

Discussion about the Priority for the Improvement of Performer Training in Korea

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Abstract

This thesis examines a significant way to enhancing and improving the term/phenomenon of performer training system in contemporary Korean theatre. To articulate the matters, this research engages in discussing and criticizing those problematic issues that we, as an instructor/trainer, have faced with through the last decades in the field of performer training and education. Specifically, we concern with the necessity of an applicable and appropriate educational/training system where each student-actor would discover his/her own adaptability by evaluating what a specific method and approach is. This atmosphere accurately provided by an instructor/trainer can also facilitate and enhance the young students' potential possibilities and/or talent, that is, as we argue a way to accomplish each performer's true nature. To achieve the goals, we underlie the necessity of establishing and/or settling performer training program/course by means of an alternative path. The research finding shows that within the atmosphere each student could share then interrogate what a possible or ideal way is according to his/her comprehensive understandings with clearer purpose: what kind of performers would you produce, train, and/or educate.

Keywords: *Performer Training, the Role of an Instructor/Trainer, Learning Environment, Teaching Pedagogies.*

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine an alternative and/or effective way for the improvement of performer training system in Korea. As we have seen that there is diversity of understandings of the notion of acting methods, systems and/or disciplines in theatre and performance studies within the field of performer training. In particular, we undoubtedly see and often feel that we have a wide range of knowledge about performer training methods, however, defining and applying an appropriate way should be reconsidered by evaluating a trainer's abilities with his/her teaching models which directly influence to enhance the student-actors' ability and their foundation.

Although we have well aware of the fact that a number of drama schools and universities have noticeably been increased in the last decades, the alarming crisis of performer training system is getting worse than before. Specifically, those two elements, the amount of learning/training and its outcomes are in inverse quantity to

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each other: most student-actors must pay attention to the other subjects rather than major subjects that interests lots of students, therefore, they would explore and interrogate a specific point(s) in deeper level, and drama institutions/universities tend to offer broader curriculums rather than one of 'depth and practical quality' in which the student-actors could develop and facilitate his/her own identity as a performer [1]. Subsequently, these concepts with the assumptions in terms of performer training can cause far more serious problems including amateurism, opportunism and factionalism.

Obvious evidence of this is that there are massive number of improper graduates and/or performers who are looking for something to help themselves whatever if it is helpful for acting [2]. Furthermore, the student-actors who are training/studying in such drama institutions do not have his/her own insight into drama/theatre fields. Moreover, even some trainers underlie an idea that a performer necessarily need to deal with every aspect of human beings in a broader sense, thus, their instructions have also inevitably had different concepts, attitude and training models for performer training. For the reason, it is significant to note that there is still much confusion about 'who would be taken the responsibility for performer training.'

Unlike the principle of acting/performer training, drama/theatre institutions and even several theatre companies/productions be likely to rely on trainers/mentors with applause who are big-name stars so-called their reputation within the field rather than the ability of great intelligence and foresight in acting/training pedagogies. Consequently, an enormous number of graduates can depend only on 'commercial' companies or agencies with the universal degrees because of the lack of precise training system and studies which are derived from unreasonable and/or unacceptable personal experiences of those trainers/mentors.

From this point of view, therefore, this essay will argue that educational institutions must pay more attention to reduce the number of other subjects in order to provide accurate pedagogies. Plus, at the same value, the performer training and coaching courses need to be established in order to make a more suitable and applicable professional teaching and learning environment. Finally, this research would suggest some ideal way(s) for performer training with the question of as a performer trainer/instructor 'what kind of student-actors would you produce?'

2. What is the Essential Quality Required to Performer Training

First of all, the number of indirect subjects have to be reconsidered and then ideally reduced to improve the quality of performer training system in Korea. The curriculum with learning sessions in most acting academies involve huge boundaries these are including from basic to advanced acting, physical *and* emotional training, text analysis, movement, direction, stage setting, lighting, costume, second languages and even liberal studies and so on.

According to the major drama/theatre institutions including *C, D* and *S* University, Seoul, Korea, the amount of average performer training subjects can be shown as less than 50 hours in 204 hours, and 35 credits in 140 credits within four years. This process causes disorganized curriculums and irregular classes of performer trainers, and eventually that makes discord relationship between schools and industries, namely, graduates have to re-educate in commercial companies for another year after they leave universities/schools. For example, Kim, a professor at *Hoseo* University, indicates that less than 29% graduates between 2002 and 2007 are working in theatre industries, and the number will be decreased more rapidly than before [3].

From my research findings, one specific reason among many is the phenomenon for producing performances in which a director leads every process from training/coaching performers to creating a specific production. Therefore, the term 'training' (coaching) in this phrase means approaching 'physical training' similar to doing warm up including stretching and massage for muscles, singing, playing games, and speech of poetic or archaic diction. These a set of physical training and/or practices are assumed related to acting/performer training, so

that are habitually led by dancers and/or experienced leading performers who were either did not have knowledge of acting or acknowledge systematized training.

As a result, young-actors are exposed not only such a pointless or mechanical approach and modularized ‘knowledge’ in drama schools and universities but also ‘vague’ and ‘inaccurate’ instructions of the directors/trainers in a practical perspective. From this point of view, this thesis firmly argues that the central aim of performer training is necessarily need to discover ‘what/who I am’ and ‘what is impossible to obtain a specific quality/state’ in order to go further exploration for reaching the deepest level. In other words, when those student-actors are fully enable to experience more details about his/her own thoughts and findings the performers’ capacity for learning and more importantly “sensory discoveries will also increase” [4] Here, the process of removing then subsequently finding new potential possibilities imply exploring the substratum of the performer’s psychic and bodily movement as unity that has to be emerged from the most intimate layers of his/her instinct. This quality/state of a performer might be hidden and/or unexpected territory by means of the performer’s true nature.

In contrast, such inappropriate assumptions and approaches are still remained as ongoing problematic issues specifically concerning the necessity of a performer’s ‘own bodily experience’ through the contemporary Korean theatre and education [5]. As many critics indicates that for instance most of directors who I have worked with assumed that the ideal acting can be achieved by representing a performer’s daily life as the performer attempts to retrace his/her own truthful or realistic expression. With the assumption, attempting ‘the exact imitation of the performer’s ordinary’, the directors even provide examples by means of demonstrating and/or showing themselves, that is, what the directors might ‘feel’ as ‘correct expression.’ What is more, many student-actors tend to focus on his/her upper body rather than grounded on the floor. Here, the ‘center’ of the body and/or breathing is familiar ‘word’, whereas such word only remain as just ‘familiar word’ itself by means of the performer’s intellectual level. In other words, they could not organize and inhabit such term(s) in practical manner because they only depend on his/her upper body.

The predominant procedure for interrogating a performer’s truthful emotion, more accurately ‘his/her feeling’ based on the performer’s daily perception is regarded as an ideal way to create reality which what many directors assumed as a ‘universal expression’ in order to attract the spectators. However, as an inexperienced performer, and even after intensive physical training over many years, those student-actors cannot realize ‘how things develop and process’ and ‘how to inhabit these principles and elements into his/her body.’ As a result, their hope laid in the strategic resistance of constant questioning and reworking with the practitioners’ unknown nomenclatures. That is, the young-actors are struggling for what the relationship between learning a specific training sources and its adaptation for being on stage, plus between the performer’s personal creativity and the embodiment for a role/character. Here, no one can expect what comes in the next, in the coming future.

3. What kind of Performers Would You Produce: Towards the Significance of Performer Training Pathway

In order to resolve those problems, this thesis would argue that an appropriate educational environment must be considered as the priority in order to produce and cultivate well-trained performers. One of the best ways of this is, for example, settling actor training and coaching course like for example the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (e.g., MA Actor Training and Coaching), London, UK that would be contributed to the development of teaching pedagogies/models and reform the disorganized acting fields to as an endurance atmosphere.

First, this course could provide student-actors to intensive researches/studies to discover the most efficient

way of training/teaching. In other words, since everyone has the opportunity to explore a number of possibilities to accomplish specific targets/goals within the environment, the process will also emphasize on experiencing and sharing 'what the universal problem is' within the field of performer training rather than to find out 'one correct way' or the answer.

The reason is that basically each student might be well aware of the difficulties being on stage as a performer and at the same time teaching the younger student as a trainer/instructor. Because they have the same motives to engage in learning the progression based on their working experiences as a performer and teaching background as a performer/trainer/director. The factor would spontaneously make a harmonious atmosphere of each module/curriculum and sincere cooperative interaction between student-actors and instructors. In other words, as Anne Bogart and Tina Landau precisely notes that through the process including 'training together', 'intensive working system', 'sharing and evaluating', leads the member of student-actors/instructors/coaches into a practical simultaneously academic environment [6].

As the same value, the MA AT&C course could offer the younger students to discover a wide range of practical and academic studies where the students would have the opportunity to accomplish not only specific approaches and pedagogies but also key principles and applications by means of his/her own experience and interpretation. Parallel with the course, Laura Wayth provides an "unique" program, The Juilliard School that as Wayth notes, serves as a "bridge between graduate study and the professional world" within which each student-actor can "taste for the demands of working in the profession" [7]. At this point, we can acknowledge the fact that through the progress each student necessarily needs to reconsider these fundamental enquiries, namely, 'what kind of substance must be accessible to the young students' and 'how can one train, teach, and educate them as a trainer?'

In order to evaluate this, for example, the students share their own interesting points and make clearer a specific theme during each session/laboratory as an independent study group with taking a role as an instructor/trainer and immature/younger performers simultaneously. After each practice, students can discuss its advantages and disadvantages in what they experienced including those difficulties and/or problematic issues that assistance to redefine their own strength and weakness as a performer trainer. Eventually, they would have the opportunity to consider and (re) evaluate the most effective way(s) within comprehensive exploration, observation of other classes, laboratories, application, presentation and feedback and so on. Consequently, as a trainer/performer the students can obtain not only the diverse approaches for performer training but also have a chance to discover the precise identity/presence as a trainer.

As mentioned above, the comprehensive development might be beneficial to discover/interrogate reasonable and sustainable pedagogies for performer training on which instructors/coaches should be concentrated on the most effective ways to teach/lead the young student-actors with the question of 'what kind of performers would you produce?'

In order to answer to this, this thesis would suggest three reliable teaching or learning models. First, trainers certainly need to provide objectively various kinds of teaching approaches and directions to produce the students as well-trained and prepared performers. However, it can be argued that many trainers who have one-sided or inflexible pedagogies with even extreme obstinacy. These approaches and assumptions lead the student-actors to a narrow point of view with very low adaptability. In addition, if the young students face with other instructions and/or guidelines, they will suffer from the confusing and even hesitating as to whether they can apply it or not. Here, Bella Merlin notes that the "important thing about a good technique is that it is open to all possibilities and all provocations" [8].

It means that the central role and place of an instructor/trainer is inhabiting the ability to eradicate such anxiousness (e.g., confusing and hesitating) by means of a performer's psychophysical difficulties and/or

obstacle in order to facilitate the students' potential creativeness. It is needless to say that the aforementioned first step for the young students is the most significant point for heightening and enhancing a remarkable possibility and/or talent in the coming future. Therefore, instructors, trainers, and/or coaches should also carefully regard his/her pedagogies considering as the same responsibility for the young students.

Another important requiring attitude of an instructor/trainer is that every student has different background and personalities. Consequently, it can be said that everyone has different learning styles and path. Namely, an instructor/trainer must acknowledge this point when s/he confront, meet and teach his/her students, and ought to provide several directions and learning styles in order to lead one's spontaneity on which the students would be found the 'next step' to reach as a well-trained performer. The instructor/trainer's credibility is depended upon how s/he prepare and set up a well-respected training session/program as the appropriate choice according to what each student's personal needs.

Although the definition of the well-trained performer is complicated one, this thesis would follow to Anne Dennis' thought that an "actor should be able to move from farce to tragedy with great freedom, finding the most articulate way possible to present the contents of his role" [9]. In brief, the students would be given far more opportunities to achieve the specific methods, if his/her instructor/trainer provide more accurate and diverse approaches having generosity at every level so that the young students will be able to make a practical application of the principles by themselves.

Second, an instructor/trainer must pay regard to everyone as a creator removing the cramming system of education, specifically, the process of study in acting must be systematic and well-organized: the trainer should formulate a system of philosophy to find the best way with emphasizing on the importance of basics for acting. As John Gillett underlies the significance of teaching/training the young actors centered on the foundation, predominantly concentrating on "basic acting process" which in turn facilitate the session or studio work to "consistency and continuity of theory and practice" [10] At the same time, the trainer must provide exactly the same length of practical opportunities to his/her students compared with the trainers. By this process, students can explore every possibility and also the belief of equality will reform their relationship that helps to accomplish self-confidence with certitude as well as high quality of outcomes.

In contrast, the grinding form of education cannot be escaped from the traditional pedagogies in the hierarchical culture of society. In fact, most Asian performing arts has been taught customarily by noted performers called as initiators, and its learning process was focused on skills rather than specific principles or studies because that has transmitted orally from generation to generation [11]. For instance, the process of learning/training '*Pansori*', the unique Korean traditional form of drama, is required to performers have to spend a long period of time or his/her whole life by means of endless or very long-term disciplines process 'under' his/her master.

Noticeably, this process can be indispensable for a performer who might want to be a craftsman or to learn it in case of necessity. However, everyone cannot learn and/or explore like this. Moreover, it is not applicable for performer training, mainly, in terms of teaching 'young' student-actors especially in this contemporary era. Because such ways will block his/her strong motivation and even they will reconsider the reason why they are studying it. Furthermore, such inherited forms can cause depriving one's rights to a different existence. That is, why an instructor/trainer must reconsider the significant meaning of sharing and cooperative environment rather than unilateral ways.

Finally, if all above concern convey profoundly, the young students would obtain their own confidence for his/her instructors/trainers as well as superior awareness of the comprehensive understanding of acting/training standards. As discussed above, without delivering a set of foundation and an applicable pedagogy the condition and place of teaching/learning environment will become ever more difficult in a pressured way. More

importantly, such a precise relationship guarantees them to more improvement over the principle of acting/training. The ideal notion that is straightly linked to the fundamental and essential form of drama/theatre education, that is partnership, teamwork and collaboration.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the lack of performer training system has still remained as a complex and complicated issue among the massive number of theatre people in Korea. This imprecise process causes far more serious problems between schools and industries. Accordingly, many young students cannot accomplish their expectations because of underdeveloped teaching and learning styles. Therefore, we have argued that the two fundamental changes must be required to make a professional environment.

First, universities and/or drama schools must provide precise acting curriculums as reducing the number of indirect subjects. So, the student-actors can concentrate on his/her subjects more accurately in the practical and academic approaches. Second, we suggested the need of AT&C courses that enable to offer students to achieve a wide range of intensive studies in the harmonious relationship between students and tutors. In addition, they share their own teaching methods, and evaluate its strength and weakness based on reconsidering the fundamental questions of ‘what kind of foundation must be accessible to the young students?’, ‘how can we teach them as a trainer?’

Finally, we claimed some ideal ways in order to reach the appropriate performer training system in Korea. Above all, an instructor/trainer should offer diverse approaches for students to produce them by means of well-trained performers. This suggests that the successful approach and/or session is derived from reliable training source(s) with consistency and credibility of an instructor/trainer in which each student could “work together” and “touch one another with the whole self” [12]. Rather than working or sustaining a *single correct way*, the process enables to explore and develop each student’s potential possibilities maintaining capable of more than mere imitation. Next, instructors/trainers must regard everyone as a creator with systematic and well-organized pedagogies rather than cramming ways. Third, a trainer must make collaborative relationship with his/her students eliminating the traditional notion like leaders and followers. Through those processes, the young students can achieve his/her own methodologies as a creator that must be applied into different styles of texts, and ultimately their ingenious contribution will make the performances more complete and perfect.

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