HOW PARTICIPATING IN FOLK PUPPET THEATER CAN WITHHOLD SCHOOL VIOLENCE BEHAVIOR IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE?

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ABSTRACT

School violence is a problem that affects physical and mental health and the quality of learning among early adolescence around the world. The situation in Thailand is no different. In this research, puppetry as an artistic and cultural activity was used to intervene in the expression of violent behaviors among junior high school students in a boarding school context. The objectives are to study how the process of participatory puppetry can raise awareness and suppress school violence, how target children define and respond to school violence in the real world, and how it is presented in the theatrical setting. The results showed that participation in puppet show activity offers a safe space to talk about school issues. Taking parts in a participatory puppet show activity, the target group became aware of their inner feelings while empathizing others' either as perpetrators or as victims of violence. It has also been found that the use of participatory puppetry has the potential to raise awareness and inhibit violent behaviors in schools.

Keywords: Participatory Theater, School Violence, Early Adolescence, Folk Puppet, Against Violence

INTRODUCTION

Violence in schools; especially bullying, quarrel or physical harm among children, may be seen as a normal occurrence in everyday life, but violence against children and its subsequent impacts are in fact considered a public health problem, human rights and social issues that can have serious and costly consequences (World Health Organization, 2014). Violence in schools may make early adolescence afraid to go to school and hinder their ability to concentrate on classes or participate in school activities. These immediate consequences have negatively impacted the educational achievement and future employment among early adolescence (Winston & chicot, 2016). The level of violence against children around the world is very high. It is estimated that more than 1 billion of young people aged between 2-17 years have experienced some forms of emotional, sexual, or physical violence (World Health Organization, 2018). Every year, more than 246 million young people around the world are suffering from school violence (UNESCO, 2011) occurring both within and outside classrooms, in places nearby schools, on the way to schools, such as playground, classrooms or school sport events, etc. (Blanco, Breglia, Guarcello & Valdivia, 2008). The study on violence in Italy during 2015 – 2019 showed that a number of school violent cases against children had teachers involved and that the number is likely to increase continuously (Devries et al, 2018). As for the severity of school violence in Thailand, the statistics in 2018 revealed the proportion of children having been bullied in schools was over 40 percent or around 600,000 persons. (UNICEF Thailand, 2018). Moreover, the survey data collected from students in educational institutions nationwide in 2010 found 33 percent of them have bullied others *via* online platforms and 43 percent have been victims of bullying (Thairath online, 2018). Bullying or parody in schools become a first-hand experience embedding violent behaviors and physical harm in children either as perpetrators, victims or witnesses of violent incidents which will have a lasting impact on their

quality of lives. Forms of violence usually occurred in schools can be categorized into three groups including bullying and cyber bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual abuse (UNICEF Thailand, 2016). These data are quite alarming and currently drawing attention from various agencies and sectors to urgently tackle the problems. However, in any situation of violence, there are not only victims or perpetrators but also bystanders who play an important role in either accelerating or intensifying violence. Therefore, a bystander intervention is considered an elemental withdrawal of inappropriate behaviors at scenes which will help restraining or reducing the level of violence (Blackwell et al., 2018). Looking from the perspectives of youth, more than 77 percent of Thai youth expressed the need of safe space and space for creativity and socialization which must be designed with participation from youth. They define safe space as 'schools that are free from physical and mental violence (UNICEF THAILAND, 2018). Regarding activities, a research on reducing violent behaviors and cultivating emotional and social intelligence indicated that arts and arts education are one of activities that contributes to prevention of violence among children (Intervention Strategy) because engaging in arts and cultural activities are correlated to the development of emotional and social intelligence for individuals, especially during childhood. Therefore, arts, creative and cultural activities such as music, drama, photography and participatory theatre; which are designed in accordance with the needs, accessibility, and participation of early adolescence, can be introduced as means to raise awareness, inhibit violent behaviors in schools, and eventually tackle the long-term issues (JääskeläİNEN, 2019). Hence, this research is interested in exploring how 'folk puppet drama' – a local communicative culture which is fairly flexible to execute, has a role-playing feature, and is considered a theatrical media – can create a safe space for self-expression and communication about school violence and allow target groups to genuinely express ideas, raise awareness, and inhibit violent behaviors. It asks two main questions including how the target early adolescence define violence in schools and how the use of participatory puppet drama can create awareness and inhibit violent behaviors in schools. This research aims to study their perception of meanings, forms, and roles of violent actions in schools and examine the use of folk puppet drama processes to raise awareness and inhibit school violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Violence against Children and Early Adolescence

Violence among people with age range between 10 and 29 years has been emerging and increasingly visible at different levels of intensity ranging from mild to fatal (Apipanyo & Wongsuwan, 2010). The forms of violence found among early adolescence are the use of hatred words against each other both in persons or through social media which sometimes were expressed without intents to harm or without realization of its negative consequences and sometimes such behaviors are expressed in order to gain trust and acceptance from peers and society (Goldstein, Cialdini & Griskevicius, 2008). As for the violence in school context, in addition to violent behaviors among students, it often found that teachers or school staff becomes a violent actor against students with rising intensity and number of cases (Devries et al, 2018). Violence usually occurs, both within and outside classrooms, in places nearby schools, on the way to schools, such as playground, classrooms or even during school sport events (Blanco, Breglia, Guarcello & Valdivia, 2008). Victims of school violence is critical because it may have a negatively impact their educational achievement and future employment (Winston & Chicot, 2016).

The use of arts and cultural media to reduce the chance of violent behaviors among early adolescence

The intervention of arts contributes to the positive behavioral expression as the artistic process gradually incubates emotional and social intelligence for early adolescence (JääskeläİNEN, 2019). Therefore, communication behaviors that cause social problems in our society should be initially dealt with through the development of individual thinking process.

People who have high self-control ability will be conscious to the consequences of their actions, be critical and restraint, and be able to adapt the cognitive process which can lead to changes of improper behaviors (Kaplan, Thompson & Searson, 1995). Paul Stallard; British clinical psychologist and the author of 'Think Good-Feel Good' (Stallard, 2019), suggested the intervention to alter the cognitive process, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors of children and early adolescence through the process called 'Cognitive Behavior Therapy' (CBT), which focuses on the participatory process encourages youth to play an active role in determining their own goals, self-observation, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement, and self-control. In addition, Stallard also emphasized the importance to understand the worldviews of early adolescence – how they interpret the meanings of particular event or experience – which will be an important insight in planning the intervention process that is suitable for each group. The creation of such arts and cultural media will help the early adolescence to realize and be able to prevent hatred forms of communication. Early adolescence should play an active role in initiating discussion, expression, sharing thoughts and views on school violence organized in a safe and free setting. This process will help them learn to listen to their own cognitive process. It then urges early adolescence to create communication and media for themselves. The continuity of such process will result in the 'new habit' among early adolescence who are capable of inhibiting the violent behaviors through self-regulation and capable of handling hatred forms of communication or violence in the society (Stallard, 2019; JääskeläİNEN, 2019; Charoenbutr, 2014; Saengvanich, 2003). It showed that this self-learning process for early adolescence to customize and manage their own cognitive mode in alignment with creative social norms will incubate the desirable mind-set based on the recognition of social and cultural diversity, embracing the culture of mutual respect, mitigating the violation of human dignity among target groups.

Figurine Concept, Puppet Drama, and Communication

The puppet is created by humans and bring to life through its motion function in order to convey messages to other people. Compared to other types of media, puppet play, or puppet drama is considered a media that can be easily created using a variety of local materials or household's leftover materials which cost much less. The use of puppets in performing drama or play is also very flexible in terms of time and places. Most importantly, puppet drama offers an opportunity for the audience to participate in the show or interact with each other during the performance (Puran, 2004). Considering the puppets and puppet drama from the communication framework, they are seen as a sender of messages which is doing the same job as human performers, puppet creators, and puppet players because all are conveying particular meanings. The puppet performance is like a communication channel between the recipients and the messengers. The messages are in fact the content of drama; therefore, the drama process involves a media design and content creation to be presented on stage or in communication channels with an interesting, independent, imaginative environment that connects a virtual world with the real world through the content of drama, delivered to the audience (Karaket, 2011). The puppets and puppet drama have been used on several occasions, not only in the theater but has also been used in the advertising industry, television as well as medical practice on social and human behaviors in Thailand and beyond (Jutarat Karaket, 2011; Phu Bal, 2006; Puran, 2004).

RESEARCH METHOLOLTY

This research uses a qualitative research methodology by conducting a participatory action research with 79 target students at junior high school level from Rachaprachanukroh 21 School in June district in Phayao province (in the north of Thailand) in collaboration with Puppet artists and research team members. The target group selection was based on purposive sampling. The research team chose the target school that allowed such action research and was willing to dedicate its teachers' participation and support to research activities throughout the project. The early adolescence target group has been selected specifically by the teachers.

Research duration was between August 2019 and December 2020 (Research activities stopped temporarily during March-May 2020 due to COVID-19 epidemic problems in Thailand). This research uses data collection tools, consisting of (1) Focus group discussions organized by classes and each class will have two groups which make a total of 10 groups to discuss the perception and meanings of school violence and to evaluate the results of puppet drama activities, (2) In-depth interviews with the target groups participating in activities and a group of ten students who performed the puppet drama for the public, and (3) The puppet drama participatory process which involved students during planning, creation, and performing periods. The target groups were informed of rights and risks and have signed the letter of consent prior to the start of research process in compliance with the ethical requirements on human-based research certified IRB No. 62/126 dated on 18 September 2019 by the academic and ethical committee of Phra Nakhon Rajabhat University. Data analysis applied content analysis methods from the tools and the content of the puppet drama created by this research process.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Understanding Violence in Schools from the Early Adolescence's Worldviews

Results from focus group discussion showed that the target groups understood school violence in three dimensions. Firstly, physical violence refers to violence caused by 1) physical exposures or actions against their body such as punching, slapping, snatching, hair pulling, kicking, or throwing objects and causing damages, 2) physical punishment by the seniors and teachers such as beating and intimidation, 3) physical and mental threats forcing them to do something unwillingly such as jumping, running, crawling, etc. Secondly, mental violence refers to actions that affect their feelings and cause pressure, sadness, and upsetting with no physical contact or harm on their body such as bullying, parody, sarcasm, blaming, yelling, and stealing personal belongings. Lastly, violence caused by purposive instigation leading people to harm each other refers to actions that encourage or increase the chances of mutual acts of violence from two sides including gossiping, revealing others' secrets/information leading to misunderstanding and a fight, and cheering in the events of punching or slapping between students. The analysis showed that the cases of inaction during violent incidents are the most prominent among peer students and senior students, followed by that of teachers.

Roles and Reactions of Early Adolescence on Violence in Schools

The research results showed that even though the target groups have all performed the roles of perpetrators, victims, and witnesses in the situation of violence, most of them defined themselves as victims or witnesses rather than as perpetrators. Specifically, higher class groups were less likely to see themselves having an active role in the violence while the lower-class groups were more likely to see themselves as victims of violence perpetrated by the senior students. On the contrary, reactions to violence among victims were to swallow the pains, sadness, and anger inside or shift away their focuses and do some activities to relieve such feelings, be patient and idle until it was over because they felt powerless and helpless. Moreover, victims often feel the needs to be patient and tolerate the violence and sometimes develop the numbness and acceptance to the fact that they cannot do anything ("Be patient if you want to graduate") and the best it can be being trying to avoid the persons who will harm them. In addition, the research found several forms of immediate reaction or revenge. Some students waited until they got to be the seniors and able to repeat the same behaviors against the juniors ("Wait until I grow up and got the power to do the same"). Some reacted by telling the teachers or other seniors about the violence while others would try to change the power relations ("If I were the senior, I will change all the bad rules. There will be no forces or bullying against the juniors"). Other forms of reaction are to motivate self-development ("trying to prove that

what they were insulted or shamed of me were not true and I can be better."). Unfortunately, some just resigned or moved out from the school.

Raising Awareness and Inhibiting Violent Behaviors in Schools through the Puppet Drama Process.

The puppet drama process to participatory raise awareness on violence in schools is a collaboration between the target groups, Puppet artists, and researchers in every phase, consisting of learning about puppets, playing puppet characters, designing characters, scene, stories, and evaluation of media. The process includes two phases as follow:
Phase 1 Learning and working with the target school; consisting of 4 activities

Activity 1, opening up space for discussion and expression of views by target group in a safe and free circumstance is to motivate and seek for various meanings on school violence derived from perceptions and experiences of target groups from the same class. Activity 2, creating opportunities for the target students to directly experience the puppets by learning, touching, and playing the puppets together with the puppet artists. Activity 3, creating and designing the puppet drama is a process that encourages target students to design stories and screenplays using information from activity 1, the target students will be guided with objectives of drama process and the value of drama which they will share prior to breaking into groups to work on it. Lastly, activity 4 using screenplays to perform is a step that target students will use the designed screenplays to perform the puppet drama with advice and support of puppet artists.

Phase 2 Performing, watching, and evaluating the drama from the perspectives of senders and recipients of messages; consisting of 5 activities.

Activity 1, performing puppet drama is an activity for a target student group to perform their puppet show on the stage for the audience who is another target student group participating in the research process (as a sender). Activity 2, watching the drama is an activity for the target student group to watch the puppet drama created by seniors and juniors who participate in research activities (as a recipient). Activity 3, evaluating drama results is an activity for the target student group to express opinions on the puppet drama (as a recipient). Activity 4, performing puppet shows for the public (by the target student representatives) is an activity for 10 student representatives from different classes to perform the puppet drama for the public who are outside the school context. The ten representatives have worked together to design the new drama stories (as a sender). And activity 5, reflections and evaluation in accordance with the framework of research by the ten target representatives after their public shows (as a sender).

Understanding the Early Adolescence's Worldviews on Violence in Schools

Performing puppet drama created by the target groups is equivalent to creating a linkage between a theatrical world and the real world by using information results from focus group discussions to design drama stories/ screenplays. Six puppet drama stories designed by target groups revealed 4 issues on school violence as follow: (1) Violence in the drama appeared in three forms including physical violence such as punching, bashing, pushing, kicking, hitting, or forcing others to crawl and jump; mental violence such as scolding, parody, or threatening to dispossess personal belongings; and witnesses of violent incidents. (2) Incidents/ situation of violence appeared in the drama often occur outside the classrooms; mostly in places where students from different classes mingle in daily life such as dormitory, bedrooms, football field, etc. (3) Roles and reactions to violence found in the drama are the reactions of two conflicting parties; one as a perpetrator and another as a victim who have interacted to each other instantly. Interestingly, in the drama there appeared characters of resistance among those with less power or juniors or weaker ones, such as a courage to challenge the seniors or seniors who control the dormitory as to why juniors have always to do what seniors say and a resistance to the authority of teachers by challenging the norms of why students have to always obey and respect the teachers at all aspects and by hitting the teachers who punish them physically. These reactions

do not appear in the real world among target groups. (4) Violent situations found in the drama were mostly resolved and unraveled by some warnings from teachers or penalty by school or society such as firing or resigning from schools. The conclusion of drama process at the end of activity found that participants agreed physical harm or force should not be a conflict resolution measure and verbal expression should be as polite as possible to each other.

Evaluation of Drama Media through the Perspective of the Media Owner

The evaluation of puppet drama process by the target groups was done through focus group discussion after watching the drama, to evaluate both their own work and the work of other groups who participated in the research activities. A total of 6 stories focusing around 4 issues under the research framework can be summarized as follows: (1) Perception of violence appeared in the drama: Focus group discussion revealed that perception of violent behaviors appeared in the drama among the target groups corresponds to the information and discussion from the first activity. They perceived – bullying through words as violent behaviors occurring in schools. It showed that the target student groups understood messages the drama was trying to convey. (2) The character that students want to be in the puppet drama: The results of the study showed that the target groups would like to be a character that helps mediating or inhibiting problems. In addition, students want to be a character that would not be impacted by violence. This includes students who want to be a character that did not cause violence. Overall, the study showed that after watching drama the target groups have become self-realized and able to reflect the perceptions and needs in their own mind. They discovered not only that they do not want to be a violent person or victim of violence, but also that they express the desires to perform positive behaviors in the situation of violence by intervening to inhibit the violence themselves. (3) The situation in the drama that needs to be changed: After watching the drama, the target groups wanted to change the violent situation to ones that would not lead to violence. The expectation on the use of participatory puppet drama: The target groups expected that puppet drama could be used to help reduce violence in the school because the drama helped revealing the overall picture (of violence that occurred in the school – researcher); and wanted "everyone to campaign on reducing the school violence" (Focus group discussion, 2020).

For the evaluation of the attitude and awareness of ten target students who are representatives to perform puppet drama for the public audience, it can be summarized into 2 issues as follows: (1) Changes after playing the puppet drama or participating in activities of the research project. The target group students stated that participating in this research activity have made them more careful when using strong words. "Be more mindful before saying anything that might affect friends and other people; and learn to speak openly without having to express strong emotions" (Focus group discussion for the second target group, 25 October 2020). (2) The target group reflected that the puppet drama creation was considered a process of emotional release that will prevent the likelihood to violent acts. "When creating the drama stories, we had a chance to talk openly about what friends did to us and what we did not like or how we felt when we got into fight. Despite that, the target groups viewed that the conversation about school violence through the puppet drama process helped them to speak out or express what was normally difficult to do in the real world especially with senior students and teachers. With the drama process, I can frankly say to seniors that I was upset with their behaviors." (Focus group discussion for the first target group, 25 October 2020). The content or story in the drama created from their own stories defined by themselves can create "a power (the most effective - researcher) because everyone has their own experiences" or have experienced it together (Focus group discussion for the second target group, 25 October 2020).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that violence against children and early adolescence occurred in the context of schools both in Thailand and abroad are not different. Thai children and early

adolescence are facing physical and mental violence from peers as well as from teachers, even in public spaces. (Blanco, Breglia, Guarcello & Valdivia, 2008); most of which they cannot communicate or ask for help to end violence. The results of this study confirmed that cultural media activities used to inhibit or intervene school violence can raise awareness on violence impacted by oneself and others including restraining the likelihood to do violent behaviors. Interestingly, this study found that the creative process and space of puppet drama become a safe space to communicate ideas, express the feelings as perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. For example, the target students can share their thoughts on counterattacking, challenging, and questioning the actors of violence or ending the violence by mutual understanding and acceptance with no one being punished. These sample reactions are almost impossible in the real world. In this regard, it showed that the art of participatory drama can help inhibit or intervene the violent situations and also benefit the development of social and emotional intelligence among early adolescence (Menzer, 2015; JääskeläİNEN, 2019). Early adolescences are able to control their verbal and behavioral expression in a positive way (Van De Vyver & Abrams, 2018; JääskeläİNEN, 2019). In addition, it proved that the use of drama for behavioral changes and reducing aggression is also effective when using with junior high school students, resulting in agreement with what many previous studies have shown for experimenting in primary school students (Karaket, 2011; Bal, 2006; Puran, 2004).

In addition, the results of the study suggest there is light at the end of tunnel if the target groups have a safe space to communicate about violence by using the art of drama which they can define and create by themselves. It will lead to awareness and understandings about the problems as well as mutual efforts to inhibit violent behaviors against others. It is an effort of children and early adolescence in dealing with expression of attitudes and behaviors that may lead to violence. The process starts from learning, realizing, understanding, and trying to refrain themselves from the use of violent speech and other forms of violence. The target groups get a chance to practice pondering pros and cons of such behaviors, adapting their thinking process, considering other people's feelings, and alleviating inappropriate behaviors (Stallard, 2019; Kaplan, Thompson & Searson, 1995).

For the potentials of the use of a participatory drama process in raising awareness and inhibiting violent behaviors among children and early adolescence in the school context, this study found concrete potentials as follow: (1) The drama process encourages children and early adolescence to share violent experiences occurred in schools and everyday life. The puppets and stories created by them can reflect and reveal actual situations in the context of school or some previous background experiences personally happened to them. (2) The potential to create the learning process for sympathy or empathy when ones are experiencing violence. (3) The potential to create a safe space for communication about violence – a topic which the target groups feel uncomfortable or unable to speak out in the real situations, especially in the context of unequal power relations. The use of puppet drama provides them with an independent and safe environment for communication, especially those who have been victims or less authority in that context. And (4) The participation in every step of drama process made the drama stories or messages so powerful and relatable to the audience especially those who have shared the same experiences.

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