (Trevarthen, 2009). The recorded audio 'behind the mute button' gave access to parent-child interaction that both supported and challenged how parents perceived their part in the directing of shared focus. The self-reflection in *Unfiltered Response* showed parents trying to hold back from what they judged to be too much direction, informed by their belief in child-led pedagogies. Findings from the observations however demonstrated the importance of the parent in scaffolding the experience for their child, keeping them in step with the story and enabling optimum engagement. What begins as majority parent-led focus direction was handed over, or passed back and forth, with the child. As agency in the child was valued, the moments of child-directed focus were particularly enjoyable for the parent. Parents wished only to lead when needed, and they judged need through being well tuned to the shifting curiosities of their child (Stern, 2010). This active engagement and responsiveness to one another supports literature which puts forward TEY as an enriching activity for home learning (Creative Scotland, 2021). Further research could compare the findings to those from a live, larger audience situation; where the freedom for audible conversation would be reduced, the points of focus physically dispersed, and post-show free play potentially available.

Parents in this study described both watching their child and 'seeing through their eyes'. The imaginative act of taking the child's perspective, present throughout the findings, demonstrates active cognitive empathy (Breyer, 2020). The out-of-the-ordinary aspect of TEY spurs this as the parent wonders how their child is receiving the novel experience. The children do not perform for their parents, but in being the watcher that is watched they are able to delight and impress them with their

responsiveness and focus. A child experiences 'pleasure in mastery' (Trevarthen & Delafield-Butt, 2014) when practicing a new skill, a pleasure found in this study that was also felt by the parent watching. When pleasantly surprised by the capacity of their child, there is an affirmation for the parent of their own efficacy. As well experiencing vicariously 'chuffedness', (Trevarthen et al., 2018) a particularly buoyant sense of being pleased with oneself, there is delight in the growing agency and creative individuality of the child allows the parent to feel satisfaction in their own parenting.

Felt empathy - the embodied sharing of affect (Gallagher, 2012) was also present in the findings. Moments of shared joy were reported and observed with both parent and child complicit in encouraging each other's delight. The extent and quality of the child's engagement with the performance impacted the parent's enjoyment. The findings present TEY as supporting empathetic and responsive connection between adult and child during a stimulating and novel event that is enjoyable for both. The mechanism for this support was a virtuous circle, experienced in this study by parents who already enjoyed considerate and affectionate relationships with their children and a love of theatre. The findings do suggest that a way into this circle is through the willing engagement of the parent in the experience, which could be useful to consider when seeking to engage parents who come from different starting points.

Shared wonder (Branner & Poblete, 2019) was less available in *Up and Down* due to the non-immersive nature of screen presentation and the way tactile interaction was delivered. Pre-planned objects were introduced on cue by the parents, making them complicit in the 'magic' rather than sharing it naively with their children. Thus the flattened hierarchy of common creaturehood that occurs in sharing an artistic event (Trevarthen & Fresquez, 2015) was ambiguously experienced in *Up and Down.* There was however a powerful meeting of intentions, illustrated by the coincidental cascade of 'I love you's before the performance began. Child, parent and performers all entered the event having just heard their value affirmed and already willing to give of themselves with affectionate energy. Whether or not the words are spoken, giving time and attention are loving acts, beneficial to the parent-child bond (Gerhardt, 2004), which TEY provides a platform for.

The communal theatre experience has power as a liminal space where participants are free to explore their shared understandings and connectedness in ways that do not immediately demand definition (Cross & Morley, 2010). A temporal space where both parent and child are not rushed to respond permits intersubjectivity that is truly responsive, where agency can be nurtured (Delafield-Butt & Trevarthen, 2020). Parents in this study looked for and delighted in their children being free to meet art as unique individuals and recognised their part in supporting this. There was something slightly paradoxical in the way letting go was felt to bring increased closeness, considered through the lens of attachment theory (Mooney, 2010) this venturing out is made possible from having established a secure base. Parents were in their turn supported by the artistic offer; it was important that their needs were seen and responded to. Putting parents at ease, a part of which is communication of expectations, are important components to the TEY experience which occur with and around the artistic content. As with other art forms TEY makes an aesthetic offer, to be met and considered by the individuals who encounter it. TEY also makes an environmental offer, creating the conditions within which very young children and their most trusted adults can learn a little more about themselves, their relationship and each other. The principle of invitation not instruction upholds the honesty, and therefore security of this environment. Gracie sleeping through *Up and Down* whilst Coral felt seen and included was an unplanned example of this principle in action.

Both *Missing Live Performance* and *Human Connection* show the high value placed on 'firsts' in the journey shared by parent and child. The 'first ever' live performance experience holds importance for the new parent. A different and more meaningful, 'first', was the event where the child was also able to share reflectively in the experience, either during or at a time afterwards. The findings show parents actively seek to bring their children into cultural experiences to strengthen connections. Their own relationship journey is one part of this, with emphasis also on connections to family, culture, and the concept of wide and varied humanity. Marinopoulos' Strategy for Cultural Health (Marinopoulos, 2019) recommends a booklet, similar to those given to track health developments, where families record the cultural awakening of the child. The findings in this study encourage this idea as a way for parents to highlight the meaningful points of their shared journey.

Grounded in theories of intersubjectivity, the findings evidence TEY supporting attachment through providing an exciting, but not frightening, environment where parents feel empowered to scaffold the child's experience just enough for them to be able to engage on their own terms. Bonding is supported through parents engaging in cognitive and embodied empathy, seeing from and feeling with the child. This is given added value by the parent when they place the experience within the shared journey of cultural exploration.

6.3 To what extent is Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis an effective tool in seeking to understand the TEY audience experience?

The three main reasons for choosing IPA: it being an ideographic, interpretive, and accessible method (Reid et al., 2005) were all upheld in the process of the study. The fit was more questionable when it came to the materials used in data collection and questions around intersubjectivity. In this section I begin by considering issues presented by the nature of the phenomenon under study, followed by a discussion on the analysis methods used and the results that were therefore possible. I then reflect on my journey as a researcher through the process of this project and present my recommendations for next steps.

The Phenomenon

Phenomenology aims to share the meaning of experience, not just the extraordinary but regular human life as lived (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). There is much emphasis in IPA on the specificity of subject matter, ideographic being taken to mean both particular people and situations (Larkin et al., 2006). The people in this study were parents, and to a lesser extent their children, with the situation being TEY. What emerged from this study were two phenomena: the experience of attending live in-person TEY, and that of attending *Up and Down.* Rather than this spread weakening the depth of inquiry into a singular phenomenon, it brought fresh and specific insights. Adult participants, in comparing the two, were able to expand upon their similarities and differences with lockdown heightening understanding and appreciation of the missed and anticipated real life theatre. The IPA method was agile enough to capture the themes across this split.

The key participants in this study were the parents though observing the dyads together offered the opportunity for the experience of the children to also be considered. With IPA's emphasis on language as data the observations, and therefore the children, were not placed centrally. This did not damage the main aim of understanding the parental experience of TEY and the observations were still very valuable. The perspective of the child is an area that could be expanded upon much further, though based on the process of this study I believe this would be a lot more fruitful with in-person meetings and observations. This is detailed further in 6.4. Taking a more embodied, present moment, approach could yield greater understanding of how the phenomenon is experienced by both child and adult. When stripping away the reliance on comparison to past experience a layer of abstraction is removed.

Literature reviews in IPA can be relatively short due to questions being inductive and not driven by theory (Shinebourne, 2011). My interest in intersubjectivity as a process in bonding called for a grounding in literature and brought a theory lens to the investigation, potentially pulling it away from the phenomenological. This was addressed by separating the two questions in the discussion: 6.1 delivering phenomenological insight into the parents' lived experience, and 6.2 considering the implications for the parent-child relationship.

How the parents made sense of their own experience in the context of their relationship was able to be voiced (Larkin et al., 2006), though there remains no fixed, shared, understanding of what TEY or 'the thing' that was *Up and Down* is. This is interesting from a phenomenological perspective as a philosophy concerned with discovering the 'essence' of a thing struggles if the thing in question is ill-defined (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). If anything, this uncertainty supported a very free curiosity, with the method then inviting my interpretations on the generous and honest thoughts of the participants.

The analysis

The small sample size helped avoid two potential difficulties: unmanageable data, and the tension between voicing the individual experience and presenting master themes. Some researchers have found the quantity of data at the emergent theme stage of analysis to be potentially overwhelming (Wagstaff et al., 2014). With the addition of observations on top of hour-long interviews this could easily have been the case with a larger number of participants and should be considered for future projects, especially where multiple materials are incorporated. Common to much IPA no analysis software, such as NVivo, was used in this study (Smith, 2009). Hand noting suited the case-by-case intimacy with the data, though with a larger sample software could potentially be useful in seeking connections across cases at the master theme stage. The ideographic-theme tension, sometimes found as a problem with IPA (Wagstaff et al., 2014), increases with each additional personal narrative that must be seen yet incorporated. Homogeneity of sample can mitigate this difficulty as it supports shared specificity. In this study all adult participants had previous experience of TEY and this strongly and positively informed the findings. This was not sought at recruitment and, as seen in the findings, was largely due to the self-selecting nature of the offer – people who have experience of TEY are more likely to attend TEY. These considerations should be taken into recruitment for future research as they had such a strong impact on the findings.

Though interpretive phenomenology more broadly may include lots of materials (Given, 2008), IPA tends to draw on the semi-structured interview (Smith, 2009). Including the observations from the video

recordings was a challenge to the 'fit' of the research method. Observation is crucial to much study of childhood with a variety of processes and analyses possible (Bentzen, 2009), particularly as a novice researcher it was important that I made a clear choice for how mine would be used. By situating the observations as complementary (Wagstaff et al., 2014) to the interviews this placed limitations on their power as stand-alone data. They served the interviews well and contributed significantly to the findings and discussion, both in how they aligned with what was said and where they differed, for example Ella remembering the feeling of sharing moments with Finn without the accompanying descriptive details. A more expansive research project could make more deliberate space for the voice of the child, with consideration given to what the equivalent of an in-depth interview would be for an infant. Details of the wider world and life of the parents, which crucially inform the analysis (Reid et al., 2005), are not available through observation alone. Does the researcher need to "wait for language" (Danaher & Briod, 2005, p. 221) or are there alternative, interactive methods that could be explored? (Arnott, 2017)

Having a clear step-by-step plan was very supportive in my progression through the analysis, particularly as I was incorporating additional materials and part-participants (Smith, 2009). IPA analysis, specifically the hermeneutic circling, has been described as like a "dance" (Amos, 2016, p. 309). Dance is often used, along with jazz, as a metaphor for shared, creative, relational activity. Compared to the development of shared meaning that is possible from inside a conversation, circling round the transcriptions and notes is more like dancing with a chair, albeit a very interesting one. Once gathered, the data is a fixed thing while the researcher remains alive, responsive and malleable. Research that sought the voice of the child would also potentially benefit from a methodology that was more flexible and reflective throughout, though this would present procedural challenges.

The interpretation

One of the most attractive aspects of IPA was the space allowed for the researcher in the research. As detailed in the introductory section on Researcher Positioning (see 1.3) I bring a large amount of professional and personal experience to this subject. Bracketing existing biases and knowledge, particularly at the noting phase of analysis, was important to help me understand the unique perspective of the participants. Again, the step-by-step nature of the IPA recipe supported this. Though we all shared a love of and familiarity with theatre, focusing on the words (and to some extent observed actions) of the participants allowed me to see more fully the anomalousness of my experience. Though I have been a parent at TEY, (including having been the parent of a child who hated it), I have as frequently been a solitary attendee, observing the audience as much as the show. The insights from this research process offered what I could not bring from my own experience alone.

My roles of creator and performer in *Up and Down* were bracketed to prioritise participant experience. The digital medium supported being able to view my performance from an outside perspective, as during analysis I saw the same framed 2D presentation of the character Troggle as participants and other members of Ipdip Theatre. Being involved in the creation gave me insight into the aims of the piece and it was important that what I wanted as an artist, particularly in audience response, didn't bias what I gathered as a researcher (see methodology 3.1). Performers, and the relationship between performer and participant, were not features of this study therefore my perspective as an artist remained in the periphery. If considering the artist-audience relationship in future research where I was

not involved in the stimulus event, my professional experience could still be brought into the interpretative analysis, using the IPA method. It was not within the scope of this study to consider how IPA could be applied in 'practice as research' methodologies.

The emphasis on interpretation in the literature (Wagstaff et al., 2014) at times caused me to question the value of phenomenological research in comparison to for example, poetry, which also seeks to touch on the universal through the specific and invites the reader to bring themselves to the writing. The 'qualitative sensibilities' (Braun & Clarke, 2020) required for research have a lot in common with those useful in pursuing artistic endeavour (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) Could this thesis have been a play? The answer to this for me lies in the role of the researcher. In giving voice to the experiences of others, in a way that invites the reader to consider their own interpretation, the researcher is a conduit for understanding. Not shining a torch onto darkened corners but handing out lanterns to those sitting there. Phenomenological hermeneutics "lies between art and science" (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 152), truth and connection are the key aims and the main test of success is that it makes sense.

Next steps

IPA was a fruitful method and it would be sensible to build on this experience by using it for PhD research. Attention should be paid closely to sample size and recruitment of participants, particularly if additional materials and non-verbal methods are considered. Attempting to give voice to the experience of the infant at the TEY event may involve greater departure from the IPA, though not phenomenology. Considering hermeneutic activity as 'reading into' in a broader sense (Kirova & Emme, 2006) could support insight, as well as engaging reflexively with the bodily responses of both researcher and subject (Finlay, 2006).

Exploring the phenomenology of the child at TEY offers exciting potential to enter imaginatively into the lifeworld of another with a radically different consciousness (Danaher & Briod, 2005). The aesthetic immersion of TEY is a rich stimulus from which to draw on the embodied and experiential to push the researcher, and reader, to consider pre-reflective responses to stimuli (Boden & Eatough, 2014). Such research would be powerful beyond the arts context in furthering the "re-humanising" (Danaher & Briod, 2005, p. 223) of our relationship with children and childhood. For study that kept a focus on the adult perspective IPA would be useful to investigate the experience of parents at live events, those new to theatre, or nursery practitioners.

6.4 What was gained and what was lost in the adoption of the digital communication tools that enabled the research study to go ahead despite lockdown restrictions?

There is limited research into how toddlers use digital communication (Plowman & McPake, 2013) and none at all into TEY on a video conference medium. This study therefore has a timely role to play in

describing the process of how Zoom software was utilised, and the impact felt by participants and researcher. In this section I begin by assessing the digital research methods used, going on to discuss in more detail the online theatre stimulus event, *Up and Down.* The relationship between families with young children and screens as presented in the findings is then considered with reference to current literature, including specific consideration of the impact of lockdowns.

Methods

The choice to conduct interviews over Zoom was made through necessity; methodology literature suggested that meeting participants in this way could limit potential rapport and intimacy (Ritchie, 2014). I would agree that some of the embodied and subtle connections that are striven for in the empathy required of phenomenology (Amos, 2016) were not possible, the 2D meeting being a flatter reality in a literal and felt way. Having a video recording was beneficial however, for example in noting the timing of gestures and expression, something that could still be included in in-person interviews. Screen recording of a Zoom conversation gives participants control over what is seen and recorded, visible to them as it is occurring. A potential ethical question around the intrusiveness of at-home recording is answered by this power being held by the participant. Although adults have the greater control and power with the use of the technology, for example uploading their own audio, even a very young child, if mobile, is able to leave the screen with greater ease than they could a physical room. This capacity is positive for participant agency and ongoing assent. The flexibility for scheduling interviews is another advantage, particularly useful when working with people with multiple responsibilities like the parents of young children. Video chat has become a part of home and work life like never before, bringing increased confidence and familiarity with the medium. Along with the green, time and cost benefits of both interviewer and interviewee being able to stay at home, this will likely make it a viable choice as a research method beyond its use as a practical necessity.

Recording the performance brought similar limitations and benefits as interviewing over Zoom, though with the additional interest of seeking to observe relational actions and shared moments. Connecting with the children through the screen was more impacted as the lost modes of embodied connection are proportionally more important to understanding less verbal people (Danaher & Briod, 2005). As discussed in 6.3 above this further emphasised the focus of this study being the parental experience, which included parental interpretation of their child's words and actions. Joint visual attention is harder to achieve and observe during an online interaction. As seen in research on family connection through Skype, the attending parent supported the child's interactions (McClure & Barr, 2017). In this study children demonstrated their understanding of the medium through holding up objects to be seen. In this sense there was clearly successful sharing of attention across those engaged in the interaction, though exactly where anyone was looking, when they were looking at the screen, could not be gauged. Whether child and/or parent were looking at themselves, each other, fellow audience members or the performers would be particularly useful for artists of digital work to know, eye-tracking software could be employed for this purpose.

The audio recordings, designed to give an insight 'behind the mute button', were an excellent material to have. The level of conversation during the performance became an interesting point of discussion in the findings and having the audio recordings enabled a rounded view of the experience from the dyad's perspective. Considering further research off-line it would be interesting to also try and capture audible

interaction before, during, and after a performance. The experience of TEY, especially for the young child, contains a lot more than what is staged with the journey into and out of the space often given a lot of thought by artists and producers. Ethical considerations would need to be addressed, but the technology is available to follow the complete journey together through the TEY experience.

Up and Down

The initial impetus for creating the work in May 2020 was to address the severed connection between grandparents and grandchildren during lockdown. This made the work unusual in that it was created specifically for the Zoom platform, other works have been adapted or filmed and screened (Small Size, 2020). As an artist I sought to bring my interactive, multi-sensory approach to a different medium, honing in on the pre-planned involvement of objects as being an important connective factor. This offer of a shared object, as seen in literature on video chat use by families (Busch, 2018; McClure & Barr, 2017), supported joint attention and potentially helped with the difficulty very young children can encounter transferring the 2D to the 3D world (Barr et al., 2008). The findings supported an understanding of the high value of the present adult (McClure & Barr, 2017) though there was the discussed uncertainty about the appropriate level of parental interaction.

Up and Down was not television but interactive, and given the known sensitivity of even very young babies to the difference (Murray & Trevarthen, 1986) it is worth asking when and how the young audience members discerned this. The performers part-simulated eye contact by looking directly to camera, with the stage manager supporting specific interactions through the 'spotlighting' function. When a performer or audience dyad were spotlighted, singly or in pairs, their image takes a larger and central place on the screen. The young children interacted with the performers in ways appropriate to the medium; showing objects, sharing food, making verbal replies and expressing pleasure at their names being mentioned. When they were not being directly interacted with, when the contingent conversation was not offered, did they still perceive the performers (and other audience members) as live and present? Or did we drop in and out of being 'real' and television? Interactive video has been demonstrated to enable vocabulary learning in toddlers where pre-recorded video cannot (Roseberry et al., 2014), and is judged to be a beneficial form of screen time when connecting with distant family (McClure et al., 2015). The most successful aspects of *Up and Down* came from when it creatively exploited the possibilities of the medium.

Something else Zoom offers is being able to see oneself throughout a conversation, or theatre show. When attending TEY performance *Hup* (Darwin-Edwards & Sinar*,* 2015) with a friend and her baby, I sat opposite them and it occurred to me that I had a better view of the baby's entranced responses than that of her mother. When Finn initiated eye contact, for confirmation of shared attention, he turned round to Ella sat behind him, as he may well have done in a live situation. When Ella wanted to quietly watch Finn's reactions she could look at the box with their faces in on the screen. This presents parents with an additional opportunity to share imaginatively in their child's experience and would be hard to replicate in an in-person situation.

Within the findings it was stated that *Up and Down* both was and was not a 'shared experience'. It was likened favourably to a book, to 'real' theatre, and compared favourably against filmed versions of performances. As an attempt at online TEY it was successful enough to entertain parents and children

and provide rich data for this study; whether digital TEY has a place beyond the pandemic will be interesting to discover. Online performances offer connection between the geographically separated, which was already an issue for many families before lockdown. Perhaps the post-show free play session which often accompanies TEY could be replicated through an accompanying app (Fletcher-Watson, 2014), offering child-oriented access to a space imagined in the digital realm.

Toddlers, Screens and Lockdown

Public conversations around children and screen can sometimes feel stuck in an overly general idea of digital technology, like a baby who says 'dog' for all four-legged animals. The truth is some are useful, some bring joy, some are terrifying - discerning the differences is a productive task parents and practitioners can take on (Plowman & McPake, 2013). Video chat is an established 'friendly animal' in the tech zoo (McClure et al., 2015; O'Connor & Fotakopoulou, 2016) as upheld by this study. In the context of a conversation around TEY and the arts, parents strongly expressed their need for community through attendance and participation, a need which included bringing their child into such experiences.

The interest in child autonomy in the findings could be explored further using digital technologies to support greater involvement of children in research (Arnott et al., 2016). Another approach could be to understand better how parents view their children's individuality, for example is O'Conner's description of "self-actualisation through touch-screen use" (O'Connor & Fotakopoulou, 2016, p. 242) relatable to parents? Or is being free to observe and respond to a theatre performance valued differently to a freedom mediated through an iPad?

Human Connection highlighted the social value of digital communication, particularly as it supported extended family relationships through lockdown. An increased confidence with the possibilities of technology was reported, reflecting research into the positive outcomes of lockdown which saw some people making new connections and discoveries, mostly in the digital realm (Williams et al., 2021). This emphasis on connection could be in itself a response to lockdown, with that which is most missed the foremost thought. Other aspects of the TEY experience, for example aesthetic immersion or discovery of the new would perhaps be more visible in 'normal' circumstances. The new normal that we are currently working towards invites us to reimagine as well as pick up where we left off. Digital theatre, including digital TEY, may find a place for itself as a form of its own, exploiting affordances of the medium rather than straining to replicate either television or live theatre. One such affordance, particularly valuable for young audiences, is contingent interaction in video chat that includes the active engagement of all participants.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

To conclude I will return to my three research aims: exploration of the parent-child TEY experience, and reflections on IPA and the digital context. This study was not a true pilot as the methodology will be subject to much revision ahead of PhD research, with a move from the digital to in-person context. Many useful insights will be taken forward however, including directions likely to yield rich data and the potential applicability of results for stakeholders. These are summarised in 7.5 PhD.

7.1 Aim: To investigate the parent and child audience experience of Theatre for Early Years.

Exploration took the form of listening to parents' descriptions, observing interactions, and drawing on my own experiences to inform interpretations. The master themes of *Missing Live Performance, Unfiltered Response* and *Human Connection* emerged as ways to present the meaning participants made from attending TEY events both live and digital. When live performance becomes accessible once again it will no longer be missed but perhaps valued differently than pre-pandemic, particularly in the way it meets needs for human connection and cultural engagement. Memories shared from past attendance at TEY were valuable to the study and could be purposively sought to enrich further understanding of how parents perceive the experience over time. Observations made of live audiences will go further, and differently, into discussing the *Unfiltered Response* and what this means for the adult-child relationship.

Greater insight into the child's perspective could be made and would enhance the discussions in this study that stayed mainly with the parent. As would the perspective of early years practitioners accompanying children to TEY. A large component of research into live in-person performance however would be investigating the relationship between performers and audience, thereby offering a deeper insight into the unique triangular audience dynamic. This could include bringing the thoughts of the artists into discussion around the roles parents play and expectations within the performance space.

Theatre makers can take from this study the importance of clarity in communicating the specific social expectations within a TEY event. Even more relevant as we return to live events in an environment where the rules and norms of public interaction both implicit and explicit are in a state of flux. There are insights for pedagogy as the supportive, open, and stimulating environment of TEY offers a place for parents to support their children's learning within a responsive empowering relationship. Through invitation and not instruction it scaffolds the scaffolders. Within our culture, and the sub-cultures that are the families within it, theatre has an important role to play in connecting individuals directly with each other and to wider narratives and values. Theatre for Early Years makes the offer of including our very youngest community members and those bound to their care. As we emerge from a pandemic that tested our resilience for isolation, we need such lived experiences of shared humanity.

7.2 Aim: To offer reflection on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as a tool for accessing and sharing a full account of the Theatre for Early Years audience experience.

IPA was an effective tool in communicating the meaning parents found in their experience of TEY. The step-by-step approach to analysis supported my learning as a novice researcher with the interpretive guidance giving permission for including my existing knowledge of TEY. Further investigations into this subject could expand the potential of incorporating non-linguistic data, with a creative opportunity presented for the inclusion of the phenomenology of the child. A larger project would allow more space for reflection on the philosophical underpinnings on the method and how these impact interpretation and presentation.

7.3 Aim: To reflect upon the strengths and limitations of researching audience experience in digital performance.

Initially a method of necessity rather than choice with known limitations, some benefits were also discovered in adopting the digital tools used in this study. Audio recordings of participants were a valuable addition to the data, with the key benefits of Zoom communication being its flexibility and the control retained by the adult participants over what was recorded.

The embodied connection and responses available with in-person meeting were missed. This restricted the power of the interviews and observations to provide phenomenological insight, particularly with the children. The online performance also experienced this limitation to its effectiveness in communication and connection, with the communal value of the in-person group experience of live theatre also reduced. This being said, an artistic encounter that supported human connection was achieved, with the most successful aspects of *Up and Down* being when the unique affordances of the Zoom medium were exploited. Digital theatre, particularly when it was genuinely interactive and engaged both parent and child, offered a mitigation against the painful lack of communal artistic events caused by lockdown. Beyond the pandemic online offers could continue to benefit families unable to access building-based work, complementing other recent initiatives such as playground and doorstep theatre.

Doubly unusual, digital TEY is not easy to categorise which makes it a challenge to market. There may also be hesitancy on the part of parents to engage in screen-based activity though this study supports others which show that it is the way technology is used that matters. Though Hoppity, Troggle and Mira were met through a screen, the families encountering *Up and Down* did so in their own real lives, where the joy shared was retained and playful interactions continued. The balls of silver foil that fell into the children's hands came from the lining of Mira's cloud and were taken immediately afterwards to show Daddy. Though we don't share the same room the ability of digital theatre to enter the audience members' homes, in real life, has a magic of its own.

7.4 Summary

This study was successful in offering detailed and encouraging reflection on the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis for research with parents and children at TEY. The digital context, necessitated by circumstance, limited the TEY experience for participants and the reach of the research but provided insight into alternative forms of connection that also have their strengths. The master themes demonstrate the high value the parents in this study place on supporting their very young children's encounters with the arts. *Missing Live Performance* showed how the loss of opportunities during lockdown led to a greater appreciation and understanding of the power of sharing in-person, live performance. *Unfiltered Response* demonstrated a keen interest in the original and authentic response of the young child to aesthetic experiences. *Human Connection* showed the ways in which TEY brought the parent and child to each other and their wider communities. Taken together these themes present the ways in which live performance for the very young supports the essential parent-child bond, holding it within a supportive environment that permits the safe exploration of surprise, curiosity and wonder.

7.5 PhD

This masters thesis contains methodological recommendations for further study, particularly around the application of IPA that will be taken forward into my PhD. The suggested routes for additional inquiry however offer a variety of potential approaches and time will be taken during the first year of study to consider these and refine a focus. Greater understanding of the parent-child relationship and shared journey would be supported by increasing space for the child's perspective. Building on this study with further work into the parent experience could reveal the factors that lead to the transformative empathy and shared awe that TEY can provide. How parents and children interact with the performers will offer additional insights, particularly for pedagogy. Other relationships, and cross-audience interaction will paint a fuller picture, as would including different audience make-ups for example larger families, nursery groups or children with additional support needs. The parents in this study shared a love of live performance and previous experiences of TEY, something which strongly informed the findings. Research with families where both adult and child are new to the form could offer alternative perspectives and thereby broaden understanding.

The needs of stakeholders and the potential value in different approaches to furthering knowledge will need to be considered. The findings and analysis contained within this study point towards audience experience at TEY being a rich arena for exploration, encouraging research to keep pace with the fresh and evolving art form. TEY at its best opens individuals to new possibilities in a connective and collective time and space that is unlike anything else in day-to-day life. Understanding the network of relationships that occurs within the TEY performance space could help anyone seeking to create the optimum conditions for playful, empowering communication with the very young.

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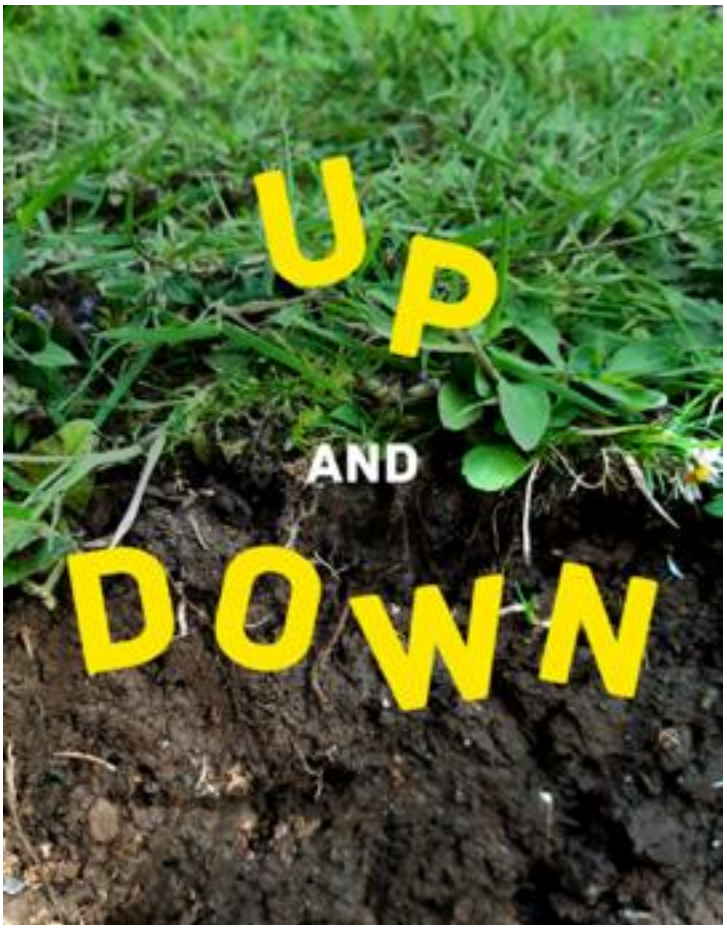
Appendix: *Up and Down* Script

Up and Down

In advance, audiences are advised on what to prepare for the visit. They are sent the following via e-mail:



[Day, date and time. Promoter /location]

Hello!

Thank you for coming to visit ***Up and Down***. Troggle and Mira are looking forward to meeting you and your family. We are also looking forward to sharing our stories and play in this very new way.

First things first, here's your Zoom link
[link]
Or, the meeting ID is [some numbers]
The password for your performance is **[a word that connects to the performance, a subtle cue, e.g. yellow, tinfoil]**

If you haven't used Zoom before, please download it in advance and make sure it's working for you. Sarah, our stage manager, will meet you and help you get set up when you arrive, or if you have problems or questions ahead of the performance day please e-mail us at info@ipdiptheatre.co.uk

Timing
The show starts at [time] and will last about 25 minutes**.** Please know we are looking to begin on time, so it would be helpful if you came a little earlier to make sure you are happy with your setup (the link will be live 10 minutes before start time), especially if you're new to Zoom. Children don't need to be sat and ready until we actually start though.

Preparation for Magic
There are a few simple things it would be lovely for you to bring along.

1 - **something yellow**. It can be a cup or a toy or a cloth or a book. It can be anything as long as it is yellow. It would be brilliant if this could be hidden behind the right side of whatever screen you are watching on. Bringing out your yellow thing happens quite early on when Troggle asks you to help her dig - listen out for "***Dig, dig, dig***"

2 - **a snack.** Anything at all that you like to eat. It can be present and enjoyed throughout, though we do have a point in time when we would love to share a snack all together - and join in with the snack song if your mouth isn't too full!

3 - **a wee piece of scrunched up tin foil**. It doesn't have to be any specific shape, and will be a little bit of something dropped from Mira into everyone's ***ready hands***. (this happens towards the end, after she has given some to Troggle, and the cue will be when Mira asks if everyone has ***ready hands***) Now this one would really be best if hidden - even from the other grown ups who might attend. That will help make it magic.

Tips
- Zoom will be better experienced on a laptop or iPad with a larger screen that can stand on its own. Phones will be a bit small to see and less fun to manage.
- Keep in mind that if you'd like to share your discoveries we will want to see you too! It might be helpful to put your device on top of a couple of books so the screen is at a more comfortable viewing angle. Also try to not have a window or big light behind you. It will turn you into a shadow, and make you difficult to see.

In times that seem a bit unsound
It is good to feel your friends around
Whether in the sky or underground
Come visit us in Up and Down!

-15min
The meeting opens. Performers, stage manager (Sarah) and usher (if provided by venue), meet. Performers and SM check mics and video.

-10min
Performers hide video and mute. Sarah lets in audience members from the waiting room as they arrive or at a pace she manages. Audience members, are encouraged by Sarah to change their visible names to how they would like the performers to address them, and including the children's names. If people are quite early they are encouraged to go and come back rather than sit and wait.

-3min
Play preshow music

Once the audience are all present the Sarah can make all the necessary announcements:

- *Audience should stay on mute but keep cameras on.*
- *We know little people need to sometimes wriggle about and move and that's fine*
- *There is not chat function but if audience need to communicate during the performance they can email the usher. Who will display their e-mail address as their name and hide their video.*
- *Explain how she will spotlight screens to make them bigger, but that if you then would like to see everyone together again you need to use 'Gallery View'*

Curtain
Sarah leads the audience in testing out the 'Gallery View' function. When you can see everyone again, give us a wave – maybe imagine you're all sitting in a big circle together.

Troggle turns on camera, unmutes, and joins in the waving.

Sarah: Hello Troggle!

Troggle: Hello Sarah. Wow. So many friendly faces! Is Mira here yet?

Sarah: Not yet

Troggle: That's okay I'll call her in a bit

Troggle is spotlighted. Sarah hides camera and mutes.

Troggle: Helloooo! Hi, hi, hi, hi, hello, hello, hello, hello, helloooo, hellooo, hello! This is great there's so many of you. It's normally just me and Mira. I'm so

chuffed you could all make it. I love making new friends. I should introduce myself though shouldn't I. My name is Trogledytie, but all my friends call me Troggle. So, 'cause you're my new friends, that's what you can call me, Troggle.

And this, is my home. I live underground. It's really warm, and cozy, and there's lots of holes and nooks for hiding my collections. I have a lot of collections. Like these holes.

Troggle shares her collection of holes. Three items, close to camera.

So that's my hole collection. Not my whole collection. Just my collection of holes. And this, is my collection of noises.

Troggle shares three of her collected noises, then her snack box

These are puffins. Puffins are birds but they live in burrows, like rabbits. And me. I'll be needing this later it's got my snack in it. Have you got a snack for later?

Troggle is tempted to nibble a peanut

Ah-ah, not yet. We can't have snack without Mira. Or Hoppity. Hoppity is a rabbit, and lives in a hole. Down here. Somewhere. She usually turns up when the snacks come out. Hoppity! *(sees yellow fabric)* Oh hello, that's new. I'm not sure what this is?

She pulls out a bright yellow bit of fabric. Then various random yellow things.

Troggle: Ah. Hod on. There's more. I think it's a seam. I'm going to need some help. Time for some digging. Everyone. Dig, dig, dig – has anyone found anything?

SM Duo spotlights Troggle + Audience.
2 different screens of people showing their yellow things. Troggle talks about the interesting things as the people show them to the screen.

SM Solo spotlights Troggle

Troggle: I wonder if I can find a [audience find]? *(she digs out a flower which is held with care and shown close up).* Oh - look at this. Mira's going to love this. Mira is my best friend. She doesn't live down a hole. Nope. She doesn't live anywhere near me. She lives in the sky. So I'm going to have to give here a call, hold on. Mira! Mira?

Troggle calls Mira on her tin-can phone. Tapping on the can.

Mira appears in her sky world, playing a ukulele and singing to herself.

SM Solo spotlights Mira

Mira: Mira am I
I live in the sky
I'm really good at colours
Cuz the rainbow's close by

Today the sky is blue
And it's nice to see you (and you and you)
With my friend Troggle
And all the things she's found.

SM Duo Spotlights Troggle + Mira

Troggle! Hello! What have you found today?

Troggle: Hello Mira! I've just this minute found something I think you're going to really like. I'm sending it to you now. Ready?

Troggle puts the things into the tin-can and sends them up.

Mira: This is delightful!

Troggle: I had some help. Mira you need to meet our new friends. They've found loads of great stuff. So, everyone, can you switch onto your Gallery View, like you did with Sarah, so you can all see each other as well. And can you hold up the things you found when we were digging?

Mira: Hello new friends! Lovely to see you! And so many treasures.

SM Duo spotlights Mira + Audience

Mira sings the objects held up by the audience members. SM will spotlight individual screens, as many as appropriate for the size and enthusiasm of the audience. The cue for Mira's song to come to a close will be the spotlight landing on Troggle, who is holding her new collection.

Troggle: I love how different they all are, but they're also kind of the same. Mira, what kind of collection is this?

Mira: My friend, all these treasures are YELLOW!

Troggle: Yellow. Nice. Thank you, you are so good at colours!

Mira: And you are so good at finding things! Like all of these new friends! I hope you can all find places to keep these safe, and I have something yellow for my snack! It's pineapple.

Troggle: Snack time?

Mira: Yes. Does everyone have something to nibble? What did you bring Troggle?

Troggle: Oh - I've got some peanuts. They're nuts, but they grow underground.

Mira gets out her snack and then starts singing the snack song. 3x

SM Duo spotlights Mira + Troggle (first verse)

Mira:

Munch munch munch munch munch munch munch munch
Snack!
Nibble nibble nibble nibble nibble nibble
Snack!
Yum yum yum yum yum yum
Snack!
Much munch munch munch munch munch munch munch

SM spotlights Troggle + audience snacking (second verse)
SM spotlights Mira + audience (third verse)

Hoppity arrives.

SM Solo spotlights Troggle

Troggle: Snaaaaaaaaaaack! Oh! Hello Hoppity. I was looking for you earlier. I knew you'd come for snack though. Oh.

Hoppity looks in the peanut box, it is empty. She whispers in Troggle's ear to communicate.

Troggle: You're hungry? It's all gone, I've nibbled my nibbles all up. I'm sorry. Maybe..? Has anyone got anything for Hoppity? Any leftovers they can share? Maybe, give us a wave if you do.

SM Solo spotlights someone feeding Hoppity.
SM Solo spotlights Troggle feeding the food to Hoppity.
Repeat with another family (or more?) feeding the rabbit.
SM solo spotlights between Troggle and Mira

Troggle: Are you full now? You're stuffed? Well that's great. Oh, oh yes me too. Mira?

Mira: Yes?

Troggle: Hoppity wants to know if you have a story for us today?

Mira: I do. This is a story about a sheep and some clouds, some clouds and a sheep.

Mira brings out her shadow theatre and music plays.

Sheep nibbles the grass

Cloud floats in and bleats to Sheep

Sheep replies to Cloud then begins to wander up towards it

Grass is gone

Cloud has a little conversation with Sheep then floats down as Sheep floats up

Duck-cloud arrives from above, meets Sheep then floats on down

Train-cloud does the same

Whale-cloud floats down and duets a little with Sheep before floating down

Cumulonimbus arrives from above. Sheep floats up but can go no higher.

Sheep begins to wander down. Cumulonimbus goes away.

Sheep floats past Whale-cloud, Train-cloud, Duck-cloud and Cloud.

Grass reappears. Sheep lands.

Music fades out

Mira: And that was my story about a sheep and some clouds, some clouds and a sheep.

SM Duo spotlights Troggle + Mira.

Hoppity whispers into Troggle's ear.

Troggle: Okay I'll tell her. Oh Mira, Hoppity says thank you. That was really lovely. And that she misses you and she wishes, she wishes that she could float up into the sky so she could give you a big hug.

Mira: Hoppity, you give wonderful hugs! Maybe you could give Troggle a hug for me? And Troggle can give you one back? And I will wrap both of my arms around myself for both of you! Ready? Mm –mm –mm –mm -mm –mm -mm.

Troggle: Hoppity says thank you, and she wishes she could hug everyone else too!

Mira: Let's try! And if everyone's getting a hug we should switch back to Gallery view so we can all see each other

Troggle: Ok so if you've got someone next to you like me and Hoppity you can hug each other, or if you're by yourself like Mira you can use your two arms to give yourself a hug. Are we all ready? 1,2,3, Mm –mm –mm –mm -mm –mm -mm

SM Duo spotlights Mira and Troggle

Troggle: The what? Hoppity is so full of hugs now, she's off to cuddle some worms.

Hoppity waves goodbye and hops off. Troggle is sad.

Mira: Bye Hoppity! Oh Troggle, I know you don't like when she goes away again. I have something for you today too. It's just here, in the lining of my cloud.

Mira gives a piece of silver lining to Toggle through the tin can phone

Troggle: Oh. That's beautiful.

Mira: I'll send it down to you.

Troggle: Ok. Ok I've got it! I'll find a safe place for this. Maybe start a new collection. Thank you

Mira: You're welcome. And I have a little bit for everyone here. Can you get back on to Gallery view so you can see everyone? Are you all there? Hold out your hands. Are you ready? Everyone make ready hands. Here it comes! Just a little something from me. You can make that into any shape you like.

Mira drops the silver from above.
SM Duo Spotlights Mira and Troggle

Mira I guess the only thing left to do, is have a boogie!

Way up here in the sky
I can watch the birds go by
And see them flap and fly
*All along the breeze (*tap tap)*

Troggle: *Way down here underground*
I feel so safe and sound
Surrounded by the things I've found
*With my friends today (*tap tap)*

I see you and you see me
And we are such good friends
You see me and I see you
And we'll meet where the rainbow ends
My friend –

Mira: *ooh wah oh*

Even though we're worlds apart
We are together in our hearts
And you're such a special part
*Of my everyday (*tap tap)*

I see you and you see me
And we are such good friends
You see me and I see you
And we'll meet where the rainbow ends
My friend –

ooh wah oh

SM might Duo spotlight some Audience dancing as Mira continues to play and chat

Mira: It was so lovely to see you all today. Thank you for sharing your treasures and your snacks today, my new friends. And Troggle?

Troggle: Yeah?

Mira: See you tomorrow!

Troggle: Absolutely. Bye Mira! Good bye Mira. See you again soon! Let's all go onto Gallery View one last time shall we so we can all wave goodbye. I think I'm going to go and catch up with Hoppity and hug some of those worms.

SM, and usher become visible and join in the waving.
Music plays

It was lovely to meet you and thanks again for all your help with the digging. Bye!

Troggle turns off video.

SM thanks everyone for coming and encourages them to unmute themselves to say goodbye.

Appendix: Interview Schedule

This schedule represents prompts and suggestions for discussion and is an available structure. The actual form and content of the interviews will be heavily influenced by the participants – the experiences they wish to relate and the points they feel most interested in sharing.

- Opening questions:

(setting the scene for talking about feelings, associations and engaging the imagination)

How are things today? What is the 'weather' i.e. your individual and shared moods?
How does this compare to the day when you attended the performance?
Which would be more typical – either, neither, both?
Would you rather live in the sky or underground? (this relates to show content)
What about your child?

- Remembering:

(discovering what aspects of the performance were important)

What do you remember about the performance, that was noteworthy?
What surprised or disappointed you?
Do you think you and your child enjoyed the same parts?
What do you think your child found most engaging about the whole experience?
Tell me more about the references to the show that you recorded happening

- Imagining:

(discovering thoughts on connection, empathy and bonding)

What your child enjoyed about the show, how does that relate to their general interests?
Do you share that interest?
What do you have in common, as personalities?
What kind of things do you do together that you both enjoy?
What kind of thing would you consider a 'bonding experience' for you both?
Have you ever been to live Theatre for Early Years?
What do you think it would be like or what you would wish it to be like?

- Valuing:

(discovering opinion on the role of the arts, on priorities for children)

When choosing an activity to do with your child, what do you look for?
How much influence do you think you have on their tastes?
Are the arts important to you? As a consumer? Or participant?
What about for your child? Children in general?