

## 'THEATRE BY REQUEST' AS THEATRE EDUCATION ALTERNATIVE.

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### Abstract

*"Theatre by Request "(TbR) is the name of one of the show's methods performed by the Studio Teater Yogyakarta initiated and led by Eko Santosa aka Eko Ompong. The basic principle of TbR is the strong interaction between viewers and performances based on the theatre game—that usually being used as basic acting training. The audience becomes part of the show with the opportunity to select and determine the number of actors' performances, themes, to control the performance of the show through certain rules set by Eko Ompong as the TbR Host. The purpose of TbR is to introduce the nature of theatre to the public, especially to school children in a simple but interesting way. The purpose of this research is to understand TbR as Theatre Education Alternative."*

**Keyword:** theatre by request (tbr), interactive, theatre education alternative

### Abstrak

"Theatre by Request (TbR) adalah nama dari salah satu metode pertunjukan dari Studio Teater yang diinisiasi oleh Eko Santosa atau Eko Ompong. Prinsip dasar dari TbR adalah interaksi yang kuat antara penonton dengan pertunjukan. Pertunjukan ini terinspirasi dari '*theatre game*' yang biasanya digunakan untuk latihan dasar pemeran. Penonton menjadi bagian dari pertunjukan dengan kesempatan untuk memilih dan menentukan aktor yang akan bermain, tema, hingga mengontrol jalannya pertunjukan melalui aturan tertentu yang ditentukan oleh Eko Ompong—yang bertindak juga sebagai 'Host' pertunjukan. Tujuan dari TbR dengan bentuk pertunjukan seperti ini adalah untuk memperkenalkan teater kepada masyarakat awam, khususnya anak-anak usia sekolah melalui cara yang sederhana tapi menarik. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami TbR sebagai alternatif pendidikan teater.

**Kata kunci:** *theatre by request (tbr), interaktif, alternatif pendidikan teater*

## INTRODUCTION

Theatre, as part of the art world, has more functions than spectacle but also guidance. The public at large has known that theatre has long functioned as an educational medium. On the other hand, the traditional theatre has also often functioned as a communication medium (Bandem and Murgiyanto, 1996:30).

There is an assumption that theatre is an effective educational medium (Kasemin, 1999:13-17). According to Indonesian History, the theatre has long functioned as a medium for empowerment and program socialization. Traditional theatre-like *ludruk* often functions as a propaganda tool. In the New Order, the government used *ludruk* as a

media for program socialization, such as the Family Planning program and others. The theatres that serve to provide this kind of education are known as Educational Theatre.

Seeing how precious the position of theatre other than as art itself is, also able to be utilized as effective communication and education media, the preservation of theatre is considered necessary. Not surprisingly, various arts began to include theatre as one of the choices of majors in the academic world. There is an assumption that theatre arts education or drama as a practical learning media in character education for students.

Usually, the teaching practices of the theatre, especially in non-vocational schools of art, such as in public schools, are based on ready-made drama texts. It is well-founded, considering that, as previously mentioned, theatre is usually a subset of Indonesian language and literature subjects. Drama script is the leading media for learning Indonesian language and literature. Then students who master the script can make it happen in the form of performances so that it becomes a form of performance (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2016:28).

Teaching theatre based on the script certainly has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages, if judging from the aspect of literature review, learners are required to be able to interpret the drama script as part of the literary work. The disadvantage, when it is required to translate in the form of performances, usually learners will be more focused on artistic cultivation or staging, instead of extracting the literary value of the drama script.

Another problem with drama-based theatre learning is that not all learners have the ability to memorize a script well within a short time frame. As a result, theatre learning is seen as scary enough for students, especially those from public schools. Theatre is then seen as only belong to talented people or indeed have an interest there. According to Viola Spolin, an art teacher in the role of Hollywood actors, everyone can act. Anyone can be in the stage world because the theatre is a representation of human experience (Spolin, 1983:3).

The problem between how the relationship between education (science) with (art) this theatre, according to Bambang Sugiharto, can be distinguished paradigmatically. Science, especially empirical science or science, is one of the means to interpret the experiences. However, he interpreted it by reducing, shrinking, simplifying or abbreviating it into the interests of pragmatic alias interests to use and utilize it. On the other hand, art (theatre), views nature differently. He does not exploit and manipulate it but instead helps to show the true beauty of that realm. If science abbreviates reality, art reveals a wealth of reality (Sugiharto, 2004:20).

Considering theatre and educational positions, whether theatre as educational or theatre of education as above, Eko Santosa or better known as Eko Ompong, a theatre director from Jogja as well as theatre majors educator in the Center for Development and Empowerment of Teachers and Education Personnel Arts and Culture Yogyakarta, mixing a performance model that combines the function of theatre as a medium of education as well as education about the theatre itself. This staging model is called Theatre by Request (hereinafter abbreviated as TbR) (Santosa, 2017:15).

TbR is not the name of a theatre group. TbR is the name of the method of the pattern of the show that puts the audience position as the determinant of the performance of the show. In other words, TbR designed the interaction between the audience and the show as part of the show. The audience is free to determine whom the actor will play, the theme to be played, even up to the tempo of the game.

In contrast to theatre performances in general that offers a variety of stories that are adapted from various media such as drama script, prose, and folklore, TbR wants to

socialize the theatre itself. If in general theatrical performances invite the audience to address the idea, value or message of the narration that is displayed through the theatre, in TbR audience is invited to know the world of theatre itself by involving them in determining the show.

Starting from 2010 to 2018, Eko Santosa along with TbR has performed 25 times in 22 cities in Indonesia (<http://teateredukasi.blogspot.com> accesed Januari 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018 at 1.00 pm). Most of the staging of TbR held in high schools (junior high, high school, even up to college, although there are also performances held at PPPPTK Arts and Culture Yogyakarta, where they used to practice and process.

To facilitate the interaction between TbR and its audience, it takes the presence of a Host. The presence of a Host as an understanding between the audience with what is presented on stage is needed. A host here is tasked to guide the audience in understanding the numbers offered while explaining the intent of the show that has been presented. Usually, this host is delivered directly by Eko himself, considering he himself who most understand the concept of this TbR show.



Pic. 1. Eko Santosa offered Play Option to the Audience

Eko admits that TbR is an Applied Theatre type which is a show designed to be applied to a particular community or case, in this case is the application of interaction with the audience (Interview with Eko Santosa, January 31<sup>st</sup> 2018, at Studio Teater, PPPPTK Seni dan Budaya Yogyakarta). Simply put, the Applied Theatre was born out of the view that theatre has the potential and functionality outside of the theatre (as the show) itself. Theatre is not only seen as a representation of life but has an influence on life itself (Nicholson, 2005:4).

Augusto Boal, Brazilian theatres director, consider that to be able to make the theatre "useful" is one of them by changing the position of the people (spectators) who are usually regarded as passive creatures in the perteateran phenomenon into active subjects who can be positioned as actors, presented performances (Boal, 2013:138). The same principle is applied in TbR in positioning the audience.

TbR does not seem to want to be seen as a conventional theatre group that can only offer performances that make the audience passive but want to invite the audience is actively involved in the show that offers educational theatre. The liveliness of the audience to be involved in the theatre event held by Studio Theatre through its TbR can be likened to teaching and learning activities where learners are expected to actively engage in learning activities. In other words, TbR does not seem to want to offer only a theatre education but also presents educational theatre in every performance.



Pic 2. One of The Audience (far left with Eko Santosa) controls the performance using percussion instrument

## METHOD

This research is a qualitative research so that oriented on qualitative methodology as follows:

### 1. Data Collection Technique

Data collection was carried out in three phases of activity, namely collecting and studying literature, field observations, and interviews.

- a. Studying and collecting literature count slowly on applied theatre as well as Eko Santosa articles and writings about the theatre studio and his views on theatre.
- b. Field Observation Field observation is directed at efforts to observe in depth the training and staging of TbR activities.
- c. The interview led to the parties involved in TbR activities, especially the artists who were directly involved such as Eko Santosa. Because, he in the TbR has a central role, namely as a drafter and implementer. Interviews were also conducted with studio theater members and some viewers of the TbR program.

### 2. Selection of Research Objects

In accordance with the title of research on the Theatre by Request as Theatre Education as well as Theatre Education, then the object of study is the number of TbR performances into a medium to bring the interaction between the audience with the show. The various types and forms of these TbR numbers affect the interaction patterns with the audience. In addition, the observation notes of the creation process (including training patterns), the interaction patterns with the audience and the role of the TbR show are also needed to deepen the analysis. This is supported by the availability of documentation of TbR performances that are determined as material objects and then the creative process as the formal objects that are subjected to the study.

3. Data Analysis using Augusto Boal Theory about Applied Theatre.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Eko Santosa's inspiration in creating this interactive TbR concept is based on the principle of Applied Theatre initiated by Augusto Boal, which treats the audience not as passive audience but must be actively involved in the show. According to Augusto Boal, the theatre that makes the audience passive (just watching) and no initiative to engage actively in the show will only make the audience represent their thoughts, hearts and decisions to the characters played on stage. Such a theatre does not treat the audience as the subject of the individual who has his own thoughts, feelings and opinions but "oppresses" them with the theatre's own thinking.

Augusto Boal's thoughts about the "oppression" of the audience were influenced by Brazilian educational leader Paulo Freire. As a figure with the same fate as Augusto Boal in the oppression of a despotic Brazilian military government, Paulo Freire criticized the educational system at the time he called "bank style education" (Freire, 2016:52). Bank style education is education that treats learners like empty vessels filled by teachers. The benchmark for a good and successful teacher is if the "vessels" are fully charged without thinking that the learners have the right to be critical of the material offered by the teacher (Freire, 2016:52). This kind of education, for Paulo Freire, is the same as oppression (Freire, 2016: 16,27,28)

According to Paulo Freire, good education should be able to present a dialogical situation between teachers and students / learners. Dialogical education is education that puts teachers as fellow students who are together critical of the material offered by the teacher. Teachers motivate students to open awareness and critical power to jointly address the material offered (Freire, 2016:23-25). Augusto Boal then adapted this thought by Paulo Freire by transforming the people - the "spectators", passive beings in the perteateran phenomenon - into subjects, becoming actors, becoming peers of dramatic action or behavior (Boal, 2013:138).

In Augusto Boal theatre works, there is a Joker who plays a flexible role and can act at will to be part of the narrative or outside the narrative and then stop the show to ask the opinions of the audience even let them play the role. The Joker in the Augusto Boal theatres is the bridge of the audience with the show as well as the critical awareness opening of the audience to what is presented on stage.

TbR itself seems to have a figure that is almost similar to the role of Joker from the theatre Augusto Boal. In TbR, this figure is known as "Host". The job of a Host in TbR is to open and close the show, selecting and offering to the audience the number of games to be played along with which actors and themes are selected. But whether the role of Host in TbR is similar to the role of Joker in Augusto Boal seems to need further study.

Augusto Boal's thoughts on how to position the audience in this show will be an analysis in answering the problems in this study that seek to explore the role of the TbR staging pattern from the Theatre Studio as an educational theatre. Augusto Boal's thoughts are in line with Paulo Freire's idea of benchmarking education from how to position learners in teaching and learning activities.

In relation to how the transformation process positioned the audience as part of the show, Augusto Boal offered four stages (Boal, 2013:142):

The first stage, Know the Body. A series of exercises are conducted to let a person know his body, its limitations and possibilities, social distortions and possible rehabilitation. Given the instrument and the main medium an actor is his own body. It is important that an audience-actor (spect-actor) knows his body well first. The same training technique is also used in TbR that is always preceded by physical training before going into the material of the numbers TbR.

The second stage, Makes Body Expressive. Here is a series of games to encourage people to begin expressing themselves with the body, leaving behind other, more familiar forms of expression.

In TbR (as Boal does), post-physical training as a warm-up, practice goes into the game (theatre game). Here the bodies of the actors-the actors and actors of TbR themselves are required to be expressive. In addition to training yourself more expressively, the game theatre will strengthen interaction between players.

Third stage, Theatre as Language. Here one begins to practice the theatre as a living and present language, not as a finished product that features images of the past, as is usually the case in dramatic play-based theatres.

Fourth stage, Theatre as Discourse / Discourse. The simple forms in which the actor-the-audience creates "spectacles" in harmony with his need to discuss certain themes.

In TbR, this fourth stage is the key to audience interaction and involvement in the show. The audience is given the freedom to determine who the actor will perform, what stories are delivered, to the dynamics of the flow of the show.

The four stages of audience transformation to the actor from Augusto Boal above will be used to analyze the numbers of the TbR shows by looking at how each number constructs a particular interaction pattern between the audience and the show. Each show number has an interaction pattern with different audiences with each other. From the results of this analysis, is expected to be read how TbR put himself as an educational theatre.

Based on observations on the exercises and performances of TbR, it was found that the pattern of interaction between the audience and the show was formed through the performance numbers presented. This interaction pattern determines the extent to which the role of Theatre Studio through TbR strives to be an educational theatre that conveys theatre education. Broadly speaking, there are three types of distribution of the number of TbR shows namely "General Options", "Replay", and "Audience Control". What distinguishes all three is the pattern of interaction where in the "General Options" and "Replay" numbers, the audience is given the opportunity to determine the actors and theme of the story to be played and enjoy the show until it is finished. While the type of number "Audience Control", the audience not only determine the actors and theme of the story but also given the opportunity to control the course of the show by sounding a certain music instrument (kenong) as a marker of changes that must be made based on rules related to certain numbers.

As a show, TbR is able to offer a new and interactive form of performances. Although when it was returned to how Augusto Boal placed the audience as a subject who has the right to be part of the whole show, TbR still has not fully given that opportunity to the audience. Viewers are not allowed to play directly as actors at the TbR shows, as should "specter-actors" like Augusto Boal's thoughts. Despite its interactive nature, the freedom of the audience in interacting with the TbR show is still tied to certain rules.

The Host's position in TbR itself is also not entirely similar to the Joker character in the Augusto Boal theatre. In the Augusto Boal theatres, Joker plays the audience awareness and asks the audience to express their opinions to allow them to play as actors. In TbR, the Host plays a role to ask the audience to choose the number of the show, determine the actors, the story, control the show, express opinions like at certain numbers (End by Audience and Suggestion by Audience) and no less important is to explain about what theatre education can be studied from the numbers presented TbR.

Hosts in TbR can be likened to teachers who provide knowledge to their students. Although connected with Paulo Freire's thoughts on education, the transfer of knowledge in the TbR is still one-way and not dialogical. The audience is still treated like an empty vessel waiting to be poured out by the Host, instead of criticizing the material and then discussing it with the Host. The material on the theoretical basis is still more dominantly delivered and explained by the Host, instead of being directly digested by the audience, it may even be possible to be practiced directly on the spot by the audience.

## CONCLUSION

TbR has strived to provide an alternative to the world of performances as well as the world of education, especially theatre education. As a show, TbR offers new, interactive and educative performances. As an educative theatre, TbR offers a different method of introducing theatre education. If during this theatre education is still largely using drama script as a learning resource, TbR offers a game theatre that is manifested in the form of interactive performances.

The theatre education that TbR wants to convey seems clearly legible, but as an educational theatre, TbR should modify the pattern of audience interaction in order to bring a dialogical interactive atmosphere. The audience is expected to take the educational value not only from the verbal explanation of the Host but also from their critical process in addressing the TbR show.

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