



AIDING LEARNING OF JUVENILE DELINQUENTS  
THROUGH THE USE OF DRAMA: A STUDY OF A  
FEMALE YOUTH REHABILITATION CENTRE IN  
SINGAPORE

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to explore whether adopting drama techniques in education has an impact on improving the communicative and thinking skills among female juvenile delinquents. This study also investigates how participating in a drama program could help aid learning for juvenile delinquents. The study is limited to a drama program implemented for a group of female juvenile delinquents from Pertapis Center for Women and Girls, Singapore. This Center is a rehabilitation center for female Muslim youth offenders. As such, the data was collected from three juvenile delinquents enrolled in the drama program. The data was gathered through observation, textual analysis and interviews. The aim was to explore how adopting drama techniques in education will create an environment where juvenile delinquents could use their thinking skills and communicate in a non-violent manner while participating in group work which enhances the juvenile delinquents capability to learn. The collected data revealed that during the weekly drama program sessions, the juvenile delinquents had improved positively in their ability to communicate in a non-violent manner and in learning and in their ability to use creative thinking skills. This study sheds light on the ways that educators in rehabilitation centers can use drama techniques to create an environment that aids every juvenile delinquent to learn, thereby enhancing the thinking skills and communicative skills of juvenile delinquents. Therefore, the study recommends introducing drama program in the juvenile delinquents education to aid learning.

## ملخص البحث

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف قدرة تأثير مهارات التفكير وتعزيزها لدى الأحداث الجانحات عبر مشاركتهم في التمثيل الدرامي. كذلك تتحقق هذه الدراسة كيفية مساعدة الأحداث الجانحات على تحسين تعلم وفهم الرسائل والأفكار من النصوص المقدّمة عبر مشاركتهم في برنامج الدراما. تقتصر هذه الدراسة على برنامج الدراما التي تمّ تنفيذها على مجموعة من الأحداث الجانحات من مركز برتايبس للنساء والفتيات بسنغافورة. لقد تم إنشاء وإجراء برنامج القصص بعنوان "مريم" من قبل الفرقة المسرحية كيلاات وهي فرقة مسرحية بسنغافورة تستمد المحتوى الفني الخاص بها من القرآن والحديث. وقد أجرى برنامج الدراما على شكل أسبوعي لمدة ١٢ أسبوعاً متواصلاً. وعقدت جلسة كل أسبوع لمدة ١,٥ ساعة. وكانت هناك ١٥ مشاركة من اللاتي تم اختيارهن ليكنّ جزءاً من البرنامج. وكانت أعمار المشاركات ما بين ١٤ - ١٧ سنة. وتبحث هذه الدراسة في تطورات البرنامج وتلاحظها. وقد تم تسجيل المقابلات ٣ من ١٥ مشاركة في هذه الدراسة. قصص "مريم" هي برنامج تجريبي في مركز برتايبس للنساء والفتيات. كشف تحليل البيانات التي تمّ جمعها أنه قد تحسنت الأحداث الجانحات اللاتي شاركن بشكل إيجابي في قدرتهن على عرض السلوك غير العنيف خلال دورات، وفي استخدام مهارات التفكير لديهن خلال جلسات برنامج الدراما الأسبوعية. في نهاية البرنامج، قامت المشاركات بتمثيل التي نتجت من النصوص التي كتبتها بأنفسهن بناء على فهمهن للنص. وقد تم كتابة نص المسرحية والإخراج والأداء تماماً من قبل المشاركات. وكانت أهل مركز برتايبس للنساء والفتيات هن المشاهدات. وعقدت جلسة الأسئلة والأجوبة بين الحاضرات والمشاركات الخمس عشرة حيث أن المشاركات أوضحت أداءهن وأجبن عن أسئلة الحاضرات. تستتير هذه الدراسة، بالطرق التي يمكن أن يستخدمها المعلمون في مراكز إعادة التأهيل وهي أساليب الدراما لإيجاد البيئة التي تساعد الأحداث الجانحين في التعلم والتي تمكن اكتساب الفهم وشحن مهارات تفكيرهم. تقوم هذه الدراسة بإلقاء نظرة فاحصة على منهج بديل للتعليم للأحداث الجانحين في إعادة التأهيل. لذلك، توصي الدراسة بإدخال أساليب الدراما في البرنامج التعليمي للأحداث الجانحين في إعادة التأهيل.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues).

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*This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents*

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter entails the background of the study, research objectives, research questions and the purpose of the study. In addition to that, the statement of the problem, the limitation and the delimitation of the study were also provided in the chapter. Also included is the organization of the research work which has been clearly mapped out to depict the structural pattern of the research work.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

In the last decade, many educators have started to consider drama programs to aid teaching and develop thinking skills and effective communication skills in mainstream education. In Singapore, drama programs for youths are increasing as educators attempt to tackle the problem of creating thinking youths who are able to express themselves successfully. However, these programs are reserved for mainstream education in national schools and are not a part of the education program that the rehabilitation center provides. Teaching drama techniques is not a priority in the education of juvenile delinquents in Singapore due to the perception that the priority of a juvenile delinquent is to master basic trade skills to financially survive when released from rehabilitation. (Sokaimi 2014) For parents whose children are in the rehabilitation center, their main concern is most often that their child no longer engages in destructive behavior and is able to think critically and make positive choices in life. The educators of the rehabilitation center agree that it is crucial for the juvenile offenders to be able to express themselves in a way that is non-violent and

develop the thinking skills necessary to build a stable life when they leave the rehabilitation center and integrate back into society. (Sokaimi, 2014)

Therefore, it would be of help if the juvenile delinquents were able to enhance their capacity in terms of thinking strategies such as critical thinking and creative thinking as well as develop effective communication skills that are of a non-violent nature. It is evident in their juvenile records that they have been unable to use these effective strategies commonly used by other ordinary youths.

While the juvenile delinquents have the ability to learn these drama techniques, they must be introduced in an effective manner otherwise it would be futile. Previously, the need in education was for the ability to memorize knowledge and regurgitate it when faced with a written examination. The concept of education and knowledge had little to do with real life. The role of the teacher would be that of an orator and knowledge would be taught in this way. In present times however, education is no longer confined to the realm of examinations and text books: (Sokaimi, 2014). There is now a need to introduce a new method of teaching that will allow for the sharpening of thinking skills and developing effective communication skills. These are skills that will be of benefit for life in school and life outside of school.

Drama techniques in education have been used in many youth rehabilitation programs and are closely related to teaching juvenile delinquents of different levels of delinquency. This could be supported by a brief literature reviewed by varying scholars and public figures such as John Dewey and Ameena Matthews.

Ameena Matthews, the famous daughter of Jeff Ford, a notorious Chicago gang leader, was herself also a gang leader of a high profile Chicago gang as a young teenager. Now no longer involved in gang activities, she runs a youth program to

helps take gang members off the streets of Chicago and bring them back to school. The youths she deals with are usually armed and are involved in active gangs where shootings and looting are common place. She has expressed how there is a lack of ability in youths who are tied up with crime and violence to express themselves effectively. They struggle to communicate in a method that is non-violent and tend to be unable to think critically. This inability to think critically results in reckless and dangerous behavior. The activist group she is involved in is called CeaseFire and uses drama techniques to rehabilitate youths who are still on the streets and involved in gang activities as well as youths and young adults who have been released from prisons and rehabilitation centers and are returning to the streets. The drama techniques used are aimed at showing youths a better way to resolve conflict. (Anthony 2011)

The aim of this study is to introduce drama techniques in education as a method for teaching juvenile delinquents.

The researcher is interested in this study based on her own personal experience teaching female youths and then later female juvenile delinquents of similar ages. The youths had the component of drama techniques in their education curriculum and this was the area of lesson where they worked in groups and would show the most stimulation and engagement. Upon completing the drama techniques component, the researcher realized that the youths displayed the thinking skills they had been taught through drama technique and were better communicators. They were able to successfully implement what they had been taught into other areas of their education and life and appeared to communicate more effectively with their peers and parents. When the researcher taught female juvenile delinquents, they showed immense difficulty in understanding simple text and showed little to no ability to question and

show curiosity at the text. The researcher also realized this tied in with their inability to effectively communicate. The researcher observed that these shortcomings had immense impact on the degree it held the juvenile offenders back from being able to reach their full potential. The juvenile offenders had trouble understanding the content of what they were expected to read and learn due to an inability to connect with what they were reading. They showed little interest in their educational lessons due to the inability to connect with what going on and were most stimulated when there was live conflict. It would be in these moments of conflict that it became most evident that the juvenile delinquents lacked an ability to express themselves in a way that they could be understood by the other party. They each often misunderstood each other and this resulted in more physical conflict. The researcher introduced simple drama techniques to the juvenile delinquents taught and it resulted in an interest in the lesson and willingness to participate, which had previously been unusual. Using the simple drama techniques, the researcher observed that the juvenile delinquents were raising questions and taking an active part in role playing based on the text. They were also drawing from their own experiences and understanding to make sense of the text, something they had previously not been able to do prior to being introduced to the drama techniques.

Another incident that impacted the researcher and added to the interest in this topic was during an internship undertaken by the researcher as an undergrad. The NGO the researcher worked with was based in Sabah, Malaysia. One of the tasks the researcher had, was to assist in implementing a program that educated local villagers about their land rights. During a lesson of the program, the instructors from the NGO had suddenly used drama techniques to aid the explanation they were trying to bring across to the villagers. The instructors had used the researcher and another member of

the NGO to role play and demonstrate a scenario. The villagers who had been silent the entire program suddenly understood what was being conveyed. The majorities of them were farmers and did not have strong reading and writing skills. Upon the completion of the program three days later, what was discussed most frequently by the villagers was the content of that initial short scenario.

These experiences have helped the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the degree drama techniques are able to create a suitable environment to aid learning not only for youths but also for juvenile delinquents. John Dewey (Dewey, 1998) supports this concept and says:

“As an individual passes from one situation to another, his [sic] world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue. Otherwise the course of experience is disorderly, since the individual factor that enters into making an experience is split. A divided world, a world whose parts and aspects do not hang together, is at once a sign and a cause of a divided personality. When the splitting-up reaches a certain point we call the person insane. A fully integrated personality, on the other hand, exists only when successive experiences are integrated with one another. It can be built up only as a world of related objects is constructed.”

The use of drama techniques is a new method for teaching juvenile delinquents in Singapore. Keelat Theatre Ensemble, the trainers of the drama program at Pertapis Center for Girls and Women, lobbied hard for the program to be implemented. They worked hard to convince Pertapis Center for Girls and Women to allow for drama techniques to be taught as they were of the opinion that it could aid learning.

This study aims at exploring whether adopting drama techniques in education has an impact on improving the communicative and thinking skills among female juvenile delinquents.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

An ability to communicate effectively and possess thinking skills is a significant factor in formal learning. It is difficult for someone to thrive in the education system in Singapore if the skills of effective communication and critical thinking are not effectively acquired. It is a daily struggle experienced by the juvenile delinquents and their educators. This struggle is not for a lack of intelligence or impaired cognitive abilities on the part of the juvenile delinquents but their inability to use these mental abilities and intelligence the right way. The juvenile delinquents require thinking and communicative skills which will enhance their ability to perform well in their lives and in their education.

Instead of approaching learning in the traditional way, juvenile delinquents should be given the opportunity to learn in a way allows for them to explore and scratch below the surface of what they are presented with. Drama techniques allow for this and serve the purpose of aiding the juvenile delinquents ability to learn. John Dewey argues that ‘the ultimate aim of production is not production of goods, but the production of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality.’ (Hilderbrand, 2003).

Noam Chomsky further explains this as ‘a decent education ought to be creating free, independent, creative human beings. It doesn't have to be developing them it has to be allowing them to follow those natural instincts; those are natural among children--the educational system has to beat it out of them and make them obedient and subordinate and so on. But a decent educational system would allow these natural aspects of human nature to flourish and encourage them. And it would be part of developing a free and democratic society of real participation. But of course that runs counter to elite interests. It's worth remembering that [...] elites do not want

it to be a democratic society. It's supposed to be what political scientists sometimes call a "polyarchy," a system basically of elite decision and public ratification. And if you had the kind of educational system that Dewey spent his life committed to, you wouldn't be able to sustain that. People would become active, involved, engaged, and would try to create a truly functioning democratic society which would, as Dewey also pointed out, require an industrial democracy. That means democratizing production, commerce, and so on, which means eliminating the whole structure of capitalist hierarchy. Dewey also pointed out that until that's done, unless that's done, politics will remain what he called the shadow cast by business over society and the educational system will be a system of indoctrination and control.” (Hilderbrand, 2003)

In light of the literature provided above, the need to explore whether adopting drama techniques in education has an impact on improving the communicative and thinking skills among juvenile delinquents is crucial as it may be of help to aiding the education of juvenile delinquents and contributing to their acquiring and developing of communicative and thinking skills. It is in this sentiment that the present study examined whether adopting drama techniques in education could have an impact on improving the communicative and thinking skills among juvenile delinquents.

#### **1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore whether adopting drama techniques in education has an impact on improving the communicative and thinking skills among juvenile delinquents. The research will explore how the use of drama techniques is able to create an environment that aids the juvenile delinquents capabilities to learn.

It is expected that the study will be beneficial to the following:

1. The Ministry of Education of Singapore – The study would provide a basis for designing the best practices and best strategies that would help juvenile delinquents in improving their communicative and thinking skills.
2. Educators – This will help educators who are dealing with juvenile delinquents to enhance and improve their teaching
3. Juvenile Delinquents – This study will explore the potential of juvenile delinquents when engaged in group work while in the drama program

### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How do drama techniques improve the communicative and thinking skills among juvenile delinquents?
2. Does drama techniques create an environment that aids in learning among juvenile delinquents?

### **1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To determine whether adopting drama techniques in education has an impact on improving the communicative and thinking skills among juvenile delinquents.
2. To explore how adopting drama techniques in education creates an environment that aids learning for juvenile delinquents.

### **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is a pioneering move into exploring the potential that drama techniques in education have in improving the communicative and thinking skills of juvenile

delinquents in Singapore. It is also the first step towards investigating how participating in a drama program can aid learning for the juvenile delinquent.

The idea by John Dewey (1998) that experiential learning is based on the assumption that the efficiency of the learning process is significantly influenced by the learner's different experience related to the studied material and the circumstances in which the whole process takes place is relatable to this study. He states that the learner's experience comprises of components such as physical, mental, subjective, emotional and social among others. Drama techniques, it can be argued, possesses all of these components and allows for the balance between them to lie upon the individual.

### **1.8 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

This study aims at exploring whether adopting drama techniques in education has an impact on improving the communicative and thinking skills of the juvenile delinquent. In doing so, the study examines how drama techniques are able to aid learning and create an environment that supports learning for juvenile delinquent. The first major limitation deals with the fact that as each individual juvenile delinquent participating in the drama program is different, their ability to learn and the degree to which this learning may occur may differ from one participant to another. The result therefor may differ in accordance with the state of abilities the participant entered the program in.

The second major limitation that inhibited the study was the lack of literature available that were relatable to this study.

The third major limitation involved an internal conflict within the organisation. Shortly upon the completion of the program, there was a police matter that involved

the organisation of Pertapis. A religious male teacher and a female staff had been taken into police custody for crimes they are now convicted of that is ill treatment of children at Pertapis Children's Home. As the whistle blower had been an ex staff of Pertapis, a few other teachers had been named in the police report filed and so an investigation began. This put the organization of Pertapis and the Muslim community under media attention. The researcher had planned to speak again with the staff and the three participants after some time had passed from the completion of the drama program. Initially, the researcher had obtained permission from higher authorities of the organisation to follow through. On the last session of the program, the senior staff and a teacher had agreed to a follow up interview from the researcher for the purpose of gathering information for the thesis. However, after trying all possible channels of contact, the researcher did not get any responses from either. The trainers attempted to contact the senior management on behalf of the researcher but were unsuccessful. As the researcher had no personal information of the three participants, such as their email address or telephone number, it was not possible to follow up once the final session ended.

### **1.9 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The population of the study was three participants who had enrolled in the drama program at Pertapis Center for Girls and Women. The researcher chose to focus on these three participants due to time and resources constraints.

### **1.10 ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS**

The study is organized and presented in five chapters. The first chapter includes the introduction, statement of problem, the purpose of the study, research objectives,