Interactive Theatre: An Alternative Method of Teaching and Learning for Rural Young Children in Sekolah Kebangsaan Pekan Ranau, Sabah

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ABSTRACT

Compared with children in urban areas, children living in rural areas experience a severe lack of exposure to alternative teaching and learning activities to enhance their self-potential. This development affects their opportunity to explore knowledge comprehensively. The Education Development Master Plan by the Ministry of Education identified five education gaps in the Malaysian education system. Among them are the urban and rural gaps and the gap between student achievement levels. In Malaysia, most districts that recorded the lowest performance in Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah are in Sabah and Sarawak. This fact is the foundation factor to justify the implementation of this study in Sekolah Kebangsaan Pekan Ranau, located in the rural district of Ranau in Sabah. A total of 60 level one students were involved in the research, which took place from 2017 until 2019. In other developments, the inclusion of theatre as part of the school curriculum in most urban areas in Malaysia has indicated a formal acceptance of the value of theatre as an educational tool. Therefore, this research focuses on using interactive theatre to develop teaching and learning strategies for young children in rural areas. Interactive theatre is a performance that engages the audience and makes them active participants in the show. It brings the audience into the same playing space as the actors and breaks the walls separating them from the actors' world. Through practice-led research, the researcher conducted a workshop session that led to a live interactive theatre production. While the significant reference of this study is Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert, Piaget and Dewey's concept of active learning was utilised to observe and analyse the research findings. This research indicates that interactive theatre activities successfully turn passive children into active participants. By getting the children involved in this performance, they shared the stage setting, became characters in the performance, and had the opportunity to change the direction of the play. As they immersed themselves in the performance, they unconsciously explored their ability to improvise the situation and articulate their opinion critically and creatively.

Keywords: *interactive theatre, theatre in education, theatre for young children, Mantle of the Expert, concept of active learning*

INTRODUCTION

Educators have recently been interested in the links between performing arts-based teaching and learning and children's development. This research programme aims to explore young children's teaching and learning in the theatre through relational practices and pedagogies. Upon completion, this research will offer the impact of alternative education through interactive theatre on society, particularly for young children who have experienced poverty and exclusion. I conducted this research project from 2017 to 2019 in a rural school, Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) Pekan Ranau, Sabah. I developed interactive theatre as an alternative teaching and learning method to increase rural children's interest and motivation toward education.

Throughout two years of this project's implementation, I travelled thrice from Kuala Lumpur to SK Pekan Ranau. The first visit was intended as a site visit and introduction to the school, the administrators, and the teachers, while the main research activities take place during the second and third visits. SK Pekan Ranau provided us with a total of 60 level one students to participate in this programme. The breakdown of these students was 20 in Year 1, 20 in Year 2, and 20 in Year 3. When requesting participants, I established the criteria for passive learners based on Dewey and Piaget's suggestions for an active learning environment, which I will explain in more detail in the methodology section. The criteria are intended to measure the outcome at the end of the research project.

The main objective of this research is to position interactive theatre as an alternative teaching tool for sharpening the critical and creative abilities of rural children. Therefore, in this article, the researcher focuses on the second field trip from 5 until 9 March 2018, where exploring the interactive theatre was the principal activity. Therefore, data from the field research accompanied by observations are this study's primary information sources.

DEVELOPING THE METHOD

In the late 90s, I served as an interim teacher in a public secondary school in Sabah. Over several years of my service, I used to be a class teacher to a class with students who are left behind, or what we refer to as a class for students with poor or low academic achievement. As I remember, at least in the school where I taught, we still practice the teacher-centred learning approach. In this type of learning or the more conventional approach, the teacher functions as a classroom lecturer, presenting information to the students, who are expected to receive the knowledge being presented passively. When a teacher takes full responsibility for educating students, the class benefits from a focused research, planning, and preparation approach. This method works best when the instructor can make the lesson enjoyable; without this, students may get bored, wander their minds, and miss essential information.

This experience tells me that such pedagogy will never give these low achievers students an advantage. On the contrary, passive students will remain passive and academic achievement will not be able to be drastically improved through such a pedagogical approach.

Upon leaving my teaching career and shifting to university, one of the courses I conducted was Drama in Education. In the years before the pandemic, I consistently conducted final assessments to evaluate my university students at school, mostly primary schools and pre-schools. What excited me was that every time our activities with these children ended, for a few days, I still received messages from parents telling me that their children were still talking about their experiences with my students. Thus, this development brings me back to my experience with low-achiever students.

The major reference of this study is Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert (MoE). The MoE approach was developed by Heathcote over 40 years of practice, where Heathcote established them as a "clear system" with "operant law" which she defined and explained through numerous charts and addresses over the years (Aitken 2013). MoE employs three teaching methods: inquiry-based learning, drama for learning (commonly associated with drama in education), and "expert framing," in which children are positioned as adult experts and guided to experience the learning process in a new way.

In addition, few studies that observed creative arts as teaching and learning tools in early childhood education inspire this study. Loy et al. (2017) developed an observation instrument item to evaluate early childhood educators' teaching strategies using creative arts to enhance children's holistic development. Meanwhile, Thambu (2019) conducted a forum for theatre to inspire thinking skills and foster creativity and innovation among students. His research is helpful to educators, parents, and lesson planners who wish to plan and implement appropriate teaching methods, such as forum theatre, to encourage and improve students' thinking skills.

Through my activities with students in university, I adapted MoE as the foundation of my teaching and learning in the Drama in Education class and gradually discovered that these methods can be utilised to help young children enjoy their learning experience by combining drama and theatre with the syllabus at school. In the meantime, I studied the development of interactive theatre, which often goes hand in hand with immersive theatre and is theatrically termed under the umbrella of applied theatre. Homan (2014) suggests that interactive theatre is not just for entertainment but is often produced to illustrate real political and moral debates. It allows the audience to immerse themselves as participants and become the main reason for the production. They can even become the main actors in the show. Interactive productions are designed to give a sense of reality, with the location and setting establishing the production's tone.

This is where the starting point of this research begins, with the hypothesis that interactive theatre can be positioned as an alternative method of conducting teaching and learning activities for children. In the context of this study, I focus on rural children.

The issue of educational disparity between urban and rural children is not new. Weir, Errity and McAvinue (2015) found that the main factor is the lack of access to educational resources. At the same time, the ignorance of the concept of "rurality" among educators prevents these rural children from getting more specific attention. The attitude of education administrators who do not emphasise specific teacher training in approaching rural children also contributes to educational issues in rural schools (Biddle and Azano 2016).

The Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013–2025 by the Ministry of Education reported that in 2011, there was a difference of almost 20% in the average Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) grade between the higher performing large states such as Johor and the lowest-performing state, namely Sabah. Sixteen of the 20 districts with the lowest UPSR performance and 10 of the 20 lowest-performing districts in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) are located in Sabah and Sarawak. In the study of Abdul Said et al. (2014) on the achievement of zero UPSR in Sarawak, the methods and approaches of teachers during teaching and learning sessions are among the main aspects that need improvement. Based on this information, the researchers suggest that alternative learning should be introduced in primary school. The above record clearly shows the chain effect of not achieving good UPSR results in the state of Sabah, which affects the decline in SPM results in the same state. The need to introduce alternative learning methods in rural areas is great, as rural children are not as aggressive as children growing up in urban areas. Alternative learning can pass on urban children's experiences to rural children.

This research focuses on children in rural areas, mainly because they are late to receive updates on current developments compared to children in urban areas. The Malaysian Education Development Plan identified five education gaps in Malaysia's education system. One of them is the urban and rural gap and the gap between student achievement levels. Most districts that recorded the lowest UPSR results in Malaysia are in Sabah and Sarawak. Meanwhile, the digital and socioeconomic gaps also distance the ability of schools in Sabah and Sarawak to reach information and communication technology needs, compared to schools in Peninsular Malaysia. This is the apparent justification for why this study is more effective in rural areas, and in the context of the author's study, it is in Sabah.

Therefore, this study focuses on the potential of using interactive theatre activities as an alternative teaching method for primary school children in rural areas. Performing arts activities, especially theatre, open up possibilities for various creative expressions through acting, storytelling, singing, musical sounds, imaginative storytelling, acting, playing, movement, and gesture in a larger context. Mastery of these elements at a child level can enhance children's critical thinking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Theatre in Education (TiE) movement was pioneered by Belgrade in 1965. TiE is positioned as a strategy to use theatre and drama to create learning opportunities for young people. The TiE movement soon spread to theatres across the UK and later around the world, inspiring a wide range of interactive theatre with children and young people (Robson 2018).

Heathcote's MoE was considered unorthodox in the 1960s when the approach placed the child at the centre of learning. The teacher's role is to create the conditions whereby a mantle of leadership, knowledge, competency, and understanding grows around the child. Despite criticism, Heathcote's work has been further developed and theorised by academics and practitioners worldwide (Aitken 2013).

Research in children's art education has explored child-initiated, cultural, and relational notions of arts teaching and learning (Aitken et al. 2007). Through the practice of progression and multidisciplinary of different artistic activities and ideas, children gradually form an interest in the educational and creative process.

Social theatre is widely used in the West, referring to activities that bring theatre closer to society. Thompson and Schechner (2004) define social theatre as a performance project in a specific and particular place. They also include theatre activities for education in schools, theatre for the community, and even theatre in prisons. The social theatre is positioned as a platform for self-esteem support, builds confidence, manages anger, heals sociopsychological wounds, creates a new approach to learning, promotes participatory community development, and can operate constructively in the face of all kinds of traumatic experiences.

As a teaching tool, drama, particularly interactive theatre involving the audience, has a long history. It develops in imaginative and dramatic methods to explore knowledge in various issues. Interactive theatre in Western countries is used to initiate discussions on sexuality education and is also developed as a tool to expand the issue of HIV and AIDS (Sawney 2003). Haneem et al. (2022) actively developed creative drama as an educational module for sexuality education in Malaysia by constructing the PEERS-DK module.

Thambu et al. (2020) examined forum theatre as a pedagogical tool for developing various levels of thinking skills among 14 moral education students. The findings revealed that various theatrical activities underpinned the four elements of forum theatre: (1) writing a script, (2) delivering a dialogue in an anti-model play, (3) discussion and decision-making in a forum session, and (4) improvisation in an intervention play, show the development of students' thinking skills at the level of analysing, evaluating and creating.

In Malaysia, interactive theatre is still a new approach that integrates interactive elements into conventional performances. The term "theatre in education" is widely used to describe these activities that are carried out based on education. It consists of various activities such as storytelling, reader's theatre, puppet theatre, forum theatre, and many more. Most primary references to interactive theatre in Malaysia rely on reports of activities held in various places, and very little is published in literary form.

However, art education and theories of child development were incorporated into the visual arts curriculum in the 1970s, followed by music education in the late 1980s. Support from academic institutions and government agencies opened the way for the arts at school and tertiary levels, and non-formal arts programmes for young people also began to emerge. Programmes such as the children's theatre programme led by Elizabeth Cardosa and Janet Pillai at Kompleks Budaya Negara, the children's theatre course at Universiti Sains Malaysia by Zainal Latiff (1979–1985), and theatre and puppetry programmes at Perpustakaan Negara and Balai Seni Lukis Negara are among the earliest programmes linking arts and children (Five Arts Centre 2017).

In the global context, most Western education systems have integrated arts education into their public primary schools. Apparently, theatre and drama activities are practised in Malaysia as an alternative space for children to explore and enhance their learning skills, although only visual arts

and music education have been included in the curriculum structure. However, there is no progressive initiative to revise the current educational concepts to include theatre and drama methods in the curriculum structure or structure it as an alternative learning method for underperforming and passive children in rural primary schools. As this is not a new research activity internationally, the researcher is looking for an opportunity for a pioneering collaboration of interactive drama and education systems in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods are used with a design that focuses on practice-led research. In this method, the performance practice leads the researcher to enlighten the research inquiry. The researcher conducted a series of workshops culminating in a live interactive theatre production. This project utilised the actual syllabus from the teacher's daily teaching plan. However, instead of using conventional pedagogy, the researchers transformed the teaching and learning sessions into a series of interactive drama activities such as storytelling, puppet theatre, readers theatre and forum theatre.

In this project, SK Pekan Ranau was chosen using random sampling. After compiling a list of Sabah's rural schools, the researcher sent emails inviting each school to participate in a collaborative project. The first school to accept the invitation is SK Pekan Ranau. We conveyed the research requirements to the school, particularly our intention to involve the passive children before the two sides came to a mutual understanding. We then made physical contact with the school after they agreed to comply.

A total of 60 "passive and low achievers" level one students, 20 from each year group selected by the teacher, are involved. The age range of these children is from seven to nine years and consists of 21 girls and 39 boys. More than 90% of the children are from the Dusun ethnic group, and the rest are from a mixture of other ethnic groups. Informal discussions with the teachers reveal that most parents are self-employed as farmers, in the family business and as government officials.

Pardjono (2002) stated that the theories of Dewey and Piaget imply that in the new learning model, communication between student and teacher is reciprocal; that is, the teacher and student are both senders and receivers and act as teacher and learner so that students become more active. Dewey stated that in active learning, students' learning involves mental and physical activities. Similarly, Piaget's notion of active learning is when a child adapts to the environment. The criteria for passive students that I use in this study are therefore derived from Piaget and Dewey: students who show no tendency and interest to develop their mental and physical activities and who do not want to adapt to the learning environment of the class. I asked the teachers to select students based on these criteria because they know their students better.

A few professional actors were hired to serve as facilitators for these activities, and they also acted together with the students. I invited three theatre students from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Mukmin, Nur Farahin and Bechek, to act in the interactive theatre. My co-researcher, Rosnani and research assistant, Wan Shaufiq, are implementing the project with me. The UMS students joined us on the third day as a "royal entourage."

I divided the children into three groups on the first and second days according to their class. Each group was given different activities: storytelling for Year 1, puppet theatre for Year 2, and readers theatre for Year 3. In the introduction and icebreaking session, the first information I informed the children was that on the third day, an entourage of the royal princess would arrive at the school for the princess's birthday celebration. I convinced the children that they needed to perform their talents in front of the princess. Especially the girls; these children were excited because the princess was coming. We trained them to perform all three activities for the next two days. In addition, they also trained the royal protocol of greeting the princess (we created with our creativity).

The basic framework for this activity is the MoE method by Dorothy Heathcote. MoE is based on the premise that treating children as responsible experts increases their engagement and confidence (Farmer 2011). They can see a real purpose for learning and exploring together, interactively and
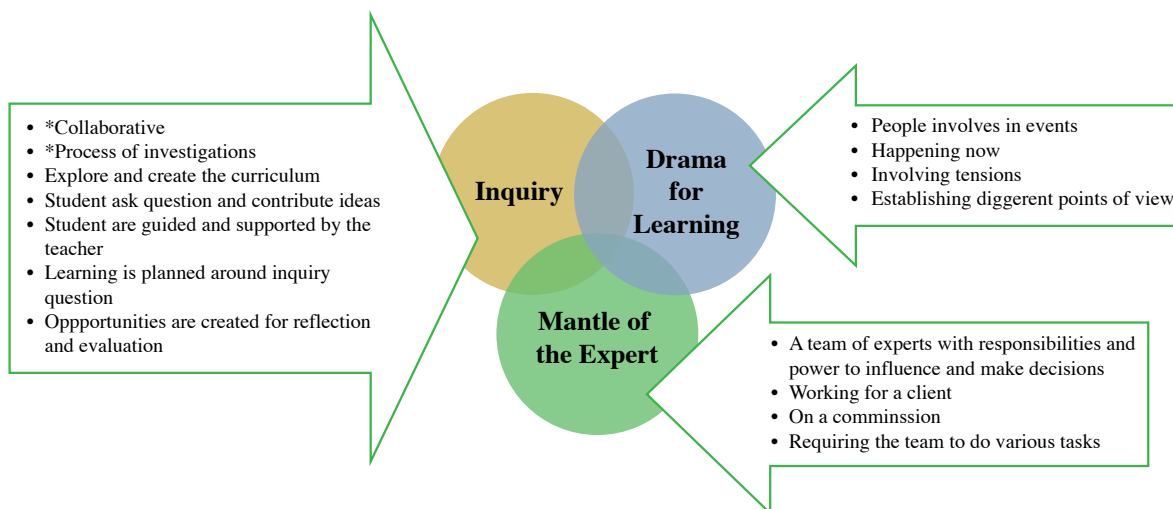
Figure 1 Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert.

Source: Adapted from Aitken (2013).

proactively—gaining skills and knowledge they can apply daily. This framework (see Figure 1) encourages creativity and improves teamwork, communication skills, critical thinking and decision-making. The technique can be used to actively explore topics across the curriculum through theatre, allowing students to take on responsible roles and make decisions to guide outcomes.

The researcher used the concept of active learning of educational theorists Jean Piaget and John Dewey to observe the changes in children's behaviours. Dewey described the mind as a verb, as something that does something, and not as something that can be filled like a sponge. He believed that students need to interact with their environment to think; therefore, every student should be involved in a lively activity around a project. According to Piaget, the basic adaptation mechanism consists of two complementary processes: assimilation and accommodation (Pardjono 2002). Piaget emphasises that learning comes about through the active engagement of learners. Therefore, teachers must ensure that learners actively participate in what is being taught and learned. Hence, the researcher believes that Piaget's and Dewey's principles are the best framework for the following section.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The measurements we use to track participant development are based on Piaget and Dewey's theories and explore both mental and physical activity, as well as the capacity for acceptance and adaptation. The data was analysed using two approaches: a reluctance to adapt in the classroom setting to integrate and eventually conform with the learning activities and a lack of mental and physical activity to interact and be involved successfully. These fundamental ideas guided our observations of the transformation of passive students into active ones. This study revealed four value aspects in total.

Agreement to Work Together

Since the main criteria for selecting these children are passive, shyness and low self-esteem are the foundation issues that need to be addressed. Various theatre games have been prepared for this purpose. Among them is a creative self-introduction game, where these children have to say their names followed by the sound of their favourite animal. Initially, it was not easy for these passive children to do it due to the shyness factor. Furthermore, all the facilitators are strangers. However, after more than 20 children played this game funnily, the atmosphere started becoming noisy and boisterous, with children's laughter and joy. When this situation arises, it is easier for the facilitator to approach these children and proceed with the subsequent activities.

Another theatre game that created a noisy and cheerful atmosphere was the game entitled "Who Do You Like?" The facilitator chose a child in this game and asked, "Who do you like?" The chosen child has to choose people they like based on their appearance. For example, when this child answers, "I like the person wearing the red shirt," all the children wearing the red shirt must get up and leave their respective seats to exchange positions with other children. This game tests the speed at which they receive information and act, creating a fun atmosphere.

The drama session helped the facilitators get closer to the children. After the icebreaking session and the theatre games were over on the first day, the children began to address all the facilitators as "teachers" with more pleasant eye contact and a cheerful smile. Piaget found that practical games with rules are an extremely effective learning tool for children at this stage of development (Lefa 2014). This is the early stage of the learning process that our children-participant went through in SK Pekan Ranau when they focused more on the social aspects of the game during the drama session to find connection and acceptance by the group and gradually agreed to cooperate with the facilitators.

Collaborative Team with A Common Goal

From the beginning of the project, we have always emphasised to the children that the royal entourage will come with the princess to celebrate her birthday in this school. To welcome the troupe's arrival, all the children had to learn certain skills, namely storytelling, puppet theatre and reading theatre. They had to practise in order to perform in front of the royal entourage the next day.

Year 1 students practised their Malay language skills through storytelling techniques. Rosnani led this session. The children are trained to pronounce certain words. They are then taught to form short words into long sentences until they become a complete story. The story is then acted out in front of the facilitator, accompanied by their style and expression. Shaufiq teaches puppet theatre techniques to Year 2 students. The facilitator provides basic materials such as socks, ping pong balls for the puppets' eyes and different types of decorations. The children can design their puppets with these tools and creatively present the characters they have created at the end of the workshop.

Year 3 students are trained to strengthen their English through reader's theatre activities. I provide them with manila paper and stationery. I read a short story in English and asked them to write each sentence on manila paper. After they had completed the writing task, I instructed them to read the story aloud with the correct pronunciation. At the same time, they were to develop style and character in their narration. This writing and reading process is meant to build their confidence in the English pronunciation of words.

At the end of the second day, all the students were given tasks to take home. They should all practise by themselves because tomorrow the royal entourage will arrive to watch their performance. Through these activities, the children took responsibility for practising their tasks at home to ensure the success of the birthday party with the royal entourage. This result follows Piaget's suggestion of creating an appropriate learning environment to take the desire to acquire new knowledge to another level. Giving the children a specific task encourages a spirit of cooperation to achieve a common goal as a team.

Imagination, Action, Drama!

When the princess and the guardian arrived, all the children greeted them officially using the choreography we had taught them the previous day. Then, the princess gave a speech showing her appreciation for all children. After the speech, as planned, all the children showcased the talents they had learned in the workshop. All the performances finished, the princess was delighted, and the children were happy. Now, it was time to cut the birthday cake. At this time, the children were excited because we brought an actual cake in front of their eyes. When the princess wants to cut the cake after the birthday song is sung, this is when the drama begins.

The children sang the "Happy Birthday" song, and suddenly, an evil character appeared near the song's end. He is a witch who wants to disturb the peace of the birthday party. The witch screams, laughs out loud, and utters frightening words. The witch said he wanted to ruin the celebration and kidnap the princess. Expectedly, some children cry in fear, but I have trained the facilitator to act accordingly. We provoked these children to come forward against the witch. Some of them were indeed afraid, but some were extremely brave. When the brave children confront the witch not to take the princess away, the witch responds by saying that if these kids do not want the celebration to be ruined, they need to answer all the questions the witch poses.

The question-and-answer begins, and all these questions are taken from the syllabus that the children should learn that week in their conventional class. All questions are combined with the syllabus from Bahasa Melayu, English, Science, and Mathematics. For example, when the witch asks, "Give me seven colours of the rainbow," these children have to sit down and discuss to get the correct answer. The desire to get the right answer is even more urgent because they are faced with an actual conflict, for which they have to save the princess's birthday party. In the discussion, the facilitators can act as teachers guiding the children in obtaining the correct answers. Through the discussion and guidance from the teacher-facilitator, all the questions the witch gave were correctly answered by these "passive and low academic achievers."

Dramatically planned, every time the kids gave the correct answer, the witch would scream and cry until finally, he crashed down on the floor when all the questions were answered correctly. This situation boosted the kids' confidence to the extent that they rushed toward the witch to attack and hit him. Thus, the lesson's objectives for the day are achieved when the drama is over. All these kids celebrate the princess's birthday happily.

Piaget highlights constructive play as a space where children can develop their conceptual knowledge by asking questions, testing ideas and gathering information (Lefa 2014). These are the processes that the children experience in the question-and-answer session with the witch. They plan, explore and discover with their imagination. In this way, they develop not only their imagination but also their problem-solving skills, fine motor skills and self-esteem! These activities lay the foundation for academic, social and emotional success.

Reflection

At the end of the performance, the facilitator introduced the children to the actors and explained that they were about to experience an interactive theatre activity. The children were asked to reflect and share their feelings through the experience. In this situation, the children had already gained some self-confidence by defeating the witch, which encouraged them to express themselves in their own "more confident" way. At this level, we could see that the children had slowly adapted their skills in negotiation, cooperation, listening, sharing, taking turns and respecting the feelings, thoughts, ideas and physical space of others. Table 1 shows the pattern of active learning achieved through the four mentioned aspects.

DISCUSSION

What exactly happens to these kids as this process goes on? They play. This process is referred to as the method of play in learning. The technique of playing while learning refers to a child's self-expression that is done spontaneously and leads to the learning process. Jean Piaget notes, "Play is the work of childhood," and for children, play is a serious process of learning their life.

The preliminary findings of this research demonstrate how these interactive theatre activities successfully turn the children we label as passive into active participants. For example, in the activity context, when the witch appears to destroy the princess's birthday celebration, the only way to defeat the witch is by answering all the questions posed. These kids interact aggressively, experimenting

Table 1 Pattern of active learning through the four aspects.

Activities	Interactive	Mental and physical action	Assimilation	Accommodation	Active learning environment
Agreement to work together	Interaction through the theatre games	Children have to think and act fast to introduce themselves	They mingled with new friends and had to work with persons they were not familiar in one group	Cooperate with friends in all activities to achieve a similar objective	Yes
Collaborative team with a common goal	Interaction with facilitator and friends	They have to create stories, actions, or singing in the workshop			Yes
Imagination, action, drama!	Actively interact with the princess and the witch	The teaching and learning session upon the witch's entrance needs their active mental and physical preparation			Yes
Reflection	Sharing experiences and feelings	This session develops their ability to think beyond their expectation			Yes

with ideas and behaviours they would never have in a traditional classroom. Believing that they must vanquish the witch in order to save the princess they adore, they adapt and blend into the drama.

This performance-based research method has brought these children into the same play space as the actors and broken down the wall that separates the children from the world of drama. In this method, what matters is experience as well as reflection. By getting these children involved in such activities, they share the same stage space, become characters in the show, and use their abilities and ingenuity to change the direction of the drama. While immersed in the show, they subconsciously explored the hidden abilities within themselves by improvising situations and eloquently casting their views creatively and critically despite the notion that they are passive students and have low academic achievement. As passive children, conventional teaching and learning patterns nowadays are ineffective in keeping them active.

According to Dewey, knowledge is an individual experience organised and constructed through learning in active learning. Meanwhile, Piaget established that assimilation occurs when the current knowledge structure incorporates new experiences. Figure 2 demonstrates the structure of activities we conducted in this session and how the process contributes to the changes from passive learners into active learners by interacting, assimilating and accommodating the new experiences.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These children have a creative experience throughout the activities without being aware. In addition to their roles, the children also explore the perspectives of others. The facilitators use different conventions of dramatic action to complete the journey of the interactive theatre sessions. Based on the observation of the activities carried out, all the tools of this study are interconnected and need to be used together as an interactive theatre module. The content of the workshop can be changed according to the facilitators' preference, but the order of the activities must not leave out the important aspects such as workshops, training in groups and performance sessions because, in each of these aspects, the values that these children need to live can be achieved, namely: (1) agreement to work together; (2) collaborative team with a common goal; (3) imagination, action, drama!; and (4) reflection.
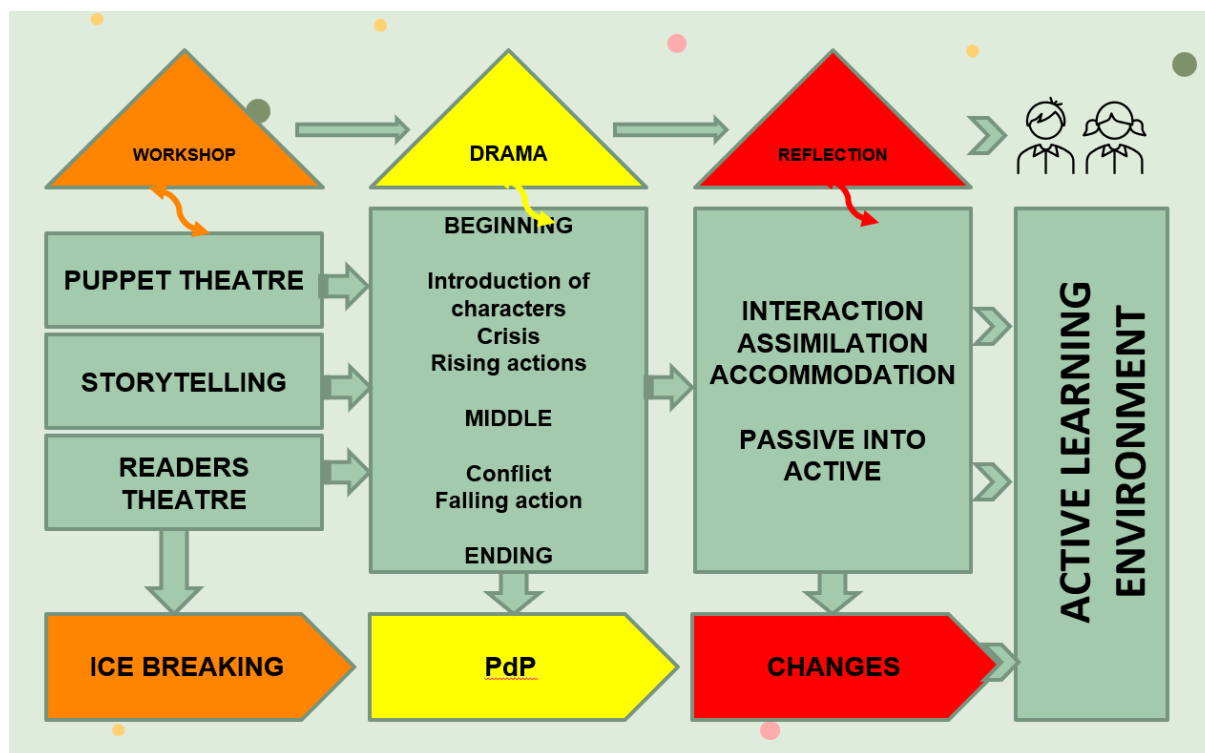
Figure 2 Passive into active activities structure.
Source: Illustrated by author.

It's interesting to witness how they go from having little mental or physical activity and not wanting to adjust to the learning activities in the traditional classroom to learning activities where they have to "save the world." A significant result of this study is to assist these children in transitioning from a condition of passivity to one in which they can ignite their excitement for learning without fear of being labelled as passive or underachievers. These kids' exchange of questions and answers with the witch's character helps them comprehend the value of having a critical and intellectual mind. The entire activities were structured around the theatrical form, which is very different from what they have been taught thus far in conventional classrooms.

As Piaget describes the experience of active learning as "a process of changing one's existing way of thinking to a new event," this study was able to accomplish its goal of positioning interactive theatre as an alternative teaching tool for sharpening rural children's critical and creative thinking skills by incorporating the theories of Piaget and Dewey along with Heathcote's MoE method in developing the activities. This research aims to continuously implement this project as an alternative teaching method for young children while pioneering a merger of performing arts and education in Malaysia.

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