Promoting Social Inclusion of Disabled Children through Participation in Theatre: An Exploratory Research

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Introduction

Social inclusion of people with disability with special focus on disabled children has received little attention in mainstream development. Furthermore, disabled children have been excluded from the mainstream activities especially in cultural performance. In Malaysia, the involvement of disabled people in theatre performance is very much a new development, and disabled children's participation in performing arts has yet to be promoted. There is therefore a gap in the literature about the presence of people with disabilities (PWDs) in the field of performing arts especially theater. Most studies on disability and performing arts are conducted from the perspective of arts as a tool to enhance the psychomotor skills, psychosocial ability or health of persons with disabilities (Mohamed Ghouse, 2011; Tye & Tong, 2011).

The chapter explores a project which is aimed at moving beyond the therapeutic roles of performing arts for children with disabilities to promoting their social inclusion in the wider community. This project/research is a multidisciplinary collaborative effort among academics from the field of Social Work, Sociology and Theater in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. They also serve as research fellows at the university’s Centre of Excellence for Disability Studies. The participants of the project are children with learning disabilities from a local special school in Kuching, Sarawak. Under the guidance of one of the authors who is a performing

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