

PEDAGOGY

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‘Pedagogy is the discipline that deals with the theory and practice of education; it thus concerns the study and practice of how best to teach.’

Q: *How can a teacher organise their class and available resources to elicit the best of their students? How can a community organisation successfully involve themselves in local schools and provide meaningful activities that add value to the lives of students within the community?*

A: With a focus on classroom culture, that incorporates meaningful and problematic activities reflecting the lived experience of the students involved, teachers and facilitators can be certain they are working towards a successful and sustainable pedagogy.

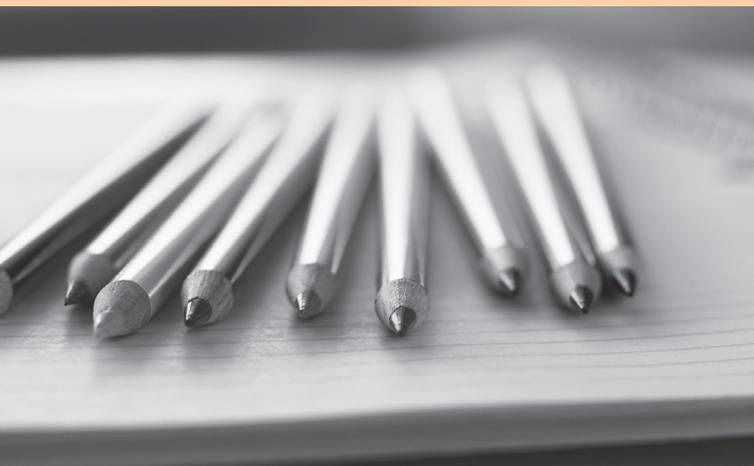
Pedagogy has a long history. The traditional approach is criticised for ‘.. a concept of education as a collection of individual elements of information which are to be mastered and then spewed back in a decontextualised setting. On this ‘bucket view’ it is expected that individuals who acquire a sufficient amount of such knowledge will be effective members of the society.’

This view of pedagogy is based on ‘.. behaviourist psychology, which lays emphasis on the stimulus-response [where] a learner has to be conditioned to produce the appropriate response to any given stimulus.’

It ‘assumes the student knows nothing, and the teacher has all the information. So the student would sit there being passive, while the teacher poured the information into the kids.’ This results in an idea that knowledge ‘has this sort of ‘canned’ status’ that can then be opened and poured into a student.

Education practice today still bears the effects of this approach with highly detailed snippets of information cobbled together by experts and dropped down from on high.

How do educators and classrooms best move forward from this old model?



What does a successful pedagogical approach look like in the classroom?

And what role does the teacher or presenter have in setting up, maintaining, and working within a sustainable pedagogical environment?

Here are some key points that represent a sustainable pedagogical classroom culture:

A problem-solving culture with freedom to approach the task as the student sees fit

Children ‘flourish best under conditions of highly motivated discovery, the free exchange of ideas, and reciprocal feedback between mutually respected equals.’

‘To best elicit curiosities within students the classroom culture should make the subjects problematic. This engages their skills and maintains their interests especially when a culture prevails in which the students

know they have the ‘freedom and responsibility to develop their own methods of solution,’ and freedom to ‘select topics, issues, segments, they felt were important and interesting to pursue.’

‘Successful learning is a function of the extent to which students feel concerned about the tasks given to them.’

Real problems with real solutions

The goal of communities ‘should be to make their .. activities as indistinguishable from everyday .. events as is humanly possible.’ If a professional would solve a problem this way why not a student?

In the ‘situative perspective, knowing is viewed as sustained participation in practices of a community.’

‘To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation.’

Process more so than product

Classroom practice is plagued by a push for quick answers. Prominent educational reformer John Dewey: *‘Were all instructors to realise that the quality of mental process, not the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth something hardly less than a revolution in teaching would be worked.’*

‘A classroom culture should elicit the ‘understanding of ideas, not simply achieving results.’

Role of the teacher

‘Learning environments should include collaborative settings where teachers act as partners, coaches as well as models, and where students can work together as well as engage in the exploration of ideas.’

‘Establishing collaborative learning situations that allow multiple viewpoints to be posed and considered..’

Where ‘effective classroom talk’ has become routine, the circulation of knowledge among peers and near peers is possible. Knowledge and ideas spread rapidly and effectively... The effectiveness of the circulation of information among peers suggests that engaging in practice, rather than being its object, may well be a condition for the effectiveness of learning.

Activity

There are many pressures in a classroom with many competing factors vying for each precious minute of a student's time. One challenge is to successfully implement highly scripted programs brought into the class, often from outside organisations, many with excellent activities and a high production standard. Frequently, programs have each minute planned and assume most children have a minimum, or at least the same level of knowledge.

Such pre-planning has advantages in a busy school setting but may pose pedagogical challenges as mentioned above. The program may be lacking in

relevance to a student's life, have no reflection to a child's or community's lived experience, or on a basic level offer no interest to a student or class. The script may only allow a short time for each section and not have the flexibility in time or responses to include the interests, experiences and questions that many students have. Students, like adults, can and do lose interest if they feel their experiences are not valued, their questions and answers irrelevant or invalid, or that the answers expected of them are too basic to challenge their imagination and intellect. These factors all have negative effects on learning outcomes and do not reflect successful pedagogy.

There are a number of simple questions you can ask yourself to help align a highly scripted program to the interests and experiences of a class. These may assist in creating a sustainable pedagogy with more successful learning outcomes.

To what extent does the activity:

1.

stem from the questions and interests of the classroom community? Is it a student identified problem? Does the activity engage the idiosyncratic background of knowledge and experience of the student? Or does the activity originate from an academic curricula that is 'abstract, literate, individualistic and unrelated to non-school knowledge?'

2.

reflect life practices outside of the classroom in the 'real world?' Does the activity represent functional/practical knowledge? Are there real problems with practical bearings that represent the 'wider community'? Does it extend into the cultural communities in which the students live and bring those communities into the classroom?

3.

have a given solution or answer? Classroom teaching 'is plagued by a push for quick answers.' Does the activity allow for the students to observe the teacher's own struggle and allow the teacher to model an enquiring mind? Does the activity allow for the use of imagination and allow the students to 'innovate and create.'

Particularly in the AOD field many resources are designed to elicit responses that would see the student respond in a particular way, '[i]t is then presumed that when they have the same statements in their heads as the teacher has or appears in the book they know something.' It is questionable whether eliciting responses such as these have any relationship to behavioural change

4.

allow for engagement? Allow for the opportunity of discourse and interaction? Does the activity allow for trial and error, multiple perspectives, and foster collaboration and peer support?

5.

dictate the pace of the class? Does the activity allow for differential rates of learning? Is there 'space left for the unexpected' and time at the end for 'celebration'?

6.

add to the broader set of aims within the classroom community? Does the activity create a 'learning community' that rewards a sustained effort? Does the activity allow for the development of skills that are transferred from one 'subject' to another? Does it build on student's habits of mind and disposition? And probably most importantly, does the activity build upon a student's sense of identity? In short, does the activity 'recognise the capacity for human learning.' Does it 'build self-esteem and identity of learners, developing their sense of what they believe or indeed hope of themselves.' Is it 'an exceptional educative event' and a 'practical realisation of their finest ideas'? If it does then you can be rewarded with a class of 'delightfully alive companions.'

Best Practice Assessment - Portfolio

Teachers require a form of assessment and parents and principals can rightly look for evidence of learning within a classroom. Too often this evidence takes the form of a memory test or worksheet which, when introduced, forces upon the class a structure not ideal for positive discourse. When you have to administer a test 'a teacher can, quite unconsciously, ignore any original thoughts of the pupil, giving encouragement only to responses which fit the teacher's plan for progress. This seems to be done to ensure the discussion gets to the intended point in limited time. The effect, however, is to teach the pupil that the purpose is to guess what the teacher is thinking, not to come up with novel thoughts of your own.'

How best to meet the genuine need for assessment? A portfolio or 'process-folio.' can collect information and experiences and serve as a document of growth over time. Students can still have the freedom to explore 'in a direction which has meaning to them.'

A learning diary to collect experiences solely with a 'Health and Physical Education' goal can act as a "silent mentor" to the students.' This method of 'self-assessment is essential if pupils are to be helped to take responsibility for their own learning' and develop the skill of meta-cognition - where students are asked to think about their own thinking by keeping journals and sketchbooks as they engage. A learning diary or portfolio is essential in developing reflective habits of mind.

Adult learning

The principals of successful pedagogy apply just as much to adult learners as children. What would these successful practices look like within an adult setting? Exactly the same but for one point.

Many adults come to learning situations 'educationally wounded'. Utilising a strengths based approach will build confidence and capacity especially where adults can prefer a practical and immediately relevant approach.

It seems worth mentioning that the respect a teacher gives to the time constraints and experience of adults is just as valid when working with children.

Neuroscience

When an individual is valued and feels the benefits of social connectedness a facilitator is enhancing the ability of the brain to engage. This benefits working memory, improves focus, enhances resiliency - all demonstrated neurological processes that aid academic outcomes.

Conversely, a classroom culture that does not value the input of an individual or draws attention to the pupil's self-esteem can lead to a breakdown in the ability of the brain to learn and the beginning of a 'degradation ceremony' at which stage learning around the subject area ceases.

References available on request

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