

Wings to Imagination: Theatre as a Learning Tool in Education

Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.

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Abstract:

Educational Institutions have been trying to find different ways to engage students in class: initiatives for them to enjoy college and learning for we are teaching the millenials, a term coined for the new age leaners who are just not that into learning with the traditional methods. We as teachers have our work cut out for us and have to look for innovative methodologies for teaching like involving them in class, taking them on field trips and organising fests. One such initiative is **learning through theatre**.

Keywords: theatre, education, learning, yours, truly

Introduction:

We live in one of the wealthiest, most technologically advanced times on the planet. Our homes are crammed with work saving devices and electronic entertainment that previous generations couldn't and wouldn't even dream of. Surely our children should be growing happier every year?

Well, no. According to figures, one in ten now suffers from a clinically-recognised mental health problem and a UNICEF's report on "Childhood Well-being" found that kids from 21 nations across the developed world are the unhappiest. A survey revealed that children who watch too much television and spend hours on the internet are "greedy and unhappy".

Kids Today Are Growing Up Way Too Fast. Kids in the 80s and 90s had time to go to school, play and make mischief. It was expected of them. But now, kids have no time to play outside for their day and night is crammed with school, extra-curricular courses and the dreaded internet. This routine is shaking things and not just stirring trouble. Parents have no time for their kids thanks to them juggling work and other responsibilities. As simple as sharing a meal or going on a picnic has become tedious. Kids don't think any of this strange for they grow up in this environment. But as they grow up and start craving emotional support and don't find any, things get complicated.

As an educator, I have been associated with teens on the cusp of adulthood going through a variety of stages in their lives. There are kids who adjust, compromise and deal with their issues. And there are some who can't and won't and don't and keep getting into tussles with various stakeholders in their lives. We see them going through problems at home with their parents and siblings; at school with their classmates, friends and teachers and in their relationships.

As a part of academic calendar, institutions look for various activities to keep the students engaged throughout the semester apart from their academics. A variety of performing arts are included in the calendar to encourage the students to come out of their "zones" and enjoy their time in college. And to a large extent, these fests have helped some kids if not a lot of them to lose their inhibitions, become more confident and forget about their worries for some time at least.

Theatre

Theatre or theater is a collaborative form of fine art that uses live performers, typically actors or actresses, to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live

audience in a specific place, often a stage. The performers may communicate this experience to the audience through combinations of gesture, speech, song, music, and dance.

For thousands of years live theatre has captivated human mind. The theatre demands inclusion, cooperation, responsibilities and coming to grips with one's emotions – even when it is simple playing a role.

The audience steps inside the live experience of someone else that is empathy when you enter a theatre, whether you are ready for it or not it happens. We go to the theatre to learn about ourselves - who we truly are.

Theatre in Education should be a process that uses interactive practices to help children to learn by encouraging and empowering them to investigate challenging situations for themselves.

It's no big secret that getting students involved in the performing arts can have major advantage in school. After all, research shows that children who sing/dance/act/play their little hearts out are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement compared with their non-performing friends and they tend to have enhanced cognitive, motor, and social development. But the benefits don't end there. Getting up on stage can enrich the students' life in all sorts of surprising ways.

One major activity that has helped kids in my institution is watching plays and being a part of their setup for some time. Theatre or going and watching plays is a very personal choice. It's not everybody's cup of tea. A play can be serious or comic or both and a lot of times boring if it's not our choice of entertainment.

Adolescents find it difficult to express their emotions. Yours Truly theatre group has provided a great outlet to our students to explore a wide range of feelings including delight, anger and unhappiness apart from giving them the voice and the platform to express their emotions without inhibition and the fear of judgement.

Theatre

- Helps to bring about personal and social transformation
- Acts has a tool for empowering the weaker session of the society.
- Is a medium through which we can shape the world we want.
- Gives life lessons and empowers one with the power to handle the challenges and struggles of life at personal, professional and societal levels.
- Enables desire in us to contribute to social changes – to become active agents of change.
- Helps us to put ourselves into another person's shoes and experience their conflicts and emotions and empathise with them.
- As a weapon for personal and social change.
- challenges perception changes attitude and behaviour
- Is inspirational
- Improves self-esteemed motivation
- Delivers key messages that can be easily understood and remember
- Maximises learning

We at Academy of Higher Learning have had a theatre group, Yours Truly as a part of our English club activity for the past 7 years. And what a journey it has been. They have become a regular fixture in our calendar for our students absolutely love them. Their USP, I think is their improvising acts which the students relate to. They are spontaneous and intuitive; their performances are unrehearsed and unscripted and they are funny. And that is what makes them a class apart from the rest. They are one of a kind who makes acting seem so effortless and cool. All they think of is their audience and how good they can make somebody's theatrical experience great.

Ours is a heterogeneous student community where most of them are from semi urban and rural settings and many come from low and lower middle class backgrounds. They come with less or no exposure and no interest to many things. Many are first generation learners and come to college to get a degree and consequently get a job someplace. But once they watch YT, they are hooked.

It has been observed over the years that a lot of the students come with very less LSRW skills in English and this makes them less confident among their peers. Because of this, students lose interest to come to class. It's a classic case of low self-esteem and self-confidence. Classes appear boring when they don't understand.

As a powerful visual medium, it's an effective way to reach the audience and in this case, students than the chalk and talk method that happens in class. When they see the actors performing on stage, they are enamored. And in this case, ours predominantly being a girls college are enamored with the young men who come to perform.

They are hooked to the visual narrative and their theatrics affect them. Emotions are captured better on stage and they are reflected in the audience. Kids in my college especially have enjoyed the playback concept where the actors listen to their stories and interpret the incidents and play them on stage. Theatre gives wings to imagination is what one can learn from YT. And I have had students coming up and telling me how close it was to what actually happened and that it was like a rewind button had been turned up and that they were watching a movie in flashback. It's a true collaboration between the performers and the audience. Its indeed a gift on the part of the actors who improvise on the spot and make such a tremendous impact on the young minds. The narrative makes a huge impact on the kids while they listen to others' stories.

When we take a feedback from students, they say that they love the performances and that they don't know how the time flies when they are watching the actors perform on stage. They also feel like they have something to carry each time they watch them perform.

Advantages

Theatre empowers students with life lessons and enables them to

- be human.
- be non-judgemental
- handle the diverse world (different cultures ethnicities cultures, perspectives and teach them to embrace diversity)
- understand their own strengths and weaknesses
- develop empathy and compassion
- find emotional outlet and release their mental and physical and emotional tension.
- develop the communication skill, imagination, self-confidence and overcome stage fear
- be creative
- have a better understanding of various issues close to their heart when it was enacted on the stage.
- see their situation and life reflected on the stage by the team.
- challenge perceptions, change attitudes & behaviour

The performances help the kids think about the issues raised and examine the consequences of actions for themselves. 'young people' characters in a performance are reflective of the young people in the audience similar to peer mentors, which helps young people to incorporate the messages into their own thinking. Identification with the characters portrayed makes for a tremendous impact on them.

Conclusion:

Theatre need not just be for the children. It can be used as a quality tool for teaching in class too. People with theatre background or who are interested in acting are known to

make their classes interesting than the others. They act and use their voice to make learning fun. Classes can get extremely boring if the teacher is monotonous in voice and tone and with no expressions. So if teachers want a good attendance in class and want their students do well, make the class interesting. A teacher should encourage her students to dream but not in class. Children will remember you and your class for the rest of their lives for you would have given them an extraordinary experience: a visual treat, encourage imagination to take flight and land wherever they want. Theatre gives artistes a chance to hone their craft, by realising their shows before a live and responsive audience. Acting is a rewarding hobby. You will have an opportunity to make people happy, intrigued them and keep them entertained.

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Sue Palmer's Why are children today so unhappy?

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