Visiting Schools for Visiting Theatre. Researching a Drama Workshop and Young People's Response

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Abstract This chapter explores a theatre mediation research project in the city of Bergen, Norway. It is an outreach project for grade 10 students, aiming at opening the doors to theatre for young people, involving Western Norway University of Applied Sciences in a collaborative venture with the city theatre: Den Nationale Scene, and two other partner institutions. The students were invited during school hours to see a play, *Anne Pedersdotter* (1908), by the Norwegian dramatist Hans Wiers-Jenssen (1866–1925), based on a witch trial in Bergen in 1590. The authors devised teaching materials and preparatory practical workshops for students, and researched the facilitation of and the responses to the introductory workshops. Following a brief tuning in to the overall project, the chapter first applies a topological reading of parts of the material. Secondly, it takes a quantitative perspective, before the chapter is rounded off.

Keywords From-text-to-theatre · Anne Pedersdotter · Theatre mediation · Theatre accessing · Exposition · Topos · Applied drama/theatre

1 Tuning In

"Anne's Sorrow", by the Swedish composer Magnus Stinnerbom, is filling the room while a class of 15–16 year olds enters. The music relates to the destiny of the main character in the play *Anne Pedersdotter* (Anne Peder's Daughter), which the students will watch some weeks later. The students take a seat on the floor, in a circle, and the facilitators initiate a discussion about the view of the world in the sixteenth

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century; religious beliefs, latter-day concerns, everyday life and superstition (e.g. a black cat on the roof could be a sign of the devil in the house). During 1 h work, the students gradually enter the life in Bergen in the sixteenth century and the story of Anne Pedersdotter.[1] Through the workshop, the students get to work on the main characters and their relations, and the language of that time, for example the way to address each other both verbally and bodily. Stinnerbom's music from the play is central throughout the workshop.

1.1 The Project: Organisation and Materials

The project was a collaboration between four partners: Den Nationale Scene (The National Stage, Bergen), the Cultural Rucksack,[2] the Bergen City School Board, and the Drama Department at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences.

1.1.1 Education Package and Workshop

Teaching and learning materials were developed, based on research about Bergen and the life in the city during the period 1550–1600. The package comprised religious, vocational, educational and other cultural perspectives, with a selection of illustrative period drawings, and hands-on suggestions for student activities, like a smart-phone-based historical city walk for students, as well as historical anecdotes and facts relating to the subject matter. All pre-performance materials could be downloaded from the web page of Den Nationale Scene, so that teachers and students could navigate the tasks through digital equipment, in school and after school (Figs. 1, 2 and 3). A 60-min-workshop was created and toured to the schools. It was based on a number of rehearsal observations in the theatre of the *Anne Pedersdotter*-production.

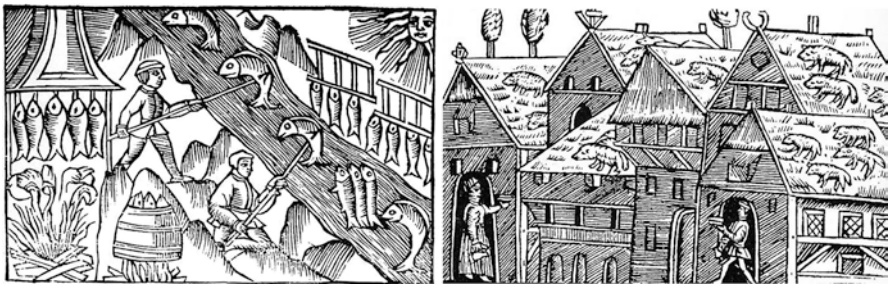
1.1.2 From Text to Theatre Projects

The current project has its background in a series of theatre education endeavours named 'From Text to Theatre'.[3] Our work is always based on a specific production, usually by observing rehearsals and having conversations with the director, actors,

[1] The dramaturge at Den Nationale Scene, Anders Hasmo Dahl, reworked Wiers-Jenssen's script, and Leif Stinnerbom directed the performance. It opened the 23rd of March 2015.

[2] The Cultural Rucksack is a government funded culture dissemination programme, administered through regional offices (counties and municipalities), to bring the arts into schools or the students into art buildings. All Norwegian students, from age 6 to 18, will experience at least one encounter with a professional art production each year throughout their schooling.

[3] The first project was in 1989. Kari Mjaaland Heggstad and Stig A. Eriksson created a number of workshops in cooperation with the DNS. Reports and articles of the work have been published in Norway and abroad (1994, 1999, 2007, 2011). Katrine Heggstad picked up on this approach from 1996. During the years 2014–2016 Heggstad, Heggstad and Eriksson have made four education



Figs. 1 and 2 Drawings by Olaus Magnus, ca. 1550. *Norges historie*, b. 4, pp. 179 and 110

Fig. 3 Printing house in the 1500s. Engravings from Gottfried's Historische Chronic, Frankfurt 1619. (https://boktrykkerkunst)

scenographer, musicians; yet devising the workshops by our own choices of dramatic conventions, structure and means of expression. A common denominator for the cooperation has been the focus on unlocking the doors to the theatre to new audiences (i.e. Eriksson and Heggstad 2007). How can we develop young students into critical and competent audience members for the theatre? This is the main question behind the approach 'From Text to Theatre'.

packages together for these productions: *Medealand* by Sara Stridsberg, *Waffle Hearts* by Maria Parr, *Anne Pedersdotter* by Hans Wiers-Jenssen and *The Nether* by Jennifer Haley.

2 Research Approaches

The research uses a mixed methods approach. A qualitative part consists of analysis of the workshop, the facilitators' logs and the class teacher's observation forms. A quantitative part analyses results from a student's questionnaire and responses from teacher observations.

The qualitative part is studied from a topological perspective. The Norwegian researcher, Aslaug Nyrnes, describes topological analysis, as orientation in landscapes of knowledge that already exists (Nyrnes 2006, p. 18). In our context "the landscape" is places in the workshop where experiences are made; for instance a selected moment, the facilitator's body language, how questions are asked etc. We take a closer look at different topoi in our project through three dimensions: *copia, mimesis* and *temporality*.[4] Copia means: "stock, store, supply, inventories and archives" (Nyrnes 2013, p. 30). Through copia, we study knowledge and culture that appears in the work. Mimesis has to do with the words and the expressions of body, face and voice. How do the participants act? The concept of mimesis means more than 'imitation'; it incorporates 'pretending' and 'make-believe' and brings to mind the role of the imagination (Kaufmann 1992, p. 38). At the same time, mimesis is a form of active representation, and thus it implies more than merely reproducing. Temporality investigates "what is at hand and happening at the precise moment" (Nyrnes 2006, p. 18). It appears in the different understandings of time and time perspectives – historically and contemporarily – and becomes visible in waiting, moving, rhythm etc. and in concepts like birth and death, beliefs and superstition. Temporality exists "in the very performance of our tasks" (Ingold 1993, p. 159).

2.1 A Topological Analysis of the Workshop

The analysis is primarily seen from the facilitators' perspectives. The material consists of the facilitators' participatory observations of the workshops and log reflections, and experiences from doing the workshop many times. The workshop develops and changes through serial repetitions. According to Foucault, there are two concepts of series with two kinds of repetitions. One (the traditional) is based on *resemblance*, pointing back to the original. The other is *similitude.* Similitude is making use of the material in context. It is always dynamic and open for improvements. "Resemblance makes unique assertion, always the same: This thing, that thing, yet another thing is something else. Similitude multiplies different affirmations, which dance together, tilting and tumbling over one another" (Foucault 1983, p. 46).

Our series is a mixture of resemblance and similitude. The original workshop plan gives the premises for the workshop in practice. The progression is given and some parts of the plan are "scripts", intended ways of verbalisations. At the same

[4] Topological analysis is inspired by New-rhetoric theory, which is influenced by philosophers like Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jaques Derrida and Walter Benjamin (Nyrnes 2007: 10).

time, each workshop will in many aspects differ from the plan. The series also have another premise: change, adjustment and improvisation depending on the situation. In parts of the analysis, we generalise the experiences from the series, in other parts we look at a specific example. The workshop consists of seven parts: (1) Conversation with the class, (2) Exposition, (3) Walking to music, (4) Working on lines, (5) Working on selected scenes, (6) Sharing, and (7) Summing up. In the analysis, we look at part 2, 3 and 6.

2.1.1 First Topos: Exposition

The students sit on the floor in a wide semicircle. In the open space, the facilitator (F) creates "the stage" by placing two chairs side by side and one chair diagonally further back. F is going to include 11 students in a depiction while narrating:

> *We are in Bergen anno 1560. Absalon Pedersen Beyer* – (F moves towards a student, smiles invitingly, takes his hand and leads him to one of the two chairs) *is a clergyman at Bergenhus Castle. Absalon is 60 years old and is highly respected in Bergen. His mother, Merete Beyer* – (a student is chosen and placed on the chair next to Absalon) *lives in Absalon's house. Merete is 80 years old and is a strict woman. She keeps order in the house and is known for her excellent cooking. She is very fond of her son. In this house, there is also a young woman. Her name is Anne* (F finds another student. She is placed behind Absalon, with a hand on his shoulder). *Anne has been married to Absalon for 5 years. She is only 22…*

Situation: A Changed Room Based on the experiences from the workshop series, the situation can be summarised as follows: The framing is not the same as an everyday school situation, even if it occurs in a classroom with all its' implicit connotations. The facilitators are guests, not schoolteachers. They do not know the group, and the group do not know them. Two different sets of knowledge and cultures meet. The supplies (copia) are different. There is an uncertainty of what to expect from each other. The setting has other "rules". The room and situation have changed.

The students are audience in this part and also potential actors. It is exciting for some participants. Others are disinterested, fear the unknown or dread the expectancy of speaking, doing, playing, or exposing themselves in front of the others. The facilitators sense this from the moment they enter the room, and they try to build a bridge through eye contact with each participant in the initial encounter, and send out positive signals like smiling, nodding, listening and responding (mimesis). The situation is coloured by the physical setting, the time, the culture and by the participants, including the facilitators (temporality). Each workshop calls for improvisation and new approaches.

Narrative The facilitators (F) have made a sequenced narrative "script". F will always include, directly or indirectly, elements of transactions through status, gender or language. The wording is one part of F's copia, the expression through voice and body is another. Copia is also present in F's mimetic expressions and will influence the communication with the class.

All three perspectives mimesis, copia and temporality are embedded in the act of narrating. Narrating involves complex signalling – in fiction and out of fiction – in a stylised, distanced and yet intriguing way: "He is 60, she is 22. They have been married for 5 years". Being in the space, telling the story to the whole group, and at the same time involving some participants in the depiction, happens as structured improvisation. It is an enactment depending on F's choices and the participants' reactions in the situation. Here is an example:

Workshop No 21 The class teacher arrives before the class. He says there are some very shy girls in the class, who are worried about taking part in drama. He allows them to be just observers. F accepts this. The three girls are standing "glued against the door" before the workshop starts (Log No 21).

> F invites the girls to take part. Two of them accept and sit down. F starts narrating and "finds" Absalon. He is now sitting on his chair and seems confident in the situation. Good mood, smiles, excitement in the group. F looks around for Absalon's mother. She meets the eyes of one of the shy girls sitting on the floor and moves towards her – the girl looks down and shakes her head. F stretches her hand out, takes the girl's hand, she resists. F whispers: *Don't worry – you are not going to speak*. Reluctantly, the girl sits down besides Absalon. F says: *She is 80* (pauses – the class laughs – the girl has a timid look) – *and rules the household quite strictly. She is a good cook – and a proud mother!* F looks at the girl, nods to her to show she has done well.

The choosing of a student that had signalled not wanting to be in the depiction raises questions about protection and safety. After all, as Dorothy Heathcote says: "The actor in theatre, the TIE team and the teacher have all made a contract to allow people to stare at them, but the children have not made that contract" (Heathcote 1984, p. 162). In retrospect, F's intention (copia) of giving the girl an opportunity to break out from her group, and of the established expectations in the classroom, might have been a violation of her integrity in the moment. However, the three shy girls did take part in the acting out of scenes in the last session of the workshop.

2.1.2 Second Topos: A Solemn Drift to Music

The students line up by the walls.

> *Imagine that you are a person of high rank, living in the sixteenth century. When you hear the music, start walking in a slow tempo and fill the space. Greet when you meet. You are not to speak, but rather gracefully greet people, with a bow or a nod or make a curtsy before you move on.* (F exemplifies greetings in a slow and ritual manner). *You are never to stop, but to have a solemn drift to the music.*

The classroom is an open space. In the Exposition, there was a "stage" and an audience space. Now the students are going to fill the room with their bodies. The lining up is a spatial starting point. They are getting ready to move into something that for many is unfamiliar or strange. They are going to stride across the floor in a certain way. Through voice and body expressions, F must create this fictional space in an inviting way.

Language The topology of F's language has several layers: Framing the participants in a historical time, with a tempo and rhythm of movement, using stylization and awareness of others' position in the space etc. The open space in the classroom has become a fictional site – an undefined place in the 1560s where people of high rank greet each other. F's choice of words will change from workshop to workshop but are mostly expressed in a poetic style, which generally sets a mood for concentration and commitment.

F's log from workshop No 25 says: "The class was involved from the first moment. It worked well to have everybody in active mode from the start. When the framing is good, the greeting and striding works excellently." The teacher's observation from the session confirms this: "Clear instruction. The students knew what to do."

The Musical Space The music is also a part of creating a "different" room, a different landscape. It takes the participants away from the ordinary, and brings them into a flow of slow movements and into a solemn mood, which foreshadows the opening sequence of the theatre performance. F will keep the flow going for as long as it takes everyone to meet. The sensitivity to the musical space, timing and each participant, is crucial.

F's log from workshop No 1 says: "They didn't use the rhythm in the music. They walked faster and talked to each other." F's log from workshop No 10 says: "The greeting worked really well. It became a solemn and nice wandering. Never

before, have the students walked so equably to the music. Perhaps because the music was put on already when we gave the demonstration." These two logs show how the repetition of the workshop develops it.

Teacher observation from No 10 says: "They straighten their spine when the task is given. Walk slowly and reverently. One boy is standing still for a long time, but then gets going. One of the boys is very tired, but takes part." Demonstrating various ways of greetings and solemn striding seem to provide protection for the students. It is not a matter of imitation, but an offer of different modes. A standard and a mood are set. By coincidence, F discovers how music along with the exemplification gives more. *A solemn drift to music* is dependent on details like when to put on the music, the setting of the mood, the wording, exemplifying the stride and greetings, participating with the students in the fictional space and how F meets everybody with the same respect.

2.1.3 Third Topos: Sharing

The students have been working in groups with eight excerpts from the script, which they have explored on "the floor". In the sharing Stinnerbom's rhythmic piece "Slängpolska" is used to frame the presentations and to provide energy and pulse.

From the series of workshops, we can generalise that most students are not trained and used to making scene presentations. However, there are always *some* students in every class that has had theatre experience from before who enjoy the work from the first moment. In addition, there are often some inexperienced students who play with great self-confidence and enjoyment. Even timid or disinterested students generally accept taking part in the sharing.

Students as Actors Performing on "stage" is demanding for many students. From our experience, most students are more concerned with the oral presentations than the physical expressions. The lines are dominating their attention in their performance of the scenes. In general, there is a lack of bodily expression, sense of timing and stage awareness. Still, out of the 1026 students taking part in the workshop only 7 chose to be merely audience in the sharing phase. This can be interpreted in several ways: It is attractive to have an audience. It is difficult to say no. Group work creates commitment. It is interesting to work in new ways. A guest teacher can achieve more. The build-up of the workshop has made them ready. An illustrating comment was logged from workshop No 4, with a class that was described as very demanding by the teacher. "The sharing worked very well. Many interesting ways of staging and acting out the scenes. We were actually quite impressed with this class" (F's log). The teacher's observation from the same workshop says: "Nice presentations. This is taken seriously." The students' role as actors presupposes a role as audience. The tight structure for the sharing creates concentration and focus: "Everyone is participating when they plan and rehearse: good activity! Great presentations! Good concentration! The whole thing was great!" (Teacher's observation, workshop No 12).

Group 1 will start the sharing. When the music is put on, you enter the stage; and when you are ready to start, the music will be turned down. Before starting your scene, each one of you makes a bow or a curtsy and names your character. The scene is acted out, and the music comes back on when your scene is finished – and the next group enters. No applause and no comments.

Generally, the sharing of scenes in a structured, almost "ritualistic", manner has been experienced as a very useful strategy, because the whole class participates. The music creates a drive, it replaces routines of (polite) applause and (shallow) commenting, and it endows the presentations with a sense of wholeness.

2.2 Quantitative Analysis

The workshop was offered to all 10th graders in the Bergen schools.

2.2.1 Students' Voices (Questionnaire)

In addition to the qualitative mapping of the students' responses, the project organisers – as well as the facilitators/researchers – were interested in a more distanced response in a quantitative form. A QuestBack[5] questionnaire was developed for the schools, and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) for data protection. The link to the questionnaire was sent out to the schools shortly after the performances in the city theatre. We could not send the link directly to each class but had to rely on our coordinating teacher contact in each school to access the questionnaire to the students, via their class teachers. This somewhat cumbersome approach may have delayed the feedback process and probably affected the feedback volume. Even after having posted a reminder, the total feedback turned out low: From a potential sample of 2400 students who were invited to see the performance Anne Pedersdotter at Den Nationale Scene, only 256 responded to the questionnaire, which is a response rate of 10,6%. Therefore, it cannot be interpreted with significance in respect to measurable effects of the total project. Yet, even with this low response, it is still of interest to the project to present some of the tendencies within that sample. The feedback involved a fairly balanced distribution between girls (52,6%) and boys (47,4%). Here are some of the results:

[5] QuestBack is a person-based digital feedback platform headquartered in Oslo, Norway. Senior consultant, Dag Ove Vareberg, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, helped designing the questionnaire.

- 90% of the respondents have been to the theatre before. However, 70% of these had never been to the Den Nationale Scene, and 30% had been to this theatre only once.
- Only 2% answer that they have seen theatre before in their school "many times" and 8% "some times", while" 39% answer "a few times" and 32% answer "only once". Nineteen percent has "never" experienced theatre in their school.
- 7% have seen theatre "many times" in their own part of the city (in a community centre, youth club, after school activity, etc.) and 10% "some times". 37% have seen a theatre performance "a few times", 17% "only once" – and 29% have "never" experienced it.
- Similarly, 4% have seen theatre other places "many times", 9% "some times", while 37% tick off "a few times", 16% "only once" and 34% "never".
- 48% of the students have participated in drama/theatre work within school hours; 52% have not, and 19% have taken part in a drama group or a theatre unit in their spare time; 81% have not.
- 52% from the sample confirm that they made use of the pre-performance teaching material (historical maps and pictures, historical city walk, etc.); 13% specifically ticked that they did not use these materials; however, as many as 35% answered: "do not know".
- 71% confirm that they took part in our pre-performance workshop, 14% did not, 15% "do not remember".

This feedback shows that a clear majority of the respondents were newcomers to their main city theatre when they watched *Anne Pedersdotter*. A majority were not entirely without previous theatre experience but close to 10% had never experienced theatre at all, and 19% had never experienced theatre in secondary school. This is interesting considering the aim for the Cultural Rucksack: every student will experience at least one encounter with professional art every year – either in school or in arts buildings. 48% of the students had participated in drama/theatre during school hours. Considering that drama is not a discrete subject in the Norwegian curriculum, this is noteworthy. However, as to commitment to drama/theatre work after school, a clear majority (81%) had not attended such activities. 34% of the young people ticked "do not know" on the question whether the teaching materials for *Anne Pedersdotter* were used or not. This response is difficult to interpret.

As to the students' responses to the actual workshop experience, there are two discernible leanings: A fair majority register positive effects from the workshop. However, there is also an element of "do not know" in these responses, which is not easy to interpret. It could be a weakness in the form, or the question was simply too hard for some students to make a decision about. The following table shows the main tendencies in responses to some selected aspects (Table 1).

The QuestBack results indicate that there is a need for more drama and theatre work in schools. It also shows that the project has had positive learning effects. To a majority of the respondents, the workshop provided both a pre-understanding and a pre-interest for seeing the play. Even if the expectations of the performance were not satisfactorily met, there is a noticeable interest in seeing how the theatre presents "their" scenes from the classroom work – more so than in watching the scenes

Table 1 QuestBack results

To which degree did you…	Very well/quite well	Not well/not at all	Do not know
…get to know the main characters?	67,8	22,8	9,4
…get an impression of the story?	61,3	28	10,7
…look forward to go and see the performance?	51,2	37,1	11,7
Were your expectations to the performance met?	39,1	46,3	14,6
How did you like to watch "your" scene?	49,2	25,2	25,6
How did you like to watch the scenes of your classmates?	36,7	32,2	31,1

of the classmates. An interesting point of feedback has been voiced from the artistic personnel in the theatre (evaluation meeting with the dramaturge, June 11th 2015). The actors reported a positive surprise that the young audiences in the auditorium predominantly emitted interest and engagement through most of the performance. Therefore, the theatre accredited the pre-performance work for this effect. The teachers' feedback from the workshop is not in contradiction with that conclusion, and is mostly positive.

2.2.2 Teachers' Voices (Observation Forms Mapping Situations and Responses)

The observation sheet had an open form. We did not ask the teachers to use any specific terminologies, or to look for certain elements. Instead, we invited them to note down observations when they saw something that surprised them, and to comment freely on each phase of the workshop. The teachers chose to comment on the work in many different ways. Therefore, this open form gave us some challenges in finding manageable categories. We started looking for similarities – categories in which we could group the answers – and see if this approach could give us some interesting findings.

We grouped the responses into six categories: Engagement, rejection/discomfort, good atmosphere, enactment, satisfaction and commotion (Fig. 4).

The feedback expressed by the slices of this cake seems quite positive, and the teachers did seem in general quite positive. Nevertheless, a closer reading of the cake reveals a more nuanced picture: 152 times engagement was mentioned, while rejection/discomfort was mentioned 83 times. These are often considered as opposites but the same teacher can both note down engagement and rejection.

Good atmosphere was mentioned 64 times and satisfaction 76, while enactment 40 and commotion 36. Commotion can be perceived as a result of the playing activities in the room. The actual playing phases take up a relatively small part of the cake. This may mean that the teachers regard enactment as only "being on stage". The qualities of good atmosphere and satisfaction dominate in the forms. We are

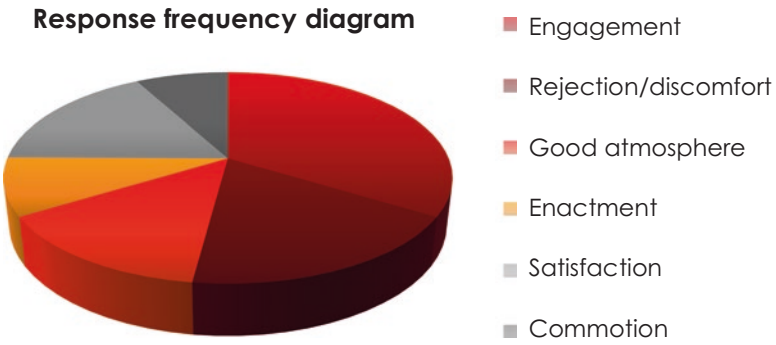


Fig. 4 Response frequency diagram

aware, though, that the facilitators were the ones who asked the teachers to do the observation. Maybe they were reluctant to be critical.

An interesting finding pertaining to the teachers' observations of facilitated activities is that the teachers tend to evaluate rather than comment on what they observe. The reasons for this might be that teachers are often put in a coaching situation for teacher students, so when they observe they tend to evaluate the way tasks are given, and how it creates engagement or discomfort.

3 Tuning Out

In this chapter, we have focused on a project of mediating theatre for young people. The performance *Anne Pedersdotter* constituted our starting point. The research involved a qualitative part (workshop) and a quantitative part (questionnaire and observation). A workshop has been at the centre of the analysis and was analysed from a topological perspective.

Conducting a sizable series of workshops has been a learning experience, both as facilitators and as researchers. It has been a mixed process of creativity, repetition, cultivation, reflection, and evaluation. It has been a process of refinement, through a series of "repetitions". Nyrnes investigates series in art, and relates how "series, as a phenomenon, could contribute to the discussion of quality promotion in arts education" (Nyrnes 2013 , p. 26). In our work, involving three researchers/facilitators, the material has developed through changes, adjustments and refinements, sometimes after evaluation, sometimes on impulse. Through the 45 sessions the repetitions of the original workshop have been based on resemblance and also to a certain degree on similitude (Foucault 1983). Similitude in our series is influenced by the consistent change of site for each workshop. The sites offer different atmospheres and this influences the organising in the room and the ways of communcating. The participants as a group also influence the structure, the choices and the energy in the room. Whilst we are three co-designers of the workshop, most of the

time we are two facilitators conducting the workshop. This also effects certain details of the workshop.

For the topological analysis of the selected parts of the workshop, video observation would have been the ideal tool – freezing the moments, going into details of the situation, the facilitation process, the communication and the artistic elements. However, from the start we knew that video observation was not an option, because of the data protection regulations and other practical considerations.

We have asked: How can we develop young students into critical and competent audience members for the theatre? In this small research project it is difficult to read a development of critical competence. Even if the Norwegian national strategy of the Cultural Rucksack programme is to contain a more long-term strategy for developing competence in arts through at least one encounter with professional art every year, the responses to our questionaire tell us that drama/theatre is very little present during their 10 years of schooling. A more long-term strategy for drama/theatre is needed. From what we have observed, there is also a lack of performing skills among the students. Still, the rehearsing and performing the scenes show that this kind of work creates interest, focus, concentration and learning. The From-Text-to-Theatre approach enables students to become familiar with the main roles and selected scenes of a play. However, the fact that 52% of the respondents to the questionaire say that they have not participated in drama/theatre work within school hours, indicates that there is a corresponding lack of drama competence among the teachers. Therefore, we end this project by asking: How can we strengthen teachers' competences so that they feel confident to apply drama/theatre in their classrooms?

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