

Using Dramatic Arts and Storytelling in Creating Effective Learning Outcome

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The Asian Conference on Education & International Development 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The outcome of effective teaching and learning is when the learners can apply, analyze, evaluate, or create something new from the knowledge they receive. Failed learning is when the gained knowledge cannot be transformed but remains just information that later is lost from the learners' minds and understanding. For learners, to be engaged many times they must get emotionally involved with the knowledge that they are learning. This research is therefore an attempt to reveal how using dramatic arts and storytelling can be such an effective tool in making learning successful. This is since the learners will be fully captivated through their feelings throughout the learning journey. And with their emotion engaged with the class, all learnt theory and information can be absorbed through their brains easily and they can understand easier and can remember for the longer period. The study is conducted through a live class in a hybrid format to train the financial advisors on wealth transfer. The class is done through switching back and forth between the hard knowledge on rules and information of wealth transfer by the professional financial trainer and the screening of the short thriller film where the investigators in the film also appear as the narrator of the whole class on site in the classroom. The research is done in collaboration with the financial training institutes CMSK and TMB Thanachart bank public company limited of Thailand.

Keywords: Dramatic Arts, Storytelling, Successful Learning, Emotional Engagement in Learning

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Introduction

Using entertainment media for adult learning is not new. It has been popularly employed in teaching various disciplines from humanities and social science to economic and medicine (Abidi et al., 2017, p. 38). The entertainment media was used for socially desirable purposes and received increasing attention since the 1990s (Kincaid, 2022, p.136). In Ryerson's research (2008, p. 1-4), he declares the significant role of entertainment media in adult learning by showcasing examples from Mexico where *Telenova* used melodramatic social content to teach people to study in order to get out of poverty; India where the usage of soap opera of *Hum Log* successfully changed the audiences' mindset on family planning and elevation of women status; and Tanzania where the serial drama had stimulated audiences' behavioral changes related to HIV/AIDS prevention and family planning. The idea of using entertainment media such as soap operas and films comes from the scientific evidence that memories which were formed through the emotional experiences that happens while watching a film, last longer and can be recalled more readily. It seems that films can help learners study some difficult subjects that might otherwise be challenging to understand with the traditional/ cognitive teaching methods.

However, the question emerges. What is it in cinematic films and soap operas that creates emotion within the audiences? To answer this, the researcher studies back into the foundation of drama as a platform of storytelling. Drama, according to Kincaid (2002, p. 139) "has more effect on an audience than many other forms of communication because it tells an engaging story, it involves the audiences emotionally, and it depicts change in characters with whom the audience identifies". Hence, cognitive, and emotional involvement is the result of watching dramatic storytelling and it is the main reason why drama has greater effects on audience than other forms of communication.

What is Drama?

Drama is "somebody wants something badly and is having difficulty getting it" (Kincaid, 2002, p. 138). In Aristotle's *Poetics*, he outlined the basis for the creation and the function of drama as an art form which he viewed the process as an imitation (mimesis) of real situations of human actions in which it distinguishes humans from animals (Mazur, 2020, p. 57). For him, the issue of interest is in the tragedy in which emotional responses from audiences come from pity and fear. Pity is "feeling of pain, destructive ... which befalls one who does not deserve it and which we might expect to ... befalls us soon" (Mazur, 2020, p. 58). Many times, the main character is, on the one hand, innocent, and, on the other hand, in a situation that causes a destructive case of unavoidable suffering. Fear is "a person's natural response to situations" (Mazur, 2020, p. 63). Many times it refers to the audience's response. At the end, pity and fear leads to catharsis or purification of the soul. For Aristotle, the purpose of drama is to create in the audiences the feeling of pity and fear, and to remove this emotion, thereby making people stronger emotionally. For him, the feelings of pity and fear are not the only range of feelings in the dramatic arts, however, to experience purification of the soul without this, tragedy is pointless.

A captivating story in drama will make audience create the bonding and empathize with the characters, and care about what happens to them. To create this, the feeling of pity must emerge when the characters face uncertainty in life. According to De Fossard in Kincaid (2002, p. 138), the audience needs to empathize with the characters in drama and sympathize with what happens to them. With this process, the audience will turn into the active

participant of the whole dramatic experience and full participatory involvement emerges. To get the audience's sympathy, the character must face challenges or confrontation. For Kincaid, "the essence of drama is confrontation, which generates emotion. Emotion is the motivational force that drives the action of the character, leading to conflict and its resolution. By means of involvement and identification, the confrontation and emotional response of the characters generate a corresponding emotional response in the audience" (Kincaid, 2002, p. 150). As a result, the empathic response in the audience emerges. The whole thing above goes hand in hand with Aristotle's Poetics where for him "the basis for tragedy is a plot which reveals human drama, and this in turn is indicated by feeling of pity and fear. Those feelings are a psychological response on the part of the audience to the tragedy of the character (Mazur, 2020, p. 61). Aristotle specified 6 key elements of drama namely action/plot, character, thought, language, music/ song, and spectacle. In all elements, the plot is the one that is related to the confrontation which generates the captivating story most. Plot is the pattern of events. It is the main structure and purpose of drama. The plot builds towards an inciting incident in which the characters confront obstacles and threats. The plot creates an ascending dramatic tension which leads to climax before resolution is reached in which the story is concluded. In this circumstance, the confrontation is climatic.

Taking the above into account, the uncertainty from the obstacles, conflicts and confrontations in the character's life keeps the audience emotionally involved. According to Kincaid, "a good story is balanced between 2 equally plausible outcomes: what the audience hopes will happen and what it fears might happen" (2002, p.138). With this the anticipation will create suspense. The intense desire of the main character will keep the audience absorbed and arouse a strong emotional response.

Emotion has a substantial influence on the cognitive processes in humans. It has a strong influence on attention and behavior. This attentional control is intimately linked to the learning process (Tyng et al., 2017, p.1). Moreover, the attentional and motivational components of emotion have been linked to heightened learning and memory. Therefore, the emotional experiences appear to be remembered clearly and with great resilience over time.

The Inheritance Puzzle



Figure 1: Atmosphere in the hybrid training class

In the class, the film that was screened as the main storyline for teaching is “the Inheritance Puzzle”. It is the story of the Charoenchai Family. A Thai Chinese wealthy family with vast number of members.

The story starts with the sudden death of grandmom Jai who did not write the will. Hence, all her inheritance of 300 million baht is divided equally among all heirs. However, with granddad Chai’s health is deteriorating from the death of his wife, now he writes his own will (400 million baht of personnel asset and 400 million baht of marital asset) which is the ignition of all conflicts. He states in his will that once he passes away, his inheritance will only be given to his 2 sons i.e. Pao and Ting in which if one dies first, the inheritance will go to the one that is still alive. However, he disregards his only daughter, Hong, who used to be grandmom Jai’s favourite and is the one that work hardest in the Charoenchai’s family business. Granddad Chai, nevertheless, dislikes Hong’s partner who came from the enemy family. Thus, he cut Hong out from his will. Once the will was written and announced, Pao, the oldest son is dead abruptly. With the whole inheritance will go straight to Ting according to the will, the rumour begins of who will possibly be a murderer who killed Pao. While everyone is looking at Ting for the cause of Pao’s death, one day Ting is found dead alone in his house with suspected suicide as concluded by the police. Who exactly is the cause of death of Pao and Ting? Will it be Hong who lost all with her dad’s will? Or the sons, daughters, and spouses of the family.

The main character of the whole situation is the investigator who is not only the main narrator in the film but also must find the true killer, but he also appears in the training classroom to bridge between the hard knowledge of wealth transfer in each chapter delivered by the financial plan trainer, and the crime story showed on screen. The students in class follow his journey to find the true killer, and to learn about wealth transfer knowledge to search how to propose the effective wealth transfer products which will prevent the deaths and crimes within the family.



Figure 2: Diagram of family structure of the Charoenchai family starting with grandmom Jai and granddad Chai on top

Aristotle's Dramatic Arts Structure

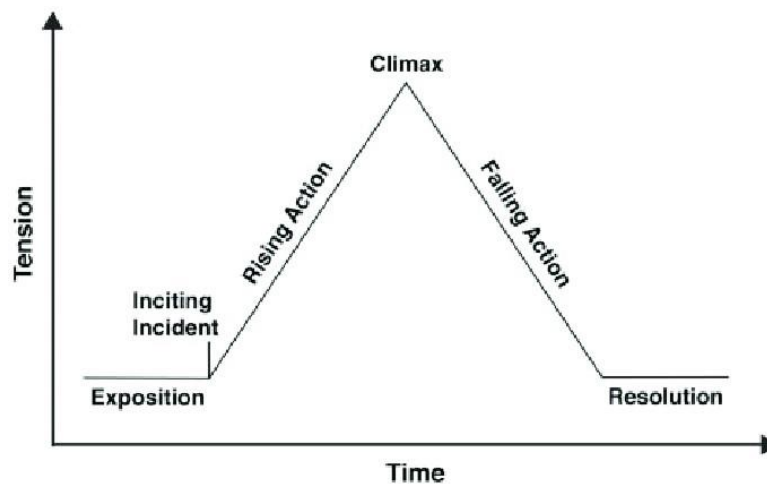


Figure 3: Dramatic Arc or Freytag's pyramid as analysed from Aristotle's Poetic (Elshafie, 2018, p. 1216)

According to Aristotle's dramatic arts structure above, the exposition of the story begins with the narration of the Charoenchai family's vast structure of member and their wealth. The inciting incident happens with the death of grandmom Jai. Throughout every step in the plot journey, audiences are designated to follow the struggle of the Charoenchai's family private investigator. Under this circumstance, the story is designed to create the bonding and empathy between the audiences who are the wealth transfer students and the investigator who are the main narrator of the story. The audiences' empathy is produced through the sympathy of difficulty and the struggle that the investigator must go through to unlock the mystery of the Charoenchai's family conflicts. Episodes of the rising actions are the series of always becoming bigger challenges i.e. rising action 1 is when grandad Chai whose health is deteriorating caused by the death of his wife, writes his own will and states that his inheritance will only be given to his 2 sons and disregards his only daughter, Hong; rising action 2 happens with the accidentally death of Pao, the oldest son of grandad Chai; with rumors and confusion happen within the family, rising action 3 emerges with the shocking death of Ting, the only remaining son of grandad Chai. The climax is thus generated. This is since not only the investigator cannot resolve the death of Pao, but also with Ting's death, the investigator now is confronted with 2 huge dilemmas with no solution. Regarding to the death of Pao, the oldest son, all the speculation and suspicion comes to Ting, the younger son, as he is the sole benefactor of the whole circumstance. Nevertheless, with Ting's death, especially with the police's conclusion of suspected suicide, the case becomes deadened. With Ting's death, the only suspicion will go to Hong's the only daughter whose granddad Chai cut out from the inheritance.

Throughout the plot of storytelling, other characters are introduced along the way to increase the challenge and conflicts of finding the true murderer of the investigation for example Nam, the ex-wife of Pao, grandad Chai's oldest son, and Chin, Nam and Pao' son who discovered Ting's, the remaining son of grandad Chai, death. Moreover Pao also remarries with Fah, and they have Ananda and Amm as their descendants. With several heirs being introduced, this create the complexity of unlocking the mystery of who the killer is. This is since all of them has the tendency to be the benefactor of the death of Pao and Ting. It could be said that the greater number of heirs and the closer to the dead person they are, the bigger obstacles they create to the storyline for the investigator to resolve.

Training

In the training, once the exposition of the story starts, before introducing any inciting incident or conflict, the knowledge on what the inheritance is, i.e. asset and debts, and the estate e.g. personal and marital asset, introduced to be Module 1: the foundation theory of wealth transfer. Then, once grandad Chai's will episode is established, the knowledge on inheritance i.e. the statutory heir and the testator is informed as Module 2. At this moment, various categories of will, and tax and fee on inheritance management is informed in the class. Later, when the death of Pao, the oldest son of grandad Chai is occurred, Module 3: knowledge on strategies inheritance management and planning to pass on an inheritance is established. It seems that the delivered knowledge part is to offer solution to the learners that if they must prevent death and crime from happening in this family what would be the financial products that they can purchase. The training ends with Module 4: health insurance and mutual fund, and the significance of family charter, the holding company and trust as the alternative solutions of the family crime.

The training is from 9.00-16.00 (6 hours in total). There are 50 participants in class on site at TMB Thanachart bank public company limited of Thailand headquarter in Bangkok. Before attending the training, all participants are required to do a pre-learning test to evaluate their knowledge and understanding of wealth transfer. Then in each module training, there are several real-time quizzes and games for the participants to conduct. And after each module ends, there will be a group assignment for the participants to do regarding the knowledge part of the training. Once the whole training ends, each participant will be required to submit an individual plan and strategies in proposing the financial products on wealth transfer and management to the designated group of customers with individual and different needs. Then each participant will be given a coaching session and private feedback after the assignment submission from the professional financial planner at the final step.

The evaluation from the participants is 85% of the learners agree that a short film helps with knowledge application, 90% of the learners agree that activities help with knowledge assessment and 85% of the learners agree that case studies from the film helps enhance knowledge retention. From this result, it is the confirmation that dramatic arts and storytelling which are the keys in creating learners' captivation through emotion, are the main mechanism and the principal key success for media to be used as a successful tool for teaching and learning of all kinds of knowledge i.e. from the hard science of medicine to finance to more human fields of literature and society.

Conclusion

Dramatic arts are used as a tool to create successful storytelling in entertainment media. Although the dramatic arc of Aristotle is proven to be a success formula in creating captivating plot and storyline that can engage audience's emotions. It is not an easy one and there is no definite 'how to' of implementing it. This is since to put the hard skill content and create the successful plot that runs under the framework of the dramatic arc, this needs not only lots of creativity and imagination to come up with the scenario, characters, and their actions, but also the deep understanding of the knowledge and its content to apply into the storyline believably and entertainingly for the audience.

There is room for further discussion and research in the above field of knowledge. If one succeeds, there will be steps and processes that will enable all kinds of hard knowledge to be

learned easier and faster through the entertainment media and its storytelling. This will make all kinds of teaching and learning fun and successful.

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