

Teachers as Actors? Lecturing Theory Classes

NG Yuk Kwan, Ricky, LEUNG Po San, Cecilia, CHUNG Kit Man, Gloria,
LAU Lai Fong, Annie

Centre for Learning and Teaching

When Confucius and Socrates taught, they had one thing in common: they lectured. Using vocal control, body language and questioning techniques, they performed, improvised and interacted with their disciples. Their direct and primitive presentations were able to draw their audience's attention, articulate higher order thinking and reflections for the understanding of their philosophical concepts. Reminiscent of drama and performance, the beauty of lecturing lies in the adoption of theatrical techniques. Tone, rhythm, pace of speech and the bodily gestures are just some of the essential elements for good performances.

Using acting techniques in teaching have been suggested by a number of researchers (Eisner, 1968; Tauber, Mester and Buckwald, 1993; Sarason, 1999; Griggs, 2001). Eisner asserts that "teachers, like actors, attempt to communicate to groups of people in an audience-like situation, and while the ends of comedy and instruction differ markedly, both the teachers and actors employ qualities to enhance communication; both must come through to the people with whom they work" (Eisner, 1968, p.362). However, the once prevailing lecture seems subsided and overwhelmed by the overly emphasised learning and teaching activities and the technological enabled learning resources. Teachers are urged to design learning and teaching activities to facilitate students to learn, particularly in theory classes.

The question remains, will theater and acting techniques enhance lectures in order to engage, inspire and articulate students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills in theory classes?

To take a closer look into this question, an empirical study was carried out over two consecutive years (2010/11, 2011/12) in one of the Hong Kong's higher education institutions. Two teachers and a total number of 87 design students from four different cultural studies classes participated in the survey. The cultural studies classes cover topics such as social, psychological and cultural theories of which the majority of design students are reluctant to learn. Using a participatory approach, the two teachers adopted acting techniques such as voice and tone, bodily gestures and questioning techniques to interact with the students during theory classes. The interactions were well received during the classes and the survey results revealed that over 80% of the students enjoyed the lectures as if they were watching good performances. It was also learnt that more than 80% of the students agreed that their engagements were the result of teachers' keen presentation skills. Findings further indicated that almost all of the students (over 90%) prefer the teachers using simple, explicit, down-to-earth language and real life examples rather than theoretical jargon in theory classes. The results of this study suggest that a teacher's facilitation skills are important while appropriate application of acting techniques in lectures would facilitate students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills in theory classes.

References:

- Eisner, E. (1968). Qualitative intelligence and the act of teaching. In R.T. Hyman (Ed.), *Teaching: Vantage Points of Study*. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott.
- Griggs, T. (2001). Teaching as acting: considering acting as epistemology and its use in teaching and teacher preparation. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Spring, 23 – 37.
- Sarason, S. (1999). *Teaching as Performance Art*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Tauber, R., Mester, C. & Buckwald, S. (1993). The teacher as actor: entertaining to educate. *NASSP Bulletin*.