

Musical for Teenagers: A Tool to Embrace English

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Abstract

The greatest challenge for teenagers in this century lies in the fact that they have to be the world citizen to take part in globalization. Thus, English is becoming more important in Indonesia. However, most of the time, oral language is still becoming the biggest problem among the students. The lack of opportunity to practice hinders them to embrace the language. This essay is dedicated to provide an alternative method in giving more opportunity by using drama and musical as tools in a workshop for students with singing ability. Representative acting is chosen since it can give a better illustration that is close to everyday life events, with two focuses: GOTE and diction.

Introduction

Judging from the curriculum in high schools and an existing trend to have English speaking day or zone in schools, it is apparent that English is seen as an increasingly important element for Indonesian teenagers to prepare in order to take part in globalization and to actively participate as citizens of this world. Students' exposure to the language is experienced through many things, either academically, such as four 45-minutes contact hours a week in class, or leisurely like movies, game online, social media and TV series. However, the biggest problem in embracing the language still lies in the active oral language or speaking. Students are demanded to be able to master the language through reading, writing, grammar, and listening without having enough time to really practice using the language and making it a part of their lives. Moreover, the English subject for national examination (UN) includes only reading, listening, and grammar, while excluding speaking. It makes the focus of the learning process is not on the speaking, and this leaves the students lacking the opportunity to actively practice the language orally. Therefore, the students need more chances to exercise their speaking skill.

I find that drama is a good way to give students that chance. There are several reasons why drama is an effective tool to help the students in increasing their oral skill ability. Maley (2009) said drama has many elements to support English learning. Drama "integrates language skills in a natural way". In doing drama, students learn reading, listening, speaking and also writing simultaneously. They have to read the script, listen to their partner carefully to be able not to miss the cue when to speak, writing their understanding about the characters and of course, saying the lines. Therefore, spontaneous verbal expression is pivotal to most of the activities. It also brings together both mind and body and restores the balance between physical and intellectual aspects of learning. Thus, drama is will support their skill ability improvement.

Another reason to use drama is because it is the right form at the right time. Creating chances for students to practice their English is easy, but creating chances that attract the students' attention and excitement is not easy. To do so, it is important to pay attention to the trend. Observing the current trends, one of the highly potential chances for them to practice their speaking is through musical. Starting from *Rent*, a rock musical where Jonathan Larson (1997) tried to "marry MTV generation to theatre," musical is trying to embrace young generation. Later, in 2006, musical got into television through *High School Musical* (HSM) produced by Disney Channel. Disney Channel records 7.73 million viewers watched its first night and the series won two Emmys (Hyman, 2007, para 4). Thus, Disney brought it to the

wide screen together with its sequels where Zac Efron was instantly becoming youth star in entertainment industry especially in USA. Moving further along, in 2010, 19 Emmy and 11 Golden Globe nominations were given to *Glee* (Fox, 2011, para 1), a musical comedy TV series that portrays the life of students in William McKinley High School, especially those who are in the school's show choir or the glee club. *Glee* fever goes beyond the United States as it reaches far and wide including Indonesia. This can be seen from the fact that Global TV, one of our national TV stations whose target market is youth, airs this program. One of the mobile phone providers also offers the *Glee* songs as the ring-back tunes for the users. Through all these phenomena, musical then brings certain excitement among teenagers who have passion in this area, choir members for example, to become the part of the trend. This, positively, can be used as a media to give another chance for the students to improve their speaking skills.

Discussion

To give a chance in practicing the English language using musical, representational acting concept can be used. Cohen (1998) introduces the GOTE (Goal, Obstacle, Tactic and Expectation) and also the diction which means "adhering to a standard way of pronouncing words" to be used in this training. The usage of GOTE enables the students to find the meaning and the reason of saying the lines/ the lyric. This method is especially appropriate for musical, since every single word is equally important in revealing the message that the song is trying to communicate

To make it clearer, I would like to explain Cohen's GOTE one by one. Cohen states Goal is the objective/ intention/ purpose/ action. It refers to what characters desire, what drives their action, the purpose of their being, and it has specific and outgoing (eg. I want to be King of Denmark, I want to marry Romeo). Actors should assume that everything on stage must be seen, first and foremost, as a character pursuing a goal. S/he must vigorously pursue his/her goal. While Obstacle (can be called as the Other too) is what stands between the students and the goal that they've set. All goals must be hard earned and must be achieved through interpersonal struggle. It is what makes achieving goals difficult; the struggle to overcome obstacle will create dynamic acting and this will bring the element of conflict which makes the actions in the performance become interesting. The next thing that the students must find is Tactic, which is the method to answer the question 'how can I overcome the obstacle they pose', 'how can I get what I want.' It is a tool to enable actors to achieve what they want. Tactics will come out of the actor's life experience, not out of the script. It can be divided into those that threaten and those that induce. These two types can also be divided into extreme tactics and a broad, middle range of subtler tactics. A good actor must move fluidly and purposefully from tactic to tactic in pursuit of victory (achieving the goal) and build the plot of the performance. Tactics' strength and versatility are what make acting, by turns, forceful, seductive, visceral and dramatic. The last letter is E, which stands for expectation; meaning that the actor must have an expectation toward the goal, as a victory. It is the passion. This will determine how hard a character tries to get what s/he wants.

The method that can be used is by giving a workshop. A workshop is chosen because it can be conducted in a short period of time and, therefore, will not bother their daily school schedule, yet is enough to give the participants the experience of applying the theory they get. To work best, this workshop is aimed at students who have singing ability. This way, the workshop can concentrate on the English skills instead of the singing skill. It is also important to remember that, of course, GOTE is not an *abracadabra* spell. It takes time, but as long as the students know and understand the principal knowledge, then it is a matter of

exercising. Therefore, I offer the system below to help the student understand and apply the concept.

The System

There must be two different speakers for two concentrations which are acting and diction. Tutors are also needed to further assist the workshop participants. In my case, the tutors are taken from senior students who ever took the acting class in English Department, and are fluent in speaking using the American standard of pronunciation. They will have preparation sessions to enable them to not only master the method but also to facilitate the high school students.

A month before the workshop, students are given the music score with an assignment that they must create a twenty-minute musical performance in a group of ten. They are required to write a script with a clear plot and to insert four out of five songs that are given as part of the play. Their English teachers must help as the editor, checking on the grammar and the vocabulary. Although singing ability is not an issue in this workshop, the participants must be made aware that there is a difference between ordinary singing or singing collectively in a choir and singing for musical. For musical, the actor must be able to communicate the meaning of the lyric vividly toward the audience by using the intact acting, very clear diction, and body movement.

Two weeks before the workshop, the representative of the committee must visit the students to check whether they have practiced the songs and had the story and the plot. The committee must also make sure that the students understand the schedule of the workshop. This will set the same expectation between the speakers, the students, the tutor and the goal of the workshop. The script must be given to the speakers before the workshop so that the speakers can have time to check on the story and the plot. The speakers and the tutors must sit together to discuss and see the possible problems in the application of the scripts.

On the workshop day, there are some sessions with different concentrations. It must be started with warm ups, both the physical warm up and the vocal warm up to prep the body and mind to a special set of assumption, acting for musical. Students involved in this workshop need to be spontaneous, responsive, therefore they need to shed their limitation and censors. (Carlisle,1996). These warm ups are important to prevent injuries on muscles and vocal chords, both of which need endurance since the students will use them in a long period of rehearsal. Also, warm ups enable more oxygen to reach the upper part of the body and to increase the flow of blood. This will take approximately 30 minutes. The warm-up activities that students should do are, for example:

1. Students stand up with their legs apart (not too broad, just as wide as their shoulder), then they have to bend down their body slowly and their hands brush the floor. If they are having difficulties, they may bend their knees. Then, they have to bounce their body. They have to do it very slowly to give a chance for the muscles to stretch.
2. Students rotate their head, shoulders, arms, neck, feet and legs. Rotation should be done slowly to each part one by one to the count of eight.
3. Students rehearse the abdomen breathing where they must be able to let as much oxygen as they can into their stomach. Then they must release the air in a 15-second counting.
4. Students are breathing from the abdomen and say *ah* with each exhalation. Then repeat it using *eh, ih, uh, oh* sounds.
5. Students are breathing from the abdomen and vocalizing *la la la la la la la la* with increasing pitch and melody.

Session one is dedicated to script analysis. Adler said “actor must be the master of both words and ideas” which makes script analysis as a must-do work for an actor (1988). The students here, as the actors, learn to understand the meaning of the lyric, not only the literal meaning but also the meaning of the words connected to the context. The tutors will trigger them by giving questions. Let us take an excerpt of the following song as an example.

1
Whistle Down the Wind by Andrew Lloyd Webber
Whistle down the wind
Let your voices carry
Drown out all the rain
Light a patch of darkness, treacherous and scary
Howl at the stars
Whisper when you're sleeping
I'll be there to hold you
I'll be there to stop the chills and all the weeping
...

Questions:

1. What are difficult words that you are confused with?
2. Who is saying this? What is the relationship between the speaker and the listener?
3. What is the problem in the song?
4. When does it happen?
5. Where is the speaker and where is the listener?
6. What promise that the speaker gives to the listener?
7. Why do they use ‘the wind’, ‘the darkness’, and continue with ‘whisper when you’re sleeping’? What is it that trying to say?
8. What would the speaker like to communicate?

Having answered the questions above and discussing the answers, the students will understand the meaning and the context of the song. By doing this the actors are guided to interpret the lyric. This will be an essential background for them to find and apply GOTE.

Then, each actor needs to determine the GOTE. The tutors will trigger them by giving the questions and involve them in another discussion, for example:

1. What does the character want? What does the character would like to achieve?
2. What is the problem which unable the character to achieve things that s/he desire?
3. What does the character do to get what s/he wants? How can the character overcome the problem?
4. Why does the character expect to get it? Why does it excite the character? What will the character do when s/he gets it?

After answering all the questions, students realize the background of what they will do in order to help them in acting. The answer must be written down on the script paper as a reminder for them.

This session will need approximately one hour. This is very crucial since understanding a reason of doing something on the stage will solve quite a lot of problems like self-nervousness, slapstick acting, and unreasonable movements. This will smoothen the next session when they have to transform the answers on the sheet into actions.

Session two is where they try to apply the GOTE and see how it works. In this session it is a must that the students have already memorized the script, so that their main focus will not be on memorizing but more into on trying the GOTE and dealing with blocking. The

speaker must be able to give effective and triggering comments, asking the reasons of doing the movements to the students. The purpose of this is to make students really realize that what they are doing do not come from mere feelings which drive them to act. If the participants are used to sing in a choir or in the vocal groups, then there will be an interesting challenge. They have a tendency to move simply because of moving, to give variations to standing still but without clear purpose. This is the biggest challenge in applying GOTE method to them. Therefore, the speaker must pay more attention to this matter. This process needs two hours with the speaker.

Session three is the diction session. Students get a pronunciation session where they are trained to say each word using American dictionary standard. According to Harmer (2001) "pronunciation teaching not only makes students aware of different sounds and features, but also can improve their speaking immeasurably." In this session, students are taught and will experience the drilling to build their awareness in saying the words correctly with the appropriate stress. The speaker introduces front, back, mid vowels and diphthongs together with the plosive, fricative, nasal, glide, blended consonant and how to identify and produce them. In order to make it more effective, the speaker uses sounds/ words existing in the lyric as real examples that they have to sing. For instance:

l as in light: moving the tongue

p as in patch: holding the air momentarily before exploding it outward

ng as in weeping: passing air through the nose

This enables the student to understand and practice the words that they have to sing.

A common problem that occurs because of the difference between Bahasa Indonesia and English is the mistake in producing plosive consonants. English has plosive consonants while Indonesian does not. This might cause incorrect pronunciation. For example is the sound 'p' which is non plosive in Bahasa Indonesia, while it is plosive in English. The understanding of the difference will enable students to remember the reason behind the pronunciation, with a hope that in the future they will be able to do self-learning in saying the words that come with that particular sound.

Another thing that needs to be put on focus in this session is the rising and falling inflection. Bahasa Indonesia has a tendency to be used in falling inflection, while English is the other way around. This is also something that they have to understand to minimize the Javanese accent when they are producing their words. Making the ending light is something that is commonly stated to remind the students.

Intonation is also one of the focuses in this session where they have to pay attention to the variations of intonation that they can use. While for singing the song, they need to pay attention to the stress that they have to put in every word, to strengthen the emphasis and intention of saying the word. Here the students will be taught how to get used to open-mouthed speaking to help them produce a clear voice for the audience.

Next, session four, is the longest duration even though it is basically the repetition of two sessions before, as students rehearse all things mentioned above. This is what I call as the process. If they really know what they have to do, then it means they understand the knowledge shared to them before. They rehearse singing the songs using the most appropriate intonation and apply the GOTE and blocking.

At the end of the workshop, they showcase their work in front of other students. This is one of the crucial parts that cannot be skipped. There must be audience. It can be their teachers, fellow students, or parents. The existence of the audience will bring the excitement to perform, putting some pressure on them to rehearse and to give the best. Audience also boosts their confidence later on when they get the applause. The performance and positive reactions from the audience will enable them to remember the lessons they have had and

make them understand the importance of being able to pronounce things to be understood by others.

Conclusion

This essay is trying to share an alternative media in helping students improving their oral skill ability in a creative way. Combining the trend of musical with classical way of language teaching can be an effective method, especially when someone has to deal with teenagers who like to sing and perform.

This method was applied in SMAK St. Albertus, Malang, to their fifty choir members in January 2011. One thing which made one of the speakers happy at that time happened not on the stage but after the performance when she went to the toilet. From outside, she heard some students walked by the toilet, singing a piece of a song from the musical that they performed earlier. One girl mispronounced the word and the rest of the girls corrected their friend's mistake spontaneously using English language.

From their performances and the simple fact above, I conclude that the workshop has made them more eloquent in using English as an oral communication media, and it has also created a better awareness among the participants in pronouncing the words. Since this workshop was not some sort of magic, of course the awareness was more as a good start for being more confident in using the language. There were still some problems in pronouncing certain words, but through this kind of training, students would get more fun and interesting opportunities to explore and use oral English correctly and precisely.

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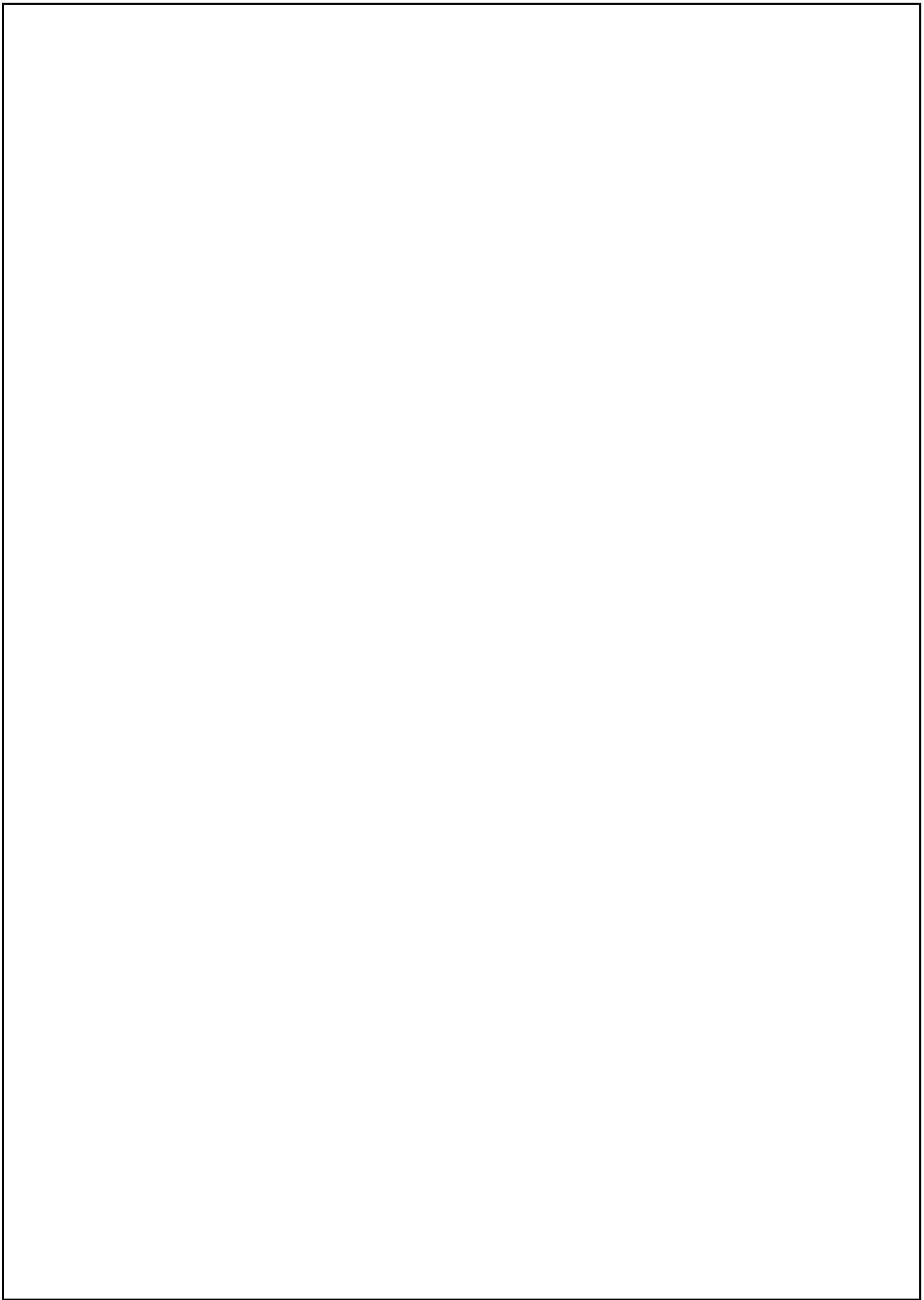
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