

**Research Article**

## **The Use of Applied Theatre Activities for Rural Children's Learning of Cultural Heritage in the ISAN Community**

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### **Abstract**

This article presents a method and the results of the applied theatre activities in the Isan community area. The method has learning tools for children's development that were designed using the Isan folk mural (called Hoop Taem) and processed at Dong Bang Village, Na Dun District, Maha Sarakham Province. I take the role of facilitator to design and lead the activities with the children's group for learning about intangible cultural heritage in the community. The method was divided into 3 parts as follows: firstly, field study in the community area to explore and understand the historical source and local wisdom, secondly, designing activities and theatre process plans, thirdly, conducting theatre activities and developing children's learning through theatre activities. Practicing the method can lead children to improve important skills such as listening, viewing, writing, and storytelling skills and develop them into performance and showing in the community space. In addition, the method enhanced awareness and understanding of children's aspects, ideas, and feelings so they can take great pride in their own cultural, and ethnic roots and cultural heritage in the village.

**Keywords:** Youth Theatre, Applied Theatre, Isan Culture, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Community Theatre

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## Introduction

Hoop Taem Learning and Dong Bang Community Wisdom Project<sup>1</sup> is a project focusing on the development of the community by utilizing the cultural capital available in the community. The existing Hoop Taem<sup>2</sup>, the Hoop Team at Photharam uposatha is a substantially important cultural heritage of the community and a tool recording the thoughts, philosophy, beliefs, and ways of life adopted by the Isan people<sup>3</sup>. The paintings dated back 100 years, so the main goal of the project is to study, learn and pass on the knowledge about community history and wisdom emerging in Hoop Taem to villagers. With participation from various places such as houses, temples, schools, local government organizations, and sanatoriums, which operated in 2018, the project has propelled "Hoop Taem and Dong Bang Wisdom Learning Center" to serve as a community learning center where villagers can derive and share their benefits. Also, it was a space for creating new-generation youths returning to study art and the wisdom of their own community. To sum it up, to describe this place as a new learning area for villagers and youth is not an overstatement.

In 2019, the second year of the implementation of this project, I facilitated as a theatre activity designer creating dramas with youth groups with Asst. Prof. Dr. Songwit Pimpakan. The need for youths in the community to immerse themselves in the learning of the arts, culture, and wisdom that emerge in Dong Bang Community through Hoop Taem was evident. A such need was accompanied by a desire to understand the ethnic roots of their ancestors entailing returning to learn the community and understanding themselves again as well as setting an important goal which is to establish pride and appreciation for heritage, intellect, culture, and people.

Hoop Taem and Wisdom Learning Center have returned to function as "Community as Classroom" at its full level enabling the youths to engage in learning outside the classroom by using applied theatre as a tool to promote learning through youth drama creation. The author integrated this as the "concept and goal" of this project to lay a solid base on which designing drama activities and practicing with the youth of the Dong Bang Community conceived and grew.

## Objective

Designing youth theatre activities with the concept of applied theatre and community arts as a base to create learning and awareness about the value of community identity among youth in Dong Bang Village, Dong Bang Sub-district, Na Dun District, Maha Sarakham Province.

## Method

### 1. Analysis of the Applied Theatre Knowledge

Applied theatre is a performance practice that can eliminate the line separating artistry from instrumentalism, education from entertainment, the public from privacy, the process from production, progress from suspension, and participants from the audience (Nicholson, 2005). It is a way that practitioners and participants collaborate to discern issues that arise within that context. Applied Theatre has a clear and specific target audience and the theater troupe's mission was to communicate in order for dramas to be a means of raising awareness and intelligence on issues related to audiences (Prentki & Preston, 2011). Therefore, actors are required to adapt their thinking from self-centered working to that oriented to using their knowledge to create art for others. In addition, the challenge of today's applied theater is to focus on the purpose or goal of the project which will efficiently lead to the design of theatre activities and the development process of a participatory group. Also, it is to enhance the competence of group members going hand in hand with raising awareness of the community's values.

However, I am an applied theatre operator who focuses mainly on theater work in the educational area and the community foresees that the creation of theatre activities allows participants to learn and create a safe

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<sup>1</sup> The project has been funded by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation operated by the Isan Community Arts and Cultural Media Network, Arts and Cultural Media Program for Health Promotion. The project leader is Asst. Prof. Dr. Songwit Pimpakan has operated continuously for 2 years from 2018 to 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Refers to the mural on the ancient Isan church walls. It is the art of local folk art. In the Isan language, Hoop refers to a picture and Taem refers to drawing, writing, and painting, a visual art method.

<sup>3</sup> Isan people refer to the people of Northeastern Thailand. The Isan area is the largest area of Thailand and has a population of 1 in 3 of the population in the country.

and creative space that varies from one community's context to others (Akkapram 2019; Damhrung 2019). Therefore, producing theatres within the community's context demands intricate blending with the art and cultural foundations of one's community in order to enlarge space and provide opportunities for young people to return to study and explore art in their communities. This may appear peculiar from everyday life but mutual understanding that applied theatre activity for the development connected with the community's arts and culture is, by all means, a tool that increases accessibility, reduces alienation – differentiation, transforms the conventional perception that theatre or performance is about faking into that which denote the space presenting and expanding the “truth” existing in everyday life, community's norms and everyone can honestly perceive or approach and it becomes what everyone can genuinely acknowledge and access.

## 2. Collecting the Participants and Issues of Working on the Project

Participants in this project were 15 elementary school students aged 7-11 years at Ban Dong Bang Community School in the Dong Bang Community. The participants represent a young generation growing up bombarded with media and technology. Despite being located 70 kilometers away from Maha Sarakham city and 500 kilometers away from the capital city of Bangkok, the community was still within the stream of communication technologies making the world smaller. As a result, such unstoppable penetration of modernity found its way to this community and the youths living in it through several online channels such as Facebook, YouTube, online gaming, etc.

The dilemma thresholding between old and contemporary cultures as a result of the clash of technology and modernity affects the youths' interest in the community's cultural norms. Grasping the concept of a substantial cultural heritage which is the Hoop Taem appearing in Photharam temple is not entirely what youths value and prioritize. That is because it is general- being seen in everyday life- and invisible to the eyes. Another reason is that Hoop Taem represents things of the past being so distant from modernity.

Therefore, a further step toward comprehending cultural wisdom is the main mission of Hoop Taem and the Dong Bang Learning Center Wisdom to encourage the youths in the community to learn, recognize, and appreciate the value of their community's art. Hence, theatrical activity design was intended to “Turn” to the learning base from Hoop Taem, which symbolizes the community's essence as well as serves as an enormous archive of history, morals, beliefs, and wisdom of the community.



**Figure 1** I and the Participants in Dong Bang Community  
source: Akkapram, 2019

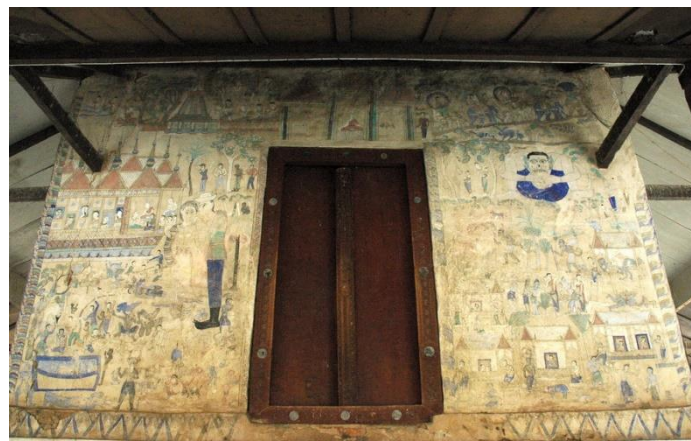
## 3. Initiation Process of Implementing and Learning Wisdom in the Community

I study the history and background of the Dong Bang Community, Maha Sarakham Province, and Pimpakan (2019) illustrated that the Dong Bang community dated back at least 250 years. Dong Bang's ancestors escaping threats of war migrated from Vientiane during the Lao Lan Chang Kingdom era roughly in 1687 and settled in the village in about 1757 coinciding with the reign of King Thonburi in 1800, the period in which the Pho Thong temple was constructed and later in 1942 until the present, the temple was renamed Photharam temple.

In the past, the Photharam temple dominated as the center of not only religion but also education for villagers. Teaching in the temple began in 1917 and extended beyond the temple's gate to the inception of Ban Dong Bang Community School established under the Education Act 1966, in the present, the school operates from Kindergarten to Grade 6 Educational development through religion evidently came to attention in "Sim" or an uposatha through written ancient Isan texts and paintings depicting Buddhist's beliefs and the Isan people's ways of life which significantly evidence that the villagers in this community are in possession of neatly consolidated art compared to other Isan communities belonging to the same period.

**3.1 The Hoop Taem art on the uposatha's wall:** Hoop Taem is commonly written on Sim or an uposatha' wall, both the exterior and interior walls since most villagers participating in religious rituals are usually gathered outside the uposatha. The stories portrayed normally derive from Buddhism such as the history, Jataka tales, dharma puzzles, and depictions of hell and heaven. It also includes folk tales in which the villagers believe in their relation to Lord Buddha, such as Sinsai, Phra Lak - Phra Lam and integrates ways of life and environment regarding the community. All in all, it can be said that Hoop Taem is a Dharma medium whose purpose is to communicate ideas, philosophies, and doctrines directly to the villagers.

**3.2 Arts and wisdom of Hoop Taem:** Hoop Taem in an uposatha was created by local artists. According to the villagers' accounts, the local artists in this community Mr. Sing Wongwad, Mr. Lee Wongwad, and Mr. Salai use local wisdom to create a technique of using powder-based paint with no primer. The uposatha wall color was used as the main Hoop Taem color and the tinting colors consist of various colors such as blue, green, red, black, white, and caste. The primary colors were light colors, neither bold nor dazzling. The images which needed to be highlighted would rely on contrasting colors such as blue versus brown, and orange versus black.



**Figure 2** The Hoop Taem on the uposatha's wall at Photharam temple.  
source: Akkapram, 2019

#### 4. Designing Applied Theatre Activities

The design of applied theater activities<sup>4</sup> in this project focused on using Hoop Taem as the base and learning art and culture as well as reinforcing a sense of pride in roots among the youths. In this regard, I have theatre processes and activities that mainly enunciated the approach to practicing and learning. Therefore, I was interested in designing theatre activities from project-based learning in order to expose youths to various learning contents concerning both social and life skills practices through art practice.

I divide the applied theatre activity into 3 phases: 1. Community Exploration: Participants will learn about community stories, important locations, and cultural heritage, focusing on murals in the uposatha of Photharam temple, a central Buddhist and artistic center in the community. This phase involves a one-day

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<sup>4</sup> Theatre activity refers to an activity that the facilitator creates for the participants to participate in the action. To lead the learning goals according to the project objectives, using drama as the core of event design. Therefore, theatre activities relate to using various skills such as acting, story-making, creating a performance text, and design techniques, including the use of aesthetic art, which make theatre activities more meaningful and rewarding than fun (Akkapram 2020).

activity 2. Experience Extraction: Participants will reflect on their learning experiences through various skills including writing short texts and poems expressing their feelings, drawing an impressive image on a sheet of paper, and engaging in group discussions. This phase involves a one-day activity and 3. Creative Performance: Creating a performance by incorporating drawings and information into a narrative, rehearsing and presenting the performance to the audience. This phase involves a four-day activity.

Therefore, I allocate a total of 6 days for the applied drama activity, with the 7<sup>th</sup> day dedicated to a post-performance activity and the assessment of participants' learning outcomes. Throughout the three phases of the activity, there is a deliberate emphasis on the continuous involvement of participants and me.

From the perspective of applied drama practitioners, I prioritize the learning that occurs within the participant group. This includes observations, questioning, sharing of thoughts, interest in the activity, personal and group discussions, and the resulting performance. The format follows the "drama-process" model, and the performance serves as a crucial tool for evaluating the learning outcomes that occur in the youth involved.

### **Results/Findings**

I have designed a theatre activity for developing the learning skills of participants, and to find the results as follows;

**1. Story listening activity to develop listening skills:** this activity focused on listening to tales and stories about Hoop Taem's history and also stories presented through the writing of Hoop Taem by Mr. Sathien Phutthisong, an expert and scholar of, Photharam Temple's Hoop Taem and the history of Ban Dong Bang. Mr. Sathien was the one providing insight into stories for the participants together with a description of the painting style and highlights of the colorful lines with Asst. Prof. Dr. Songwit facilitated as an assistant in this activity.

Participants gained a profound understanding of their community's history and the origins of the mural art on the temple walls, knowledge they had not been exposed to before. Even though they were born and raised in this community, they had not received information or learned narratives related to the life and roots of the community. This may be attributed to the fact that school education often focuses on national history without promoting learning about the local history and cultural heritage of their own communities.

One could argue that this activity served as a means for participants to relearn and reconnect with their community, leading to a deeper self-connection with the community. They developed an increased awareness of the value of their community, prompting them to view their community in a new light and prioritize it as a cultural learning space with significant importance to the people of Isan. Additionally, they felt a stronger sense of responsibility for the cultural assets within their community and recognized the need to be stewards of the community's culture, especially for Hoop Taem, which is a cultural heritage of the Isan people.

**2. Hoop Taem observing activity to develop imagination and concept of Hoop Taem:** this activity emphasized connecting the imagination to the Hoop Taem paintings in order to understand the concept of the story that had been heard and served as a replication activity to hammer the stories to the participants' memory.

Participants learned and understood the stories depicted in Hoop Taem, which include tales of the creation of the world, the literary work "Sinsai," the narrative of the journey to hell, traditions, rituals, performances, and the way of life of the people of Isan from birth to death. This activity allowed participants to independently read the images on the wall. Furthermore, the narratives depicted in the murals contributed to an easier understanding of Buddhist moral principles, such as maintaining goodness and avoiding wrongdoing as it affects the afterlife. They also gained insights into the community's past way of life, some of which have disappeared in the present, like the use of Isan idioms in flirtation.

The results of this activity were that participants gained insight into the wisdom of the ancestors passed down through belief in Buddhism, folklore, legends, and the villagers' way of life. They translated this knowledge into mural paintings, transforming it into a cultural heritage passed down from previous generations. Participants realized that these paintings and stories are not just artistic expressions but genuine reflections of wisdom, knowledge, and faith in Buddhism that mirror the identity of the community. This instilled a sense of pride in being a member of this community and a desire to share this knowledge with others.

**3. Drawing activities to enhance memorization skills:** this activity focused on understanding the stories and communicating the thoughts selected from the stories in Hoop Taem through drawing on paper. This activity helped revise memories and stories to precision, including an analysis of the stories selected with the reasons and perspectives of each individual.

This activity allowed participants to reflect on their interests through drawing skills and express their thoughts and imagination inspired by various narratives. Watching Hoop Taem reflected diverse interests and preferences, fostering a stronger connection with the cultural heritage of the community, and bridging gaps between people, spaces, and cultures. The learning process involved critical thinking, internalizing the knowledge, and expressing it through drawings.

As a result of this activity, participants could accurately recall the stories, characters, and events from Hoop Taem. The information absorbed through listening and observing was stored in their memories through imagination and processed into drawings. This process significantly differed from traditional classroom learning that emphasizes memorization from books. Participants were able to listen and understand deeply, connecting their thoughts with emotions evoked by the narratives and visuals. Before documenting the information in their memories, they translated these recollections into drawings, making learning enjoyable, memorable, and reflective. This approach allowed participants to express their opinions with confidence, free from fear of being right or wrong.

**4. Visual storytelling activities to develop story analysis and connect with thinking perspectives:** this activity involved copying paper-based drawings onto large canvases and painting them, focusing on the youth's participatory work process by means of simulating a rectangular canvas as an uposatha with four sides of walls and having the participants copy the images of the tree on paper in the same direction as on the wall. The process also included the participants cooperating to paint the picture drawn.

This activity engages participants in utilizing their memories and feelings from previous storytelling and drawing exercises. The repetition allows them to record memories and thoughts in long-term memory, transforming them into personal knowledge. Enlarging the A4 paper drawing onto fabric presents a challenge for participants to experiment with expanding their ideas and imagination. Mathematical skills are employed to proportionally divide the fabric into four equal parts, simulating the four walls of a temple. Participants then use their imagination to freely draw each side of the temple. The activity aims to facilitate participants in learning about proportions through hands-on work in visual arts, emphasizing artistic perspectives over proportion accuracy.

As a result, participants actively use thinking, analysis, and management skills to contribute to the creation of artwork. The temple and Hoop Taem serve as models, encouraging participants to find creative ways to draw images aligned with the models. Participants collaboratively engage in the activity, planning both before and after in a step-by-step manner. They discuss, debate, and exchange perspectives, fostering a respectful and accepting environment for diverse opinions. The fabric becomes a collaborative work owned by everyone. After completing this activity, participants have gained insights into the importance of the temple and Hoop Taem as symbols of collaboration, unity, faith, and the fusion of positive energy, creating a cultural legacy for future generations in the community.



**Figure 3** Participants are painting the Hoop Taem on the canvas.  
source: Akkapram, 2019

**5. Storytelling and performance creation activities to develop participatory work skills:** storytelling activities commenced with each participant choosing a story on the Hoop Taem that interests them and those with the same interest would be grouped together. Then, going into the storytelling process, participants were asked to visualize the situations using Augusto Boal's image theater approach which features visualization of events through the use of the body, creation of freeze frames and motion pictures, and composition of pictures into one story. After that, each story from each group was connected to create one drama to convey the thoughts and voices of the youths collaborating on brainstorming to communicate this emerging story to the audience. However, participants have learned the following from this activity:

**5.1 Critical Analysis and Story Selection:** They have learned to think critically and select stories of personal interest. This involves utilizing these stories in collaborative narrative sessions with other members who share similar preferences.

**5.2 Idea Generation and Perspective Exchange:** Participants have successfully generated ideas and exchanged perspectives in interpreting newly created narratives. Through the use of imagination and certain life experiences, they have compared and contrasted, resulting in narratives that reflect the contemporary context of the community

**5.3 Group Performance Rehearsal and Role Assignment:** The activity involved practicing group performances and establishing internal role assignments. For instance, individuals with strong storytelling skills took on the role of narrators, while those with less experience were assigned acting roles. This required the use of speaking skills, with participants alternating between speaking and acting in collaboration with others.

As a result of this process, participants, particularly elementary school students, have improved their communication skills. The outcomes within the participant group include:

**1. Enhanced Analytical Storytelling Skills:** Improved skills in critically analyzing stories, connecting thoughts from narratives to their perspectives, and emphasizing cause-and-effect relationships.

**2. Narration with Understanding, Not Just Memorization:** The ability to narrate stories with understanding rather than mere memorization, allowing for comparisons with people and events in contemporary society.

**3. Image Theatre Technique Rehearsal:** Participants engaged in the rehearsal of performances using the Image Theatre technique. This has led to increased confidence in expressing oneself and discipline in collaborative work.

**4. Improved Language Usage and Communication Skills:** Better language usage and communication skills have been observed among the participants.

**5. Deep Understanding of the Value of Stories within Hoop Taem:** Participants have gained a profound understanding of the value embedded in the stories within Hoop Taem.

This holistic approach to the activity has not only enhanced analytical and communicative abilities but has also fostered a deeper appreciation for the cultural and narrative aspects within the Hoop Taem context.



**Figure 4** Participants creating stories through playing theatre game.  
source: Akkapram, 2019

It could be noticed that the five types of theatre activities designed by the author represented the author's need to develop learning skills for youth groups through various senses ranging from listening to creating performances. The performance of the show would be the processing of knowledge and understanding that occurred within the youths, which were conveyed through theatre works to the audience.

## Discussion

The activities were continuously organized on Saturdays and Sundays of every week over the course of 2 months between September to October 2019. However, I implemented a five-part theater activity to engage participants in various aspects of Hoop Taem, encompassing story listening, Hoop Taem observation, drawing, visual storytelling, and performance creation. Each activity aimed at developing different skills, including listening, imagination, memorization, critical analysis, and participatory work. The goal was to foster a deeper connection with the community's cultural heritage and promote a sense of responsibility for its preservation. I would like to summarize the discussion as follows.

**1. Cultural Reconnection:** The activities facilitated a profound understanding of the community's history and cultural heritage. Participants, even though born in the community, discovered aspects of their local history and Hoop Taem that had not been previously exposed to them. This cultural reconnection is essential for preserving and passing down traditions.

**2. Learning through Creativity:** The emphasis on drawing and visual storytelling provided a creative outlet for participants to express their thoughts and imagination inspired by various narratives. This approach departed from traditional classroom learning, making the learning process enjoyable, memorable, and reflective.

**3. Cultural Appreciation:** The activities not only instilled a sense of pride in being part of the community but also heightened awareness of the cultural value embedded in Hoop Taem. Participants learned to appreciate the mural art not merely as artistic expressions but as reflections of wisdom, knowledge, and faith that mirror the community's identity.

**4. Collaborative Learning:** The visual storytelling and performance creation activities encouraged participants to work collaboratively, exchange perspectives, and respect diverse opinions. The process involved critical analysis, idea generation, group performance rehearsal, and role assignment, leading to improved communication skills among participants.

**5. Community as a Learning Space:** The activities elevated the status of the community as a cultural learning space with significant importance to the people of Isan. Participants recognized the temple and Hoop Taem as symbols of collaboration, unity, faith, and positive energy, creating a cultural legacy for future generations.

In conclusion, the applied theater activities effectively served as a holistic approach to learning, incorporating various senses and skills. They not only enhanced analytical and communicative abilities but also fostered a deeper appreciation for the cultural and narrative aspects within the Hoop Taem context. The performance aspect of the activities acted as a medium for participants to convey their knowledge and understanding to a broader audience, contributing to the preservation and promotion of community identity values.

Moreover, during the activity and after the theatre performance, the youth participants having partaken in learning and experiencing changes in various aspects would be discussed as follows;

**1. Changes in concentration and interest in activities:** before the activity, I had the opportunity to talk and meet with fellow participants using theater games to assess the characters, and personalities of the youths participating in the project as well as the advantages and/or disadvantages. It was found that this youth group was undergoing Hyperactivity problems exhibited by a lack of patience for time-consuming or ongoing activities. However, the participants were highly enthusiastic about the activity, so the designed activity lasted precisely 10-15 minutes per activity. Still, there had to be the focus-drawing elements such as drawing and painting from the prototype in Hoop Taem, composed of a 3-lined poem from the Hoop Taem stories or using physical movements to present situations or stories from Hoop Taem. Through these activities, the youth not only had fun but also learned together.

At the beginning of the activity, 10 minutes was designated as the time limit but after that, extra time could be granted as deemed appropriate in case the participants were intensively engaged in the activities. Likewise, in some activities, if needed, a brief break was given and the activity was resumed shortly after. One noticeable change was higher concentration and interest in activities among the participants. Furthermore,

continued operation demonstrated that the youngsters were able to enhance their concentration and interest in the activities to the point of being able to practice long, repetitive performances continuously until they became performance workers.

**2. Changes in learning and understanding skills:** during the implementation of various activities particularly the part focusing on listening to the story, drawing pictures, and composing poems, it was quite evident that the youth group was intrigued by the story in the Hoop Taem. Such phenomenon was reflected in questions constantly raised leading to a constructive discussion of the most common grievances such as “who are the characters of Sinsai?”, “Why did the character of Malai go down to Hell?”, “Why did Rahu (solar eclipse) have to swallow the moon?”, “Who drew a Hoop Taem?” “has Hoop Taem been around for a long time?” etc. These questions interested the youth because of their novelty. Upon receiving answers from experts, they gradually cultivated a further understanding of both the origin and significance of the stories of the Hoop Taem mural paintings on the wall. Such acquisition reinforced a sense of pride in the community where the Hoop Taem is situated.

**3. Practicing imagination from Hoop Taem and communicating the concept through painting:** as a lecturer specializing in theater arts and teaching the subject in the university including working in various areas, the author found that pressing problems for Thai youths during this period was nothing but a lack of imagination which is essentially the basis for planting and growing creativity. Consequently, I designed the activities intended to sharpen imagination as part of the drama process to enable them to nurture their imagination skills. Then, drawings functioned as a platform reflecting the creativity of individuals. The results yielded consist of lines, colors, shapes, and figures that young participants conveyed on paper and later copy onto pieces of canvas. Even though they are visually different from the original Hoop Taem, their commonality lying in the light color was a similar feature which reflects an understanding of defining the identity of the Hoop Taem Dong Bang and utilizes the background technique of using the colors of local craftsmen as a model for their own creativity.

In terms of the ability to analyze and connect ideas to create the performance, this drama creation did not involve writing drama skills. Instead, it prioritized the creation of the performance on the basis of a participatory work process of the group entailing the use of educational background and analysis, understanding of the story, and interpretation to connect with one's points of view. Also, it demonstrated a link to the community's ways of life vividly communicated through the performance focusing on the use of body movement. Conversations stayed dynamic throughout the process of improvisation, so the performance chapter originated from an understanding of the participants within the group and applied to Isan poetries or quotes by relying on memorization throughout a practice process - repetition to make the performance more complete. In the practice process, the focus was on the exchange of ideas within the group and the development of dramas creating a sense of unity within the group to the point that the members were capable of perceiving and understanding the acting story in the same direction.



**Figure 5** Opening scene of Berng-Yaeng Hoop Taem Dong Bang.  
source: Akkapram, 2019

**4. Youth Theatre production titled *Berng-Yaeng Hoop Taem Dong Bang*:** the youth theatre productions were presented using narrative and role-playing methods based on the Hoop Taem stories. The length of the performance was approximately 20 minutes. The order of events in the performance was detailed as follows;

4.1 Opening Scene: Presenting an Isan poem depicting the legend of Rahu and the origin of various beliefs. This part was inspired by the Hoop Taem Rahu Om Chan on the eastern wall of the uposatha.

4.2 Scene of Dong Bang people in the past: Presenting agriculture such as rice planting, trade, silk weaving, courtship with Isan music, and using Phaya poems to flirt, inspired by the Hoop Taem on the north wall of the uposatha.

4.3 Scene of the Lord Buddha in Hell: Presenting the story of the Phra Malai visiting to preach the Dharma in Hell. This scene presented a series of sins according to Buddhist beliefs which were one part of the history of the Buddha illustrated on the Hoop Taem uposatha's western wall.

4.4 Scene of Lord Buddha history, the devil hindering episode: Presenting the events in which Lord Buddha was hindered by three devils and the devils led an army to thwart the Lord Buddha but Mother Earth came to help the Lord Buddha defeat the devils, inspired by Hoop Taem on the western wall.

4.5 Sinsai storytelling scene: Presenting Isan folk tales inherited from the Lao Lan Chang Kingdom. It features a fight between Sinsai and devils until love with Nang Kinnaree, Inspired by the Hoop Taem on the south wall.

An Isan dialect, a local language used by the people of the Dong Bang community in daily life, was used throughout the performance, including the use of idioms, teachings, and poems that are the philosophy of Isan locals to connect each scene. In addition, Isan folk music mixed with modern music was also played in the performance.



**Figure 6** Participants are performing theatre in front of their painting.  
source: Akkapram, 2019

The students involved in the youth theatre production "*Berng-Yaeng Hoop Taem Dong Bang*" gained multifaceted learning experiences:

- **Cultural and Historical Knowledge:** The performance compelled students to delve into the cultural and historical narratives depicted on the Hoop Taem murals. Each scene represented a distinct aspect of Dong Bang's history, including legends, agricultural practices, religious beliefs, and folk tales. Through the enactment of these scenes, students absorbed knowledge about their community's rich heritage, fostering a deeper understanding of the significance behind the Hoop Taem stories.

- **Language and Communication Skills:** The use of the Isan dialect in the performance allowed students to engage with and express themselves in their local language. This not only enhanced their linguistic skills but also contributed to the preservation of the Isan dialect as a cultural asset. The incorporation of idioms, teachings, and poems further strengthened their grasp of the philosophy embedded in the local language.

- **Artistic Expression and Performance Skills:** The narrative and role-playing methods employed in the play provided students with a platform for artistic expression. They learned the art of storytelling, role

portrayal, and the synchronization of scenes, contributing to their overall performance skills. The amalgamation of Isan folk music with modern tunes showcased their creativity in blending traditional and contemporary elements.

- **Teamwork and Collaboration:** Performing a theatrical production requires teamwork and collaboration. Students likely developed interpersonal skills as they worked together to bring the scenes to life. The division of roles, coordination in scene transitions, and the overall orchestration of the play would have instilled a sense of teamwork and mutual reliance among the participants.

In this regard, I have measured and evaluated the participants in connection with the project objectives. It can be explained as follows:

- **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** The play effectively served the research objective of preserving cultural heritage by actively interpreting and presenting the stories depicted on the Hoop Taem murals. The performance became a dynamic means of transmitting cultural knowledge to the audience.

- **Community Connection and Identity Awareness:** The use of the Isan dialect, idioms, and local philosophies created a strong connection between the performance and the Dong Bang community. This aligns with the research objective of fostering community identity awareness. Through the scenes representing various aspects of Dong Bang's history, the play contributed to a sense of shared identity among the community members.

- **Engagement with Research Themes:** The order and content of the scenes in the performance align with the research themes explored in the broader project. Each scene likely corresponded to specific aspects of Dong Bang's cultural, historical, or religious heritage, addressing the research objectives systematically.

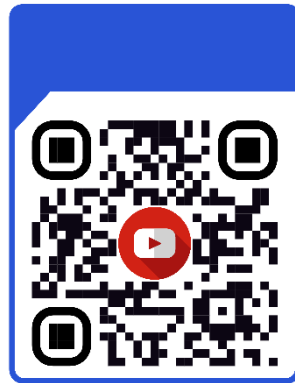
In conclusion, the youth theatre production not only provided students with an immersive learning experience but also contributed significantly to the fulfillment of the research objectives related to cultural preservation, community connection, and identity awareness. The integration of language, music, and performance showcased a holistic approach to achieving the research goals.

## **Conclusion and Suggestion**

I incorporated diverse elements of the Hoop Taem as a base for designing theatre activities such as stories, visuals, colors and lines. During the activities, the development of skills and understanding the origin of the Hoop Taem painting had been made the focus. The participants were absorbed into the background of the Hoop Taem mural painting in relation to the history of the community and aesthetics of folk artists and the cultural roots of Dong Bang Community. The group as a result significantly acknowledged the value of arts in the community and that altered the long-held perception that the Hoop Taem was something ancient and belonging to the past to something unique distinguishing their community from others.

Moreover, the stories depicted in the Hoop Taem mural paintings formidably embody philosophies and reflections of the traditional Isan lifestyles and represented the identity of the Dong Bang community - the land with abundant wisdom, arts, and noble traditions which have been ingrained in the community's ways until the present. These influenced the thinking and feelings of the youths and also draw their interest back to understand that they in fact belonged to roots and cultures shaping "self" carving distinctive identities.

However, the author was convinced that the theatre activities designed and conducted in this project were ideal applied theatre activities for promoting and creating learning spaces for youths in order to draw their attention and put the cultural heritage in their own community into a refined perspective, especially during this time in which Thailand is exerting effort to move towards and be in sync with the evolving trend of economic, technological and modern social development striding at full speed. Nevertheless, it is a concern that the community and involved organizations have to address and continue to ponder on what needs to be done so that Thai youths and the new generation of Isan youths do not abandon their noble roots and culture and can also apply or create them for sustainable existence in the future society.



**Figure 7** Scan to see the performance of Berg-Yaeng Hoop Taem Dong Bang.  
source: Akkapram, 2019

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