

SEMINAL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PEDAGOGY OF LITERATURE AND THEIR COMPLEMENTARY ROLE: AN EVALUATION

G.P. Gayathri
Research Scholar
Dept. of English and Communication
Dravidian University – KUPPAM

“A good friend will come to see you in prison, but a really good friend will come to hear your lecture” – Malcolm Bradbury (as quoted in Teaching Literature by Elaine Showalter)

ABSTRACT

This paper mainly discusses the complementary relationship between teaching literature and the role played by the four cardinal stakeholders: the students, the teacher, the syllabi / the content and the (cultural) environment. The researcher believes each one of these has a fundamental job to do. In teaching literature also these four stakeholders have to complement each other for effective teaching.

The job of the student is to orient himself/ herself to the topic. The teacher has to prepare the student by warming up the teaching ambience by showing models and by offering comments. The text in the first place has an inbuilt self-sufficiency, and is prone to dynamic existence. The environment which includes culture of the classroom has a substantial role to play for the success of teaching and learning of a poem/ a literary text.

The paper attempts to validate the above claim through the exemplification of a poem.

Key-words/ Phrases: Pedagogy of Literature & Complementary Role of the Stakeholders

INTRODUCTION:

A quick review reveals that one of the old subjects to be taught is literature. In the ancient and traditional education system, studying and teaching literature always has occupied an important place. Hence studying literature, becoming familiar with literature and acquiring knowledge about literature—the making

and criticism of it—always has been viewed as having enough knowledge and skill. Most of the time, especially in the ancient Indian scenario, literature began to acquire a prominent component of the curricula. Hence epics and mythological books written in Sanskrit and modern Indian Languages continued to be considered as source of knowledge.

Over a period of time, in spite of the emergence of many new disciplines and fields of study, literature through the middle age remained as a much desired field of knowledge. In fact during the Middle Ages and later on from the beginning of modern times, studies in literature did not lose their prominence. They continued to be a major pre-occupation of the academics.

However, in spite of the leading role played by literature, the learning and teaching methods do not seem to be much reviewed. Strictly reviewed, there has not been much verification of the process of teaching and learning. In a nutshell, it appears that teaching literature is taken-for-granted.

It is apt to recall how Elaine Showalter, one of the pioneering proponents of Pedagogy for Literature, reflects on the prevailing state of affairs of teaching and learning literature: “Most practical studies that are presently available usually concentrate on writing. The emphasis is more on writing rather than literature. There are many debates about the literary canon but none of the current studies talks about the day to day literature classroom teaching.” (“Preface,” *Teaching Literature*: 2003)

Further Showalter aptly points out what is missing in the pedagogy of literature, “There are many debates about the literary canon but none of the current studies talks about the day to day literature classroom teaching.” (“Preface,” *Teaching Literature*: 2003)

Taking the above as background, while retaining the common features and the backdrop of Teaching Literature in general, the present paper specifically attempts to review the much taken for granted teaching and learning of Literature(s) in English. More importantly, the paper attempts to highlight the complementary role of the stakeholders of the Pedagogy: The Student, The Teacher, The Text and the Environment (of the Class/Student).

Nature of pedagogy:

Pedagogy refers to “the interaction between teacher, students and the learning environment and the learning tasks.” This broad term includes how teacher and students relate together as well as the instructional approaches implemented in the classroom.

Pedagogy means:

Pedagogy means the method and practice of teaching, as an academic subject or theoretical concept. Pedagogy originated in the late 16th century, from French *pedagogie*, and from Greek *paidagogos*. (www.edtechnow.net/2013/5/12/pedagogy)

Various Stakeholders in the Pedagogy:

Stakeholders mean participants in any enterprises. The following are the stakeholders in the activity of pedagogy of literature: teacher, the student, the content /material /knowledge /skill and the environment.

Definition and significance of each stakeholder:

Teacher: “A person or thing that teaches something; especially, a person whose job is to *teach* students about certain subjects.”(<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/teacher>)

However, a casual empirical verification proves that the responsibility of teacher goes beyond “teaching something.” In fact, a teacher has to facilitate learning by following certain strategies which include motivating students and creating appropriate ambience.

Student: “A person who is studying at a university or other place of higher education.”

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/student>)

Among various definitions for the word, student, the common and underlying concept is studying. But in the domain of learning including literature studying on the part of a student does not happen by default. But a student has to participate in the learning in a complementary manner.

Content/ Syllabus/Text/Knowledge:

Text: a book or other written or printed work, regarded in terms of its content rather than its physical form, the main body of a book.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/text>)

Though a definition of text goes, mentioned as above, the synonymous terms, Content/ Syllabus /Knowledge imply how a literary text or any text imparts information/skill pertaining to an aspect which is connected to life. Hence highlighting and understanding the same is necessary in the teaching and learning of literature.

Environment:

Definition of *environment* - the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates, the natural world, as a whole or in a part. (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/environment>)

But the classroom environment means cultural ambience of teaching and learning in a given context. This fact

The relevance of stakeholders in the pedagogy of literature:

For the success of teaching all the four stakeholders have equal role. For example: In any teaching, learning context, teachers and students should be playing a participatory and complimentary role. Especially in higher education in the field of literature the scope is much wider. Since the subject of literature is very close to life and society that is around us the participation of a teacher or a student is somewhat easy, comparatively speaking.

As all of us know the material/ the syllabus or at a basic text level a literary text is expected to be relevant to human life/ society/ progress of society etc.

When we come to domain of literature, most of the time syllabus of literature whether they are individual texts or individual literary theory or practice are obviously related to human life.

In any teaching, learning context the environment of the classroom or the culture behind the classroom has influencing role. In Indian classroom context the role of environment especially in literatures in English context is facing self contradictory situation.

Some popular present trends in teaching literature:

Providing Gist of a Text in General Terms:

Providing the gist of a text which means giving the meaning of text in general terms.

Common-sense Based Teaching:

A common sense based interpretation has clearly a limited benefit. By just basing on commonsense the value of literary text is reduced. Secondly the informed interpretative ability or knowledgeable interpretation is required.

Model /Alternative Pedagogical Attempt at a Poem:

This pedagogical modal is applied to the following text, and the consequential benefits are also brought out. However, first of all, the conventional mode of teaching-learning is shown which is followed by the model/alternative teaching of the given text:

Self-portrait

A.K. Ramanujan

I resemble everyone
but myself, and something see
in shop-windows
despite the well –known laws
of optics,
the portrait of a stranger,
date of unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father.

If conventional method of teaching is done following either giving the gist of the poem or explaining the poem from commonsensical point of view, the under-mentioned could be the outcome of the teaching of the poem:

Taught from the Perspective of Providing the Gist (of the text under discussion): When the speaker of the poem looks at the mirror of a wayside shop, what he finds is not himself, but some stranger's portrait, signed at the bottom by his father.

Taught from the Perspective of Common-sense (of the text under discussion):

The speaker of the poem does not seem to be confident. When he goes around and looks at himself in a wayside shop window, what he finds is not himself. The reflection seems to be of a stranger's portrait which for some explainable reasons is found to be signed by the father of the protagonist's father. In view of this situation, the poem does not seem to have coherence and clarity.

The Alternative Pedagogical Model

The Role of a Teacher as a Stakeholder: It is inspiring to recall what A.K.Sinha says about the role of the teacher, "It has also to be remembered that in the classroom the teacher is involved in more than simply instruction." (*Provocations*: 1993)

- The role of teacher is motivating and orienting students.
- Briefing students about the background of literary, cultural and philosophical aspects like modernist and existentialist.
- In the present context, the poem stands as an opportunity to detail out features of modernism, like:
 - a. Indirect questioning and enquiring about finding identity and meaning of life.
 - b. Referring to existential angst which is a central aspect of the poem, without referring to that the discussion will be incomplete.

The Role of a Student as a stakeholder:

A student can add and play the complementary role along with note-taking and participating. This includes the following:

- a. Commenting, analyzing and agreeing or disagreeing with the teacher's approach.
- b. Becoming empathetic with theme of identity crisis and existential angst.
- c. On the whole learning by participating.

The Role of Text of the Poem as a Stakeholder:

- Finding the fact that the text is relevant to human life, understandable.
- Realizing that presence of modernism and existentialism makes the text relevant intellectually and academically, also.

The Role of the Environment of the Text/ Class/Teaching/Learning

- The cultural environment of the text partly may be alien but partly can be empathetic.
- Similarly the Classroom Cultural Environment—including the participatory and complementary role of the student-teacher-text creates conducive atmosphere.

Conclusion:

Having seen the limitations of conventional teaching of the poem under discussion, and the advantages of making all the share-holders of pedagogy—the Student, the Teacher, the Text and the Cultural Environment of the Class/Context, it can be stated in confidence that the latter method brings out the full potential of the text.

Speaking precisely, all the stake holders have complementary role to play in the pedagogy of literature or for that point of any subject. As has been proved in the present context, the stakeholders have done the following:

1. The teacher motivated the students and prepared reception of the poem.
2. Students also in a complementary way contributed to teacher's role.
3. The text itself has inbuilt relevance. (The analysis has established the relevance of the text to life—by focusing on the identity crisis and uncertainty.)
4. The cultural and social environment of the text and the classroom/student is self-evident.

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