

*Resee the Beauty of the Temples:
A Case Study on Performance in Front of Temple by a Children's Theatre Workshop
Combined an Oral History Story Theatre as an Example*

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Abstract

Religious buildings worldwide, including temples in Taiwan, have utilized religious legends, myths, and classical literature to teach people in an expression of art, culture, and humanity. With globalization, people have gradually forgotten the art, education, and entertainment contexts of temples. This study adopted that the temple as a museum and explored whether a teaching activity that involves public drama performance can facilitate people's understanding of diverse cultures in temples. Using a 3 days theatre workshop for children that played the stories from the painting on the walls in the temple, and collecting the oral history stories from the community and made it as a story theatre played by professional actors, and then combined these two types of performances as a program in front of the temple. The results indicated that incorporating the stories from the temple into the workshop as a drama performance could help children and the community gain a further understanding of temple decorations and arts. Moreover, professional actors playing with children could be as a model learning for children and enable the audience to experience the culture contexts and diverse values of temples, to resee the beauty of the temples with new vision.

Keywords: Story Theater, Temple, Theatre Workshop for Children, Oral History Stories

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Introduction

Religious buildings around the world use a diverse array of materials to imbue religious narratives, myths, classical literature, and more, such like the church in Europe, and the temples in Taiwan. These artistic expressions in Taiwan's temples, including calligraphy and paintings, retell tales from classical literature and showcase figures like those from the "Investiture of the Gods", "Romance of the Tree Kingdoms", and "The twenty-Four Filial Exemplars". In the early days, these temples not only served as places of ancestral veneration and solace for departed souls but also fulfilled roles in education and entertainment. In the festivals, temple custodians would orchestrate performances of traditional opera, and puppet theater to commemorate the festivities. These performances played a role in fostering community and other such social connections. However, amid the ongoing wave of globalization, the original functions of art education and entertainment – within these spaces have gradually faded from collective consciousness.

If it possible to have a theatre activity for children that narrative the art stories of the decorative art, to ask people reseeing the temple of the beauty?

Research Questions

Recognizing this, I envision a harmonious fusion between the stories intrinsic to temple decorative art and engaging children's theatrical activities. This envisioned integration extends to live performances held in proximity to the temple, fostering a dynamic interaction between the artistic narratives and the physical space they inhabit. Therefore, this study treats temples as museums, using the concept of museum theater, and the drama education, children cognitive. We design a 3-day children theatre workshop that work around a temple and wonder to know the question below:

1. How to design a children's theatre workshop that connects with the temple of decorative art?
2. How can the performance design of theatrical events enhance the understanding and interest of the participating people in the decorative arts of the temple?
3. The difficulties and challenges faced in the implementation of activities.

Literature Review

For drama education and creative drama, "Fun" is the key, that Ward Winfred emphasized, because in a drama game could empower the participants to release the mind during the game, and because of it, the participant could feel free, and start to try do something fun. She manure 6 values of drama game, such like: 1.Experience in thinking creatively and independently. 2.Practice in strongly motivated social cooperation. 3.Opportunities to grow in understanding people who have a different viewpoint from themselves. 4. Controlled emotional release, which every child needs. 5.Experience in thinking on one's feet, and expressing ideas clearly and fearlessly. 6.Fun. (Ward, W. · 1952 : 1-2). In the end of the values, she wrote "just plain fun!" Therefore, the participants can get the power from the game, and the fiction structure in the game, participants can use his own thinking and mind to make decision and act, but in a safe atmosphere, and after the game take the real experience out of the game in his life.

Drama games are fun, because the dominance of the game can help the participants to achieve physical and mental liberation and emotional expression in the process. Participants

are empowered by the unspoken rules of the game in the process, so they can flexibly make decisions and actions with their own ideas or judgments in the hypothetical framework of the game, and then discuss cause and effect with the group to gain practical experience acquisition. Therefore, when the leader structured the children's body creativity workshop, "fun" was the core focus of the entire lesson plan design.

And the social cultural scholar Lev Semenovich Vygotsky also pointed out that Children's learning and participation through social interaction can help them actively participate in the environment. These common activities help internalize the thoughts and behaviors of the society in which they live, making them a part of their own life context. Besides he also point out that The Zone of Proximal Development could give the learner some support, they could do it well and achieve the objective.

Summarize the basic theories of the above scholars, drama is a process that can create a fiction problem to allow children to solve it with their own experience. Performances in front of the temples can help children in age of 7-11 engage in social interaction. Basic of this, we design a three-day course for children between age of 7-11.

Method

This study employs a case study research approach to investigate the efficacy of the program, utilizing quantitative data obtained from questionnaires to gauge the sentiments of both children and audiences who witness the performances. The research steps and sequence are divided into 4 phases: 1.Preparation, 2.Development the activity, 3.Collation of information, and 4.Conclusions. I am both the course designer and the spectator that observe children's learning, and the audience reaction in the course and performance.

1. Preparation

- ***The Course Design***

This course is structured into two distinct segments: the unified group session and the small group workshops. The Unified Group Session focus on the training of body creativity, the small group workshops focus on the training of the story imagination. The performance that children played is mainly based on the painted stories in the temple.

- ***The Story Performance Setting***

The choice of story dramatization should align with the interests and inclinations of the young performers, I choose two famous traditional tales, one is "Chang's Rushing to the Moon" and another one is "One meal and Thousands of Gold". "Chang's Rushing to the Moon" is a story of moon festival in China. It tells that a woman called Chang fled to the moon after taking the pill for escaping her rude husband; "One meal and Thousands of Gold", is a story about that a man whose name is Han Yu. When he was young, he was very poor, and an old lady gave him food to support him to study. Few years pass, Han got an official job, and became rich, so he went home, and gave a lot of money to that old lady.

- ***The Professional Actors Participating***

And during the course, we used professional actors joined the rehearsal and performance to support the act of children. Because performance in front of the temple is the open field, the audiences are free to enjoy the play, they can choose stay or leave anytime. Therefore, if the performance can't catch the eyes of audience at begging, it's hard to collect the audience

again, so the actors are the key to see if the play is successful or not. Furthermore, the story that actors act is re-create from the life that the community residents, we make this performance as an oral history theatre that belongs this community.

- ***About the Performance Area***

We choose Mazu-lou temple as a stage, is not only it was in Tainan City since 1752, an old architecture, but also there is a ground in front of its building, the size just fit as we could play as an experimental theatre. for our little actors and the audiences, and Mazu is a sea goddess and she is a common belief in Taiwan. People believe that she could protect those people who work at sea and safe them home.

2. Development

This is the course we play during the days. We warm up our body ever first class, and go to the temple together. Than find out the story, and analyze it. So in these 3 days we work together as a theatre group nearby the matzo-lu temple community, make the props, have lunch together, and rehearsal in front of the temple.

- ***About the Oral History Story***

I interview the resident in this community, and rewrite their story as the story-theatre, and performance out.

3. Collation of Information

After the performance, we collect 11 copies of questionnaire feedback for children's, 42 copies of questionnaire feedback for children's, we ask 9 questions about the workshop, the red words shows that they think this workshop did help them to know the story and change the impression of the temple.

• Have you ever join this kind of drama workshop?	• Yes 55% ; None 45%
• Do you like this workshop?	• Like 82% ; Soso 9%; Dislike 9%
• Which activities you like most in this workshop?	• Creative drama game 34% ; temple tour 7%;lunch time 10%; rehearsa 34% ; performancing 14%
• How do you think the timing of this workshop?	• Just ok36% ; too long 0%; too short 64%
• Before you join this workshop, what's your impression of the temple?	• A place for pray 47% ; a place for fun 13%; a place for visit 33%; strange 0%; full of god and ghost 7%; other 0%
• Did small group working help you to understand the story that you perform?	• Yes 91% ; Soso 9%; None 0%
• Is it helpful for you to understand more about the story that you performance?	• Yes 82% ; Soso 18%; None 0%
• After this workshop, could you speak your way to tell the story?	• Yes 55% ; Soso 27%, No 18%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After this workshop, did you change your impression of temple? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No 9%; Yes 91% • ***If your answer is yes, please fill the questions about the new impression of temple below*** • Full of story, like the story book 26% • Full of crafts 21% • A place for fun 21% • A place for peace 32% • Other 0%
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For the audience, most of them also change the impression, they think it help people to know the community more, and feel more closer in this place.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you like this kind of performance ? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like 95% • Soso 5% • Dislike 0%
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which part you like mostly? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Matzu Lu temple 36% • Children game 24% • Love story in the temple 17% • The memory in childhood 24%
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it help you to know this community? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 93% ; soso 5%; No 2%
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After this performance, do you feel more closer in this place? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 90%; Soso 10%; No 0%
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you pay more attention to enjoy more in the temple, after this performance? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 93% • Soso 7% • No 0%
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Besides, comparing the feeling that audiences enjoy the performance before and after. Before the performance, they think temple just a place for pray, but after they think it's a place for emotion, and culture.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you think, before you enjoy this performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No thinking 6% • A place with god and ghost 1% • Place for pray peace 34% • Place for fun 2% • Place for visit 14% • Place for storytelling 7% • Place for emotion 19% • Place for culture 16% • Other 1%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think, after you enjoy this performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No thinking 0% • A place with god and ghost 1% • No thinking 0% • A place with god and ghost 1% • Place for pray peace 14% • Place for fun 5% • Place for visit 8% • Place for storytelling 19% • Place for emotion 29% • Place for culture 26% • Other 0%

Conclusions

- ***For Children***

“FUN” is the main point in this case. Because for children, it can stimulate children's imagination, express their own ideas naturally, and integrate them into creation, because of the atmosphere. Therefore, we discuss the play, children share their opinions, and thinking in the story. For example in the group of “One meal and Thousands of Gold”, they naturally added the issue of water resources protection into their lines during the performance. And the group of “Chang’s Rushing to the Moon”, they put the bullying issue in their play. Besides, for the prop using, children used the same blue cloth, but in different role in the play. They used the background as a prop to imagine the story and used it as the river.

- ***For the Audience***

We use role play with audience instance of telling how to appreciate the art in the temple, and after the performance, some audiences respond that they finally know what’s story on the roof of the temple, and begin trying to really appreciate it.

- ***About the Future***

Conveying how to appreciate the traditional art is a good way for people to know where we are from. But how to determine these public arts is importance in a good convey, so that people would like to take look of them naturally, is the challenge in this case. So that, in the design of courses and performances for people could accept these naturally is the purpose in this case.

I hope that this sharing can make more people understand the value of culture in their lives, see not the superficial beauty but the deep cultural meaning behind it, and allow the beauty of temples to be seen again.

Thank you to all the staff, students, audience, and my beloved children who participated in the performance.

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