

Quest for Performative Pedagogy in Riva Palacio's "The Good Example" and Anton Chekhov's "Who was to Blame?"

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Abstract— This article makes an attempt to explore the idea of performative pedagogy to develop the holistic and wholesome personality of the learners. Taking the case of two popular stories, the researcher argues that traditional pedagogy not only makes the learners lethargic and lousy but also kills their latent potentialities; therefore, modern education should be such which could bring in critical and creative insights within the learners' faculty of mind, and this is possible only through full-fledged application of performative pedagogy—the one which highlights how to prepare students to think of themselves as active participants rather than simply passive learners/listeners.

Keywords— Education, Holistic Personality, Interaction, Pedagogy, Performative.

Pedagogy is understood as teaching methods. The word "pedagogy" is derived from the Greek word, *paidagogia*, which means to lead a child. Pedagogy, in this sense, is an art of teaching to the learners to make them lead the society. While teaching, interactions between teachers, students, and the learning environment and the learning tasks just come to the fore. Learning depends on the pedagogical approaches teachers use in the classroom. Several pedagogical approaches are executed in schools, but some approaches are more effective and appropriate than others. The effectiveness of pedagogy often depends on the particular subject matter to be taught, on understanding the diverse needs of different learners, and on adapting to the ground conditions in the classroom and the surrounding context. In general, the best teachers believe in the capacity of their students to learn, and carefully utilize a variety of pedagogical approaches to ensure this learning campaign.

Effective pedagogy can lead not only to academic achievement but also social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development of a learner. Acquisition of technical skills along with general ability to contribute to society will bring positives outcomes in the long run; therefore, it is important to consider teaching pedagogy seriously.

The prime purpose of education is to teach the students how to live life by developing their mind and equipping them to deal with reality. For that, they should be taught theoretical, practical and conceptual knowledge. They have to be taught to think, to understand, to integrate and of course to prove. They should be given a favorable

environment to unleash their latent potentialities. For all these things, a teacher is expected to execute innovative techniques and tips so as to draw the attention of the learners. The imposition of knowledge just like that without understanding the psychology of the learners will simply bring counterproductive results.

Along with the development in educational system and its long-term goals, the concept of performative pedagogy is widely discussed at present. Performative pedagogy places emphasis on as to how to develop the holistic personality of the learners by constantly engaging them with diversified activities within and outside the class room. Bell Hooks regards education as the practice of freedom and hence puts emphasis on the need of making each and every class room performative to drive the learners in diversified activities. She further asserts:

To embrace the performance aspect of teaching, we are compelled to engage 'audiences' to consider issues of reciprocity. Teachers are not performers in the traditional sense of the word in that our work is not meant to be a spectacle. Yet it is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning. (11)

Here, the critic is trying to focus on the give and take relationship between teachers and the learners. Teachers as catalysts need to galvanize the learners with ideas and ideals in such a way that they will be able to engage and

reflect over them in their life. In other words, the learners should be active participants rather than passive listeners to make the entire class room performative enough.

While discussing about performative pedagogy, it is imperative to discuss about Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, which gives the highest premium on human interaction to understand the multiple subject matters. When the teacher singularly engages himself/ herself in the class room without letting the students interact, the students are dictated by the teacher's authority. Due to the lack of multiplicity of sound and meaning in such class room, the students will feel bored and they cannot express and expose themselves. Bakhtin's dialogic theory also highlights on the interplay between performance, sound and ideas. Explaining Bakhtin's idea of dialogism, Holquist puts:

Dialogism argues that all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space, where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideologies). (21)

In fact, dialogic method of learning things is effective and impressive in the class room. When the single voice begins to rule the class room in the absence of dialogue, the learners will be passive, parochial and pathetic in terms of understanding the things taught in the class room. Bakhtin's description of the language of the dominant ideology as a 'centripetal' force is directly proportional to the authority of teacher in the class room, which forces the learners to be passive receivers rather than active performers. Inside the class room, the authoritative voice of the teacher becomes so powerful that it cannot give productive platform to raise question or challenge and hence, works to maintain the status quo making the class room dull and disparaging. The two popular stories, which I am going to analyze herein, also give critical remarks against the traditional pedagogy that gives a spacious room to rote learning rather than creating an environment to learn in a performative way.

The widely-acclaimed stories, "The Good Example" by Mexican writer, Riva Palacio and "Who was to Blame?" by Russian writer, Anton Chekhov craftily depict the coercive and crippling effects of the so-called traditional pedagogy on the learners. By pungently darting their criticisms against the regressive, rigorous and rotten pedagogy, this essay claims that both the writers are the ardent supporters of performative pedagogy which has immense potentialities to make the life of the learners

fertile, fruitful and fructifying. A brief synopsis of their stories is imperative before evaluating their common concerns and thought patterns.

Palacio's story takes us to the southern part of Mexican village, where there was a school run by a teacher, Don Lucas who would teach the students by using the traditional method. First, he would read out the things and then encourage them to repeat the same. Following the teacher's words the students would "in a single cacophonous chorus, chant the alphabet, syllables, religious catechism, and the multiplication table" (99-100). They would in fact, learn the things by heart not by mind. After the children went home, Don Lucas would relax on the chair and share his food with his dear friend, a parrot, named Perico. But Perico and Don Lucas would understand each other. By overhearing his master, Perico too, had learned all the lessons. One morning, however, the parrot flew away to nearby jungle. After several months, Don Lucas, on the way to nearby village, heard the children reciting the familiar lessons in the jungle. At first, it seemed to Don Lucas that he was hallucinating in that torrid heat. But as he went nearer, the sound grew clear: "this desolate forest harbored a school" (101). Lucas then stopped, startled and amazed on seeing "a flock of parrots flying by nearby trees and chanting in unison ba, da, fa, ga, ja, be, de, fe, ge, je" (101). Just behind the flock, flying majestically, there was "Perico" who, while passing his master, turned his head and cheerfully said "Don Lucas, I have a school now. Ever since then, and well ahead their time, the parrots of that district have seen the shadows of obscurantism and ignorance disperse" (101). Here, the writer may be trying to tell us that the traditional pedagogy merely produces imitators like the parrots. By memory-based education and teaching method, even a parrot can open the school.

Similarly, in the story, "Who was to Blame?" the narrator's uncle, a teacher of Latin grammar, very rigorously and authoritatively teaches his students, which is reflected in the case of the narrator himself. He encouraged the narrator to recall regular and irregular verbs of Latin grammar without understanding his orientation to learn something in enthusiastic and conducive environment. The result was that the narrator grew up as disheartened and disappointed person which becomes quite clear when he says:

Whenever I chance to see some work of classical antiquity, instead of being moved to eager enthusiasm, I begin recalling, ut consecutivum, the irregular verbs, the fallow face of my uncle, the ablative absolute [...] I turn pale, and my hair stands up. (215)

We do find the intense disappointment in the narrator simply because of the discouraging teaching methodology of his uncle. The narrator's uncle applies same and similar method to teach a young kitten to catch a mouse without understanding the delicacy of its age. He simply imposed his authority while teaching; the result of which was that even after being a tom cat a sense of disappointment and timidity problematized him. By mere sight of the mouse, he began to take "ignominious flight" (215).

Here, Anton Chekhov like Palacio, is critiquing the so-called traditional pedagogy. Since the pedagogy itself is discouraging, the learners are further discouraged by the rendering of the punishment from the part of the teachers or instructors. Both Chekhov and Palacio are overwhelmingly hinting at the so-called rigorous, regressive and obsolete pedagogy which simply produces imitators and disappointed persons making them lousy, lethargic and lazy. Traditional pedagogy mars the creative potentialities of the learners; therefore, they will always be lagging behind. Unlike the traditional pedagogy, performative pedagogy make the life of the learners healthy, wholesome and creative as it bears radical touch and innovative twist.

It is the performative pedagogy that galvanizes the latent capacities and capabilities of the person which are manifested in the form of vibrating and vigorous performance. By valorizing the performance studies and its pedagogy Nathan Strucky and Cynthia Wimmer say, "Performance studies participates in an ongoing redefinition of cultural, social and educational practices" (34). Here, redefinition refers to make the pedagogy and cultural practices enabling and life-affirming only then the learners will move distinctly ahead in the line of their career-making. Another distinguishing hallmark of performance studies pedagogy to Struck and Wimmer is:

[...] its emphasis on embodiment. This emphasis demonstrates its concern with what happens to the bodies of teacher and students in the class room [...] a substantial development in performance studies pedagogy has been a consistent attention to enactment, to experiential learning in the class room. (3)

Here, the critic sheds light on the value of learning empirically in which there is spacious room for embodiment and enactment. Unlike rote learning, performance studies pedagogy always accentuates the underlying potentialities of the students to the surface. In the traditional pedagogy, the learners can be reduced into the level of one-sided imitators as in the story of Palacio and the disheartened and disappointed learner as in the

story of Chekhov. Such traditional pedagogy has been implicitly and succinctly criticized by both the writers.

By valorizing the performative nature of teaching, Richard Schechner says that in performance-driven classroom, "the feelings of the teacher and the students are brought into play on their own and in relation to each other not hidden under cloaks of objectivity" (xi). Here, Schechner is placing emphasis on creative interaction between the teachers and the students so as to make the pedagogy distinctly dynamic.

CONCLUSION

To cut the entire matter short, it can be said that the famous short story writers, Riva Palacio and Anton Chekhov by implicitly critiquing the so-called contaminated germs of traditional pedagogy and its detrimental impacts on the learners, are in the position of rallying cry for the performative pedagogy for the betterment of the students and the society. Having shown the perils and pitfalls of traditional pedagogy, both Palacio and Chekhov are the perfect votaries of performative pedagogy. Performative pedagogy is the ultimate passport that leads the learners into the pinnacle of glory. It is the performative pedagogy which takes the learners from the limited territory of traditional pedagogy to the open landscape of performative pedagogy which activates the vital forces like intuition, imagination and sensibility of the entire humanity.

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