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BALANCING BETWEEN THE NOTIONS OF QUALITY AND ATTRACTION IN TEACHING ARTS MANAGEMENT

Abstract

Today's reality of the system of Higher Education, revolving around the discourse of instrumentalization of education and placed in the wider social context primarily influenced by capitalist realism (Fisher 2009), is turning schools into entrepreneurial ventures (Dragičević Šešić and Jestrović 2017). This academic context positions the teacher/lecturer under more pressure than ever. McGregor's Theory Y (1960) focusing on the trust in the dynamic student-teacher relationship, far too often becomes substituted with the consumer-provider relationship. This article discusses the challenges the new context is bringing into the teaching of arts management on the undergraduate academic level. The author presents selected pedagogical case studies from his "Sport Billy" teaching suitcase, and discusses the merits of using different theatre practices, such as – site-specific theatre, radio drama and psychodrama as methods in teaching arts management. Three examples of different ways of constructing a space of understanding between students and teachers in the outcome-based teaching and learning environment, and tools that teachers can use to navigate through that environment, are presented.

Key words

higher education realm, arts management, Theory Y, student-teacher relationship

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Introduction:

Constructing the space of trust between students and teachers

From the perspective of today's reality around the system of Higher Education (HE) – the discourse of instrumentalization of education turning schools into entrepreneurial ventures (Dragičević Šešić and Jestrović 2017: 69), and difficult to avoid in the wider social context primarily influenced by capitalist realism (Fisher 2009), being a teacher in HE seems like a position under more pressure than ever. First and foremost, because teaching is not intended to be the only role academics perform within the system.

An academic is evaluated on the basis of four major roles – teaching (in the UK context evaluated through the Teaching Excellence Framework – TEF and the membership status in the Higher Education Academy); research (evaluated through the Research Excellence framework – REF); outreach and connection with the industry and the community (professional, consultancy and community engagement projects as well as the media exposure) and the “service to the University” – performance of various administrative tasks that the institution requires. In certain environments, because of the pressures of the evaluation criteria for academics (in the UK context, REF is perceived as more important than TEF), teaching has slowly become secondary to research and other grant-seeking activities such as consultancy and Research and Development contributions to the development of entrepreneurial or business initiatives such as hubs and incubators within academia (Heinsius 2018)². Paradoxically and despite their research-centered culture coupled with decreasing public funding, looking at the revenue streams of UK Universities (Baker 2017), for a number of them more of their income still comes from student fees than from research grants.

If we actually do put students and academics in the center of the processes within the academia (not only in theory but also in practice), and look at them through the lens of McGregor's Theory Y, it is important that we insist on the positivist approach to the organizational climate students and teachers create. That would mean to stand behind Theory Y (McGregor 1960) and have trust as a default starting point in the dynamics of student-teacher re-

2 One of the examples is “i2 media research” Ltd. founded in 2002 as “the expert consumer insight and user experience research and strategy consultancy based at Goldsmiths University of London, delivering rigorous research and innovation to business” (www.i2mediaresearch.com). It is a spin off from the Goldsmiths' Psychology Department, working with some of the most successful (new) media companies in the UK.

lationship, as well as a belief that students are there because they want to learn something and teachers are there because they want to be a part of this learning and teaching process. We should find a way to develop the space which both students and teachers would find useful to participate in (Biggs and Tang 2011). The anxiety I felt at certain stages of my development as a teacher/lecturer referred to the understanding of the process of construction of this space – what elements influence it, what I can do as an educator, what tools I can use, what students can do and what approaches they can have when engaging with this space. And, in the center of this transformative reflection process for academics (Biggs and Tang 2011: 45) is the realization that this space operates on mutual trust.

One of the aspects that adds pressure to this shared space comes from the diversity of students, which is a consequence of “academic capitalism” (Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter S. and Rhoades, 2009) and their different approaches to studying (Biggs and Tang 2011: 5). This diversity, especially present in the so called “global cities” such as London and which has never before been present on this scale, calls for multilayered methods of teaching within the framework of outcome-based teaching and learning (OBTL) (Biggs and Tang 2011). This makes the organization of one’s teaching session, as well as the curation of a module outline, a seriously complex task. This construction or curation process consists of a number of segments that point to the primary and a few secondary learning outcome(s), using diverse teaching methods. In the background of the entire process is the mutual understanding that both students and teachers are trying to shift from the quantitative approach to learning and teaching as the main focus (Cole 1990). Trying to go beyond the two “blame models” of teaching – blaming teachers or students (Biggs and Tang 2011: 16), we need to do whatever is needed to have as many students as possible achieving the learning outcomes.

Flexibility and diversity in teaching

Although many teachers wish their students had intrinsic motivation and enthusiastic approach from the very beginning of their joint work, that happens rather rarely. Together with students, teachers/lecturers need to find ways to provide the space(s) for such a motivation to emerge, taking into consideration the variety of stories that students are bringing with them. From the student perspective, finding their own value within the process of learning has a number of obstacles. One of the first ones is the wider context of edu-

cation as an industry, or as Gerald Raunig calls it – “factories of knowledge” in the context of “industries of creativity” (Raunig 2013), with the inevitable consequence of the consumer/provider relationship projected onto students and teachers³.

As one of the main preconditions for the construction of this joint space, a point needs to be reached at which the energy between the student cohort and the teacher/lecturer passes that obstacle, and is focused on the importance of the value of the process beyond the prevailing social context. Mark Fisher saw this context as a combination of “reflexive impotence”, a self-fulfilling prophecy, “where you know things are bad, but you also know you can’t do anything about it,” and “depressive hedonia” – “an inability to do anything else except pursue pleasure” (Fisher 2009: 21). From there on, this learning and teaching journey towards the value creation can include a few immediately applicable “how to” outcomes; mid-term outcomes that are not immediately reachable; and the long-term outcomes that call for the mutual trust in the process that has certain outcomes which will prove to be of value at some point in the future. If all three types of outcomes are clearly communicated, according to the expectancy-value theory of motivation (Feather 1982), the joint space that takes teacher/lecturer and students towards learning outcomes becomes a reality.

When that space is constructed, teachers need to know how to navigate it. It takes time and transformative reflection to develop a kind of “teaching inventory” (Prosser and Trigwell 1999), and in the further segment of this essay, I will be discussing some elements of the inventory I used in my own teaching practice as an arts management lecturer on the undergraduate level of studies. These tools have been developed in a constant cyclical process starting from the definition of an issue/problem, choice of a potentially adequate tool that can be used, application of that tool, evaluation of results and feedback, and then the redesign of the tool which is at the end of the process stored in the inventory.

3 This was one of the main underlining reasons for the largest strike in the UK HE system in the last few decades, in February 2018. What started the strike was the attempt to change the pensions scheme for the academics working in the UK HE system, but it was clear to both the students and the lecturers who supported the strike, that this was a part of a much larger issue of the extreme marketisation of HE.

“Sport Billy”: deconstructing one possible teaching inventory

In 1979, a company called “Fimation Associates” from California, developed an animated television cartoon called “Sport Billy”. It was a story about a young boy called Sport Billy from the planet Olympus, populated by athletic god-like beings. Billy’s power comes from his magic size-changing gym bag that produces different tools that he needs along the way as he battles the evil Queen Vanda and her henchman Sipe. Using action learning as an application of action research (Kember and Kelly 1993), the symbol of the Sport Billy magic bag full of appropriate tools was a framework I decided to take for my own teaching inventory. The bag slowly started filling with tools that were applied based not only on an idea of comfort that I as a teacher felt, but mostly based on how appropriate they were in the context of desired learning outcomes and the group of students I worked with.

There are a number of methods and approaches that are used in different art forms that have the potential to be tested and used as teaching methods. Since I am also educated in theatre studies and work as a theatre producer, the parallels between theatre methods and pedagogy were inevitable. I will present here three “Sport Billy” cases that reflect this approach.

#SportBillyItem1: Reading in the Dark

This particular one is inspired by the culture of listening to radio dramas in the dark, creating an atmosphere in which the sense of hearing is slowly being emphasized more than other senses up to the point when the group gets united into a temporary community bonded by the identity of sound. I tested this method as a way of approaching the issue of motivation of students to read the required readings for the session, which otherwise almost no one was reading.

The unexpected segment of the class, where I was reading a required text to students sitting in the dark, connected most of us in that space to our first childhood reading experiences. To some of the students this was an explicit memory, while some had it as an implicit context for their overall reaction. It also confronted all of us, teacher/lecturer and students, with our own relationship with the notions of patience and focused attention. A short, effective and provocative event/experience was created, that was at the same time a rational and an emotional statement. None of the students left from that short

session without some relation to it, and it became an internal reference point in the space that we were creating together. Patience as a concept has in this way become a subversion at the time of instant gratification.

#SportBillyItem2: Building the Common Space Through Psychodrama

The reality of a significantly diverse student cohort often proves to be a challenge for the organization of the structure that will help most of them achieve desired learning outcomes. At the beginning of this journey, most students feel that their anxieties, confusions, insecurities, angers, fears are only their own, and they have difficulties opening up to Others in this new space. A potential solution for this challenge is to work on the issues they share as members of different identity frameworks (i.e. generation, interests, experiences), questions they share as the members of this new community/cohort, while respecting and nurturing the positive values of their differences.

Psychodrama was chosen as a potential opening up tool because of its proven transformative potentials and a democratic process connected with the techniques of participative theatre and psychotherapy methods (Carnabucci 2014). Under the guidance of a licensed psychodramatist, and students split into smaller groups, the teacher is an equal participant of the circle of trust. Prior to the sessions, together with the psychodramatist, I defined the main questions that will be important for the creation of the joint space with that particular cohort of students. Participants in the process are acting out the scenes connected with their lives, and which are coming from the main questions we defined, such as – pressures and expectations from their family; insecurities around the artists with which they will be working with. Through this process, two sessions per week per group, students explore and reflect on their problems in the group, while group members function as a kind of therapeutic agents for one another.

The last stage of the process is after the return from the space of psychodrama process into the usual teaching space. It is important to connect the often deep and emotional, but most of the times empowering experience from the psychodrama sessions, with the space of learning and its learning outcomes.

#SportBillyItem3: Site Specific Theatre as a Method

One of the main aspects of education in the field of arts management is concerns project management as the underlining concept which the students will be applying in their professional practice. The first phase of any project management task is the research and exploration phase that needs to be done as a precondition for a good project idea and later – the construction of the project. The issue here was that students found conventional teaching on the research process not interesting, since they couldn't understand the connection and its usefulness. A potential answer was again found in theatre practice – from the beginning of my teaching career (Brkić 2011) I was using this approach extensively with the objective of widening typical research horizons offered to students, helping them in developing self and peer-learning processes linked to context understanding and further socio-political reflection.

Site specific theatre is a theatre practice that connects in a deeper way with the place where it is performed – its memory, aesthetics, social construct, architecture, artefacts (Pearson 2010). All of these aspects can be explored, and the performance itself can be a construct that emerges from the explorations of these dimensions of space. Students are placed in a physical space (i.e. backyard of a building) in groups, and placed in the environment which they need to research by way of using particular methodologies given to them as options they could use. At the end of the research process, they have some time to construct an idea for a project based on their research findings. After the presentation of their ideas, we all reflect on the process and how this as a method can be transferred to their professional practice as arts managers, i.e. when they are in the situation of having to develop an arts project with a diverse group of people.

Sustaining the focus

What I tried to present in this reflective essay is the importance of understanding the wider context of higher education system in a particular social environment, that as such prevents teachers from actively contributing to a critically engaged learning process: enabling students to actively participate in a learning process through research and specific classroom practices, would not only benefit students and teachers creating mutual trust relations, but also might help in bringing “cutting-edge ideas to academic discourse, that would endorse public debate and critical thinking by providing oppor-

tunities to remix the knowledge produced through different societal actors in the public sector and civil society” (Dragičević Šešić and Jestrović 2017: 70).

At the same time, I have tried to present three examples of different ways of constructing a space of understanding between students and teachers in the outcome-based teaching and learning environment, and tools that teachers can use to navigate through that environment. I also gave three examples of tools that are responding to this context. As a final stage in this pedagogical process is a certain level of self-management – it is important to always have the learning objectives in focus, connecting them with the needs and ideas of understanding of a particular group of students.

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BALANSIRANJE IZMEĐU POJMOVA KVALITETA I ATRAKCIJE U NASTAVI MENADŽMENTA U UMETNOSTI

Apstrakt

Realnost današnje situacije u kojoj se nalazi sistem visokog obrazovanja vezana je za diskurs instrumentalizacije obrazovanja koji preobražava škole u preduzetničke poduhvate (Dragičević Šešić, Jestrović 2017), kao i širi društveni kontekst koji je primarno pod uticajem kapitalističkog realizma (Fisher 2009). Ovaj kontekst stavlja nastavnika/predavača u poziciju u kojoj se oseća pod pritiskom većim nego ikada ranije. Makgregor (McGregor) se u „Teoriji Y” (1960) fokusira na poverenje u dinamičan odnos student–predavač, međutim u novom kontekstu ovaj odnos se najčešće menja odnosom konzument–producent. Ovaj članak bavi se izazovima koji novi kontekst donosi za nastavu menadžmenta u umetnosti na nivou osnovnih akademskih studija. Autor predstavlja nekoliko pedagoških studija slučaja iz svoje „Sport Bili” predavačke torbe u nastavi menadžmenta u umetnosti, koje su vezane za korišćenje različitih pozorišnih praksi, kao što su sajt-specifik teatar, radio-drama i psihodrama. Predstavljena su tri primera kroz koje se vidi kako se na različite načine može konstruisati prostor razumevanja između studenata i nastavnika/predavača u kontekstu sredine fokusirane na nastavu i učenje okrenuto rezultatima, a zanemarujući proces.

Ključne reči

oblast visokog obrazovanja, menadžment u umetnosti, Teorija Y, odnos studenta i predavača