

STAND UP!: **THE POTENTIAL EDUCATIONAL IMPACT OF ANTI-BULLYING DRAMA WORKSHOP FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based upon an on going research into a participatory drama workshop called *Stand Up!* that toured in five secondary schools in Depok, West Java, Indonesia, during October 2017. The workshop was initiated by Theatre for Life, a community non-profit based in Depok, and it was funded by the Community Service Grants from the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia. Targeting at Year 10, Year 11, and Year 12, the workshop intended to raise awareness on bullying among secondary school students. *Stand Up!* shared the same framework, techniques, and objectives as Theatre in Education (TiE) in a way that it took place at educational settings and aimed to explore a pressing issue for educational purposes. The methods used in the workshop alternated some basic dramatic activities such as role playing, freeze frames, flashback, and improvisation with Boal's forum theatre techniques to encourage students to debate pick-up lines, enact assertive behaviours to tackle bullies, and discuss effective ways to report a bullying situation to teachers or parents. This paper provides summary of the workshop content and methodologies. It goes on to discuss quantitative data from the research in order to examine the potential educational impacts of the resulting project for the young audiences whom it engaged with.

Keywords: drama, participatory, bullying, adolescence

ABSTRACT

Makalah ini berangkat dari sebuah penelitian tentang program penyuluhan anti-bullying melalui lokakarya drama-partisipatif berjudul *Stand Up!* yang dilaksanakan di lima sekolah menengah atas dan sederajat di Depok, Jawa Barat, Indonesia, pada bulan Oktober 2017. Lokakarya ini diselenggarakan oleh Theatre for Life, sebuah komunitas non-profit yang berbasis di Depok. Program ini didanai oleh Hibah Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat dari Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya, Universitas Indonesia. Sebagai sebuah Teater Edukasi, program ini bertujuan memberikan edukasi mengenai bentuk-bentuk perilaku bullying di lingkungan sekolah serta meningkatkan kesadaran akan pencegahannya.

Metode yang digunakan merupakan perpaduan antara kegiatan dramatik seperti bermain peran, gambar diam (*still image*), kilas balik (*flashback*), dan improvisasi dengan teknik teater-partisipatif (*participatory theatre*) dalam Teater Forum dari Augusto Boal seperti mendiskusikan penggalan dialog atau adegan *bullying*, memberikan contoh perilaku asertif ketika berhadapan dengan *bully*, dan mendiskusikan cara yang efektif untuk melaporkan situasi *bullying* kepada guru atau orang tua. Diskusi dipandu oleh fasilitator dan terjalin antara aktor dan penonton yang diberi kesempatan untuk memberikan saran dan memeragakan langsung masukannya. Makalah ini mengkaji sejauh mana metode dramatik-partisipatif yang digunakan dapat membawa program *Stand Up!* mencapai tujuan edukatifnya. Analisis data yang digunakan adalah analisis kuantitatif dan deskriptif kualitatif.

Keywords: drama, partisipatori, forum teater, bullying, remaja

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Linda, a fifteen year old junior high school student, killed herself after being ridiculed by her schoolmates for failing in her classes. In the same year, two other teenagers were also found hanging in their homes after being bullied at school. Years later, Fajar Murdianto, a twelve year old elementary school student in Indonesia, died after receiving multiple beatings by bullies at his school. Recently at the end of July 2017, another teenage suicide triggered by school bullies in Riau further provoked a massive public outcry against the issue. These cases revealed that school bullying is one of the leading reasons for child suicides in this country, and the most prevalent form of juvenile delinquency in education sector. This, undoubtedly, demands a serious attention.

'Bullying' is defined as being an aggressive intentional behaviour or act done by an individual or a group of people repeatedly over time against another individual who is less powerful (Olweus, 1993). There are several types of bullying such as physical, verbal, mental (including social exclusion), sexual, and, the most recent form, cyberbullying. Bullying can happen in many social institutions including schools. According to the survey conducted by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) in 2012, the vast majority of students in this country reported that they had experienced bullying ranged from name calling to physical beatings. Of those who reported this, 42.1% identified their classmates as the primary source of abusive behaviour.

NGOs, teachers, and school committee have taken significant steps to counter this issue by holding campaigns, regular parent-teacher meetings, and seminars as well as creating arts to raise public awareness for the cause. Despite the effort, bullying cases have shown no signs of decline. In 2015, KPAI reported there were 79 cases of students acting as bullies. KPAI chairman Asrorun Niam Sholeh stated that the number constituted an increase from last year's data, which recorded 67 bullying cases. Asrorun further explained that the absence of good role models for students, inappropriate TV shows, and violent video games are the main cause for the rise.

Responding to this phenomena, a recent initiative from Unicef, the UN agency dedicated to the welfare of children, is trying to spread awareness on the importance of

preventing bullying by training students to be an active anti-bullying advocates. Such an idea of directly involving young people in the cause has inspired me to initiate a participatory theatre programme called *Stand Up!* which intended to inspire young people to become agents of change in bullying prevention. *Stand Up!* toured in five secondary schools in Depok, West Java, Indonesia, in October 2017. The pilot project worked with a community non-profit called Theatre for Life, and it was funded by the Community Service Grants from the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia. Targeting at Year 10, Year 11, and Year 12, *Stand UP!* intended to raise awareness on bullying among secondary school students. In this project I took the role of a facilitator and a principle researcher. This paper is my attempt to discuss some preliminary findings of the ongoing research on the potential educational impact of the resulting project for the students and my reflective practice to better understand the use of a participatory drama as a strategy to explore sensitive issues. As the reseach is still on going now, the paper only presents the quantitative results.

METHODOLOGY

This research combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Co-researchers Fhardiyan Putra and Mia Marissa, who are adolescent psychologists, helped with the design of the questionnaire and analysed its results. The facilitator gave the questionnaire before and after the workshop to the students to complete individually. The qualitative research consisted of observations and focus-group interviews. At this stage, the data collection for the qualitative reseach is still on going, so student responses have not been completely followed up. Before the workshop began, the students were given informed consent. To encourage honesty in their answers, they were told that participation was optional, their responses and their school would remain anonymous, and the tests' results would not affect their grade in the future. The procedures were approved by the schools.

PARTICIPANTS

Five senior secondary schools in Depok were invited randomly to participate. There were four public schools and one vocational school. There were 20 to 25 students joined the workshop in each school. To serve the purpose of the project, it was required that the students are members of the student union (OSIS) as we believe this group has the power to be anti-bullying advocates in their school. In total there were 104 students. Ninty-five students sent back completed questionnaire, while nine questionnaires were rejected due to incompleteness.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire contained eight questions. Seven multiple-choice questions asked about the students prior knowledge on types of bullying, how it affects individuals, and how to handle it, followed by one question directed at discovering students' attitudes towards a bullying situation. Immediately after the workshop, a post-test was administered by the co-facilitator by using the same questionnaire as in the pre-test, with added five open-ended questions inquiring the students response to the drama activities.

The questions asked what character they played in the drama (i.e., bully, victim, or bystander), why they chose to play this character, what they felt about the bullying situation, and what they learned from being in role. The results of the pre-test and the post-test were compared to see whether the students' comprehension and empathic awareness changed. Additionally, their responses to the open-ended questions were recorded and content analysed to give main themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stand Up!: The Structure and the Dramatic Strategies

Stand Up! mostly shared the same theories, techniques, and objectives as Theatre in Education (TiE) in a sense that it happened in educational settings and worked with a group or audience to confront a pressing issue for educational purposes (Taylor, 2003). It also adopted a participatory theatre methodology, particularly forum theatre techniques, developed by the renowned Brazilian director and activist Augusto Boal (1979). Boal's spirit of changing the passive spectator into a 'spect-actor' (1979: 122), first in the dramatic world and then in the real world is at the heart of this project which aimed to inspire the young audiences to be the agents of change for the cause. This also goes hand in hand Paulo Freire, one of the most influential of twentieth century educationists. His core principle of critical education believes that education should be an active process where teachers and students are both 'subjects' in the service of social change (1972: 44).

The structure of the workshop alternated dramatic activities such as role playing with interactive activities such as discussing pick-up lines, enacting assertive behaviours to tackle bullies, and debating effective ways to report a bullying situation to teachers or parents. These techniques were used to encourage the students to evolve from mere observers and passive recipients to active participants engaged in discussion about what they have just watched, reflection on what they think it means, and debate about what they think should happen differently.

Before touring, the workshop was trialled with different audiences of the same age group and background. In its final version, *Stand UP!* ran for about 120 minutes. The workshop consisted of three lengthy parts. First, it opened with interactive drama games in which the students were briefly introduced to some basic drama techniques such as freeze frame, thought tracking, flashback, and improvisation. Freeze frame, also known as still image, is a drama technique in which participants create an image using their bodies, with no movement. The image can be made by individuals, small groups, or even the whole group. This technique is often combined with flashback and thought tracking. For example, in the workshop the students were encouraged to remember their experience at school. Then they illustrated this experience in a still image. After the image was created, they were asked to think of a word or a phrase that described their feeling at that time. The facilitator would tap on the students' shoulder randomly, and the students should say the word or the phrase out loud. The activity was interspersed with interactive discussions where the students shared the story behind the image.

In the second part, the facilitator displayed several pictures around the room. Each picture described bullying situations. The students then chose one picture they found the most intriguing and relatable.



Fig. 1. Using picture to create a play about bullying situation

After that, in a small group of five the students worked together to create a short play about bullying based on the picture. The facilitator asked the students to explore the main elements of drama such as conflict, characters, and plot (Klarer, 2004). The play should describe three fragments; what happened before the bullying take place, how the bullying occurs, and how it affects those who are bullied, those who bully, and those who witness the incident. In doing this, they were encouraged to incorporate their knowledge and experience into their group performance.



Fig. 2. Performing a scene highlighting tensions when a junior gets bullied by seniors

In the final part, after each group performed their fragments, the facilitator chose one play to be discussed or reviewed as the forum theatre. The label 'forum theatre' as used in order to provide an instant reference for what happened in the workshop. This

format was applied to help create a platform where the students could learn new information and make meaning around the issue through the theatrical frame. Led by the facilitator, the students were given the chance to question the characters, comment on the actions, and influence characters' decisions. For example, the facilitator would stop an action and asked the students to comment on the theatrical moment they just witnessed: 'What did you feel when this was happening? What do you think he or she (the bully, the victim, or the bystander) should do in this situation? What else could be done?' These questions elicit a critical response from the students to develop a deeper analysis of the bullying situation and find alternative solutions. Here, too, the actors could answer on their stand points and provoke responses from the audience. Referring to the theatrical moments they just witnessed, the students deliberated these questions with the facilitator and each other. The facilitator then gathered all ideas and asked the actors to use one of them in their scene. The actors then improvised a new scene which led to a better resolution for the bullied victim. Finally, in the post-performance discussion, the facilitator summed up all ideas and possible solutions suggested by the audience and the actors and sometimes gave a further clarification of the issue when necessary.

Stand Up! and Its Educational Impact

The preliminary findings of the quantitative data show that the student responses to the questionnaires were very positive for the whole project. In the initial stage of data analysis, the pre-test scores and post-test scores drawn from the students' answers to questions numbers one to seven were compared using *t* tests (on SPSS using dependent *t*-test). The average results of the post-test is higher than those of the pre-test'; ($t(94) = -7.636, p < .05$). In other words, the students' understanding on bullying after joining the workshop increased. These findings are matched with the student responses to the open-ended questionnaires in the post-test. A total of 85 students or 89.5% felt that they now know more about the issues after joining the workshop than before.

Moreover, the comparison between the student responses to question number 8 in the pre-test and the post-test also showed a positive finding. There is a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test scores; ($t(94) = -5.121, p < .05$). More students answered in the post-test that they wanted to help the victim when they witness a bullying situation. This result is highlighted by the students' responses in the open-ended questionnaire; 93.7% considered the drama they played to be relatable and touching. This high proportion was matched by those who felt empathy, especially for the victim characters (82.1%). These findings suggest an increased empathic awareness on the issue.

Another important positive findings highlights the value of this form of theatre in dealing with the difficult issues; more than half found the workshop was very enjoyable. The word "fun" was frequently mentioned in responses to the open-ended questions. They particularly appreciated the "serious-but-fun" atmosphere of the drama activities. A substantial majority further stated that the forum theatre was good for getting them to discuss the controversial issue. They felt that during the workshop especially in the

forum theatre, they were given the opportunities to speak up their mind and encouraged to think about this issue from a more complex perspective.

During the drama activities, they students reported that they experienced various emotions. Some were positive (such as excitement when rehearsing the role play), whilst some were rather negative (such as pity, annoyance, humiliation, and fear). However, these negative emotions seemed to be the one that led them to empathise with the victim characters and help them understand that bullying behaviours are unfavourable and detrimental. Some student responses also show a critical attitude that tried to see the bullying situation from both the victim and the bully. On the one hand they empathised with the victims, but on the other hand they suggested both the victims and the bullies to reflect on their negative attitudes and change them. For example, in one response, a student said that the bullies must learn "how to control their anger" and stop making other people their "emotional punch bag", but at the same time she also suggested that the victims should learn "how to be more assertive" and "be braver to stand up for themselves."

Nevertheless, a more alarming student responses were also noted. Some student responses in the open-ended questionnaires indicate a potentially bullying threat. A minority of respondents still think that it is "okay to bully others just for fun", and some others insisted that "bullying can be a necessary punishment to discipline juniors". These responses should be probed further, but unfortunately the tight scheduling of the schools meant the qualitative interviews have not taken place, so the researchers were not yet able to follow up these responses.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the preliminary findings of the quantitative research on *Stand Up!* has shown a success with a high proportion of students strongly hinting at the fact that they now feel better informed about bullying and have more willingness to help prevent it than before. It is also important to note here that the mindful placing of interactive activities, woven through a dramatic framework, in *Stand Up!* plays a pivotal role in creating a safe environment for the students to talk about bullying within the drama, in a way that rarely happens in a traditional classroom. On a more cautious note, the findings also suggest that the students who found the workshop enjoyable, interesting, and good provoking discussion also include, at least, some within the minority who have sympathy with the bullies and support bullying behaviours as a joke or disciplinary action. Although the statistics show they are only a small number of students, this group still needs to be taken seriously because it may lead to real bullying incidents in the future. As the research is not fully completed at this stage, student responses have not been further followed up for clarification and review. It also becomes a limitation of this current paper for not including a discussion on the varied impact of the project based on the student age, gender, types of school. For the purpose of this paper, however, it is enough to suggest that the statistics underline the project's success in capturing authentic voices of the young people whom it engaged with.

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