

Executive Summary

Common understanding of the general public towards “theatre and drama” is that of “TV soaps” or “people making their livelihood from acting around”. For academics, “theatre arts” or “dramatic arts” could be categorized into two aspects:

1. As integrated arts involving other forms of arts such as literature (script-writing, dialogues, lyrics), visual arts (production design), performing arts, and music.
2. As “process of learning” derived from the art and science of theatre training which could be designed to develop skills and insights of targeted participants.

This second aspect has been developed into various applications, for example, Drama in Education (DIE), Theatre in Education (TIE), Creative Drama, Sociodrama, Process Drama, Forum Theatre, etc. Educators, social workers, and development organizations in Thailand are seeking more and more possibilities to benefit from theatre arts as tool that help extend human development.

In 2004, our team of researchers spent 9 months working on the project “Youth Development through Drama Process Integrated with Community Heritage” commissioned by Ministry of Culture. Participated in the project were schoolchildren, teachers, development workers, and local artists who had come to conclusions that theatre and drama process could extend learning ability, creativity, sense of discipline and responsibility, and self-esteem beyond usual expectation. These findings were our strong support when starting this research project entitled “Implementing Theatre and Drama for Youth Development: A Pilot Study for Policy Advocacy”, funded by the Knowledge Network Institute of Thailand.

The research project aims to:

1. Survey policies and practices of theatre arts for youth development in Thailand and other countries;
2. Synthesize support policy towards theatre arts as development tools in other countries; and
3. Develop strategies for policy-makers on implementing theatre and drama for youth development.

The research processes are as follows:

1. Review and summarise the role of theatre arts in youth development from existing research works in Thailand.
2. Summarise support policies on theatre arts for youth development in other countries;
3. Conduct field-research interviewing and observing 19 groups of practitioners as well as organising focus-group discussions among service-providers and service-users.
4. Present research findings to invited group of experts in related fields for comments and suggestions.
5. Organize workshop-seminar to brainstorm ideas among stakeholders from knowledge management organizations, state agencies, local and international non-government organizations, theatre groups, educators and academics to analyze data and to draft policy strategies for Thailand.

Review of researches on theatre arts/drama process used for development confirms our presumption that creativeness, cognitive skills, and critical thinking usually accumulate through simulation of stories, incidents, causes-and-effects, hence formation of constructive knowledge and attitude. Drama process thus fosters communication skills through body language, verbal language and written language.

The practice of theatre concentrates equally on mind and body. Knowledge about one's own self is as important as his/her ability to recognize "the others". Collaboration of different factors in our life could be analyzed through theatre exercises: concentration/breathing, senses/observation, movements/language, writing/thoughts/actions. "Learning by playing" in theatre process ignites nerve-cells network and foster development of both sides of the brain affecting emotional intelligence, reasoning, morals and ethics at the same time.

Reviews of theatre arts for youth development in Australia, Scotland, England and the United States of America indicate clear policies and implementation:

Concepts

- The Arts is a significant factor in human development, from childhood to old age, be it vulnerable or marginalised, mentally or physically challenged, elite or ethnic groups.
- The Arts generates society full of creativity.
- The Arts plays an important role in education, innovation, and foster life-long learning.
- The Arts plays an important role in economic development. It generates incomes, opportunities and support tourism.
- The Arts fosters individual and national identities.
- The Arts generates well-being of people in the country.

Forms of Support

Support of the arts is committed by the four states. States are major supporters and policies related to theatre arts for development and youth as main targets are presented. The supports can be categorized into two forms:

1. States support in terms of policies and setting state organizations to proceed with the matters; for example, Australia Council, Scottish Council and Arts Council England.
2. States support in terms of policies and allocate budgets to independent organizations. In this case, supports may be made available by state funding resources such as the National Endowment for the Arts (USA).

Methods of support

1. Infrastructure support.
Provide physical spaces for the artists to perform and develop their skills as well as opportunities such as festivals, and other necessary working tools and equipment.
2. Arts and Artists development.
Encourage trainings or exchanges among artists, artists and educators, within same or foreign countries.
3. Network building
Collaborate to create database of the arts in individual and institutional levels within the countries and overseas and link arts networks with other types or networks, such as education or funding resources networks.
4. Knowledge generation
Create database, conduct trainings, research, and dissemination in prints, animation media and websites.
5. Budget allocation
Allocate budgets for individual artists, projects, groups or arts organisations and infrastructure.
6. Public dissemination
Promote widely and equal access to participation in arts. Increase awareness for roles of arts among the general public, which will create groups of general audiences,

institutes and organizations as arts supporters. It also nurtures audience development and help artists to accomplish quality works.

Findings from groups and organizations using theatre and drama for youth development result in categorization of groups and models to use theatre arts as follows:

1. Groups and organizations equipped with theatrical and dramatic skills can employ various models and methods according to their aims, for example, to use drama process to “empower” young participants to dare thinking and speaking out. It also emphasizes strategic importance of Youth Theatre Group, for theatre could be effective tools in telling both their own and their community’s stories. It also aims to build networks for exchanges of concrete experiences and visions so that young people could acquire better understanding towards society their place in the community.
2. Non government organisations and education institutes use theatre arts to supplement main curricula in the organisations. A number of organisations rely on theatre and drama as “communication tool” to disseminate their content such as women’s rights, children’s rights, environmental issues, etc. As theatre communicates by performance and actions, not verbal preaching, it triggers interest and lead the audience to consider targeted issues, in many cases with passion.
For youth development, theatre enables these young practitioners to develop their in analytical skills, then transform the agendas into stories. Assertiveness and immediate problem solving skills are gained when taking their theatre to different communities without knowing in advance what issues might arise and what problems they might encounter.
3. When using drama and theatre in school and community works, young people found that their voice can be “heard” more. The fact that adults sometimes underestimated their quality had changed into new perspectives once they showed how constructive they could be with their community theatre projects which brought both adults and young people together to their roots. Since the process of community theatre sometimes begins with tales that could be told only by the elderly, connection between past and present, themselves and tales, enables all involved to clearly “see” themselves as crucial members of the community. Amid globalisation that is blurring and obscuring the self (selves), as seen by youths, theatre arts takes them back to search for and understand their own “identities”

Obstacles and limitations for using theatre arts for youth development can be categorised as follows.

1. Groups of organisation directly employing drama process.
 - 1.1 State, private funding agencies and foreign international development agencies have their own agendas to advocate; thus, these organisations have to take the position of funding agencies when working. As a result, their theatre arts skills are limited and artistic creativities will be harnessed by agendas of funding agencies.
 - 1.2 Incorporation of theatre arts in education process can be limited by narrow understanding of theatre arts by personnel in education. Additionally, if the process is to be included in education policies, working with teachers will not be sufficient. More would have to be done with directors and policy makers. The policy level work is not an easy one.
 - 1.3 Despite the policy levels agree with the drama process, an implementation of policies will remain a difficult task because operational level personnel still have limited understanding and theatre and drama skills.

- 1.4 Lack of infrastructure necessary for the development of knowledge and understanding of drama and theatre for development, such as information system, research and knowledge creation, places for production, public forum, etc.
2. Non governmental organisation and educational organisations using drama and theatre.
 - 2.1 Lack of capacities building for organisations to fully develop drama process.
 - 2.2 In case of education institutes, directors do not understand roles of drama and theatre in youth development, which is an obstacle for implementation in schools.
3. Youth groups
 - 3.1 Lack of schools and communities' supports force many groups to suspend their operations or change their roles to other directions, such as changing to commercial or paid theatre group in other events.
 - 3.2 Lack of "coaches" to upgrade capacities of youth groups to utilise drama process in development. Coaches, including organisations that train drama and theatre skills, provide training for teachers or local development organisations, also have their own missions and do not have time to follow-up and support youth groups.
 - 3.3 Limits to access funding resources or funding agencies forces some groups to terminate their operations.

The above reviews and synthesizes of findings can be concluded in the research of "Strategies to Promote Theatre Art of Youth Development in Thailand," as follows.

1st Strategy: Drama process for youth development knowledge management.

- 1.1 Gather existing knowledge at present to build drama and theatre for youth development database.
- 1.2 Research and generate new knowledge to connect existing knowledge of folk artists and contemporary theatre and drama knowledge.
- 1.3 Develop networks of learning and knowledge management of theatre and drama artists, educationists and development workers to enable learning process for success and failure stories from domestic and international levels.

2nd Strategy: Foster knowledge of theatre art for youth development

- 2.1 Acquire and allocate spaces for theatre artists for youth development experimental workshops and spaces for theatre to perform and present the drama and theatre act to the public, as a process to "develop theatre artists" and "understanding audiences."
- 2.2 Create "social spaces" of drama and theatre for development through academic forums, theatre and drama for development festivals, etc. for general public's understanding of roles of theatre and drama for development.

3rd Strategy: Create model schools

Initiate "model schools" project to create lessons learned and knowledge on integration of drama process with other subjects already taught in schools for learning process and learner development.

- 3.1 Select schools that are interested in using drama process for education and development to join force with theatre artists to incorporate drama process in education and learner development process.
- 3.2 Generate lessons learned from collaboration with school and theatre artists to further the impact.

4th Strategy: Make supports available for groups and organisation using theatre arts for youth development.

4.1 Incubate skills, methods and academic knowledge of theatre and drama for groups and organizations using theatre arts for youth development.

4.2 Allocate and support budgets for groups and organizations using theatre arts for youth development, from fixed governmental resources and enable them to conduct their own fundraising.

5th Strategy: Creation of personnel

5.1 Initiate “Theatre arts for development/ education” curriculum, utilising experience of educators, development workers and theatre artists who have used theatre and drama in learning processes and learners development.

5.2 Develop personnel such as instructors and development workers to effectively utilise the curriculum.

5.3 Indicate that the theatre art is a “sought-after discipline” in university level so that the budget for personnel development can be allocated.