



The Effectiveness of Psychodrama in Treating Bullying among School Children

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Abstract

Psychodrama stands out as a proven method for addressing behavioral issues and shaping psychological constructs. Within this realm, school theater emerges as a psychotherapeutic intervention with a profound impact on behavior and the overall psychological well-being of children. By tapping into a child's energy, it serves to alleviate emotional and mood disturbances. This research endeavors to illuminate the extent to which school theater can effectively reduce the prevalence of bullying as a pernicious and recurrent aggressive behavior with detrimental effects on the psychological development of our children.

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1. Introduction

Aristotle was the first to highlight the psychological comfort that drama provides through evoking empathy and fear, achieving psychological healing. The therapeutic use of drama dates back to diversifying objectives in line with the variety of methods and approaches. Consequently, children's drama is considered a form of expression that enhances a child's self-confidence.

Recognizing the role of theater within educational institutions has become imperative for achieving educational and pedagogical goals and as a therapeutic tool that can be employed to modify a child's behavior at all educational stages. In addition to its educational function, theater contributes as:

- A form of human expression and communication relying on conveying experiences and human models.
- An inclusive art form fostering various artistic and aesthetic skills in the audience.
- An educational medium aiding in interpreting life experiences and human knowledge.
- A therapeutic medium that can be utilized to modify behavior and reactions in students.

Therefore, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

- To what extent can school theater treat general child behavior and, specifically, bullying behavior?
- What are the means and techniques employed in school theater?
- To address these questions, the research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach by investigating the causes of the phenomenon, followed by proposing methods for its treatment through drama. The subsequent stage involves suggesting an applied model.

1. School Theater:

School theater encompasses a set of theatrical activities presented within the school premises, where the school stages theatrical performances for an audience composed of students, teachers, and parents. It primarily relies on "satisfying the diverse identities of students, such as acting, drawing, music."¹ School theater is also considered an educational tool that employs theatrical forms as expressions of educational principles. This is conveyed through simple techniques such as expressive decor, character-revealing costumes, and captivating lighting, without excessive use of these elements².

In this way, school theater plays a prominent role in developing children's abilities and skills, such as public speaking, fostering their imaginative and expressive freedom. This aids in shaping their

¹ Hassan Marei: School Theater, Dar and Library Al-Hilal, 1st ed., Beirut, 1993. P13

² Jamal Muhammad Nawasra, Spotlights on School Theater and Child Drama, Dar Al-Hamid for Publishing a³Hassan Marei: School Theater, p 15nd Distribution, Oman, 2nd ed., 2010. P 44

personalities, building their morals, nurturing their taste, engaging them in problem-solving, and redirecting their attention from negative topics during leisure time.

School theater addresses educational topics that serve the curriculum, enhancing subjects like religious studies, language, and history in an engaging manner that facilitates understanding and comprehension of academic materials. It also tackles educational topics aligned with modern educational methods that intersect with a child's social life. This enriches the scientific process, instills moral values in students, and contributes to their cultural and scientific development, in addition to instilling habits, traditions, and developing ethical judgments.³

The objective of a child's participation in school drama extends beyond mere enjoyment to purposeful entertainment, aiming to:

- Develop expression and communication skills.
- Foster an understanding of others.
- Build self-confidence and self-evaluation.
- Highlight the importance of the individual in collective work and within the community.
- Instill respect for rules and instructions.

The utilization of school theater in these multifaceted ways underscores its significance as an educational and therapeutic tool, contributing to the holistic development of children.

2. School Bullying:

School bullying is defined as a collection of "deliberate negative actions by one or more students to harm another student, occurring repeatedly and persistently." These negative actions can manifest through verbal means, such as threats, admonishment, provocation, and verbal abuse. Alternatively, they can involve physical contact, including hitting, pushing, and kicking. Non-verbal forms of bullying, such as spitting on the face or inappropriate gestures with the intention of isolating the individual from the group or refusing to respond to their wishes, can also occur.⁴

Bullying is a condition indicative of a disturbance in the psychological and cognitive growth of those affected. It results from intentional harm and continuous harassment of an individual or a group due to a lack of impulse control. Bullying takes various forms:

- Physical bullying, encompassing all physical assaults in any form.
- Verbal bullying, including all forms of verbal assaults such as insults, sexual and racial slurs, etc.

³ Hassan Marei: School Theater, p 15

⁴ Al-Qahtani, Nora, School Bullying and Intervention Programs, Journal of the College of Education, October, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia. P 117.

3.1 Causes of Bullying:

3.1.1 Family Factors:

Proper upbringing relies on a set of methods, including:

- Encouraging mutual dialogue and providing space for expressing thoughts.
- Using kindness, gentleness, and motivating the child, enhancing their self-confidence.
- Building a strong relationship with the child based on love and appreciation.
- Emphasizing understanding, clarity, and avoiding violence.
- Believing in the child's abilities and encouraging them to overcome failure.

Other methods contributing to the acquisition of harmful behaviors towards others include physical punishment, threats, harsh upbringing, and neglect, leading to the growth of negative tendencies. The absence of harmony between parents, disputes, and raising male children with the belief that they are superior and must be physically dominant can also contribute to the growth of bullying behavior.⁵

3.1.2 School and Peer Group Factors:

The school environment has a significant impact on a child's behavior, influencing their academic achievement, success or failure. Positive school atmosphere correlates with academic success, learning motivation, while a negative school environment is associated with low self-esteem, symptoms of depression, and the emergence of behavioral problems such as bullying and aggression.⁶

3.1.3 Personal Factors:

Bullying behavior may stem from the individual themselves due to a lack of knowledge about bullying practices or an error in exercising this behavior against certain individuals. It could also be a manifestation of the individual's concern, unhappiness at home, or their previous experience as victims of bullying. Psychological traits of the victim, such as shyness and a lack of friends, may make them susceptible to bullying.⁷

3. The Importance of Psychodrama in Treating Psychological Crises:

Psychodrama holds significant importance in addressing psychological crises and promoting overall well-being. Here are key points highlighting its therapeutic benefits:

- Psychodrama contributes to enhancing both mental and physical health for individuals and enhances their psychological and social abilities.

⁵ Rahba Al-Adli, The Disturbance of Sibling Rivalry and Its Relationship to Anger and Bullying Among Middle School Students, Journal of Educational and Psychological Sciences, Iraq. P214.

⁶ Mahram Abdul Aal et al, School Climate and Its Relationship to School Bullying in a Sample of Preparatory Stage Students, Journal of Educational and Social Studies, Vol. 22, Issue 3, Egypt, 2016. P118.

⁷ Iyad Omar Suleiman, Social Skills and Their Relationship to Bullying Behaviors in Dogs in the Nazareth Region, Master's Thesis, College of Educational and Psychological Sciences, Department of Psychology and Guidance, Jordan, 2015. P36.

- Psychodrama plays a role in improving individuals' self-awareness.
- Psychodrama helps in building self-confidence and improving self-image.
- Participation in psychodrama contributes to the development of social skills.
- Psychodrama positively impacts social relationships. By providing a platform for expression and interaction.
- Psychodrama offers a creative outlet for expression and interaction with others. Through the dramatic process, individuals not only express themselves but also learn from the experiences and perspectives of others.
- Psychodrama fosters collective interaction and teamwork.
- Psychodrama can play a crucial role in positively influencing children's behavior. By encouraging positive actions and reducing negative thought patterns.

4. *The Objectives of Psychodrama:*

5.1 *Catharsis:*

Aristotle was the first to introduce the concept of catharsis (emotional purification). In his work on the art of poetry, he defined tragedy with a significant function, namely, catharsis, which liberates from negative emotions through simulation. Aristotle stated that tragedy induces emotions like pity or fear, and it goes beyond its therapeutic function to achieve pleasure for the audience. The term catharsis is closely tied to emotional and psychological impacts on the viewer.⁸

According to Aristotle, tragedy is a "mimicry of a serious action, complete in itself, with its incidents so arranged that it evokes a sense of pity and fear, and, thereby, accomplishes the catharsis of such emotions."⁹ Thus, catharsis, in Aristotle's view, serves both psychological and social functions by influencing the audience.

5.2 *Role Play:*

One of the therapeutic goals of drama is to discover the hidden thoughts and images in the dark side of the psyche that control non-normal behavior. Through spontaneous participation, roles unfold, revealing unfamiliar roles, their motivations, and their portrayal within the theatrical space.¹⁰

⁸ Abbas Arhila, *Aristotelian Influence in Arabic Literary Criticism and Rhetoric to the End of the Eighth Century AH (Issues of the Book and its Methodology)*, Rabat, 1999.

⁹ Aristotle, *Art of Poetry*, Translated by Ibrahim Hamada, Sharjah Center for Literary Creativity, Dr., Egypt, 1982. P111.

¹⁰ Kamal El-Din Hussein, *Drama and Theater in Psychotherapy*, Dar Al-Ma'arif, 1st ed., Egypt, 2015. P 32.

4.3 Identification with the Model:

Identification is one of the drama therapy techniques that rely on complete integration with the character played, allowing the individual to contemplate, empathize, and unify with the character. In doing so, the person's thoughts and behaviors become a positive model from their perspective.¹¹

4.4 Psychosomatic Therapy:

The body is considered the vessel that contains every movement made by humans throughout history. It is the foundation for expressing all the meanings individuals want to convey. It is said that movement does not lie.¹² The body, being one of the most affected parts of the body by psychological states, reflects one's mental state. The movements of a person are suggestive, laden with symbolism and meanings that work to convey an idea to others in a more profound and accurate form than words. These movements translate our various feelings and emotions. It is an involuntary language that forms a framework for modern thought.¹³

The body is the "machine of thought," and communication occurs through signals and bodily gestures, sending specific messages in different situations and circumstances. It reveals hidden feelings and brings them to the surface, providing information or thoughts about the other person. It unveils the thoughts circulating in the mind, and there is no hiding from the ideas that manifest through these physical expressions.¹⁴

4.5 Utilization of Theatrical Space:

The theatrical space, or stage, is a performance area set symbolically to represent reality. It encompasses the dramatic reality that stands independently from real life. In this dramatic reality, the patient engages with his imagination, forming an emotional connection with characters that resemble his personal reality. This connection leads to the revelation of many psychological aspects causing anxiety and disturbance.¹⁵

The theatrical space is where the theatrical performance takes place, acting as a space that mediates between the internal and external reality of the child. It plays a significant role for the child in transitional issues, typically represented by his play doll. This doll allows its existence to some extent between "I am" and "I am not," creating a bridge between subjectivity and objectivity.¹⁶

¹¹ Same reference, p33.

¹² Ibrahim Abdullah Ghuloom and others, *Techniques of Theatrical Formation*, Vol. 2, 1st ed., General Establishment for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 2002. P 110

¹³ Ahmed Yassouf, *Aesthetics of Quranic Vocabulary*, Supervised and Presented by: Dr. Nour El-Din Atar, 2nd ed., Dar Al-Maktabi for Printing and Publishing, Damascus, 1999.

¹⁴ Mohammed Mahmoud Beni Younes, *Psychology of Motivation and Emotions*, 1st ed., Dar Al-Maseera, Oman, 2007. P 340.

¹⁵ Kamal El-Din Hussein, *Drama and Theater in Psychotherapy*, Dar Al-Ma'arif, 1st ed., Egypt, 2015. P 33.

¹⁶ Same reference, p 37.

5. Elements of Psychodrama Structure:

5.1 Psychological Representation Theme:

The teacher selects themes that align with the behavior being addressed, encompassing meanings, social values, psychological aspects, and behaviors. These themes work together to crystallize the individual's character, improve behaviors, and reduce psychological crises. The teacher can either compose these themes or involve students in their creation with the teacher's assistance. Alternatively, they can choose from existing texts.

5.2 Characters:

Children involved in the process, with the help of their peers, perform the characters. The teacher may also take on roles for the children to experience aggressive or rejected personalities, helping them understand the harm caused to others. Conversely, children who feel weak when in a position of strength are assisted in overcoming anxiety, frustration, and conflict, achieving self-realization.

5.3 Diagnosis:

A crucial part of therapeutic theatrical activity involves discussing play events by presenting and analyzing the issue. The focus is on the behavioral aspect rather than the performance art aspect, following these stages:

- Presenting the theme of the theatrical representation and discussing its events immediately after the performance.
- Commenting on the events, evaluating them, and providing constructive criticism.
- Explaining the reasons leading to those problems.
- Highlighting the results and effects on the individual and society.
- Reviewing the lessons that help alleviate their behavioral problems.
- Discussing and proposing solutions.

6. Proposed Model for Theatrical Activity

➤ Characters:

- **Karim:** A depressed, disabled student.
- **Farid:** A bully exuding signs of cruelty.
- **Ahmed:** A confrontational student.
- **Salim:** A kind and loving student.
- **Nasim:** A diligent and cooperative student.

(Karim enters, walking with a noticeable limp and signs of sadness. Farid and Ahmed approach from the opposite direction, looking at him disdainfully.)

Farid: Hey, limp guy, how many times have I told you not to walk in this area? It's for the strong, not the weak like you.

Ahmed: Hahaha, poor guy. Get up and defend yourself.

Karim: (slowly getting up) Don't judge me by my appearance. I didn't choose how I look. What's my fault if my legs are short? Please, I beg you.

Farid: I hate you because every day my parents say, "Why can't you be successful like Karim?" and insult me. You deserve all this hate.

Karim: I never objected to God's will. I've set a goal in my life—to be strong in morals and knowledge, not just physically. You can strive to prove you're successful too.

Ahmed: We don't want advice from you, you wretch.

(Farid and Ahmed push Karim to the ground.)

Salim: Stop hurting your friends because of him. Karim has become withdrawn and isolated because of your actions. Aren't you ashamed? Whoever searches for a friend without faults will be without friends. If you see someone's flaws, be silent. If people find out your flaws, they won't hide them.

(Two children enter and help Karim stand up.)

Salim: Enough hurting your friends because of you two. Karim has become isolated and withdrawn. Aren't you ashamed of what you've done? Whoever looks for a friend without faults will be without friends. If someone sees your flaws, they won't hide them.

The poet says:

*Do not reveal the flaws of people; what you cover ***** In doing so, Allah will unveil your own secrets*

*And mention the virtues of others if they are mentioned ***** Do not tire anyone with what is within you*

Nasim: Yes, we're all brothers in Allah. We should cooperate and love each other. Bullying creates hatred and resentment. Karim has a pure soul and loves everyone.

Remember what Allah says: *"O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule another people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule other women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by offensive nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after one's faith. And whoever does not repent – then it is those who are the wrongdoers."* May Allah be truthful. (Quran; Al Hojorat :11)

(Farid and Ahmed apologize to Karim.)

Farid and Ahmed together: We are sorry, and we hope you accept our apology.

Karim: (joyfully) Thank God!

We'll be friends again, just like before. Let's work hard and fight against bullying together.

All together: No to bullying! No to bullying! No to bullying!

❖ **Introductory Session:**

The teacher begins by preparing the students, explaining the nature of the artistic work, emphasizing the importance of participation in collective work, and encouraging them to listen to various opinions and suggestions. Finally, the teacher suggests the topic of bullying, defining it and mentioning the negative opinions associated with it. Then, the teacher asks the students to vote on this topic.

❖ **First Session:**

The teacher presents the play's script and starts preparing the students psychologically, assigning roles and inviting them to discuss the characters.

❖ **Second Session:**

After agreeing on role distribution in the previous session, the teacher invites them to perform movements, encouraging them, removing shyness, and hesitancy. Then, they choose the performance location and outline its boundaries. The teacher invites the acting students to sit together to read the play multiple times, adjusting vocal performance and facial expressions.

❖ **Third Session:**

Training the students on their roles several times, transferring the theatrical text into a performance, and asking the students to maintain quietness, jot down their notes, and provide feedback to help their peers improve the performance.

❖ **Fourth Session (Play Performance):**

The students, both participants and audience, get excited. Each student takes their predetermined position, and the teacher encourages them, utilizing natural lighting.

❖ **Fifth Session (Diagnosis):**

The teacher focuses on the behavioral aspect rather than the artistic aspect, inviting the students to discuss the play. Some sample questions might include:

- ✓ What do you think of Ahmed and Fareed's behavior?
- ✓ What do we call this behavior?
- ✓ How did Karim feel? Was he at fault?
- ✓ What advice did Saleem and Fares give them?
- ✓ What are the motivations behind bullying?
- ✓ What does bullying others cause?
- ✓ How can we eliminate this behavior?

5. Conclusions:

- Theater represents one of the types of psychological therapy based on the application of therapeutic mechanisms.
- Psychodrama relies on collective interaction.
- School theater does not deviate from being a form of psychological therapy.
- School theater has proven its effectiveness in addressing various psychological issues in children.
- Bullying is a serious societal issue that can be mitigated starting from school theater.
- Emotional discharge and expression.

6. Recommendations:

In conclusion, we arrive at a set of recommendations that can be summarized as follows:

- Activate school theater in all schools to address various child-related problems.
- Invest in school theater and prepare the school community to use it in behavioral therapy.
- Teachers should collaborate with counselors, psychological and social specialists to find solutions to psychological problems through drama.
- Hold meetings for teachers and parents to discuss behavioral issues in children and collaborate to find solutions.
- Invite theater professionals to address children's psychological problems through their work.
- Engage problematic students in cultural and theatrical activities to harness and invest in their abilities.

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