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2011-10-10
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LANGUAGE and INTERPRETATION in PLAYBACK THEATRE in a MULTI-LINGUAL SOCIETY: DRAMA FOR LIFE PLAYBACK THEATRE COMPANY, WITS UNIVERSITY, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA.

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Supervisor: Professor Hazel Barnes

A Research Report Submitted to the Wits School of Arts in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of a Master of Arts in Dramatic Art Degree by Course Work and Research Report

JOHANNESBURG 2011

Statement of Originality

This work has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any University. I declare that this report is my own unaided work. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the report contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the report itself.

Ngefor Shella Zanjam

April 11, 2011 ……..

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly I would like to thank the Drama for Life programme, GTZ and the University of the Witwatersrand. Without the opportunity they offered me, I would not have known about Playback Theatre and increased my knowledge and skills in the field of applied drama and theatre.

I would also like to thank the amazing Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company for accepting me into their mist and for lending me a hand in the process of this research. I could not have done this without their constant encouragement and support.

I am indebted to my supervisor Prof. Hazel Barnes for all her time invested in this research especially in editing my writing.

Thanks to all my friends, family and lecturers. Despite my difficult times adapting to the South African educational system, you believed in my abilities and kept supporting and encouraging me. Finally to the Masters class of 2010 for their constant words of support and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

In this study, I explore the language of Playback Theatre and its application in a multi-lingual society through the experience of the Playback performers. I consider the performances and experience of the Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company at Wits University, Johannesburg, as application for the study. Literature on performance and ritual theory gave a framework for analysis while writings on language and the experience of community are included to illuminate the analysis of Playback Theatre performance in a multi-lingual society. The research report, based on principles of Action Research, has been undertaken using an ethnographic approach that draws on participant observation, informal individual interviews, researcher reflexivity and focus group discussion.

The Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company is described and analysed giving the history and information on their practice. This leads to an analysis and a transcription of Playback Theatre performance. From this stage, the research report identifies and analyses elements of verbal and non-verbal language implicit in a Playback Theatre performance. Exploring the implication of this interactive form of theatre in a multi-lingual society shows that Playback Theatre can be applied for any context and in any setting as the experience of the performance relies on the non-verbal enactment of the stories by the actors.

In the concluding section, the report reflects on the complex nature of writing up a report from a participant observer view when one does not hold a full position as a member of the group or community. The report has shown that the ritual frame of Playback Theatre allows for the actors to be able to hold and enact any story from audience members. The Playback actor remains the centre of action in the experience of Playback Theatre performance. This research has looked at language from the point of the actor which therefore means that there needs to be further research on the experience of the audience members in terms of knowing how effective Playback Theatre can be when experienced in multi-lingual societies.

INFORMATION FOR READERS

Informants' Names

All names within the transcript of the Playback Theatre Performance have been changed for privacy and to avoid implicating others through identifying material associated with the named person. Informant's names for the focus group have been maintained as elected by the informant signing the consent form.

Performance transcript

The performance or explanations of the actor's enactment have been put in italics to different dialogue from performance. The performance has been edited leaving out details from the beginning and at the end to concentrate on the actual performance event.

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