

Thesis title

**From Revelry to Alchemy: six lenses for
interpreting theatre for young Australian
audiences**

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Works of this kind are written over a number of years to be shaped explicitly by intense research and implicitly through the influences of many important role models. As such this study has been fashioned through inspiring professional engagements, academic conferences, as well as intriguing debriefs with co-workers who have challenged my assumptions and driven my desire to fully appreciate the different roles that theatre plays in building culture, communities and wellbeing. I sincerely thank the many people who have thereby informed this study either consciously or incidentally.

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PREFACE

Theatre 1. A building or room fitted for the presentation of dramatic performances, stage entertainments etc. 2. Any area used for dramatic presentations 3. A cinema 4. dramatic works collectively, as of a nation, period, or author. 5. A room or hall fitted with tiers of seats rising like steps, used for lectures etc. 6. A room in a hospital in which surgical operations are performed: *an operating theatre*. 7. A place of action: *theatre of war*. [ME, from L, from Gk: seeing place theatre]

Drama 1. A story or a short piece of dialogue, intended to be acted on stage, radio or television, and usu. 2. Plays as a branch of literature: *the drama of the Elizabethan age*. 3. The branch of art, which deals with plays from their writing to their final production: *a school of drama*. 4. Any exciting, important or fast moving series of events: *the drama surrounding his resignation*. [LL: a play, from Gk: deed, play]

Poetics 1. The systematic study of literature, or a unified theory of texts.

Rhetoric 1. The art of persuasion

Though the focus of this study is theatre for young audiences, it reflects an overall interest in the dual role of theatre as both art and communication; a tool by which humanity both reveals and dreams itself, for audiences of all ages. In essence it celebrates theatre for young audiences not as a separate genre but as works of art that belong on the spectrum of theatre in all its various forms, offering layered-aspects which might be appreciated differently by different audiences.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses theatre for young audiences as an aesthetic artform in and of itself. Focusing specifically on the moment of live performance, it proposes six interpretive lenses as systems of signification that facilitate understandings of how performances created essentially for children offer important multi-layered experiences for their audiences. Reflecting on the dual roles of theatre as both art and communication, the study challenges the polarised notion that such work exists solely as either a teaching tool or light entertainment.

The artistic codes proposed as part of this research have been developed over twenty years of personal experience creating theatre for children and may be considered as constituting what could be called a poetics of children's theatre.

The six codes are:

1. *Revelry*, the code that aims to communicate a raucous sense of euphoric, *cathartic* energy and unity through audience participation, carnivalesque laughter and fear.
2. *Enchantment*, the code that communicates a sense of *soothing* and surrender to a sense of sublime wonder and hope.
3. *Instruction*, the code that *teaches*.
4. *Identity*, the code that aims to *connect* on a personal level, in which individuals recognise themselves or something of their own lives. .
5. *Enlightenment*, the code that shows diversity and *critical thinking* about philosophical and social issues.
6. *Alchemy*, the code of stimulation that seeks to communicate *change*; aiming to grow the imagination and inspire a sense of self-belief.

Findings show that whilst theatre for young audiences can be both educational and diversionary, it also provides in-depth works that provide complex encounters. Thus theatre for young people is an enriching medium for its audiences of all ages.