

# Teenagers and performing arts

## Presentation Jan Staes

This presentation only asks questions. It doesn't give any answers.

### Growth

The number of children in primary school goes up.

In secondary school we have 4 different types of education: aso (theoretical orientation), tso (technical orientation), kso (focus on arts), bso (professional orientation).

Teachers in primary and secondary education are not young. We need a lot of new, young teachers.

### Diversity

The population in Flanders is very diverse. Without migration we would not have such a growth in Belgium. Soon 60% will have one parent not born in Flanders ). A large number won't speak Dutch as a mother tongue.

### Learn

The chances of succeeding in primary school are high. In secondary school that changes. In a class room that should be full of 14 year old students, 40% is actually 15 of 16 years old. These numbers will grow as more and more students will struggle with the language.

### Unknown

We have 17% poverty in Flanders at the moment and that number is raising with 2 to 3 percent a year. We have to keep in mind that for a lot of people 5 euro is a lot of money.

### Access

60% of the 12 to 18 year old teenagers owns a laptop. Teenagers have mobile devices, even the teenagers in poverty (second hand devices). What do they use their devices for? Mostly social media apps as facebook, snapchat, Instagram, youtube.

### Change

Teenagers need new skills, the skills of tomorrow. Some of these skills we had not heard of 5 years ago. Do teachers and adults have these skills?

### Options

Buccaneer and anchor-time: experiment versus safety. Teenagers are not just rebels. They need safety too because they have to make choices all the time.

### Choice

Forget about the categorization. That was in the 80's and 90's. Ask any teenager what genre of music he/she had on his/her Spotify. It will be a combination of genres and types of music. Teenagers listen to everything now.

### Collaboration

Networks, partnerships, crowd funding etcetera.

Do we have crowd funded projects in arts for teenagers? At this moment 20000 projects are funded by crowd funding in Flanders. Only 2 of them are in arts.

### Restless

Teenagers have smart phone stress nowadays. They always need their smartphone with them. Otherwise they feel restless. 60% of all teenagers would feel restless when missing a text message from a friends. There is a fear of missing out. When they enter a theatre hall the first question is to switch off their smart phones... In a movie theatre nobody asks that. Teenagers text during the movie and they take pictures because they want to share.

Question: should we ask them to turn off their phones? Could we do that? Would we do that?

### Creating

Participation numbers are quite good. The question in the survey was whether they visited X more than once (age 10 to 16). Adult numbers are worse. When young people turn 20 and start having children their participation level drops significantly.

Why are the numbers of sports participation higher than those of participation in the arts?

Answers from the public:

- You can do it in group, it's social.
- It's fun, healthy and it has a good promotion in the media.

Why do we have an answer ready to the questions why people should to sports. Why don't we have a clear answer for arts.

### Communities

Being off line is cool because it's difficult: things are changing.

### Experiment

Temporal actorship: teenagers create meaningful time zones with friends. They create safe havens. They are the first generation that is capable of doing it that well with people from all over the world (through social media).

### Connection

Transparency versus privacy: that's our problem. Learning what to share and what not to share.

### Curious

Teenagers are sharing on the internet. They are not creating. They are only creating in the form of sharing.

### Believe

This is huge. It could be religious but also believing in each other, in technology, ... We have to convince people to believe in possibilities.

### New relationships

### We can't be denied

That is difficult. Teenagers are more individuals than groups.

## Art enthusiasts

Theatre?

Functions of theatre: in the 70's and 80's it was education, in the 90's it was all about the esthetical values (art for arts sake). From 2000 it was about connection. What are the functions of theatre today? If theatre is a mirror of society we need to reinvent theatre and its function time and time again.

What is the function now? Answers from the public:

- Showing a different reality
- Giving a new perspective and sharing the new perspective

How often do you ask yourself that question? Why do you want people to come to performances? What do we want to say? What is the urgency? It's not just a single word anymore. Maybe it's diverse as society is. That's not a problem. There are just different options.

Forms of theatre: the functions are still relevant but we need to think of new ways and new ideas. There is not one network, connection, layer anymore.

Maybe it's:

- H. Arendt, The crisis in Education, 1954: theatre is a half-way house
- Quote Torn Halves: who takes responsibility and helps them making choices, adding a different point of view.

Autonomy, competence, relatedness, selfdetermination theory:

When do we learn things: what's my relation to it? What's my autonomy? Do I have the option not to go or to choose for myself?

Redefinition, modification, augmentation, substitution:

We can use technology for what it's mend for. Most of the technology is substitution, sometimes augmentation, modification (interactive website), redefinition (go and make a website yourself on the performance). If you only do the first two it's not effective to use technology and it's very expensive.

When can performing arts have one of these functions? Can performing arts be a redefinition of other activities? Theatre can easily be a substitution for football for example. But can it be redefinition?

Do you have one thing in your school career which they said it was useful but you found out you couldn't do anything with it? Latin. What if we see theatre as learning a language? Would it be Latin or English? Would you be using it actively yourself or would you be just translating it?

How can we make it active? Maybe fewer performances, more workshops? Maybe the other way around?

## **Workshop questions**

These questions have been sent in by teachers, artist, producing companies and curators from Flanders:

- Are Teenagers interested in performing arts?
- How can we motivate teenagers to come and see a performance?
- How can we get teenagers interested in other shows than concerts or circus shows?
- Would teenagers also want to attend a show without their parents?
- Would teenagers also want to attend a show together with their parents?
- They say you should let teenagers organize things themselves. Ok, but how can we do that?
- Do teenagers experience culture in a more individual way than 10 years ago? If so, how can we deal with that fact?
- What's the best way to communicate with teenagers? Do we best use social media, flyers, ...?
- Does a subscription package or a membership formula for teenagers work?
- What does art mean to teenagers?
- When, how and why do teenagers decide to attend a concert?
- How different is the choice for film, a pop concert, theatre, modern dance or classical music?
- Do teenagers perceive a difference between a museum and a theatre hall?
- What would teenagers recommend us (artists and curators) to change?
- If teenagers would be curators, what would they do?
- How can motivated teenagers motivate their friends?
- Do motivated teenagers want to motivate their friends?
- Do teenagers want to be involved in the realization of a season?
- How can we involve teenagers when the offer is so limited?
- Are age indications a good thing or are they very restricting (or stigmatizing)?
- Do young teenagers feel addressed by our current program?
- Do artists and theatre makers touch upon your own important subjects? Or doesn't that matter and is it all about the crossroad between teenagers and adults?
- What is missing on a content level when it comes to performances for teenagers?
- Is theatre still a suitable medium for teenagers nowadays? When is it? When is it not?
- Do performances raise questions to teenagers?
- Do artists make enough effort to provide answers to questions?
- Are teenagers fine with the fact that other people make choices for them?
- If theatre would be a sport, what kind of sport would it be?
- Do you, as a teenager, want to be addressed in theatre?
- Do you want to be treated with a VIP arrangement or do you prefer to be 'one of the many'?
- Did you ever see a show in English? Would you like to? Would you be able to understand?
- How 'digital' should a show for teenagers be?
- Do you perceive a school play as class at school or as a performance?
- When do you feel addressed by a performance?
- Are there subjects that performances for teenagers cannot / should not broach?
- Are curators / artists authorized to say that they do or do not know teenagers?
- Are performances for teenagers really different from performances for adults?
- Do we (over)protect teenagers in theatre?
- Should a teenagers have the freedom to choose not to attend a school performance?
- Should we offer teenagers performances divided in genres? (humour, thriller, drama ...)
- Performances for teenagers: large or small theatre hall?
- If computers and smartphones are the answer to teenagers and theatre, then what is the question?

These are the questions discussed during the seminar + the key words:

Group 1:

- When do you feel addressed by a performance?
- Are there subjects that performances should not/ cannot broach?

Key words: shame, (together) with, judgement, respect, taboes

Group 2:

- What does art mean to teenagers?
- When do you feel addressed by a performance?
- What is missing on a content level when it comes to performances for teenagers?

Key words: relevant; reflection, choice, adequate, promotion

Group 3:

- If teenagers would be curators, what would they do?
- When do you feel addressed by a performance?
- Do we (over-protect teenagers in theatre?

Key words: responsibility, rebellion/resistance, emotion, challenge

Group 4:

- If teenagers would be curators, what would they do?
- When do you feel addressed by a performance?
- Are performances for teenagers really different from performances for adults?

Key words: respect, artistic quality, equality, dialogue, freedom

Group 5:

- What would teenagers recommend us (artists and curators) to change?
- Wat does art mean to teenagers?
- If computers and smartphones are the answer to teenagers and theatre, then what is the question?

Key words: respect, enhancement, multitasking, judgement

### Thoughts to share:

- 'With': we are often a group of adults talking about them instead of with them. Include them in discussions and choose/make the performances also with them. The content we are making shouldn't be about them but in dialogue with them.
- We need teenagers to have the answers to the questions For example: When do you feel addressed? We can only make assumptions.
- The difference between a 13 year old and a 15 year old is big. We are generalizing.
- We have had these discussions 15 years ago. How can we get them to participate? How do we create these methodologies? Answer: the 50's Tupperware strategy: go to their homes, don't ask them to come to you. But how do you get yourself invited in their networks?
- Example Bobri festival in Ljubjana: While teenagers were in the parliament, grownups had to go out to do a quiz with questions made up by teenagers (questions on actors, music, ...). The adults knew only 3 or 4 answers in total. It made us think of how different our worlds were. The teenagers are too quick, it changes quick.
- This is a starting point. We can reinvent and start all over again. (neo)  
But we don't have to throw away everything we discussed in the 80's and 90's. We can still use these elements and adapt them. Substitution, modification,....

### Presentation Tadeja Pungercar (Slovenia)

Bobri festival is quite a new festival. Within the festival we organize teenage projects. The festival started in 2009. Each year it is funded by the government. And each year there is a central topic. The goal is to promote cultural events for children and youth in Ljubljana. The festival has a 160 events (theatre, movies, dance, music, workshops, ...) for approximately 7000 people. We use age marks and make a booklet. There are not enough productions made for teenagers so we also used productions for adults.

My main concerns were: How can I reach teenagers? Are we doing something good if we can reach 50 teenagers every year? In the beginning I didn't have a structure. I was just being enthusiastic and I had a dialogue with them. First I gave them something to feel safe. I handed them inspiration from all over the world. A professional critic went to the schools to talk to the teenagers.

With 'young eyes in Bobri' I encourage and empower them and get them in contact with the artists.

I don't address them as a teacher but as a mentor. Then I send them the pdf of the festival. They can choose their own shows. I give some recommendations, including shows for younger age groups. They have to go to the festival on their own: they get a map but have to come by themselves. They have my phone number in case they get lost.

They write critiques outside a school context in order to get to know how they think.

I wanted to use the media they use. So I ask them to make a reportage. They get the structure but they do everything else themselves and they do the research to formulate questions. They do the interviews in an informal context, in a bar with beers and maybe cigarettes.

Last year we mentored them for a photography project. They made pictures all the time in their free time so I wanted to show them that photography can be art as well.

I try to involving them and give them a different perspective on art.

Their videos were shown on the national TV.

They are also ambassadors: they share the video's with their peers.

They had been given responsibility. They interviewed artists but also their own friends after the show.

The teenagers learned how to speak about performances, even when they didn't like a show.

### **Cristina Cazzola (Italy)**

How do you feel about teenager after this morning? Do you think about teenagers the same as before or differently?

We are always referring to an ideal teenager. What is my daughter like? What was I like as a teenager? Stop doing that. Go out and ask the teenagers. You need to be engaged by them. Not the other way around. Make clear why you need them and they will be fantastic. We need them. You need to communicate with them. There are 1000 of examples on the participatory level. Inspiration video teen project: the teenagers have presented their own project to the curators.

Engaging the teenagers by using the theatre critic tool: share their experience by giving them tools and voice, to empower them. Change their role, share, ...

How to reach teenagers that are not interested in theatre? Peppy's diary method: the show starts the day you decide to go to the theatre, not the moment the light goes out in the theatre hall. It starts in the car, at breakfast, ...

Why are grown ups not coming to theatre anymore? Solutions: you need to transfer their role from passive to active. Problem: there are no shows adequate for them.

Ask theatres to make a program and the teenagers were engaged in the same way. Give them the tools, not as a lesson but by means of a show. Provocating a reaction by projecting some show in the program and acting as if the theatre was there.

Theatre can become an addiction. In a certain moment they can vote their ambassador. Why were they eager to be at a festival abroad in Danmark? Because Danish guys are handsome. Maria wanted to come to Oslo because she was addicted to.... They had free time. And she went to the theatre with a teenager from Oslo. Now we have a teen crew from different countries.

Conclusion: we asked a researcher to inquire the teenagers and see how he/she perceived the teenagers. The most important thing is 'look at me'. They need to have a project with you. Their future with you. Get in contact with their passion.