

EXPERIENCE LEARNING PRACTICE IN EDUCATION: AN INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH THROUGH THEATRE

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I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand. ~ Confucius, 450 BC

Abstract: Development has different connotation for different group of people and many of these people are excluded for accruing the benefits of development. The fact of such exclusion are staggering, deeping, inequalities across the world. India is home to large population of different caste, creed and economic status and development can be inclusive only if all of these different groups of people are made partners and beneficiaries of the development process. Inclusive development follows UNDPs Human development approach or integrates the standards and principals of human rights; participation, non-discrimination and accountability. The present paper focuses on theatre as a tool of promoting these tenets of inclusive development i.e. participation, non-discrimination and accountability. Theatre can contribute in nation building by installing various soft skills such as team spirit, leadership, problem solving among the practitioners at undergraduate or post graduate educational level. This in turn would lead to responsible citizenship among them. Theatre is guided by the principles of client participation, decision making, which plays an important role in the process of empowerment by providing support, but empowerment itself is an autonomous process of the individual, the group and the community. Rather than relying on others to represent them, they begin to represent themselves and other people in similar conditions. At the other side Experience learning method leads to create an artificial environment within the class by using theater approach; reflecting, evaluating and reconstructing it (sometimes individually, sometimes collectively, sometimes both) in order to draw an pre experience before going to the field. This paper will explore the importance of theatre and experience leaning method in education and these teaching methods would be useful as a tool in developing the soft skills among the masses. It will beneficial to all the practitioners to engage the tool of theatre in the curriculum at bachelors or masters level to create a “real life” situation at classroom setting.

Key Words: Theatre; experience leaning, Inclusive development; Education/Practice; empowerment,

INTRODUCTION

It is understandable from the behavior that our students respond in the class room, the number of questions they ask, the quality of their class room participation tasks assessment and the sorts of ways they integrate knowledge from one subject to another that students learn in remarkably different ways. It is equally important that our students have different expectations of what teaching should be about. Explore the problems of educational method; there is a need of a pedagogical ‘reform’ in context with teaching methods. The honest question for all of us in this context is: Why should students show up for class? What unique value is offered in our class that should compel a student to attend it? What are you providing in the classroom that cannot be obtained elsewhere in the textbook, newspaper, on Internet, TV, or in the library? Our main task as classroom teachers is that we should identify the unique teaching method that would be useful in creating holistic-real life experience in the classroom. The goal of this essay is to address these questions and try to explore the answer.

Data and Sources of Data

In this Study secondary data has been used collected from various reports, articles, websites, research papers, books etc. The Present study explored the importance of theatre and experience leaning method in education and these teaching methods would be useful as a tool in developing the soft skills among the masses. It will beneficial to all the practitioners to engage the tool of theatre in the curriculum at bachelors or masters level to create a “real life” situation at classroom setting.

Theoretical framework

Factors influencing learning: According to [Entwistle, McCune, and Hounsell \(2002\)](#), and as depicted in Figure 1, factors influencing the quality of learning achieved include course material presentation and both the type of teaching–learning environment provided as well as the students' perceptions of this environment.

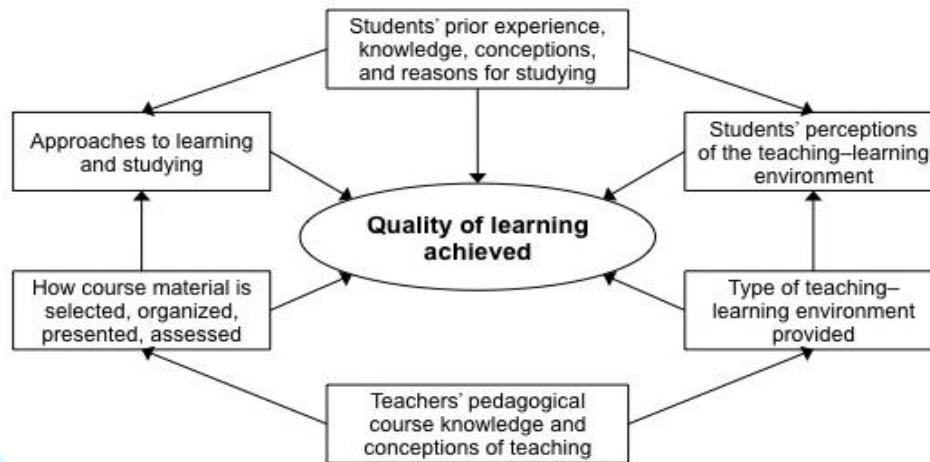


Figure.1. concepts related to the quality of learning at university (entwistle, mccune, &hounsell, 2002)

There is a need to identify these given factors that affect the learning of the student at university level, i.e. “encouragement of active listening” among the students and equally participation in classroom; the environment of the classroom; teaching method used by the teacher; course designing; presentation of the lectures; the given factors decided that what quality we are providing within the classroom or outside.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Lecture as a traditional method and other associated active/passive processes of learning

Lectures are always a required tool of learning that provides oral information among the student. Psychological research and theory affect this tradition by dividing the person into body and mind or into active and passive processes. Insufficient attention is paid to combinations of these two categories. The result is a gap between what experiences tell us about how we learn and what the experts tell us. “Thought and action tend to have been separated, thinking and understanding to have been seen as abstract and general, therefore as teachable in abstract isolation from practical experience. In contrast, practical competence has often been spoken of as though it were just a matter of doing; skill is then taken to mean a combination of thoughtless behavior habits, inculcated through simple practice” (Tomlinson & Kilner, 1992). For example, Internet works as a passive learning tool, we normally type a word or a statement on Google and get a list of options, we use these options for our learning but I feel that this process is a weak alternative for learning. It does not provide you a real and live interaction, because the Internet is a passive entity (it doesn't initiate dialogue) it lacks the attentive component: it doesn't look in the eye, it doesn't smile at you with encouragement or appreciation, and it doesn't respond to non-verbal nuance. You can't get attention from a search engine, or even a book. You *can* get attention from a teacher in the classroom. As the students engage in the problem-solving process with you, learning in the classroom becomes uniquely interactive: it is a reciprocal, live dialogue in which you and your students continuously negotiate the material as well as each other's abilities, needs, demands, and goals.

Understanding of real classroom exposure

Real experience in classroom is unique as it provides student to be alive and interactive. Students may learn about handling knowledge and handling people. But how do we create such a classroom? If nothing else, this is a worthy debate to enter into. Theatre provides this experience a live experience in classroom. Classroom time is an imperative resource that should be used mindfully and efficiently. “One would be hard pressed to identify a more vacuous classroom activity than copying notes; it is the hallmark of the dead classroom”. Our challenge is to incorporate their daily content for e.g. students whispering that should be engaged as a positive experience into the classroom discussion that gives a teacher a new sight of discussion, just like a good architect those incorporate their different elements of the landscape into successfully designed sites.

Teacher should once in a while come to class unprepared. I think the reason behind this is that we already prepared over-script lesson notes for an hour class. We perceived “preparation” as minutes to minutes notes or a lesson plan on the basis of given contents from various books, internet, reports etc rather than perceived “preparation” in a different way as prepared our self to interaction with

students, improvise and exploration within the classroom. For example a semester ago I was interacting with master's students, we discussed about gender and its general perceptions and roles. I tried to explore this issue I asked the student to draw a picture of driver on their notebooks and give a name to them, after few minutes I asked them to show this exercise then I perceived that the whole class has made a picture of a "male driver" and named as men name like (raju, mohit, rajesh). Not a single student perceived this role in context with women. This is an eye opener to me that in a professional world how much we perceive, the same perception that rest of the student has in their mind about gender biasness. As we are concerning about the social aspects of life, I invite students to share their stories, their experience what they have done in their weekend in general or about an issue in which they have some expertise. I am trying to explore the comfort level of students with other classmates or with me as a teacher. I found that students were very less interested to share their experience in general. Moreover, the students' stories provide me relevant sketch to illustrate the concepts and ideas discussed in class. For example, a student's story about her upcoming wedding may become relevant when we discuss in class the topics of cultural institutions, the dominance, caste/class or the dynamics of marriage system. Think of your classroom as a high quality preschool playroom. A high-quality preschool environment formulates a balance between student's freedom and class discipline. Let ideas be the materials for your preschool. Provide the students with adequate, tasks or problems to solve. Think that how can we fit it into this environment? How does it change things if you stick this idea here? If you don't know the answer to a question, you admit it and ask, so we get the answer to a given question by doing here. You can teach your students how to come within reach of a gap in knowledge as an opportunity for learning rather than as a limitation. You can work on an honest model for a student that a teacher also has some limitation and they also face difficulty to approach learning and create a safe learning atmosphere, and help frame the classroom situation as a work in progress not only for students but also for you.

As I mentioned earlier, the unique value of the real classroom situation is almost demonstrably lost when students are assigned the "student role." In keeping with the preschool playroom metaphor, it is useful to have students engage in "pretend play" by assigning them in class the roles that they don't yet occupy but will occupy in the future. For example, in my Social Work class, I may cast a group student and assign them a role of a client who asks them to come up with an appropriate problem of domestic violence. I cast them in the role of Social Worker and ask them to interview a "client" and justify their responses as a social work professional; which method he/she use to solve client problem, how he/she diagnose them or how he/she made a treatment for them and ask them to solve this problem effectively as a social worker. As they take on "adult" roles, they tend to enact and practice, emerging behavioral plans; they have to think ahead, stretch, and imagine in making "experience learning". Experience-based learning also known as Firsthand experience that learners analyses their experience in an artificial atmosphere within the class room by using dramatic approach and reflecting, evaluating and reconstructing it (sometimes individually, sometimes collectively, sometimes both) in order to draw an pre experience before going to the field. This review of their experience may lead to further action. They engage in more fruitful interactions, come up with a good understanding of the material, and have more fun. I tried to explore an interaction process among them as a real improvisation at artificial setting. The real or simulated experience makes possible learning through interaction with one's environment. The person situation interaction is itself crucial. Also it should be noted that different students will react quite differently to the same situational cue, and that the interaction process should be monitored closely. In the classroom, as in life, all else being equal, more fun is better than less fun. It has been reported in the literature that students rate a dynamic, enthusiastic teacher. Class evaluations add a measure of process, and when students have fun learning, they learn that learning is fun, which is, in my mind, one of the goals of teaching.

Construction of real life experience within the classroom through Theatre's tool

The use of drama as a tool for teaching is not new: historically, both drama and theatre have long been recognized as potent means of education and indoctrination. The ways they are used today, however, are new, and they differ in a number of respects from the ways they have been used in the past.

Theatre in education (TiE) is a relatively new phenomenon that dates from the beginning of the twentieth century, with roots in the Creative Dramatics movement of the 1930s that aimed to promote "children's artistic and personal development" (Nicholson 2009: 16).[5] Even after more than half a century since its appearance, TiE continues to be innovative and alternative in relation to standard educational systems in the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and other countries, and it has always depended on "the social, cultural and political climates in which it takes place" (Nicholson 2009: 35). TiE aims to "engage and educate students by presenting dramatic material that directly relates to their concerns and needs" (Mirrione 2011: 76). We mainly considered theatre as a subject to be learnt, rather than as a tool for learning. Edward Bond argues that "we must distinguish between drama and theatre. Theatre can teach, drama teaches nothing – drama creates Theatre may help you find yourself in society, drama requires you to find society in you". Use of *Playback Theatre* (PT) in classroom is an improvisational form of theatre in which a group of student use 'play back' technique by telling real life stories to other student. Playback Theatre was created in the 1970s by Jonathan Fox, a therapist and theatre performer in New York, as a way to explore personal stories through the art of theatre. The Play back theatre works to create an environment based on trust where every student feels safe and comfortable enough to tell a story from their lives experiences, no matter how silly, sad, joyful, or embarrassing they may be. When done successfully, this creates a channel of communication among other student within a classroom. For example one student "responded" with his own first stethoscope experience: not being able to find a pulse. The ensuing enactment was humorous, but it relayed an underlying sentiment of failure that the actors captured and played back. Play back theatre gives nourishment to student community specifically, based on the principal of mutual respect that leads to trust worthy

relationship among them. *Role plays* is another form of theatre that facilitate integration of theory with practice and observed limitations of student to student role plays. Bachelors and masters can interact with each other by using role play method they can act as client-professional and frames an environment of “real life feel” at classroom stage. This practice explores the effectiveness of working with standardized clients from a student perspective. Compare perceptions of interviewing skills from the professional vs. “client” view through interview checklists. Explore the effectiveness of acting as a client using improvisation from the theatre student perspective.

In relation to these distinctions, Theatre in education provides a situation where a student explores their skills effectively and student learns directly in an artificial atmosphere with experience. "Theatre is a clear window into the mind, the soul, the heart of humankind--the study of which should be the aim of higher education. Theatre brings life to learning." (Jane Alexander). Importance of Theatre as a tool in higher education answers today's market demand for skills in creative, critical, and collaborative thinking. Psychologist Howard Gardner posits a theory of multiple intelligences which states that each individual learns through seven intelligences: linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Theatre education cultivates all of these intelligences. Through experience learning, students increase their interpersonal skills, including the ability to notice and make distinctions among others' moods, temperaments, motivations and intentions. They also build strong intrapersonal skills, including the ability to access, understand, and discriminate among one's own feelings.

CONCLUSION

In summary, my hope is that the ideas discussed here provide one important direction in creating a real life experience within the classroom. I have argued that to keep the teacher-in-the-classroom format justifiable and viable we need to identify some unique valuable tools of learning like theatre, classroom experience and practice of theory in class etc. I have proposed that the classroom experience provides direction, decision making, leadership, inclusive growth, self-training, face-to-face and academically productive group interaction. In other words, the classroom is a great place to learn how to deal with knowledge and how to deal with people both of which are essential for success in the world, and neither of which can be downloaded from Yahoo. Learning requires opportunities for practice and exploration, space for thinking or reflecting ‘in your head’ and for interaction with others, and learning from and with peers and experts. These imperatives, coupled with those of our discipline, should affect our view of how we teach (and design courses) in our particular higher education context. What is important about teaching is what it helps the learner to do, know or understand. There are different models of learning that it is useful for the university lecturer to be aware of. What we do as teachers must take into account what we understand about how students learn, generally and in our own context. The rationale for the choice of teaching and assessment methods needs to consider how students learn, and the make-up of our student intake, rather than infrastructure or resource constraints.

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