

STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING IN
'THE SCHOOL OF ROCK' MOVIE
DIRECTED BY RICHARD LINKLATER

Iwan Pranoto
(Universitas Palangka Raya)
Pranotoiwan@fkip.upr.ac.id

ABSTRACT

One of the teachers in the 'School of Rock' movie is characterized uniquely compared to the others. Instead of being like a teacher normally does, the main character of this movie is a member of a band who disguises himself as a teacher. He once pretends to be his friend who applied as a teacher in that certain school. Categorized as a comedy movie, it does not have a serious plot but is a lot of fun. Nevertheless, an interesting thing pops up about how the main character, Dewey, teaches art through his 'own way of teaching'. To analyze this movie deeper, the researcher used a literature review as a data collection. This article was then presented by using a narrative method that is by breaking down each element thoroughly and educational approach through Herbert Read's art. By completing this article, it is expected to see the interrelation between the elements building the art with its comprehensive meaning.

Keywords: education for liberation, education through art, school of rock

INTRODUCTION

School of Rock was released on October 3, 2003, by Paramount Pictures, grossing \$131 million worldwide. This movie successfully received positive reviews from critics and viewers, with praise for the lead actor's performance, Jack Black. School of Rock is one of the highest-grossing music-themed comedy movie of all time. The story

begins with the appearance of the 'No Vacancy' rock band at a nightclub, three weeks before they join the audition for the Battle of the Bands competition. The guitarist, Dewey Finn, created antics including moshing on stage that abruptly ended the band's performance.

The next morning, Dewey wakes up in the apartment he lives in with Ned Schneebly and his

girlfriend, Patty Di Marco. They told him that he had to either pay the rent or move out. When he met with 'No Vacancy' members at a practice session, he found out that he had been replaced by another guitarist, Spider. Then, while trying to sell some of his belongings for paying rent, he answered a phone call from Rosalie Mullins, the principal of Horace Green Elementary School, asking Ned about a position as a substitute teacher. Desperate for money, Dewey disguises himself as Ned and lands the position. On his first day at school, he claims his name to be "Mr. S" and spends the whole day acting strangely in class.

On the second day, Dewey overhears the students playing their instruments in a music class and planning to form a new band for the Battle of the Bands audition. He picks Zack Mooneyham as a lead guitarist, Freddy Jones as a drummer, Katie as a bassist, Lawrence as a pianist, and himself as vocalist and guitarist. He assigns the rest of the class as backup singer, groupies, and roadies, along with Summer Hathaway as the band manager. During the lesson, Dewey

Finn or Mr. S actually tells the students about resistance to "The Man" or the rule curbing students' creativity. He also shares his knowledge about the history of rock and metal music in the world.

Later, the name 'School of Rock' was popped out by two students as the official name of the band. Dewey sneaks a few students to go out of school to join the audition in a certain place, while the rest of the class stays behind to manipulate other teachers.

After successfully getting the audition tickets at Battle of the Bands, the misfortune came when the headmaster asked Dewey Finn to prepare presentations and introductions for the parents' meetings the night before the audition takes place. Unfortunately, Dewey Finn is caught in his disguise because Patty, Ned's girlfriend who is also his friend, reported him to the police and Horace Green's school. The parents are extremely angry knowing that their children are being taught by a fake teacher.

The next morning, a group of parents is in an uproar in front of Mullins' office; while the kids decide

not to let their hard work of practicing the band go to waste. A school bus arrives to pick up Dewey, who is taking the kids to the Battle of the Bands, and decides that they should play a song written by Zack.

Sadly, the School of Rock lost and No Vacancy won. Despite that, the audiencesshow positive responses to the School of Rock and ask them to give an encore. Mullins and the parents, who were annoyed and angry, say they are impressed by their children's talents. Sometime later, an afterschool program known as School of Rock is opened with Dewey continuing to train the students he had previously played with, while Ned teaches the beginner about music and guitar.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were obtained by employing a literature review. This study was then presented by using a narrative method that is by breaking down each element thoroughly and educational approach through Herbert Read's art. By completing this article, it is expected to see the interrelation between the elements

building the art with its comprehensive meaning

The data collection was carried out by using a literature review.

These data are used as a support for data analysis, so those that appear and will be verified are the data obtained through library research (Meztika, 2004 :1-2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Being a teacher for some people is not an easy matter, no exception for Dewey Finn, an idealistic *rocker* who was expelled from his own group. In this movie, Finn has challenged himself from a sloppy *rockerto* an elementary school teacher. Dewey Finn, played by Jack Black, is a vocalist and guitarist for a band that usually performs from one cafe to another. Finn has to accept the fact that he is expelled from his own group because his contrast idealism with the other members. During his unemployment, he accidentally receives a call from a private elementary school. The call was for Ned Schneebly, Dewey's roommate, who had applied as a substitute teacher at a school.

Tempted by the salary as a substitute teacher, Dewey pretended to be Ned Schneebly and declared himself ready to teach.

What excited Dewey to teach is his intention to participate in a band festival in his local town. Dewey casts his students to be the members and crews of the band he formed. Of course, this was done secretly without the principal and parents' permission. During the time he spent interacting with the students, he amazingly explores each of the student's potential in music that was previously less appreciated. He manages to form a band formation consisting of a drummer, guitarist, *bassist, keyboardist*, and backing singer, while he himself acts as the main vocalist.

Not only band personnel, but Dewey is also good at exploring other students' potential as the band crew. He trusts his students to handle various things, such as costumes, stage visual effects, security teams, and band *merchandise*. He seems to only give basic directions and leaves the rest to his students to be creative. As a musician, Dewey is described as someone who masters various

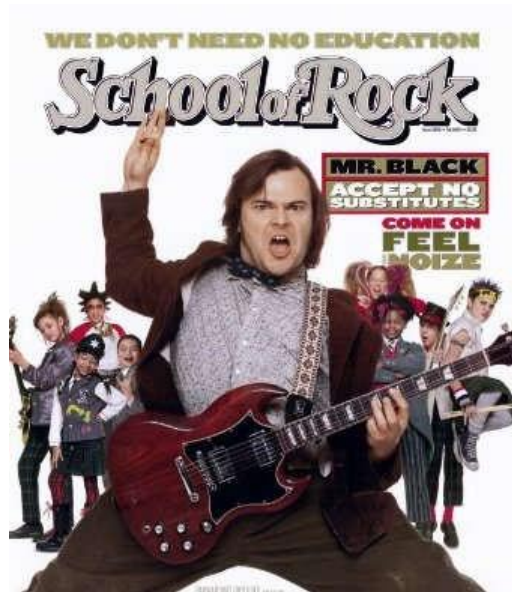
musical instruments. During the rehearsal scene, he gives directions and examples of how to play an instrument or sing for each band member. As a leader of the band, he also quickly drafts a picture of the performance they will play on stage.

Dewey's understanding of music is very strong. In one scene, he gives an assignment to the students through the *compact disc*(CD) that he distributes. He tells students which song they should pay more attention to. So does when he teaches music theory.

An expert in the educational field once stated that music has an important role in students' life. Those who actively participate in musical activities are not only developing their creativity but also improving their individual development, sensitivity, sense of beauty, expression, challenge, discipline, as well as introducing the cultural history of their nation (Rien, 1999:1)

Dewey is described as a teacher who gives material on the history of *rock music*, then analyzes the videos of several famous bands' performances. This scene is accompanied by a snippet of The Ramones' song "Bonzo Goes To

Bitburg (My Brain is Hanging



Upside Down)".

As a musician, Dewey's idealism is poured out in the group he formed. The idealism about music that is previously rejected by his colleagues, he instills in the students in simple language and in an entertaining way so that they can understand him. Besides acting as a teacher, his role to be a great motivator is also shown in the movie. Zach, the student who is chosen as the guitarist, is initially less enthusiastic about performing because his parents prohibited him from playing guitar at home. With his style, Dewey motivates Zach, even he can write a song that is then selected to be played at the band

festival. To show appreciation, Zach praises Dewey's skill in teaching music in front of other teachers when some teachers are gathering in the cafeteria.

In addition, a keyboardist who is described as a nerdy student and unconfident to perform in public is motivated by Dewey. The captain of the class also experiences the same thing. He was once chosen as a support team that takes care of the band's merchandise. However, he thought this position did not suit him. By having Dewey's full trust, he now becomes the manager of the band who takes care of everything but the performance.

Equally interesting is when Dewey motivates one of his backing singers who is suddenly unconfident before the audition because of her weight. Dewey then gives examples of singers including himself who are overweight, but have a great self-confidence.

The researcher shares the same philosophy as how Dewey's teaching-learning process is done. He believes that teaching should be student-centered, not teacher-centered. Students should be treated

as the subject of the study. Meanwhile, teachers act as a facilitator and do not become the only source of information. In student-centered learning, the teacher does not talk all the time and makes the students become passive learners.

According to Westwood (2008), Student Center Learning (SCL) is a learning method that empowers students to be the center of attention during the learning process. Rigid learning instructions from teachers are transformed into learning that provides opportunities for students to adapt to their abilities and behave well during the lesson.

Back in the movie, Dewey's disguise as Ned Schneebly is exposed. However, due to the emotional bonding with the students, the band still joins the festival secretly. The principal and parents know about it, but they ended up watching their children's performance. Because of their incredible performance, Dewey is finally trusted as a music extracurricular teacher with Ned Schneebly.

Based on this movie, Dewey Finn is not only good at being as a musician, but also as a teacher who masters both theory and practice. He also acts as a motivator who encourages students to show their true potential in music. The portrait of the teacher displayed by Dewey plays a very important role in forming students' character.

CONCLUSION

Dewey's appearance as a teacher has changed the conservative and rigid learning into a more freedom and liberal learning. Through music, he shows an example of teaching by forming a rock band to his class. No more students sitting neatly and behave politely during his class. Instead, he let his students to do what they want to do, including ridicule him, although it breaks the school's rules.

Dewey, in fact, never thought he would come to a school as a teacher. He is also not someone with such background either. At first, he was a musician, a former guitarist of a rock band. He was expelled from the band because his behavior on stage annoys his members. After he

was unemployed, he had no income to support his life.

Richard Linklater's *School of Rock* looks like an ordinary school and music genre movie. The main requirement of this genre is usually: a group of students who make a musical group or band that becomes the center of the movie, just like *Sing Street* (2016) or *Bandslam* (2009). However, it is not merely about a school-music genre, it is about a critic to educational system in formal school. It is obvious that students in formal school act like obedient robots who learn something through a restrictive curriculum. It can be seen when Dewey comes to the class for the first time and sees the students boringly join the lesson.

This movie is similar to Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* (1989). Both of them criticized the formal education system in different way. While the *Dead Poets Society* uses a literary approach, the *School of Rock* uses a musical approach. Both movies also depict teacher's role in changing students' learning perspective, from obedient into stubborn students. They also end with a reflection that student is

supposed to be free to determine what they want to learn and how they want to learn it.

a. Education that Facilitates, Not Limits

School of Rock set in an expensive favorite school. The main goal of the school is to create students who excel academically, such as smart in math, science, and so on. Memorizing is a way of learning and exams are a way to measure students' understanding of the lessons.

The statements above are pictures of formal school in general. Everything is regulated by a system or curriculum. The students are required to follow the curriculum that has been provided by the school, start from what to learn and how to learn it.

As a result, like the early scenes in this movie, they are just like robots waiting for orders from their teachers. Look at how Summer Hathaway (Miranda Cosgrove), the class president, explains to Dewey how the previous teacher taught them.

Had Dewey not been to the class, the student will remain to be a

robot. This makes this movie is interesting to be studied from an educational perspective. In a restrictive educational curriculum, students must be initiated in order to free themselves. While this movie uses a musical approach by forming a rock band to ignite the students to study freely as they wish.

If there is no intuition, their hidden talent will remain hidden. Fred (Kevin Alexander Clark) for instance, his parents or anyone will never know if he has talent as a drummer. His talent for playing the drums will also be dull because he is constantly busy with the school assignments.

Although the school has provided a special lesson for music, its portion is very small compared to the lessons that have been required by the curriculum. In liberation education, according to Paulo Freire, students should be given the opportunity to freely determine what they want to learn. If Fred is talented at drumming and loves it, the curriculum should facilitate it, not limit it, on the pretext that academics are more important than non-academics.

The liberation education of Paulo Freire above is seen in this movie. Dewey discovered his students' hidden talents in music. Despite that, the movie itself is almost entirely based on Dewey's obsession to become a rock musician, from which he can understand and facilitate his students' interests.

One of the principles of liberation education is that the teacher is the facilitator of the student's interests, and Dewey did so.

This is an ideal education system where teachers and students learn from each other. No one teaches others and no one is taught by others.

Implicitly, the *School of Rock*, through Dewey's teaching methods, wants to oppose the formal education system. Dewey once said, *"This is my way of teaching by letting students learn music by forming a band. They have musical talent and love it. How about your restrictive way of education, do the students like it? Let's see who is more successful."* Dewey managed to develop the talents of his students by his teaching method.

However, is talent always realized by every student? What

about students who don't know what their talents are? In this movie, Dewey was not able to trigger and facilitate all students to develop their potential. As a result, not all students become the part of the crew and the band members.

For example, Frankie (Angelo Massagli) and Leonard (Cole Hawkins), the two students are chosen as security team by Dewey just because they have big posture. In fact, does not every human being have the talent and potential of each? Ivan Illich in his essay entitled "Alternatives in Education" in the book *Claiming Education* once mentioned that formal schools do not let students to develop their talent and even eliminate them.

According to Ivan Illich, a formal school with its restrictive curriculum can bury the students' talent. "Students who are used to schools' rules and orders will become humans who cannot show their existence." Their brain will respond quickly to commands from the teacher to do the assignments. On the other hand, they will not be able to think when it comes to self-awareness and freedom.

At the end of the day, students will learn because they are asked to do so, not because they like it. The system is continually done as long as they become a part in a formal school. Do not talk about the opportunity to develop their talent, knowing it exists even impossible. Who cares about talent, if what students want to do is governed by the curriculum?

b. My Education Is My Authority

Education exists not to prepare the students to be what their parents or school wants in the future. It indeed determine their future but it does not mean parents have the right to choose what kind of education is the best for their children. It also cannot be imply that parents have the authority to limit what their children wants. Their future must be determined by themselves and that is what that is.

Back to the movie, the scene when Zack (Joey Gados) is scolded by his father because he is rarely seen doing schoolwork, and more often watching musical performances, shows that parents are still intervening in their children's

interests. In this case, again, *School of Rock* is similar to *Dead Poets Society* where parents become a terrible scourge and an obstacle for any student who wants to develop his interests.

Regarding parents who restrict their children's freedom in determining their education and future is depicted in Kahlil Gibran's poem:

"Your child is not yours. Give them your love, but do not give them your thoughts,
because they have their own thoughts.."

Every parent who loves their child definitely wants the best for their future. However, that does not mean parents have the right to define and formulate what is good and bad for their child's future. The good or bad, the child must decide for himself, "*Because they have their own mind*". That is what the researcher can understand from the poem above in an educational perspective.

REFERENCES

- Attard, Angela, et al. ***Student Centered Learning, Toolkit for student Staffs, and Higher Education Institution*** . Education International and the European Student Union, Brussels, Belgium, 2010.
- Priyatmojo, Achmadi., et al. 2010. ***Handbook for the Implementation of Students Centered Learning (SCL) and Teacher Aesthetic Role-Sharing (STAR)*** . Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Education Development Center.
- Redolfo, P. Ang . ***Elements of Student Centered Learning*** . Loyola Schools Loyola Antenoe de Manila University, Office of Research and Publication, 2001.
- Westwood, Peter. 2008. ***What Teachers Need to Know about Reading and writing Difficulties*** . Victoria: Acer Press.