

The Importance of a Fundamental Building Block



A puppet is just a doll, which means almost nothing to an adult. Much more valuable are children. An actual doll represents a body from the realm of legends, and is attractive to everyone. It reminds us of the stories that are retold to the young by elders over the generations. This is how society progresses from one era to the next. In modern times, one educator utilizes puppets as an information media for teaching in educational institutes.

When a puppet enters a classroom, it excites the audience, even if it is not of the legendary kind. The puppet is able to convey various themes to children, and they, in turn, can learn with fun and happiness.

From my observations of puppets in action in front of 2,161 primary school children, I found happy smiling faces on both educators and children. During the show, the children were also called up to take part in the performance during a fight scene between a giant and three goats. The goats asked the children to join their side to attack the giant, and they rushed onto the stage, perhaps a little over eagerly.



All the children were spellbound by the story which incorporated a message about unity, as did other puppet stories.

Educators turning to become storytellers must first abandon their strict disciplinarian approach in front of the children, as exists in conventional classes. Though these approaches are different in function, they are aiming for the same goal.

The Duang Prateep Foundation has come to realize the importance of effective media for teaching children. Thus, their puppet troupe was set up as a project to perform around the country and train educators to make puppets as creative media for children. The troupe loads up its van with all its accessories of puppets, backdrops and gifts for children who are willing to take part in the shows. Currently, the stories of the disciplined ants, the caterpillar that turns into a butterfly, and the unity of the three goats are performed in almost every corner of the country.



Another mission of the troupe is to hold puppet-making workshops for educators. These begin with fixing small items leading up to complete assignments, including basic sewing and the art of puppet performance. The participants are allowed to keep their completed creations for use in their own classrooms. All the teachers who joined the workshop were happy to make their own puppets and gain experience in showing them.

Furthermore, after the workshop, the troupe gave the teachers an assignment to move around their local educational region to put on shows. They have to remain active in order to

become part of a puppet network that empowers educators who belong to it. Not only do the children benefit from this, but the teachers take more pride in their careers.



Into the classrooms comes more information that is not boring any more. Educators take on a new character in front of their students. All of these results are expected in the years ahead.

Prior to visiting each area, the DPF troupe co-ordinates with the local education office to arrange for the visit. Upon arrival in their van, the show is broadcast widely throughout the village. And the puppeteers will lodge with a local family during their stay. Children who saw

the show at their school come home to tell their parents how impressive the puppets were. One mother recounted: “My son has never mentioned anything else about school. He is very foolish; I offered him 500 Baht for a day of tutorials, but he wouldn’t take it because he doesn’t like reading. But this morning he mentioned about the puppet display, and reading too. It amazes me very much!” And other parents made similar comments to me.

A reading habit is hidden in the story of the three goats undermining the giant. The show is used to promote reading among children who are in the education levels of elementary, junior and senior high school. In 2011, education officials approved 117 books as optional books for students to read, and yet there was no activity to promote reading. It is expected that both parents and educators desire improved reading behavior in their children, and this is likely to be realized when the workshops come to their areas.

Nevertheless, there is always the danger of educators falling back into their old ways of routine teaching at their school. Current school administrations only allow small adjustments to their system. But proper administration of utilizing the puppet media is needed. If there is no proper system to organize shows as information media, a good chance for the children will be lost.



At the far-flung schools we visited the physical facilities were in poor condition. Buildings and toilets were old, roads were muddy and sports fields rough and uneven. Teachers with a limited budget were burdened with too many projects to be completed in a year, which are just the dream of their boss in Bangkok. Some school masters may act to please their boss rather than the children. Children’s health is also compromised, as a

junk food vendor has been allowed to sell packs of junk snacks in the school. All schools are doing something similar. Junk food is not good for children’s health; it only weakens the body with toxins. One teacher confided that children now suffer broken bones more easily, which could be caused by the low-grade food. Parents give their children 15-20 Baht per day. One pack of junk snack costs 3-5 Baht, so children buy it and eat it 2-3 times a day. Children lack proper knowledge about food and nutrition. Food that has been provided freely by the school is not attractive to the children. Thus, they may be ingesting artificial food in overdoses, which harms young brains and leads to children appearing either emaciated or obese.

These conditions at local schools, which are still ongoing, gave me sad picture of the future. These critical problems need to be solved. But we do not get much detail on these issues; we only see the end result.

We need to place children at the centre of the school, in a system of child-centred learning. Teaching media are expected to greatly improve their outlook on learning and provide them with up-to-date information. Otherwise, society will not be strengthened by its fundamental building blocks – its children.



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