



5.4. HACK THE THEATRE

– Denmark

This PowerPoint presentation was developed by Naja Birke, a T.E.E.N. tutor from Teatercentrum in Denmark, to explain the idea behind the 'Hack the Theatre' concept.

To find the power point presentation and get more information go to www.teentheatreetwork.eu at the section "Tools and Research".

'Hack the Theatre' Workshops

It is important to stress that the 'Hack the Theatre' workshops were adapted as necessary according to the context of the participants and their environment, as well as the resources that were available to use in the municipality.

Sometimes the municipality had a local theatre with professional educators or actors / directors who would engage in the process or we would involve a social media expert or a critic etc. The different

groups of teenagers were also of different ages and some individuals had dyslexia, so each group required adaptations in different ways.

Each of the workshops had different themes such as reviewing, using social media, working on creative processes, recreating ideas in another media format, and so on. Nonetheless, every workshop with a class or a TAG team began by watching a performance together.

Having encouraged the teenagers to rethink how they commented on a performance, groups then explored how they could form and express their opinions on what they thought of the performance. From this starting point of having explored the performance through the workshop theme and activities, the teenagers then produced a 'hack'.

The process of hacking a theatre performance was intended to allow and inspire the teenagers to express themselves and comment on their experience in ways other than writing a review. For example, they might make a video that presents an idea about how the audience are let in and out, or they may offer suggestions about the production of supplementary learning materials. In one workshop, after watching the *'DIVA'* performance by *Sofie Krog Teater*, some teenagers reshaped the performance by coming up with multiple new endings, whilst other groups focused on constructing background

stories for some of the characters in the play. The teenagers were keenly inventing new ideas that had been sparked from the play. In another session, one group decided to reshape a scene that they felt had used too much pathos, saying that it felt silly in an otherwise very solemn play. They offered recommendations to the director to adapt it to maintain the serious tone. Another group simply commented on the nature of the touring venue, pointing out that the seats were uncomfortable, which they felt detracted from the experience of an otherwise excellent performance.

It was important to the team that these comments should be sent or presented directly to the professionals involved in producing the performance rather than being disseminated (like reviews are) to other potential audience members. As such, the hacks produced at the 'Hack the Theatre' workshops were shared with the theatre companies who had produced the original performance. By doing so, we aimed to create a dialogue between theatre professionals and their young audiences. This gave the young audiences an opportunity to engage in conversations with theatre professionals at *Aprilfestival* through which they were able to feedback their comments directly. This also gave them a huge sense of achievement and responsibility, believing that they, as young audiences, could contribute something valuable to the debate with professionals.



A Hack by Syddjurs CultureCrew

Based on the performance '*Den halve papdreng*' ('*The Half Cardboard Boy*') produced by *André Andersen SOLO*.

What do we think of the play?

We thought the play was generally good. The way the actor did things was really good, because he managed to make it interesting even though it was on a serious theme. Before we went in we thought the play would be boring but when we saw it we found out that it was very good and interesting. The way the actor told it made it interesting.

What would we change?

We think the seats should have been different because many of the seats were not really nice to sit in. We think they should be more comfortable. We think it is important to be able to sit well to make the most of the play. See the picture below.

The hack from Syddjurs CultureCrew is very interesting because it relates to the practices of how we produce theatrical experiences for young people in Denmark. Since a lot of the theatre performances are toured, and therefore do not take place in an actual theatre but in classrooms and school gyms, the seats are very often old classroom chairs, tables, or even just a space on the floor.



Furthermore, it raises the question of how to encourage teenagers to become active theatre-goers who choose to go out and see a performance when they are used to theatre being brought to them in schools. How do we encourage young people to find their way to theatre buildings and to select from the possibilities available to them?

Another lesson learned from the 'Hack the Theatre' workshops is that young audiences are schooled from an early age on how to write a review in a very structured way. It can be very difficult for them to rethink how they comment upon a performance because they become uncertain of what is expected of them. In this sense, the workshops were an opportunity for the students to be open to new possibilities, not always following the rules set by the schools, and using their imagination and creativity in new ways. The potential of the workshops to help young people rethink what they had learned from school was only realised at the end of the workshop series in the 2018 *Aprilfestival*.

Building on this, we need research into the relationship and intersection between the roles of 'theatre audience member' and 'student'. This was clear from many discussions during the project - from the hacks produced in Syddjurs about the conventions of touring theatre in Denmark, to the Italian TAG

team's recommendation not to bring teenagers to the theatre with their schools, and to the discussion about Norway's '*Cultural Rucksack*' that provides theatre for all school children nationally. Examining how the two roles influence and impact on one another needs to be a priority in looking at what happens if and when teenagers are able to co-curate performance programming in schools, at festivals, and in local theatres and cultural institutions.

To find online the guide entitled '*Talking about Theatre*' and get more information go to the website <http://www.talekunst.dk/en/home/>. This material has been developed by Matthew Reason, Professor of Theatre and Performance in the Faculty of Arts at *York St John University*, and helps to initiate conversations about theatre from six different points of view. It is available in both Danish and English.

Furthermore, this next link contains questions about young people's habits and engagement as theatre-goers, as well as expectation and experience cards that can be printed, ready to use. The Danish version of the cards was developed by *Teatercentrum, Dansehallerne (The Dancehalls), LMS (Live Music in Schools)*, and teachers from the municipalities of Haderslev and Kalundborg. The English translation of the questions and cards was completed by *Teatercentrum* in the course of the T.E.E.N. project. *More information on the website teentheatrenetwork.eu at the section "Tools and Research"*.

