



## Theatre In Education: Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts – A testimony of a methodology

*Sisir Dutta*

This contribution is not a description of a specific method but of a broader programme and work experience of BITA.

<b>Name of Activity</b> Theatre In Education	<b>Total time</b> Preparation time varies depending on the context, content, etc. The dissemination period is 45 minutes including interactive dialogue.
<b>Overview</b> TIE is a participatory method, including interactive and performative moments and integrating cultural methods into school- and folk-education. The TIE content might come from learners, the school curricula or extracurricular subject matters. The content could include local and global issues like environment, climate change, education, science, human rights and child marriage etc.	<b>Materials/room</b> TIE typically includes a theatre company or professionals presenting in an educational setting (i.e. a school) for youth. It can be conducted both indoors and outdoors.
<b>Number of people</b> Any	<b>Target groups &amp; Age</b> Children and youngsters, children from different cultures, religions, races, and backgrounds of all ages

### **Learning outcomes**

TIE creates a space of learning for children in a joyful environment. It contributes to enhance knowledge and positive attitude in children towards real-life matters. It helps to enable the children to discover their dormant aptitudes and abilities.

*Theatre in education* (TIE) originated in Britain in 1965. TIE typically includes a theatre company or professionals presenting in an educational setting (i.e. a school) for youth, including interactive and performative moments.

Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA), initiated the TIE activity from the year 2000 in different schools in rural and urban settings of greater Chittagong and Noakhali regions, placing due importance on child rights and child education.

The program originated as an outcome of a survey conducted in 1995 with underprivileged children, to find out the status of cultural activities in school and the students' perception of pleasure through education. The majority of findings reveal that the education system had no space for children's creativity and expression in educational activities and that they found no delight in learning. Consequently children became less interested in education and some of them stopped going to school.

Teachers shouldn't be held responsible solely for this situation. The pattern of the education system is such that there is no space for recreation and participation, although some topics are included in the theoretical discussion.

Keeping the findings in consideration, BITA launched recreational theatre activity incorporating TIE.

The primary aim of the intervention is to ignite in children keen observation, imagination and simulation, to motivate and trigger creativity so that they are able to uncover their latent talents and faculties.

The objectives of TIE:

- To create a space of learning for children in a joyful environment
- To enhance knowledge and positive attitude in children towards real-life matters

- To enable the children to discover their dormant aptitudes and abilities.

Children constitute around 42% of Bangladesh's total population of over 116.5 million.

The development of the country depends on how these vast populations are being build up with appropriate education. The primary duty of the state is to ensure minimum education of all citizens. It requires a modern, updated, methodical education policy and progressive education system. But in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, our education system and teaching methods are influenced by colonial systems or pre-independence stages of education, which mainly entails a one-way communication. We recognize without hesitation that our students, particularly in school, don't get enough experiential, hands-on learning exposure in their formal educational settings. It seems like they devour education instead of internalizing it. They don't find inspiration to explore their latent strengths.

It is an indispensable task to cultivate cultural education including traditional practices and associated activities for a delightful learning environment as well. The educational setup might be created in the classroom but it is also necessary to extend it outside.

We think the essence of the TIE method should be expanded through interactions to create a positive environment in the family and community as well. A large number of students in primary and secondary school levels, aged mainly between 5 to 16 years are at an impressionable age and need these creative interventions. This is the period of not only self-preparedness and but also for self-construction.

Regrettably in this period, they remain disconnected from cultural practices. In later stages, they don't make progress in the cerebral and social spheres as bearers of culture.

TIE promotes and strengthens entertaining education. Children are naturally drawn to processes, which involve participation, and to do something interesting.

We think various tools of the Method arouse inquisitiveness among the children. As per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC or UNCRC), cultural education is an integral and important part of child rights. But children of Bangladesh are denied it, so it's imperative to bring changes in the education system and teaching methods. In this regard, theatre arts could play a vital

role. In this process, theatre arts or differently termed TIE could be considered as an active education system in our country.

The TIE content might come from learners, the school curricula or extracurricular subject matters. The content could include local and global issues like environment, climate change, education, science, human rights and child marriage etc. The dissemination period is 45 minutes including interactive dialogue.

For its translation into practice we analyse the context and determine the key issues for the use of theatre through participatory ways. The probable issues, texts and performing forms of dissemination are consulted with stakeholders. The performing form is then finalized and disseminated in schools or communities. The children perform in TIE in some phases accompanied by presentations by peer performers. After the peer presentations, they directly take part in question and answer sessions that stimulate their power of expression and be enriched with in-depth knowledge on the specified issue. Simple questionnaires are used to get their feedback and accordingly follow up actions are undertaken. Through reflective learning and a gradual refining process, learning through theatre has spread.

We think TIE could be a substantial mechanism for folk-education. So BITA has continued to identify contemporary issues through consultation with teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders. The subject matters cover rights education to essential day-to-day learning matters. The issues include: Our Six Seasons, Country and History, Concepts and History of Human Rights, Discrimination and Protection, Women Education, Child Rights, Ecology and Environment, Women and Child Trafficking, Delinquency, Reproductive Health, etc. To make the content vivid and understandable in the classroom or outside, BITA uses visuals, songs, masks, puppets, mimes, rhymes, recitation etc. Variety draws the attention and eagerness of children. So BITA applies different forms to invite students to learn through fun.

Expert members of BITA Theatre Core Team and skilled local theatre activists conduct TIE activities with primary and secondary school students. Another notable side is teachers are becoming skilled to facilitate the learning methods with classroom lessons in an attractive presentation style.

BITA has varied publications on TIE where the 'Theatre In Education Program' guideline is an important one. This valuable instrument is very helpful to develop resource persons or performers



and also to develop productions suitable for classrooms or outdoors.

Western countries especially Europe exhibited an adeptness in the skillful utilization of TIE, whereas our country's success is minor. But we have a thousand years old cultural heritage, which needs to be engaged with.

Theatre has been used in different social and professional sectors to educate on development perspectives. But at the primary and secondary school levels it's penetration is limited: initiatives to integrate theatre and alternative medium of instruction, neither in state peripheries nor in institutional set ups exist. A couple of private and non-governmental organizations are trying their best to advocate for such endeavors.

As we've observed TIE reaches out to younger people, the cultural forms used in the Method are effective to understand the nature and evil effects of radicalization and hopefully will be helpful to build a sense of rational thinking, tolerance and peace in a world of multiplicity. Since the Method is participatory itself, where children from different cultures, religions, races, and backgrounds work together in harmonious manners, it has far reaching outcomes.



To turn the possibilities into reality, we should consider and realize the following recommendations:

- Firstly undertake initiatives to include TIE in the country's education system. Policies and pragmatic strategies should be formulated engaging experts through the Ministry of Education.
- Training Guidelines might be developed integrating TIE as a compulsory course in Teachers Training Curriculum.
- Diploma courses might be initiated through establishing Separate Teachers Training Institutes. This course might be made compulsory for those joining as teachers. Hence it would be possible to recruit at least one arts-educator-teacher in every school.
- At the university level, inclusion of TIE into the curriculum of the Theatre Arts Department, so that university graduates will be able to incorporate this experience and learning in their respective work spaces.

- Alternative ways in education system incorporating theatrical processes with coordinated efforts from non-government organizations working with Theatre in development initiatives, *Shilpakala Academy* (principal state-sponsored national cultural center) and Teachers Training Centres.

As a whole, the possibilities of TIE are unlimited. Since our social and cultural environments are mostly conservative, customary communication means having limitations in conveying messages on child abuse, child marriage and gender based violence to the masses including children. TIE presents artistically, key messages that get acceptance from people from all walks of life. So integration of the arts and content effectively overcomes barriers in communication and opens new doors to bring change in thoughts and actions of people.

Students, teachers, school management committees, community organizations and government officials are now beginning to recognize TIE as an effective mode of learning and have extended cooperation in practice. That our intervention through TIE has finally found relevance and acceptance is encouraging for us because we see the true value of education though creative means—which is essential for the progressive advancement of the nation and the country.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Sisir Dutta* is the founder of Bangladesh Institute of theatre Arts (BITA). He worked for over 10 years as a Feature Editor in a newspaper. He was Director of Arindam Nattaya Sampradiya. He has some publications on culture and development and news articles published in national and international Journals. He holds a Masters in Sociology.