

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 the second micro-teaching exercise, I wanted to make full use of different teaching approaches so I chose something that would involve physical activity with the students: drama.

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

Setting up not only one but two important 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, and I tried to employ SMART objectives: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound. Access to video and powerpoint was very helpful in concentrating this part, which began with a slide showing exactly what I wanted the students to take away from the session.

The slides were designed to focus on the central problem, that Boal detested Aristotelian catharsis. This was tested with a targeted question to ascertain understanding.

Video footage of Boal near the end of his life, in which he referenced Aristotle's 'histrionic sense', and our privilege of self-consciousness highlighted his philosophy. It allowed learners to 'meet' Boal, far more memorable than just hearing about him second hand. (**Professional Standard K4.**)

The lesson had clear sections, beginning with some reflection with an increasing amount of participation beginning with chatting and identifying their recognition of Aristotelian dramatic structure - the tragic trajectory.

Assessment 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 a bit warmed up I then wanted to explain to them the different types of theatre espoused and practised by Boal in Brazil and other South American countries.

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 practise is from our habitual theatrical themes which are seen, through Boal's lens, as "aristocratic": as being representative of the 'great spirited man', or privileged hero.

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

As the lesson timing was going quite 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.

I was fantastically pleased especially with Pete's participation in view of the fact that he had never done anything like that before. It's very easy to underestimate how difficult it would be for someone like Pete to get up and pretend to be 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, and although he admitted that he didn't really like it, 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 immediately became very interesting as Ed, coming from a Portugese/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 very hard to argue with.

We ended with discussion, and of how different it was to be a completely active audience member instead of a passive one suspending disbelief.

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 sent away.

The session finished with 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 of needs. **Reese & 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.

Safety and shelter were not in question and 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 take any happening and use it 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. (**Professional Standards** A1, A2, A4, design, delivery and effective environments and approaches to student support and guidance).. Marrying them to **standards** 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. (**Professional Standard K3**) and there was visual, aural and kinaesthetic content REF, 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 delightful in itself

They were to an extent **intrinsically motivated** as well, to find out more about the subject, which means that I'd managed to convey at the very least how interesting it is.

Retention of information using the brain theories, that's why I wanted to cement it 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.

Initially I tried to draw on learners' **declarative memory**, both semantic, based on the background information I provided in the slides, and episodic, as the learners had two opportunities to try out expressive techniques.

Procedural memory is activated by doing the exercises and having the freedom to define their own content. I'm pretty sure Pete won't forget it in a hurry.

Emotional memory is activated by using personal elements, a memory, a situation, an oppression.

Seeing the man himself including referring to his own torture, and 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.

This take-away is bound to cement the idea of **theatre being transgressive** rather than compliant, and this is indeed the reality of the entire chequered history of multiple oppressions of theatre, as representing freedom of speech through the ages.

Asking learners to bring their own experiences and to make them to all intents and purposes public is very challenging. It definitely moved the teaching from **pedagogy**, which certainly was present in the beginning minutes, to **androgogy**, asking students to look at and incorporate and analyse their own experience.

But the analysis was not so much mental as emotional - Boal's theatre asks them to act honestly from a real emotional place because the 'plot' is not, Oedipal and **epic** but personally meaningful. So although it might be huge for the person another person may not even recognise the significance, until the context is explained to them. This further illustrated the **Aristotelian model** which relies on having, not just the same experience, but also the same basic 'aristocratic' values applied to that experience.

Learning took place in all three domains. Cognitively, learners evaluated their knowledge and experience, they synthesised this knowledge in understanding the concepts explained, and in trying them out, leading to analysis, including applied to their own stated favourite drama. This was designed and did to some extent lead to comprehension and to knowledge and the desire for more.

In the **affective domain** learners received some knowledge which they had a chance to 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 them and 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 has 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 see 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 the learner will try and explain what they found difficult about the teaching. 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

This lesson would be a good springboard for a longer session of practise. Due to time we were not able to explore the 'interruption' part of Boal's work, which takes away 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 the ideas Boal presented.

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, an educator and author of the book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, in 1970.

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

Equal opportunities are served by the study of democracy as a part of every exchange, the subject of this lesson.

As such every interaction has the potential for learning as the learning is not merely contained in the teaching with a corresponding expectation that the learners will also 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 is 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

The lesson went well and was well received. Learners' discussion showed that they had lent their imaginations to the exercises and this made them more enthusiastic and invested.

Not all learners were comfortable sharing personal information and this is 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.

The 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, it's not us that it's happening to but another fictional person.

We are meant to experience everything vicariously through the hero/anti hero. They do it, in leather, (probably cactus or pineapple very soon), looking incredible, so we don't have to.

So it feels scary to start acting..... what if what happened to them then happens to you? This is the exact question that makes this practise so important and gives it such tremendous power to effect change the sole driver.

This is an equal opportunities paradigm where the ideas also apply 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 Lyndsey 2014)**.

This fulfils standard K5 in the contextualising higher education and recognising the implications for professional practise.

It is 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.