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| Author(s)    | Joon H. Wong and Agnes Chang  |
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## **Building Confidence & Raise Self-Esteem Through Musical Production**

Joon H. Wong & Agnes Chang  
National Institute of Education  
Nanyang Technological University  
Singapore

*I've learnt what I've not had the chance to learn in the 9 years of education life, such as the processes involved to produce a musical. I've had a new experience, which will last me a lifetime and the joy, and love in arts has somehow improved my character and social skills. I've experienced the consequences of the whole crew not cooperating or tolerating. Of course, I've then realised the important and motive of the school's motto. I'm able to manage my time well so that I do not fare badly in my studies or ignoring my friends.*

*Jeslyn Cheong (3G), AISS Choir*

**Abstract:** Musical production is one of the real joys in life, and students can benefit from a variety of activities. The sheer delight of children's singing and playing, listening to fine music, dancing, playing a musical instrument, and enjoying music as a family is a reward in itself. Whichever role the students are involved in, be it main roles in the production or backstage crew members, the experience offers tremendous benefits - academically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. The production of a musical provides so many varied activities that every student can be assured of succeeding in at least one – and often more than one, regardless of his or her mental ability. This paper attempts to understand:

1. How students felt about being part of this major production.
2. How it has effected their perception about themselves.
3. Whether the Normal Technical Students are just as reliable.

### **Introduction**

Ahamd Ibrahim Secondary School produced an adapted version of Rogers and Hammerstein, an all time favourite musical “*Oklahoma*”. It was staged at the Victoria Theatre on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> July 2000.

Drama has been the school tradition. In 1994 the school attempted the first musical “*South Pacific*”. It was not till 1998 that the school put up another musical “*The King And I*” in Victoria Theatre. More than 80 percent of the cast were from the Normal Technical Stream. At the same time, it was our first attempt to involve mainly the Normal Technical Students to choreography the dances.

### **Objectives of the musical**

1. *To raise funds for the 16 visually impaired students in Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary school. These students need story books in Braille, which are costly. They need special IT equipment to help them in their work.*
2. *To stimulate greater interest in aesthetics among all the students*
3. *To maximize their creative potential.*
4. *To develop their self-confidence, especially among the Normal Technical students.*

The whole production involved more than 300 students from the Express, Normal Academic and Normal Technical Streams, several teachers, teachers' children, non-teaching staff and parents. *Five* partially blind students were part of this production as support singers. It was a school and community effort.

### **This paper attempts to understand**

1. How students felt about being part of this major production.
2. How it has effected their perception about themselves.
3. Whether the Normal Technical Students are just as reliable.

### **Questionnaire**

The questionnaires were given to the students at the end of the third performance. It was given to those students who went through the whole process of preparation. Students who were involved in the earlier preparation such as props making and those who were only required to carry out duties during the performance were not included in this survey. *137* out of *165* students responded and submitted the questionnaires.

There are altogether 10 items in the questionnaire. The questions focused on students' self-perceptions and expectations. Students were required to tick the suggested answers they thought were relevant to them. Under each question, a blank space is provided to allow any answer that might have been omitted.

### **Results**

Table 1

Level

| <b>Level</b>              | <i>Sec. 1</i> | <i>Sec. 2</i> | <i>Sec. 3</i> | <i>Sec. 4</i> | <i>Sec. 5</i> |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>No. of Respondents</b> | 51            | 46            | 43            | 10            | 0             |

Based on the statistics in the above chart, more lower secondary students were involved in this production. This is to aid the teachers in identifying some students with potentials to assume greater responsibility in the next production. At the same time, the teachers needed to workout a list of musical works that these students could achieve.

Table 2

Streams

| <b>Streams</b>     | <i>Normal Technical</i> | <i>Normal Academic</i> | <i>Express</i> |
|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Respondents</b> | 47                      | 39                     | 51             |

Table 3

Gender

| <b>Gender</b>      | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> |
|--------------------|-------------|---------------|
| <b>Respondents</b> | 50          | 87            |

During the earlier preparation, the teachers did realize that it was easier to recruit female students than male students for the production. Likewise in most of the Core Curriculum Activities such as Choir, Chinese Orchestra, Military band, Dance Troops share the similar sentiment. This provides another possible study on the perception of male students towards cultural activities.

Table 4  
Race

| <i>Race</i>        | <i>Chinese</i> | <i>Indian</i> | <i>Malay</i> | <i>Others</i> |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>Respondents</b> | 73             | 23            | 39           | 2             |

Table 5  
How do you feel being chosen to participate in the making of “Oklahoma!”

|    | <i>Choices</i> | <i>Percentage</i>                |    | <i>Choices</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|----|----------------|----------------------------------|----|----------------|-------------------|
| 1  | Happy          | 67.88%                           | 6  | Unexpected     | 21.17%            |
| 2  | Excited        | 64.96%                           | 7  | Surprise       | 16.79%            |
| 3  | Honored        | 52.55%                           | 8  | Scared         | 11.68%            |
| 4  | Nervous        | 43.8%                            | 9  | Nothing        | 4.38%             |
| 5  | Anxious        | 24.09%                           | 10 | Neutral        | 1.46%             |
| 11 | Others         | Proud; Bring glory to the school |    |                | 1.46%             |

There was no formal audition for most of the students who took part in the musical except for those who wish to have a role as main cast. Few students who responded neutral or nothing were from the choir. Their explanation was that they felt that it was a natural thing to do as choir members of the school. Furthermore, this was not their first performance.

Students responded that they were shocked to learn that it takes a lot of energy to produce a musical. Most of them were happy to be part of this musical, as the experience as a performer was something that they could not acquire through the textbook.

Table 6  
Do you like the role being assigned to you?

|   |            | <b>Percentage</b> |
|---|------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Yes        | 94.16%            |
| 2 | No         | 4.38%             |
| 3 | No feeling | 1.46%             |

From the responses, it is obvious that the students liked and were comfortable with what they had been assigned. A number of them felt that they had learnt something new and it was something that they could claim ownership. It is especially challenging when they were asked to study a personality, who is totally different from them.

Some did not like the role assigned because there was too much make-up on their faces. One of the students responded that she was needed to look old and she did not like it. However, she liked to be part of the musical.

Some dancers responded that they appeared only for a short while in front of the audience, but they understood that their roles were just as important. One actually commented that she was still feeling stressful although she has to just appear in one of the scene.

Some choir members responded that they like the idea of being the ‘mysterious’ singers as they were stationed in the orchestra pit most of the time as support singers.

Table 7

Do you have any formal music training.

|   |                                       | <b>Percentage</b> |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| A | Yes (please list the number of years) | 10.22%            |
| B | No                                    | 89.78%            |

Those students who have some sort of formal music training are mainly the choir members. However, only a handful of students are maintaining their private music lessons. Most of them had terminated their music lessons a year before they took their *Primary School Leaving Examination*.

Table 8

Is this your first musical.

|   |  | <b>Percentage</b> |
|---|--|-------------------|
| A | Yes  | 96.35%            |
| B | No (please state the number of musical you’ve performed) | 3.65%             |

Those students who responded that this was not their first musical because they were involved as either dancers or understudies in the earlier musical production of the “King & I”. One of the students was involved in a church musical.

Table 9

What do you like best being part of the musical?

|   |  | <b>Percentage</b> |
|---|--|-------------------|
| 1 | Working and gathering together with friends  | 61.31%            |
| 2 | Learning something new   | 60.58%            |
| 3 | Gain C.C.A. points / Merit Point   | 45.98%            |
| 4 | Learn to discover your own unknown talents   | 44.53%            |
| 5 | Working with people whom you like.   | 26.28%            |
| 6 | Excuse from lessons  | 18.25%            |
| 7 | Getting the attention  | 6.57%             |
| 8 | Others:<br>It is a form of personal expression.<br>Able to sing, dance and act with friends.<br>Able to make the audience laugh.<br>Away from the textbooks<br>Able to play and work hard at the same time.<br>Learn to work as a team.<br>New exposure.<br>Always like the musical by Roger and Hammestein. |                   |

Most of the students responded that they enjoyed “*working and gathering together with friends*”. The ‘friends’ who were in the musical were the main factor to why they took part in the production.

A survey was conducted in 1997 to find out more about the Secondary One and Secondary Two Normal Technical (NT) students in Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly ‘*friends*’ was the reason to why the NT Students came to school. They added that they were most happy to be with their ‘*friends*’. The two different surveys showed that despite the questions were phrased differently and the survey was conducted under different context, ‘*friends*’ played a very important role for all adolescents.<sup>2</sup>

My personal observation was based on the two musicals that I was working with the different groups of students. I noticed that the students came as a group to be part of the musical production. However, if one of them should decide to leave the production for some reasons, that particular student would definitely turn up for all rehearsals in order to be with the friends who were still in the production. This has once again proven the point that the need for friendship and peer-acceptance was very important for them.

Table 10  
What have you learned by participating in the musical.

|    |   | Percentage |
|----|---|------------|
| 1  | Teamwork  | 74.45%     |
| 2  | Self-confident  | 63.50%     |
| 3  | How a musical is being produced.  | 62.04%     |
| 4  | Music   | 58.39%     |
| 5  | To recognize and appreciate one’s own talent  | 51.82%     |
| 6  | Learn more about the teachers-in-charges  | 45.26%     |
| 7  | To share with each other and care for each other  | 44.53%     |
| 8  | Self-discipline   | 44.53%     |
| 9  | To be more receptive / tolerant to other culture.   | 43.07%     |
| 10 | Acting  | 39.42%     |
| 11 | Dance   | 37.96%     |
| 12 | Time Management   | 37.96%     |
| 13 | To be creative  | 37.23%     |
| 14 | Self-respect  | 36.5%      |
| 15 | Social Skills and Manners   | 35.04%     |
| 16 | The lives of Farmers and Cowmen   | 28.47%     |
| 17 | Learn to think on your feet   | 27.74%     |
| 18 | Others: Get to know more friends; Enjoy working together; Understand the amount of time and hard work needed to produce a musical; The history of Victoria theatre and the environment. |            |

The students felt that ‘*teamwork*’ is what they have learned. It is especially true because the students were:

1. Chosen from different streams and levels.

<sup>1</sup> Wong Joon Hwang, et. al. “A Study of Secondary One and Secondary Two Normal Technical Students in Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School. 470 – 476. Education Research Association Annual Conference. 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Rice, F. Philip. “The Adolescent Development, Relationships, and Culture”. 7<sup>th</sup> edition. Allyn and Bacon. 1992.

- Given a task or role each, they were required to work closely in order to run the whole show smoothly.

During the rehearsals, words like ‘listen’, ‘watch’, ‘give support’, ‘keep the movements uniform’, and ‘help’...etc, were commonly used and emphasized by the teachers. Students were told to keep an eye on the *five* visually impaired students to make sure that they do not trip over any of the wires and to render help if necessary. It could have inculcated the important of teamwork to the students.

A Secondary Three Normal Technical Student responded that “*I have been chosen to be the main cast and dancer*” is something most memorable throughout the whole production. It is not too difficult to detect his happiness and this has boost his self-confidence when he was being selected. Another Secondary Two Normal Technical student prop member wrote that: “*It makes me feel good*”.

Table 11

Would you like to take part in another musical production given the chance again?

|   |                                | Percentage |
|---|--------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | Yes                            | 94.89%     |
| 2 | No (please briefly state why): | 4.38%      |
| 3 | Others: Unsure                 | 0.73%      |

Majority of the students responded that they would like to take part in the next musical. Some of them stated that they would like to take on a more important role. While some commented that they would not mind being part of the musical if they do not have to act. This came mainly from the Choir members.

However some students commented that too much time was taken for the practices and rehearsals. The production of the musical was also highly stressful and demanding, they had no personal time for themselves and they did not wish to miss any lessons.

Table 12

Use five **ADJECTIVES** to describe the musical. (E.g. Wonderful, Boring, Interesting...etc.)

| FUN        |               | MORALE BOOSTING |                | DOWNSIDE   |
|------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|------------|
| Amazing    | Interesting   | Cool            | Good           | Stressful  |
| Enjoyable  | Humorous      | Tasteful        | Special        | Confusing  |
| Surprising | Joyfully      | Warmth          | Experience     | Boring     |
| Attractive | Lively        | Great           | Wonderful      | Outrageous |
| Melodious  | Sweet         | Very Good       | Touching       | Difficult  |
| Exotic     | Extremely Fun | Successful      | Memorable      | Scary      |
| Amusing    | Exciting      | Marvelous       | Fantastic      | Crazy      |
| Relaxing   | Happy         | Outstanding     | Excellent      | Tiring     |
| Animating  | Enjoyable     | Challenging     | Well-Organized | Noisy      |
| Tremendous | Nice          | Unbelievable    | Useful         | Costly     |
| Hilarious  | Cute          | Fabulous        | Unique         | Tough      |
| Sensual    | Fun           | Addictive       | Best           | Anxiously  |

|              |             |               |                     |  |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|--|
| Entertaining | Sexy        | Beautiful     | Artistic            |  |
| Lovely       | Joyous      | Power         | Fantastic           |  |
| Delightful   | Romantic    | With Style    | Educational         |  |
| Funny        | Loving      | Unexpected    | Once in a Life Time |  |
| Meaningful   | Dramatic    | Eventful      | Spectacular         |  |
| Fresh        | Fascinating | Well-Prepared | Creatively          |  |
| Presentable  |             | Perfect       | Bright              |  |
|              |             |               | Encouraging         |  |

The adjectives written by the students could broadly be divided into three main categories: Fun, Moral Boosting and Downside. The responses were encouraging and positive. The chart above reflected that the morale of the students was greatly boosted at the end of the third performance. The positive comments and feedback given by the audience and teachers at the end of each performance could have contributed to these responses. A great deal of confidence has developed in the students, in the process of making this musical a hit by the performers.

In response to question 9 and 10, most students seem to have learned something beyond the textbooks. A large number of students seemed to have developed a positive self-concept through their description on how the musical has changed them. Overall, they seemed to have enjoyed themselves tremendously. The dancers found it interesting to wear a bloomer. Some of the dancers felt really proud as they were asked to help to choreography some of the dances and to comment on the dance steps. Students also added that they were really touched when they saw the joyous facial expressions of the students at the end of the third show. A number of choir members were proud of themselves for being able to stay calm during the performances despite the warbling legs.

A student who wrote that an event like this is “*Once in a life time*” opportunity. In reality, there is not much opportunity for students to take part in a production like this and at the Victoria Theatre. There is no doubt that this musical production is going to be in their memories for the rest of their lives.

### **Educational Implication:**

#### **The value that the students could achieved in the production**

The production of a musical overlaps with and interweaves several activities – speech, melody, rhythm and so on. It is best experienced concurrently and in relation with one another. Positive musical experiences are very important for students, for they open up whole new dimensions of responsiveness for exploration and understanding. Besides sheer enjoyment, the study, listening, and practice of music enhance the social, cognitive, motor, affective, and creative development of the students. It also boosts the concentration and memory skills needed for school success.

Music study refines all the learning – in reading, mathematics, and other subjects – that students are doing at school. So that is why music combined with words aid listener in remembering the words. It also helps language and communication skills develop and even pave the way for the mastery of foreign languages. As children grow, musical training continues to help them develop the discipline and self-

confidence to achieve in school. The day-to-day practice, along with the setting of goals and achieving them, develops self-discipline, patience, and persistence.

Music is a right-handed function and speech / language a left brained function that aids in the development of visual, auditory, and language skills. It also develops hand, ear, and eye coordination and improves agility, dexterity, and small muscle development. In addition, the attention span is lengthened.

Dancing is intergenerational; it is especially true with folk dancing. It is a wonderful activity for students to engage in, providing them an opportunity to do something fun together. It also develops the students' spatial awareness, rhythm, and coordination.

In the process of learning a dance, the students will learn to cooperate and follow directions. They gain a sense of belonging, and there's no need to for partners. It offers friendship and wholesome exercise for students.

As the world has become a "global village", as an educator, it is essential to provide the different types of exposure and experiences to our students. A major production like this is a wonderful form of entertainment, exercise, and a way for students to celebrate and learn the western culture of the past. One cannot simply ignore the world in which people live as one goes about helping the students become more sensitive to the aesthetic qualities of the world. A bit of sensible strategy would seem in order especially working with the weaker learners to avoid fruitless barriers to aesthetic learning while at the same time helping to make more and more of the aesthetic components of the world accessible to all students.

### **Bondage between students and teachers**

Schools usually choose the best and the brightest kids to put up big show. It is also unlikely to leave it to the Normal Technical students to support it. Based on the positive feedback from the audience, the students have once again proven their capabilities. For the first time, visually impaired students were involved in this production. It has provided opportunity for teachers to weave in the importance of being a sensitive and caring person. A production of such magnitude supports and enriches the bounding between students and teachers. It enhances togetherness and cooperation in school. It provides the teachers the opportunity to discuss about moral and values with the students.

Several students responded that they have learnt more about the teachers who have worked very closely.

### **Developing a sense of belonging.**

Often time, students can develop a strong sense of belonging to the school if they have been active. Apart from teaching the students that the school is their Alma Mater, creating opportunity for students to participate in a school musical could also help in developing a sense of belonging.

A Secondary One Student stated that "*I guess I feel a little more attached to AISS [after] for participating in this musical*". At the end of the third performance, all the performers and with supporters gathered together and gave four thunder-roaring cheers. It was not instigated by anyone but the students themselves.

### **Self-Esteem and Confident**

Through observation and comments from other teachers, we agreed that most of the students' behavior has improved tremendously. They posed less disciplinary problems. It has also helped the students to develop the self-discipline and self-confidence to achieve in school. The day-to-day practice, along with goal setting and achieving them, develops self-discipline, patience, and persistence. The discipline is carried over to other areas: doing homework and other school projects responsibly and punctually, keeping materials organized, etc. Performance in general helps students feel a sense of worth and boost their self-esteem.

The school attempted to save cost by not hiring any outside help to do the production. The teachers and the students were required to use their own resources to produce the show. Therefore it has provided room for critical and creative thinking throughout the making of this musical. Hence the school was able to have such a low budget the musical.

### **Conclusion**

Musical making is part of aesthetic education. It should help people share as fully as possible in the creative and expressive qualities of a work of art, so they can experience the exploration and discovery of feelings captured in those pieces. It should also involve people in the creation of Art to the fullest extent possible, to experience their own exploration and discovery of feelings through the act of creation.

The production of a musical is one of the real joys in life, and students can benefit from its various activities. The sheer delight of students' singing and acting, listening to fine music, dancing, playing and enjoying music together as a big "family" is a reward in itself. Whichever roles the students are involved in, be it the main roles in the production or backstage crew members, the experience offers tremendous benefits – academically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. It is a form of reconciliation of individual uniqueness with social unity.

In his forward in the program note, the principal, Mr. Tan Keng Joo said:

*“The musical provides the opportunity for the development of the pupils' artistic talents. It helps to arouse an interest and inculcate an appreciation of the aesthetic among the performers and audience... the performers come from different levels and streams. Participation in the musical enhances the self-esteem, morale and confidence of the pupils beside fostering a sense of belonging to the school.”*

Musical making provides so many varied activities that every student can be assured of succeeding in at least one – and often more than one, regardless of his or her mental ability. It also requires several hours of preparation. However, the time and effort are well spent because the students eventually have learnt in many ways. Most important of all, at the end of performance, the students were able to say, “I DID IT!” Self-worth is a critical construction in the affect-motivation link. Therefore the maintenance of positive perceptions of competence and general self-worth in each student is essential.

As a teacher, apart from having to impart the knowledge to our students so that they could perform well in the examination, we must always continue to be bounded by the nature of education. We must not forget that teaching and learning are our primary function, so that we must conform to the best that is known about how to teach effectively and to provide the most stimulating possible environment for learning to occur.

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