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Drama Pedagogy And The Making Of A Teacher

By Mr S. Rethinavel, Lecturer, Visual and Performing Arts Academic Group

Like diamonds in the rough, teachers have to be honed and shaped in classrooms. A drama education opportunity reveals the value of interaction in learning for both students and teachers.

As expressed by Heathcote, a pioneer of educational drama, a teacher's pedagogical philosophy and style is borne out of the dialogic process with their students. Within teacher preparation, it becomes important that we give student teachers real-time and real-life experience in a safe manner within the classroom, so that they can discover their self-identities as teachers.

In drama education and pedagogy, teacher identity and pedagogical philosophy are especially important due to the affective and collaborative nature of drama as a medium. The dramatic space requires student teachers to engage and facilitate learning with their students as co-creators in a democratic and multimodal learning space. Hence, engagement with real students becomes vital as part of the preparation for drama student teachers.

With help from Dr Alexius Chia, Assistant Dean, International & School Partnerships, my class of BA (Drama) students and I had the opportunity to collaborate with the

teachers of Yusof Ishak Secondary School (YISS) to teach English Literature to Secondary One, Two and Three students using Process Drama over a period of three weeks. The student teachers, under the active mentorship of their respective YISS teachers, brought the texts, characters and literary concepts within each lesson to life.

The collaborative efforts between the YISS teachers and NIE student teachers produced innovative lessons modelled after the 21st Century Competencies (21CC) framework. YISS students found the lessons highly engaging and welcomed the collaborative dramatic space that facilitated their voice and choice. The process dramas enabled them to think and embody literary texts, making their learning immediate, real and critically thought through.

The YISS teachers found the ideas from our student teachers fresh and innovative. They welcomed the use of drama as a teaching pedagogy due to its capacity to create a highly engaging and democratic learning space. They saw how English Literature came alive through

drama, and how students with differing language needs in both reading and oracy could easily understand and relate to the texts through the dramatic embodiment of literature. Affective learning begets effective learning.

As for the student teachers, they welcomed the real-world experience of planning and executing their lessons. The classroom dynamics enabled them to critically assess their pedagogical approach, learn to be more reflexive in class and practise their reflective skills. They were able to personalise their experiences, develop their identities as teachers, delve deeper into the ethos of their chosen calling, and understand first-hand how a teacher is only made in the classroom.

The Centre of Teaching and Learning Excellence is a collaborative effort by the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST), MOE and NIE. Based at YISS, the centre provides an in-situ environment for the professional development of teachers by master teachers and experts from AST, MOE and NIE.

