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# Learning about other children

THE AUDIENCE sat cross-legged on the floor, heads craned forward with rapt attention. Then they leapt to their feet and ran gleefully around the room, banging walls, chairs and the floor.

A startling thing for an audience to do, you may decide, but in this case the best possible reaction the "actors" could have wished for. The average age of this 45-strong group is 10 years. Black, white and brown, they are participating in a week-long creative drama programme at the Community Arts Project (CAP) centre in Mowbray.

Through its year-round workshop activities of sculpture, painting, drawing, music, karate and yoga, CAP provides facilities for young people from all of Cape Town's communities to pursue creative expression and learn skills — and do this in the company of different racial groups and cultures.

This week's programme, traditionally held in the December holidays, was prepared and directed by Elizabeth Mills of Two Hoots Theatre Company,

which specializes in educational theatre for children.

"Through this event," Elizabeth Mills said yesterday, as we watched from the sidelines, "we try and get the children to mix and learn something about each other's different language group."

By now the children were again cross-legged on the floor, listening intently as drama student Jenny Stein explained in fairy-tale style the origin of language.

Three students from the UCT School of Drama are contributing their services: Jenny, Gys de Villiers and Richard Nzimande, each conducting and taking care of the three different language groups, Xhosa, English and Afrikaans.

Yesterday it was Jenny's turn to tell a story — about how in the beginning everything was silent. She stalks around imploring the world to make a sound.

With the aid and prompts of Richard and Gys sounds emerge, the children join in and in the final hubbub of whistling, blowing and banging she concludes: "And so the sounds that came from the animals and plants went to the different countries and became different languages."

Today Gys will tell his story and the week-long programme will come to an end. Hopefully during the process the children had grown less shy of each other and come to learn a little bit about each other's different customs.

Elizabeth ruefully admits there are too few white children; "They are the ones who can benefit most from the mixing," she says, but judging from the excited participation of those present the programme has been a great success.

The positive aspects of this small part of its annual programme only serve

to highlight the current crisis at CAP. For the last couple of years it has been operating in one large room of an old warehouse on Main Road, Mowbray.

Project director Derrick Joubert explained: "We have been terribly frustrated by our lack of space. We offer a wide variety of disciplines but our intake of students and scope of our activities is hampered by having to cram them all into this one room."

For two years CAP negotiated with the Cape Town City Council for the hire of a section of Observatory Junior School which has been standing empty for that period.

"We were on the point of finalizing the terms of lease when EXCO just suddenly reversed the decision of the council to hire the building to us. No reasons were given."

Other options are also being investigated, but so far CAP has met with little joy. "All we need," said Derrick Joubert, "is an adequate building to hire so that we can expand our projects."

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