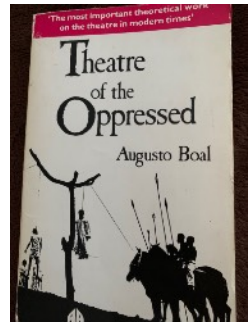


Theatre of the Oppressed - Light

Reflective Essay on Micro-teaching Assessment 2 PCET - 45 Minutes - Angel Garden



Introduction

“Learning is about change: the change brought about by developing a new skill, understanding something new, changing an attitude.”

Reece I and Walker J (2006)

For my second micro-teaching I wanted to make full use of different teaching approaches, so I chose something that would involve physical activity with the students: drama. This essay will reflect on the experience using Gibb’s reflective cycle.

What Happened

My ambitious plan included both pedagogy and andragogy. The first part consisted of talking with powerpoint slides to give facts about both Aristotle and Augusto Boal, to supply context and begin to show why Boal was so critical of the ideas of drama of the ancient philosopher.

Setting up retentive learning about two important historical figures in such a way as to illustrate the effective foil for Boal’s entire life-work, as well as getting to actually practically try it out, was ambitious for a 45 minute lesson. My strategy followed Bloom’s taxonomy, building on the short pedagogic element prior to practical exploration of teaching methods and ending with evaluation (Petty 2004).

My plan involved SMART objectives: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound. Video and powerpoint were very helpful in concentrating this part, which began with a slide showing exactly what I wanted the students to take away from the session.

I designed the slides to focus on the central problem, that Boal detested Aristotelian catharsis. This was tested with a targeted question to formatively assess this part of the lesson .

I presented a video of Boal near the end of his life, in which he referenced Aristotle’s ‘histrionic sense’, and our privilege of self-consciousness, thus contextualising the work of these two key theorists. The video also allowed learners to ‘meet’ Boal, far more memorable than just hearing about him second hand. (K4.)

The lesson had clear sections, beginning with some reflection, with an increasing amount of participation beginning with chatting and assessing their knowledge of Aristotelian dramatic structure, before introducing more challenging elements, following Maslow.

Assessment, both formative and summative was incorporated as the lesson progressed in a 4 section anonymous feedback sheet. The sheet was designed to provide plenty of opportunity for participants to analyse their own learning, and my teaching, as well as gaining potential insights into their own favourite drama.

Once the learners were comfortable and engaged, a basic tenet of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, I then wanted to explain to them the different types of theatre espoused and practised by Boal.

I shared the story of the shoe-shine boys’ “nail in the wall” drawing, as a symbol of their oppression. Nobody but other shoe-shiners understood the image, highlighting how personal oppression actually is. Only the other shoe-shine boys knew that they had to rent a nail to hang their kit on before they could shine shoes for a tiny amount.

This story dramatically illustrates how far this theatre practise is from our habitual themes which are seen, through Boal's lens, as being representative of the 'great spirited man', or privileged hero.

We discussed how accepting this "aristocratic" standard depends on the suspension of disbelief, and that this was specifically not a requirement of Boal's theatre

As timing was going well I asked them if they would consider doing a scene. I was quite nervous about this because of the potential for refusal.

In the event, Pete, a kindly engineer, took the part of a 14 year old who didn't want to do a paper round but did want to get the money to go on a school trip abroad. He capitulated right away to Caroline's assertion that 'you'd better get on with it Sunshine'. He explained to us that when he was a kid he had two jobs and always basically did what he was told, which highlighted both generational and personal conditioned behaviours.

I was pleased with (especially) Pete's participation, in view of the fact that he had never done anything like that before. It's easy to underestimate how difficult it would be for someone like Pete to get up and perform 'an imitation of an action', act as someone else, and he immediately came up against the problem of suspending his disbelief.

He could not easily do it, and remained 100% authentic, relating the scenario squarely to his own experience, agreeing to do the paper round with no further complaint. I consider this a great result in the context of the lesson. Pete related the exercise to his own experience rather than trying to come up with anything clever or contrived. He took a personal step forward in standing up, although he admitted that he didn't really like it, and we all saw the technique, in its specificity, through his participation.

Moving things along I suggested a re-run, this time with Ed and Jane (who had supplied the story of her son's paper round). I suggested that Ed be the mum. Jane didn't hear me and began to berate the reluctant teenager, as Caroline had done to Pete. I interrupted to say "no this time you be your son and Ed will be the mum". This became very interesting as Ed, coming from a Portuguese/West African family, folded his hands together in a gesture of quiet authority and told the "son" in no uncertain terms how easy he was having it compared to how Ed (as mother) had had things. Immediately there was created a cultural statement of experiential authority, naturally displayed, and hard to argue with.

In this way the difference between the two cultural forms was made explicit, illustrating why Boal's was so revolutionary and why he was captured, tortured and exiled.

The session finished with reflective discussion, my heartfelt thanks to the participants and a final quote from Boal about how Aristotelian theatre is still operating as a system of intimidation today, after a slide of a random set of titles on Netflix.

Evaluation

The room was somewhat cold on entry, and I was worried both for myself and for any others for whom that might interfere with basic needs, as laid out in Maslow's hierarchy (Reece & Walker 2007). Although no break would be required for 45 minutes, I was not able to ensure adequate comfort and was personally grateful for the heat that teaching created in me, and even took a layer off during the lesson.

Anticipating the potential "threat to self" that could be perceived at being asked to display vulnerability in acting (Edmondson, Higgins, Singer & Weiner 2016). I tried to be encouraging and light in tone during the lesson, open to what occurred rather than appearing too time focussed, although of course fitting it all in in 45 minutes required careful time planning and observation. So when it turned out that two students were in the wrong room, it all seemed delightfully spontaneous to me.

Once people were on their feet I felt more comfortable and able to use what might happen to enhance the experience and the teaching, which is what I learned from my many years in drama - enthusiasm and being ready to listen is all you need.

Following assessment one, where I had forgotten to look after some participants fears about what they had learned about frequency emissions, I wanted to really look after learners, especially as I was asking them to share or at least think about personal material. (A1, A2, A4, design, delivery and effective environments and approaches to student support and guidance).. Marrying them to K1 and K2, in embedding these values in the actual material and how it is delivered.

The teaching took account of individual learners and how they best learn. (K3) and there was visual, aural and kinaesthetic learning (Reece and Walker 2007) to appeal to all learners, who were asked at all stages if they were ready to move on, .

Motivation was mainly extrinsic, because they'd been asked to come to the lesson, to make up numbers. It was not to recognise this that I thanked all heartily for their participation, however but because I was genuinely grateful and delighted that the 'poetics' described by Boal were very much present which is good result showing that learners' needs were broadly taken care of.

They were also to an extent intrinsically motivated to find out more, which could have been influenced by the "participative management" of the andragogic approach (MacGregor 1960).

I wanted to cement retention of information by doing the two different exercises. I tried to reduce my slides to those that would give information which would become memorable once the context was supplied, and to appeal to all learning styles; Honey and Mumford's Kolb based activist, reflector, theorist, pragmatist, as well as the Montessori derived VAK learning style theory.

The lesson (and Boal's work) included elements from cognitivist, behaviourist, and humanistic learning schools (Petty 2004). Learners were encouraged to construct their own meaning from all the material and to analyse their own media consumption. Behaviourally they were encouraged gently towards participating in a potentially challenging 'acting' scenario with the promised reward of seeing the theory in action. This in turn led to humanistic exploration of their own situations, again supported by Boal's theories.

Seeing Boal on video referring to his own torture, and with the haunting visual image of a single nail in the wall as well as the kinaesthetic learning, were all there to act as 'memory hooks', to help learners afterwards. The take-aways reflected the essentially transgressive nature of theatre; a chequered history of oppression through the ages.

Asking learners to not only bring their own experiences but to also disclose them is challenging. It moved the teaching from pedagogy, present in the beginning, to andragogy, asking students to look at and incorporate and analyse their own experience (Knowles (1980), an intrinsic part of Boal's approach.

Analysis is not solely mental but emotional - Boal's theatre asks us to act honestly from a real emotional place because the 'plot' is not aristocratic but personally meaningful. So although it might be huge for one "actor", another may not recognise the significance until the context is explained. This further highlights the "aristocratic" Aristotelian model with its applied universal 'values' to experiences.

Learning took place in all three domains (Reece and Walker 2007). Learners evaluated knowledge and experience cognitively, they synthesised this knowledge in understanding the concepts explained, and also in trying them out. This lead to analysis, including of their own stated favourite drama.

In the affective domain learners received some information which they could evaluate and then organise their own activity, which led them to some extent to internalise the work, since it was kinaesthetic. By imitating existing techniques, we began the long process of becoming adept in a dramatic language in the psychomotor domain.

Kolb's model of learning (Petty 2004) allows for starting anywhere as long as you move clockwise so we started with reflection upon their own consumption of entertainment and moved on to abstract conceptualisation. Although I supplied some initial facts, it was in order to set up the central conflict between Aristotle's socially controlling cathartic model and the peoples' theatre. This was a new concept for the majority of the class. Active experimentation, as the learners got up from their seats and took part in some theatre activity, provided us all with concrete experience upon which to reflect, which lead directly back to and deepened the original conceptual understanding.

Assessment was mainly formative. I used a continuous 'q and a' sheet to ensure that learning had taken place, improve methods of instruction and make sure students gained an idea of their own success. Summative assessment element was in the question of whether further study of the subject would be pursued (Reece & Walker (2006)).

The nature of this work means that each person's experience and feelings about that, *is* effectively the "action" and all of it is genuine and legitimate when seen through this lens. This is not some romantic idea of a powerful person, but action that links personal experience to a wider context

How do we know that learning took place? I chose to ask evaluative questions with shared responsibility, "I do/do not understand about Boal's theory because..... etc.,"

If no, there is going to be learning for me, because there will be explanation of what they found difficult. If yes, then I will hopefully understand something I don't know, that person's reasoning about the subject, based upon their own life experience.

This was by far the most interesting part of the feedback as there were such a variety of responses.

Further Analysis

The lesson would be a good springboard for a longer session of practise. Time prevented us from exploring the 'interruption' part of Boal's work, which removes any possibility of being passive, as you have to concentrate and intervene. No sleeping at the back!

The learners were given lots of information and had a tiny go at one activity. But the level of interest and especially stated intention to look into it further and the reasons for that, show that the lesson has potential to actively explore far more of Boal's ideas.

I would like to teach this lesson again to almost anyone at all. I have full faith in the pedagogical and androgogical framework of Boal, who acknowledged a debt for his own ideas expressed in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, from those of Paulo Friere, a renowned educator and author of the book, "*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*", in 1970.

This hands-on approach cultivates a healthy tension between the reality of education as 'change', and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, because change is seldom comfortable.

Equal opportunities are served by inclusivity in education (Donaldson 2015), which in turn benefits from study of democracy as a part of every exchange, the subject of this lesson.

Every interaction thus has learning potential for learning which is not merely "contained" in teaching any more than learners act as passive containers. This learning is cross-cutting and supports the need for critical thinking. Examining the usefulness and/or manipulative qualities

of public entertainment fulfils sustainability targets. Evidence of relevance and learning was in the responses that people actively want to find out more.

This appetite isn't necessarily about specific facts about Boal. I haven't walked around for the last xxx years thinking to myself "Boal was born in 1931". But I have carried with me a spark of his cheeky optimism in thinking that humans are ripe to take control of their own destiny.

Conclusion

Learners' feedback confirmed that the lesson was well received, and that participants had lent their imaginations to the exercises, making them more enthusiastic and invested. The feedback forms worked very well and showed a wide range of responses, all appreciating the information and the presentation of it, in spite of 1/3 of participants not liking the practical exercise. The feedback from my tutor was enthusiastic and encouraging and my own immediate reflection was that I loved the fact that others enjoyed it and couldn't believe I'd fitted it all into 45 minutes!

Not all learners were comfortable with the practical exercise, a common problem which is really only overcome by doing more of it. This is why the beginning of the lesson was important. The 'reason' for doing drama this way lies in the 'reasons' it is done in the Aristotelian cathartic model. Of course we've developed habits that fit in with that status quo as all our drama is manufactured like that. One of those habits is to be a spectator rather than an actor.

Catharsis itself depends on it *not* being us acting. We identify with the various stages of the tragic hero's destiny, from a position of complete safety, *because* it's not happening to us but to the hero/anti-hero: our experience is wholly vicarious although the emotions are real.

So it feels scary to start acting..... what if what happened to them then happens to you? This question illustrates both the impact and importance of Boal's work.

This equal opportunities paradigm also applies to teaching, because the line between spectator and actor is beautifully mirrored in the realities of andragogy and pedagogy. It speaks to teacher student partnership and self-evaluation, (Norman 2014).

This fulfils standard K5 in contextualising higher education and recognising the implications for professional practise. It's the difference between being told to sit down and shut up, and being cordially invited to actively change your circumstances and bring others along as well.

"Authentic Education is not carried on by 'A' for 'B' or by 'A' about 'B', but rather by 'A' with 'B' mediated by the world - a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it. These views, impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness, imply significant scenes on the basis of which the programme content of education can be built. In its desire to create an ideal model of quote good man, I naïvely conceived humanism often overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real people."

Friere P (1970) The Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Pp 66.