

Engagement and Empowering the Students in Wat Makleu Community in Preserving the Narapirom's Canal through a Shadow Puppet Performance: Hun Ngao Lao Reung Klong Nara.

Pawaluk Suraswadi¹

Abstract

This applied theatre project uses drama process and community-based learning in order to engage the students at Makleu Temple School to recognize the value and importance of the Narapirom canal and the life-style along the canal as in the old days. This project incorporates theatre gaming, drama process and puppetry to pass on community life-style and values to young generations nowadays. The students participated in this project practiced in artistic process, which were: theatre gaming and creative drama. This process enhanced the simultaneous response to any given circumstances and roles. The students had an intrinsic learning since they gained some new perceptions about themselves and their community. They also gained self-worth and learned to be responsible for their practice and performance. They also learned about a team working, which was the key to make their performance successful. For extrinsic learning, the students recognized the importance of the role as a change agent for their own community. In this project, these students appreciated the living-style in the old days along the Narapirom canal. The students reconnected with people in the community through this project. They recognized that they could help

¹ Mrs. Pawaluk Suraswadi is currently a lecturer in Drama at Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University

cutting, drying and selling water hyacinths in order to make the canal clean. This concept is highly important to be understood by people in the community that the Narapirom canal was once the center of people in the community in the past. It is highly important to create a concerned and active person who live in and belong to the community in order to preserve the canal and protect the root and history of the community from being forgotten. As the facilitator and the director of this project, I believe that learning through drama and participating in a community-based learning project would make the students to gradually think more about the Makleu community. This learning process will make students become active and change agents of their own community in the future.

Keywords: Engagement; Empowering

Introduction

In 2014, the applied theatre project, Hun Ngao Lao Reung Klong Nara was initiated in order to use creative drama process and creative shadow puppetry to work with students at Wat Makleu community, Salaya district, Nakhonpathom province. Funded by the faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, the project was aimed at engaging the group of student at Wat Makleu aged between 9-11 years old to bridge the gap of living-style in the old days along the Narapirom canal together with preserving the environment of the canal through creative arts process: creative drama and shadow puppetry. The duration of this project takes 5 months from April-August 2014. There are 11 students participated in this project. As a facilitator of this project, these students took part in creative drama process, creative puppetry and making shadow puppets, observing and listening to stories from elders in the community about the Narapirom canal. The final product was a shadow puppet performance named Hun Ngao Lao Reung Klong Nara, performed by the students at the pavilion of Makleu temple on August 31, 2014 at 7pm.

The Makleu temple community background and changes of life style along the Narapirom Canal, Salaya district, Nakhonpathom province

The Narapirom canal is located in the border of Nakhonpratom and Nontaburi province. The canal links Klong Taweewattana and Nakornchaisri River. King Rama V built the canal in order to conduct more water to rice fields in the area. In the past, people used the canal as the major way of traveling to Salaya. The canal was then clean and without water hyacinths. There were many landmarks along the canal such as major orchards, lotus field, markets or temples where people stopped their boats to greet and gather together as a living water community. The life of people then highly depended on the Narapirom canal. Thus, the community children in the past appreciated the living styles along the canal and considered the canal as part of their life.

The ways of how people living along the Narapirom Canal these days have been gradually changed due to several developments in the area. Laddha Tangrod (2014) one of the oldest people who has lived in this community, told me about the changes in the community's setting from past to present that as followed:

"In the past, we were surrounded by huge, golden and never-ending ricefields. Once, the infra-structure reached this community, we now see merely light poles with lots of electric wires like messy spider webs across the sky. Roads have been cut into the rice fields separating them into tiny squares."

Outsiders now own the land that used to belong to the local people. Factories, buildings, and houses have replaced the canal's branches. The Narapirom canal now takes bad water and garbage from factories and rice fields. The canal is full of water hyacinths. People now use road as a major transportation route and no longer see the importance or beauty of the canal and its living style along the canal.

As the facilitator and the director of this project, I used the form of shadow puppetry to tell the story of life in the community in the past 30 years in order to bridge the generation gap and to engage the students to recognize the values of living along the canal together with helping to preserve it.

Figure 1. Makleu temple community and the 100 year-old wooden bridge crossing the Narapirom canal nowadays



Figure 2. The Tradition of Tak Bat Klang Nam: the priests sails a boat along the Narapirom canal to receive food from villagers in Makleu temple community in November.



Concepts and Theories

1. The children development through play and creative drama

Play always takes an important part in children development. Peter Slade (1995: 2-3) states that there are two types of play which are projected play and personal play. For projected play, the child projects their mind onto or around objects outside them such as playing with dirt or dolls and creation of pictures. For personal play, the whole person is used for moving and doing the action. The person takes total physical, emotional and/or spiritual responsibility for the action. In this project, children's dramatization or creative drama is a personal play, while shadow puppetry is a projected play.

Play is learning. Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn (2547: 21) states that play is a learning process which incorporates imagination and perceptions together with understanding from reality. Learning through a personal play or creative drama is a learning tool for children in exploring through themselves as a whole person together with interacting with issues in the society. Lynn McGregor (1977: 25) explains as followed:

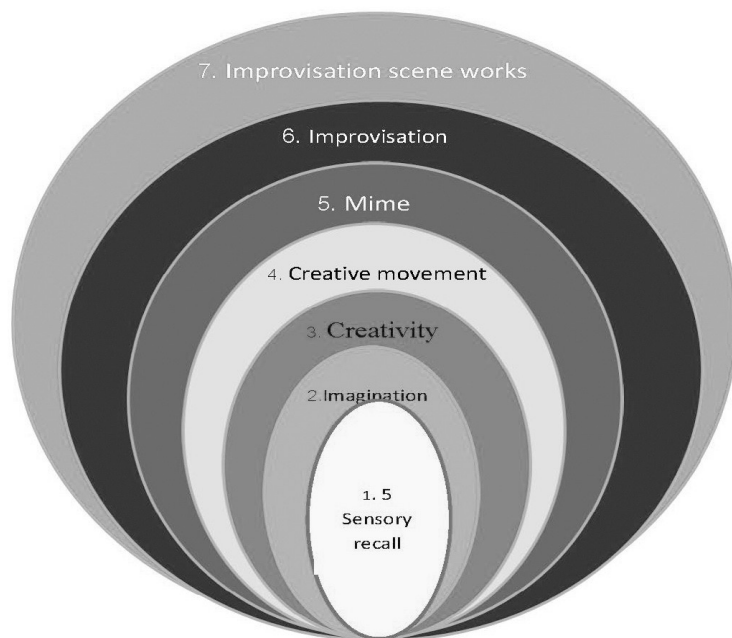
“Learning through drama results greater understanding of people and their situations; mastering the use of the process of representing of people and their situations; mastering the use of the process of representing, ordering and expressing feelings and ideas; controlling and using dramatic media; and working with others on both symbolic and real levels.”

Learning through Drama is a process emphasized on the learners’ feeling about social reality. Lynn McGregor (1977: 31) further explains about this as “participation in drama is to explore their past experiences and understanding in order to project into new symbols and roles...Their symbols are derived from their perceptions and feelings about reality.” The learners become imagined roles based on the situation, which they respond to. Then they develop their roles and act out which reflecting their beliefs and assumptions in the drama. Learning through drama always has duality concept which are drama as an expressive learning, and drama as an intelligence process. It is the process that requires the learner’s whole person which incorporates head – heart – and entire body parts of that person to act.

Richard Courtney (1990: 137) explains about drama and human learning as followed:

“What achieved in dramatic activity are: intrinsic, extrinsic, aesthetic and artistic... Intrinsic learning is when dramatic activity enhances the learners’ in qualities which are perception, awareness, concentration, variety of thought-style, expression, inventiveness, problem identification and solving, confidence and self-worth, social learning and negotiation with others, and motivation and transfers of learning...Extrinsic learning is when dramatic learning enhances the learners’ potential and abilities other than drama...Aesthetics learning is when the dramatic activity enhances the learners’ feeling, judgment, and choices...As for artistic learning, its elements in spontaneous drama and theatre coincide: gesture and movement and human interaction.”

In this project, there are 7 steps of process drama leading to the artistic learning of Richard Courtney as Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn, (2546: 39) explains in this following picture;



Through these exercises: five sensory recall, imagination, creativity, creative movement, mime, improvisation and improvisation scene works, children are guided by the facilitator to explore about themselves in order to be able to use their head-heart and body to response to the given situation spontaneously.

2. Community-Based Learning in order to bring back the people's pride about their community

Applied theatre process is based on the Cultural Capital² or the art and historical resources and background of that community that can bring back the pride of the people who live in the community. Pornrat Damrung (2557: 72) explains that the applied theatre activity developed from the cultural resources of the community itself can unite and empower the people in the community because it presents life, stories or histories of the local people.

² Cultural capital is both tangible and intangible assets; but importantly, they are not related to income, net worth, or any financial measure. In this paper, cultural capital means values that are embodied in the culture and people of Makleu temple community: like traditions relating to the living ways along Narapirom canal. These values are important to make the people live with a balance and healthy way in a community.

Janet Pilai (2014: 3) explains about the community-based learning as followed:

“It focuses on using modern tools and processes to investigate traditional knowledge which may embody historically significant ecological, aesthetic, economic, social, spiritual or scientific value. Such values, including knowledge and skills, develop from the long-term interaction between humans and their environment and are embedded in the selective or collective memories of the community.”

Janet Pilai (2014: 6-7) also speaks about collaborating with community together with art-making process that it includes “observation, selection, composition and representation, which allows learning to take place. This learning is layered with emotional, physical and sensual experiences resulting from contact with living spaces and people.” This learning process attempts to find the balance between the use of emotions, intellect and senses in the participants as what Janet Pilai (2014: 6-7) states as cognitive, affective and sensual learning that take place in the participants.

Figure 3. Makleu youth were helping the elder in the community working on Dok Rak picking while listening to the story of the community.



The Story of the shadow performance: Hun Ngao Lao Reung Klong Nara

The skits of the puppet are: In the first scene, it opens with the picture of a hundred year-bridge and how lively the market along the canal used to be. This bridge itself is one of the very last pieces of history that still exists in the community. It was renovated by people in the community which was led by Walee Suadmalai, the community leader with help from the Liberal Arts faculty at Mahidol University.

In the second scene, there is one girl named Pae who is practicing her swimming in the canal. Later, when she is able to swim, Pae and a group of her friends swim along the rice boats with great fun. Then along the way they are walking back home, they find lots of local fish such as catfishes and Lot fishes (a long tale with yellow-colored fish). They try to catch them for their dinner.

In the third scene, it is about memories of Dum who still remembers ceremonies relating to the canal's life such as Tak Bat Klang Nam or a ceremony for giving merit to monks by sailing along the canal. Dum's marriage ceremony is also related to the canal since her groom takes a boat from his house to her house along the canal.

The forth scene is about Da's adventure life in the canal since the water way in the canal that she has been used for sailing for her ice-cream vending is gradually filled with garbage, discarded weeds and planted and water hyacinths. In this scene, Da has to fight with a larger than life-size water hyacinths puppets.

The last scene is dedicated to the reviving of community lifestyle in this century because people in the community clean and take care of their canal by cutting and drying water hyacinths for sale. This makes many families spend time wisely together again when they working together in this drying water hyacinths project.

Working Process:

1. The Drama Process

In this project, the drama process includes theatre gaming, 7 steps of creative drama and tableau vivant. The students went through exercises of creative drama every workshop. Then 2 months later, they created 3 tableau vivant, which contained the beginning, the middle and the ending of each scene. These scene works were based on stories and memories of the elders about the Narapirom canal. The scenes then were selected by the director and were turned to a script and a shadow puppet performance.

1.1 Theatre Gaming: Theatre gaming is playing with objective. It is the objective that each individual participant must become involved with others while attempting to reach a goal. The theatre games that the director used in this project came from Viola Spolin's process, which are: gaming for body warming up, sensory awareness, concentration through improvisation and communication with and without words. These games enhance the learners' freedom, respect and focus in the drama work.

Theatre gaming enhances students' awareness, concentration and group work. Zip Zap Zup is one of the warming up games that was used in this project. Other theatre games that were used were: a group counting, karok tak rung, playing tag, 1 posture with 1 sound. These games were for enhancing students' concentration and simultaneity. Students also played mirror games, walking in a space with different shapes, turning a bottle into something else, closing eyes and listening to sounds, closing eyes and walking in the imagined space. These theatre games were parts of the first 5 steps of creative drama process, which had the objectives of working with 5 sensory recall, imagination, creativity, creative movement, and miming. These exercises prepared and developed the students for improvisation exercises and improvisation scene works exercises. In the process, students

also had their voice training session. They learned how to use their diaphragm to make their voice louder in the correct way. The theatre games, voice training and creative drama process motivated the students to the performance as a final product of this project.

Figure 4. The Students had a creative movement exercise.



1.2 Community-Based Learning Process

In community-based learning process, students collaborated with their community to investigate stories, memories or history of the community. They used the stories and memories as a springboard for their improvisation. After the students listened to any stories about a community life-style in the past, they would do creative dramatization scenes. They dramatized scenes, were in roles, improvised and did hot-seat exercises based on different real-life characters whom they met. Then, they wrote their journal reflecting on their feelings and some thought, ideas or values that they discovered along the process.

Figure 5. The use of creative drama process: students were improvising the scene based on the stories from the community



2. Shadow Puppetry

In this project, a master puppeteer, Sirikarn Banjongtad from Makhampom Theatre troop (the People's Media Foundation) was invited to do a workshop with the students twice. The students were inspired by her workshop. The workshop was a found-objects puppet: students needed to create a creative shadow puppet performance with any found-objects.

In this workshop, students searched for any interesting shape, movement and form of objects for making their own found-object show. They had to make up their own story based on the characters that they used. Then they practiced and performed for their friends in the project. This exercise was to prepare the students to create and make their shadow puppet performance.

Figure 6. The children are experimenting with found object puppet.



Most of the works in puppetry were drew and done by the students under my guiding as a facilitator/ director of this project. The children drew lines of their own puppet characters based on a real person whom they knew or listened to the stories in the community.

It was very hard for young children to perform shadow puppetry. However, the students learned to hold the puppet characters still and to perform a puppet performance as a group work. They experienced to be in the dark and to hold the lighting still in order to make this shadow puppets performance magical and perfect for the audiences.

Figure 7. Behind the screen of Hun Ngao Lao Reung Klong Nara.



Figure 8. Sirikarn Banjongtad, the Master Puppeteer from Makhampom troop.



However, there are some puppets that were designed and made by me. The first one is a larger than life-size water hyacinths puppets. This one is inspired by Indonesian Wayang Kulit puppetry. I used the traditions of Kayon or the tree of life puppet in Javanese shadow puppet for making larger than life-size water hyacinths puppets. In the final scene, I used a half-human-part puppet, which demonstrated the activity of a family in the community joining and cutting water hyacinths. In this scene, I used a background of a canal picture to be projected on the screen. The frame and the screen were designed and made for touring to schools in Salaya area.

Figure 9. Scene 1: the picture of a hundred year-bridg and how lively the market along the canal used to be.



Figure 10. A half-human-part puppet demonstrating the cutting of water hyacinths like a general routine life of the Makleu Community and picture of the Narapirom canal was projected onto the screen.



The Results of the Project:

1. Drama develops the students holistically

Like general young people nowadays, the students in Makleu temple community were culturally disenfranchised through the widespread usage of media, social-online and a broken family. In this community, children mostly spend their time playing game online or are left with television since their parents are in a labor class who need to earn a living without much time and concern to take care of their own children. Sometimes, the children are left without the parent's care for several months due to their work site that is far away from the community.

Also another factor that is highly form the students' perceptions of the world is the Thai educational system, which highly places importance on standardize tests. This system causes the students to be excluded from the roots and values of the community. The drama process in this project enhances the spirit of inquiry in the students about themselves as a dramatist. The practices through theatre gaming, creative drama is "an intrinsic learning" (Richard Courtney, 1990: 137).

Richard Courtney (1990: 137) explains about an intrinsic learning in dramatic activities as followed:

“Drama process enhances the learners’ in qualities which are perception, awareness, concentration, variety of thought-style, expression, inventiveness, problem identification and solving, confidence and self-worth, social learning and negotiation with others, and motivation and transfers of learning.”

Theatre gaming deepens students’ awareness, concentration and group work. May Boonthong, (2014) one of the participants, said that “the game zip zap zup, made me alert and paying more attention to what I was doing and going to do either in the performance or in real life. I am usually very slow and careless to things around myself.”

Through the voice training session and creative movement activity, Chettidha Kittpitak (2014) said that “I really liked the voice training practice because it made my voice louder. I also felt bolder to act and be more creative.” Yolladha Triwongtum (2014), said that “I felt that my pronunciation was getting better. Theater activities made my personality better. The activities also made me more dexterous with my body and movement.”

In the improvisation session, the students felt and acted out in role based on the given situation and real-life character. The students lived through a particular moment in time and use their feeling, experiences, memories and imagination to develop the story and to solve conflicts in their role. The drama activities made the students gain more self-confidence and self-esteem. They recognized the results of working hard and see the values and responsibility as a person to do and to achieve in this project. Vanita Keawkumrop (2014), explained about a new perception about darkness and shadow puppetry, and a responsibility that she learned through this project as followed:

“I like shadow puppet because before joining in this project, I am probably afraid of them as it feels like playing something in the dark and it makes me think of ghosts. But now I know about a shadow puppet. Being in this production and process makes me more refine and become a detailed person. I truly need to pay attention to what I am doing in order to make it good. Also this is a great opportunity to know more people in this community. I also learn to work and not to have any problems with my friends in this production.”

Nongnush Pradubpan (2014), explained about working in this project as followed:

“I really like puppetry. I feel that it comes alive. A puppet can do everything like human being does. I used to go to the gaming center a lot but now I quit because of

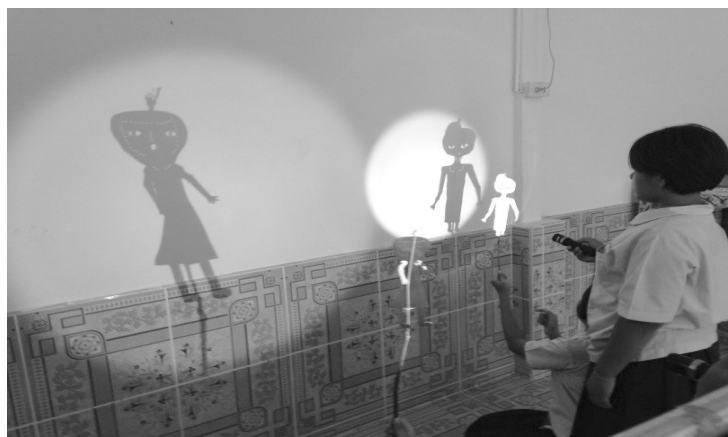
working in this production makes me know a lot about my community. Now I know that playing games is a waste of time.”

For social learning aspect, drama process is a team work that requires lots of interaction in the group. During the rehearsal and performance process, the students learned to work as a team work. They learned and practiced how to be a puppeteer together with speaking lines of the story. In order to make a perfect picture of the shadow puppets in some scenes, they had to work as a great team. They had to change the attitude about themselves and their attitudes towards other people in the team in order to make a good team. The students placed an importance on the work that they did the most. They worked really hard and truly cared for the practice as a good team work

In every performance, the students had to learn to interact with audiences during the performance. Before and after each performance, they had to be punctual, to help putting altogether the frame and many types of lighting equipment. They also prepared for the performance space to be ready.

In the touring session in several schools around Salaya area, the numbers of the team members in this project was gradually decreasing due to the requirement of the students' school to study for the standardized test. In the last time of the touring performance, there were only six out of eleven students left. Many scenes were eliminated. However, a group work, the students were able to maintain their positive energy to finish the performance for the audiences. The drama process and puppetry in this project uses of the senses, emotions, cognitions and hands-on experience of the students as a holistic development of the participants in this project.

Figure 11. The students were practicing working with shadow puppets



2. Drama develops the students as major change agents for Makleu Community

The students who participated in this project recognized and understood the importance of living style in the past along the Narapirom Canal. They also realized how important it was to take care of the canal especially the part of their community by keeping it clean and without water hyacinths.

The project connected the students with the community elders. Twice a month, the students had got to listen to elders' stories. They had learned about many traditions and ways of life in the past. Some were no longer existed in this community; such as how the boat vendors sold their food and goods in the canal. Some students were impressed with the character, Pae who practiced swimming in the second scene. Some students remembered the part of a Naga parade (a parade of a candidate for the Buddhist priesthood) the most since it was fun to perform and sang the rhyme along the scene to make it like a real ceremony.

The students collaborated with their community to investigate stories, memories and history in order to use them as a springboard for their creative dramatization. Through dramatization exercises, students improvised in role based on the given situation and characters from the memories of the elders. The process functions as a learning tool for children. Janet Pilai (2014: 6-7) explains that "this (community-based) learning is layered with emotional, physical and sensual experiences resulting from contact with living spaces and people." This process is "an extrinsic learning" (Richard Courtney, 1990: 137) as Richard Courtney explains that "the extrinsic learning is when dramatic learning enhances the learners' potential and abilities other than drama." This process motivated students to explore the story of their own community. Through the drama process, the students recognized the value and importance of their community. The students became an agent of change for the future of the Makleu community.

Figure 12. The villagers in Makleu temple community cut and gathered water hyacinths in the Narapirom canal for drying before selling for animal bedding in a laboratory.



After the first performance at the pavilion of Makleu temple, the audiences who were people in the community enjoyed and appreciated the show. They really like that the story of the performance came from their life and memories. Tip Sansuree, (2014), the mother of one of the students said that “she has never seen anything like this before since most of the art-forms that the community children did were folk songs or traditional Thai dance. She also felt so proud of the students in this project.” Walee Suadmalai, (2014), the leader of Makleu community, explained about how the drama process in this project developed the students and the community as followed:

“She saw an applied theatre project like this one as an important tool to make children and teenagers in the community have a critical mind. The drama process will encourage them to question about themselves and about their community. After participated in this project, some students changed their behavior in a better way. They spent their time in a benefit way for the community. Some students became more positive and be more responsible even though they had a record of unsolved problems in the family.”

The shadow puppet performance: Hun Ngao Lao Reung Klong Nara uses the memory, belief, perceptions and values of the people in the community for making the story. Janet Pilai (2013: 3-4) discussed that these qualities are a Cultural Capital of the community, which is the heart and soul of each particular community. It is the cultural root and continuity of the culture of the community. This concept is highly important to be understood by people in the community that the Narapirom canal was once the center of people in the community in the past. It is highly important to create a concerned and active person who live in and belong to the community in order to preserve the canal and protect the root and history of the community from being forgotten. The project used a drama process to create a child as an active agent of change for using creative arts for preserving the history of the community for the sustainable present and future of the Makleu temple community.

Conclusion

This applied theatre project uses drama process and community-based learning in order to engage the students at Makleu Temple School to recognize the value and importance of the Narapirom canal and the life-style along the canal as in the old days. This project incorporates theatre gaming, drama process and puppetry to pass on community life-style and values to young generations nowadays. The students participated in this project practiced in artistic process, which were: theatre gaming and creative drama. This process enhanced the simultaneous response to any given circumstances and roles. The students had an intrinsic learning since they gained some new perceptions about themselves and their community. They also gained self-worth and learned to be responsible for their practice and performance. They also learned about a team working, which was the key to make their performance successful. For extrinsic learning, the students recognized the importance of the role as a change agent for their own community. In this project, these students appreciated the living-style in the old days along the Narapirom canal. The students reconnected with people in the community through this project. They recognized that they could help cutting, drying and selling water hyacinths in order to make the canal clean. This concept is highly important to be understood by people in the community that the Narapirom canal was once the center of people in the community in the past. It is highly important to create a concerned and active person who live in and belong to the community in order to preserve the canal

and protect the root and history of the community from being forgotten. As the facilitator and the director of this project, I believe that learning through drama and participating in a community-based learning project would make the students to gradually think more about the Makleu community. This learning process will make students become active and change agents of their own community in the future.

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