OVERHEAD PROJECTPLAY: FILLING THE CREATIVITY GAP OF 21st CENTURY LEARNERS

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Abstract
Some studies show Millennials are tech-savvy but lack of soft skills needed in the working world. Creativity is one of the soft skills needed and indeed, is one of the pillars in Trilling and Fadel's 21st C Skills that students need to master. Overhead Projectplay (OP), a shadow puppet play using overhead projectors done in Theatrical Design class, English for Creative Industry Program at Petra Christian University, can be a good theater education project to foster students' creativity. The process to create OP is proven to nurture students' ability to think creatively, work creatively with others and implement innovations, as they used the classic technology and became the playwright, director, and actor.

Keywords: 21st Century skills, Creativity, Theater Education, Overhead Projectplay

Introduction
Millennials grew up with the internet and gadgets, making them a generation dubbed as digital natives. Yet, their being tech savvy alone does not guarantee them a job after graduation, as employers perceive them lacking the necessary soft skills demanded by the working world (American Management Association, 2012; White, 2013; Pianin, 2014; Jaschik, 2015; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Schooley, 2017). Companies expect graduates to possess a good set of soft skills on top of the hard skills for the industry they wish to enter, but these youths, as confident as they are in their soft skills, are unable to fulfil that (Jaschik, 2015; Hart Research Associates, 2015). In Indonesia, although there has not been studies as frequent or as complete as in the United States, concerns over college students' and graduates' lack of soft skills and its link to employability are present (Zubaidah, 2013; Gewati, 2016; Muhammad, 2017; "Soft Skills Lengkapi," 2018). Scholars in education has raised the importance of soft skills even more so since at least a decade ago (Schulz, 2008, Trilling & Fadel, 2009), but the aforementioned studies and news articles show that the concern over this unmet need has consistently appeared years after. It is clear that more needs to be done.

Among so many required soft skills, creativity is one of the prominent skills when we consider what the future means to businesses and the workforce. As Industry 4.0 is approaching fast, where automation is predicted to replace human workers in various job sectors and more jobs are done by using advanced technology and networks, creativity ranks third in the top 10 key skills for employees globally as they need to be able to handle matters which machines cannot deal with and to spot new opportunities (World Economic Forum, 2016; Gray, 2016). Working millennials in 36 countries, including Indonesia, are aware of this growing need for creativity in the future related to their job and state that they are unprepared for that (Deloitte, 2018). The urgency to address this soft skill gap is real.

Considering the facts and the trend of future jobs, it is imperative for universities to pay more attention to building their students' soft skills, particularly, creativity. In fact, government, companies, and working youths are all in unison when it comes to that (Zubaidah, 2013; AMA, 2012; Muhammad, 2017; Deloitte, 2018). More often than not, a university is students' last formal training ground that stands between them and the professional workplace. A university, then, has to shoulder a greater responsibility to hone students' creativity skills.

A clearer sense of higher education's responsibility in equipping students with creativity can be further established by the fact that creativity is one of the main pillars in Trilling and Fadel's (2009) 21st Century Skills. Creativity and innovation nest under the Learning and Innovation Skills, the top sets of skills most in demand in the 21st century. Creativity and innovation, along with critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, are "three top-drawer skill sets in our toolbox for learning, work, and life in the 21st century" (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 60). With creativity deemed as a skill crucial not only for learning and work, but also for life, it is all the more reason for higher education to make sure that they do the best they can to provide creativity trainings for their students before they graduate.

To develop their students' creativity, higher education needs to form "learning environments that foster questioning, patience, openness to fresh ideas, high levels of trust, and learning from mistakes and failures" (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 57-58). That type of learning environment would make students comfortable to come up with new ideas no matter how silly or trivial they seem to obtain a certain goal, question and explore them, and not feel dejected when those ideas do not work. Instead, students would cherish those mistakes and failures as an integral part in finding the best way to achieve that goal, and use what they learn from those mistakes and failure to come up with better ideas.

Trilling & Fadel used the Partnership for 21st Century Skills framework for building creativity and innovation skills where students should be able to think creatively, work creatively with others, and implement innovations. To think creatively means students "use a wide range of idea creation techniques such as brainstorming; create novel, new and worthwhile ideas both incremental and radical concepts; elaborate, refine, analyse and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative efforts" (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 59). To work creatively with others, students:

> *develop, implement and communicate new ideas to others effectively; are open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives; incorporate group input and feedback into the work; demonstrate originality and inventiveness in work and understand the real world limits to adopting new ideas; and view failure as an opportunity to learn; understand that creativity and innovation is a long-term, cyclical process of small successes and frequent mistakes.* (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 59)

Then, to implement innovations, students "act on creative ideas to make a tangible and useful contribution to the field in which the innovation will occur" (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 59).

While higher education can and should adopt this framework for creativity in many ways, art education should be at the forefront as art is always associated with creativity. Theatre education, in particular, can play a significant role in helping students cultivate their creativity. Theatre is considered "more likely to foster creativity" (Bailin, 2011, p. 209) because creativity in drama "is possible in all aspects of dramatic work" (Bailin, 2011, p. 210). The product that theatre produces is a result of many roles which use the interplay of imagination, interpretation, skills, knowledge, and critical judgment in doing their part for that dramatic work (Bailin, 2011).

Bailin (2011) argues that there are at least three aspects or roles in producing a dramatic work which function as an arena for creativity: playwriting/playwright, directing/director, and acting/actor. A playwright creates a script that portrays human experience and their possibility and expresses them in the choice of words, in what is said and not said by the characters, the indicated or envisioned stage movement, in the setting suggested, and in the dramatic structure created. A director interprets the play, the characters in it, the meaning of lines and interactions, and the particular ways to bring those alive in the performance. An actor needs to work with the script, director, and fellow actors to understand and analyse his or her character and present it in a believable way on top of other acting skills like movements, voice and body control, projection. This creativity training is present in every act of playwriting, directing, and acting, regardless whether or not it results in a new or innovative genre or work or treatment.

Based on what we have done in the Theatrical Design class at Petra Christian University, we would like to propose that Overhead Projectplay (OP), a name we use for a shadow puppet play using vintage overhead projectors, can serve as a good theatre project to provide a creativity training for university students. Using the one-and-a-half-month observation of the steps and process that students used to create this project as they became the playwrights, the directors, and the actors of their performance, as well as the end product, we can say that OP nurtures students' ability to think creatively, work creatively with others, and implement innovations.

This art form was brought to our attention when we learned about Manual Cinema, a Chicago-based "performance collective, design studio, and film/video production company founded in 2010 by Drew Dir, Sarah Fornace, Ben Kauffman, Julia Miller, and Kyle Vegter" (Dir, 2016, p. E-15) which calls their art work "cinematic shadow puppetry" (Dir, 2016, p. E-15). Manual Cinema (MC) combines "handmade shadow puppetry, cinematic techniques, and innovative sound and music to create immersive stories for stage and screen" (Dir, 2016, p. E-15). In its typical performances, MC uses "vintage overhead projectors, multiple screens, puppets, actors, live feed cameras, multichannel sound design, and a live-music ensemble" (Dir, 2016, p. E-15) but with no dialogue, giving the audience "a silent film aesthetic" (Denyer, 2017) experience. Another unique aspect of MC is that they perform literally between the audience and the screens which show the final product of their art, letting the audience see not only the artwork but also the artists at work. It is a compelling sight for the audience as they witness the construction of the art and the result simultaneously (Denyer, 2017).

We recognized immediately that this was something we could include in our Theatrical Design class as an appealing project which would both challenge and foster students' creativity due to its simplicity in technology and its complexity in execution. We also realized how our students might relate to this art form, as it bears resemblances with *wayang*, the traditional Indonesian shadow puppet show. We then simplified MC's typical performance approach and only borrowed the use of vintage overhead projectors on a screen, puppets, and performing between the screen and the audience. We also added a pre-recorded narration and music to be played during the performance, parting with MC's no dialogue concept.

Method

Thirteen third-year students in the Theatrical Design class were divided into four groups to develop a ten-to-fifteen-minute OP performance based on Indonesian folktales in English. This was done in one and a half months, from late October 2017 to the performance date in early December 2017, where the class met weekly and the groups also met outside the class for independent work and rehearsals.

Throughout this project, we mainly used observation for data gathering. Since we were with the students from the beginning until the day of the performance, we had direct access to observe how they conducted each step and how they interacted with one another during the whole process. In doing so, we gathered meaningful insights in how thinking creatively, working creatively with others, and implementing innovation occurred in this project, as well as how students cultivated their creativity in the arenas of playwriting, directing, and acting.

After we introduced the students to MC and the art form, we devised these seven steps for the students to follow.

Creating the script

Just like with most performances, it all starts with the script. Students first discussed and decided a story based on the given topic. As a group, they decided on a specific folktale, then they wrote the story. While they were not creating the story from scratch, since the folktales exist already, they had to decide which version of the folktale they wanted to use and then wrote the script in English. This script, which consists of narration and dialogs, would later be recorded and played in the performance.

Creating the story board

The fact that OP would be a visual-heavy performance requires these OP student-artists to visualize the script they had created. It was then most apt to borrow a method from film, a highly visual medium, in the next step: story board. They had to come up with detailed story board from the beginning until the end of the script, including deciding whether a scene would be presented in a certain way (medium shot, close up, etc.) and whether or not there was any movement in that scene. This detailed story board would become the very performance they would do for the audience. In creating this story board, they would also learn all the necessary puppets and objects they had to create to do the performance.

Creating the prototypes of puppets and objects

Puppet making starts with the drafting of the puppets and objects which will appear in the performance. Students either drew the puppets and objects themselves or found pictures on the internet then modified them. Either way, they needed to use a consistent visual style throughout the story. Most puppets were made of paper or plastic. These puppets and objects were prototypes since they were subject to change in the editing process.

Rehearsing

This is the step where students attempted to bring each frame in their story board to live. First, they had to decide which frame was shown using which one of the three overhead projectors they were using. Next, they needed to execute the frame just as they planned it in their story board, including any movement it might have. This involved placing the objects and puppets, moving them at the right time and pace, trying out any special effect, and dividing the teamwork until the desired outcome was achieved. They would also use a rough recording of the script in the rehearsal to see if it worked with the planned story board.

Editing

After students learned what worked and did not work at the rehearsals and received feedback, they then continued with the editing phase. They would make necessary changes to the script, story board, and puppets to ensure the best possible performance. This may involve changing, adding, or deleting sentences in the script; changing the pace of narration; adding, altering, or deleting a frame in the story board; changing the mechanism in moving the puppets or other objects; changing the special effect or the way to create it; and

altering the teamwork. Since rehearsing and editing are intertwined, students might go back and forth between these two steps.

Recording the script

When everything was pretty much settled and agreed on, students would do the final recording of the script. In this step, they took the role of voice actors who had to use the right pace, intonation, stressing, and vocal expressions in telling the story. This was also where they integrate any music or sound effects which would support and enhance the OP storytelling.

Rehearsing with the final audio recording

The last thing students had to do was more rehearsals using the final audio recording. This step exists to make sure everyone would perform their specific tasks at the exact moment with great accuracy. It is necessary for these OP-artists to do it over and over to develop the muscle memory in performing their part.

Results and Discussion

Upon the implementation of those seven steps, each of these four groups presented a ten-to-fifteen-minute OP performance at Petra Little Theatre on December 5-6, 2017. The performances were: The Legend of Danau Toba, Keong Mas, The Legend of Candi Prambanan/Roro Jonggrang, and The Legend of Batu Menangis. Each group performed three times for 195 diverse audience members in total, from primary school students, youths, to adults. Their performances enchanted the audience and left a lasting impression.

The responses from audience members confirm that OP, as a theatre art form, champions creativity both in its conception and execution. They said that using an old technology to create captivating performances was a brilliant idea. Some also pointed out how creative the efforts of the groups were to promote forgotten or lesser-known folktales to the audience, especially primary school students. Some were in awe with the precise synchronization of the movements by the performers. They acknowledged timing as the vulnerable element here. One little movement out of the agreed plan could ruin the harmony of the performance. It is clear from these comments that the audience could see how thinking creatively and working creatively with others as playwrights, directors, and actors, without a doubt, played crucial roles in creating the innovative performance. This type of outcome was the result of creativity training which the students underwent while developing their performance, which we will describe below.

The moment we introduced the students to MC and this particular art form, we could see how it appealed to them. Students acknowledged how cool yet challenging the art form was and felt intrigued to create something similar (Logbook, October 25, 2017). They were aware of the limiting nature of overhead projectors but it excited them to work around that to create a captivating performance. We saw this as a good sign as these youths showed genuine interest and the art form poked at their sense of creativity, preparing them for the process ahead.

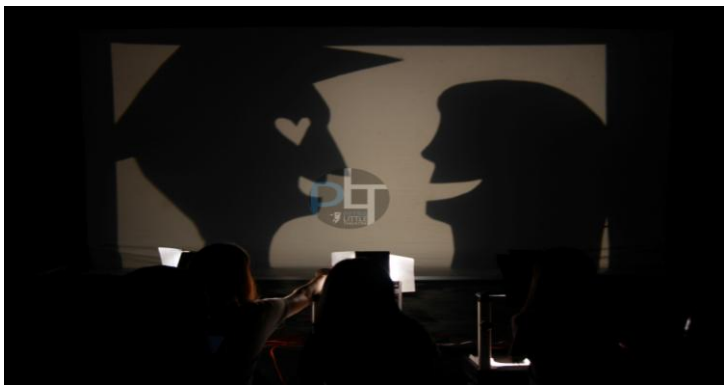
During the development phase, we witnessed these students actively engaged their creative thinking and work creatively with their group members in each step. In general, we observed that they brainstormed, discussed, and made all decision as a group after careful analysis and evaluation on each elaborated idea. When ideas were rejected or proven ineffective, they would identify the problem and find a solution, realizing that it was all a regular process when it comes to creativity and innovation. They would even give feedback to other groups when necessary. Without functioning creatively as both an individual and a group, none of the group would ever produce a good OP performance. These abilities fit right into Trilling & Fadel's description of thinking creatively and working creatively (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 59).

Although thinking creatively occurred in every step, this skill emerged strongly in three aspects. The first one was when they created and edited the script. Taking up their role as playwright, they focused on how to express the folktale in English using the most suitable words and sentences, and dialogs which sounded natural and meaningful. When we informed The Legend of Batu Menangis group, for example, that some of the dictions were stiff and too old-fashioned for contemporary audience, they worked to find better replacements (Logbook, November 8, 2017). Another example was when we asked for a more detail description for some parts of the narration for the Keong Mas group, and for them to check whether the expression they used at the ending of their script fit the tone of the story, they changed those parts accordingly (Logbook, November 18, 2017). The result for both groups was a clearer and more enjoyable script. This fact, then, also shows that playwriting is indeed an arena for creativity.

The second aspect which showcases the students' creative thinking and in fact, also their innovation in this art form, is when they created the prototypes of the puppets. The students, facing the fact that they possessed different drawing ability, came up with different visual styles, some were more innovative than others. The Legend of Danau Toba group decided to use a very simple style which they could draw more

easily, relying on basic shapes of objects and people with minimum details (Logbook, November 15, 2017). On the other hand, The Legend of Candi Prambanan group adopted a Japanese manga style and combined it with tracings of real pictures of the temple which are labeled for reuse with modification (Logbook, November 15, 2017). This shows that they were able to think creatively to either work around the limitation concerning their drawing skill or to use what they had and combined it with other resources.

Other than the style and shape of the prototypes, students also displayed creative thinking and innovation in terms of mechanism in moving the puppets. Movements would create a livelier and more enjoyable scene, so students needed to find the right mechanisms to move their puppets. Discussions on puppets' movement and functions, followed by experiments to find the most suitable and reliable mechanism took place before they could finally create a new style of puppets. The Keong Mas group, for example, tried attaching palm-leaf ribs to the puppets to move them, but the result was visually unappealing on the screen. After several attempts, they settled with strips of transparent plastic glued to the parts they wanted to move. These strips provided enough invisibility on the screen, yet they were sturdy enough to move the puppets (Logbook, November 22, 2017).



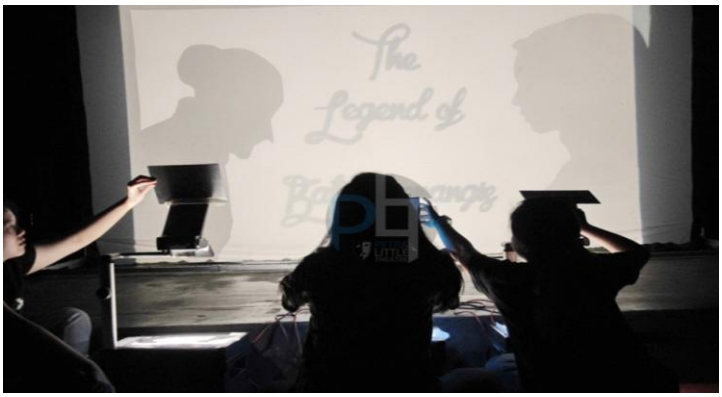
Picture 1. The simple visual style used by The Legend of Danau Toba group. Picture used by permission, © 2017 Petra Little Theatre.

The third aspect which highlights our students' creative thinking skill was the special effects. Special effects are an important element in any performance because they are excitement-inducing, and OP is no exception, especially because the artists are working with limiting technology. The Danau Toba group managed to change Toba's and the lady-fish's eyes into heart-shaped ones to symbolize how much in love they were. This was done by creating two heart-shaped holes as the puppets' eyes and covering them with a piece of paper until the moment came for the students to pull the paper and reveal the heart-shaped eyes. (Logbook, November 29, 2017). The Legend of Batu Menangis group cleverly adhesive-taped three transparent plastic sheets with raindrop prints on them into one long sheet and ran it in a steady pace to show a never-ending rain pour, while one of them turned the daughter puppet into stone by slowly pulling up the plastic attached to the legs of the puppet which already turned into stone, covering more parts of its body with stone-shaped paper (Logbook, November 29, 2017). It was amazing to witness how creative these young people were to innovate when they knew the goal that they would like to achieve.

Picture 2. The Legend of Batu Menangis group doing a scene where the daughter turns into stone during a storm. Picture used by permission, © 2017 Petra Little Theatre.

Looking at these last two aspects specifically as a theatre production, they demonstrate the students' creativity as director of the performance. Their decisions of using or not using a particular mechanism or a special effect reflected their directing ability to interpret the scene, the interactions happening there plus the characters. They knew the type of movement and special effect they wanted, and they made various attempts to achieve that. They exercised their critical judgment using their imagination, knowledge, creativity, and skills. With every trial-and-error, they trained both their directing and creative thinking skills to come up with alternatives that addressed the particular issue and finally produced the best possible way to move their puppets or to present certain special effects for a great performance.

Just like with thinking creatively, the training of students' skill to work creatively with others occurred all the way in OP development, yet it was the most intense during the rehearsals, particularly in acquiring the perfect timing for a well-synchronized performance. To do that, students had to set their scene as soon as possible, and to know exactly when to move the puppets, and if one member was helping another in that frame, he or she had to perform that task at the exact moment. For example, in The Legend of Batu Menangis group, one member had to be ready to use both hands to perform the laundry scene, so another member had to find the right moment to close the flap on the projector displaying the previous scene and open the flap on that projector with the laundry scene (Logbook, November 22, 2017). If the closing and opening of the flaps were done late, audience would not see a smooth transition of the scenes, and that would disturb the flow of the performance. The member who did the laundry scene also had to come up with clear hand movements that showed the way the character in the story did the laundry (Logbook, November 22, 2017). That way it would be believable for the audience.



Picture 3. Working together during the show. Picture used by permission, © 2017 Petra Little Theatre.

More than just training their skill to work creatively with others, this aspect also engaged their creativity as actors. Students had to analyze the scene and the character they were playing to be able to portray him or her through the right movements. The practice to find the right movements was needed so they could produce the exact movements every time they performed that part. This also applies for those who helped their teammates in opening and closing the flap. They also had to remember and internalize their movements in the sense of speed and time accuracy. Without these skills, they could not present a great performance.

Conclusion

When we put the seven development steps of OP under Trilling & Fadel's framework for creativity and innovation and Bailin's arenas of creativity in theatre, we found that the steps fit perfectly in fostering creativity. All the creativity skills in Trilling & Fadel was always present in every step. Meanwhile, the innovation skill was mostly challenged in the step of creating prototypes. Bailin's creativity arenas in the making of a dramatic work were obvious in OP, with directing/director and acting/actor as the dominant ones. Therefore, we are confident that OP can function as an effective creativity training for university students. OP helps students fulfill the framework of creativity skills needed for their future in the 21st century.

We would also like to encourage fellow faculty members to consider using OP as one of their pedagogical methods in helping the students cultivate their creativity skills and to encourage more research on this art form pertaining to creativity. We believe further development of the steps we provided in this paper would increase the effectiveness of the method or cover other possible aspects.

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