

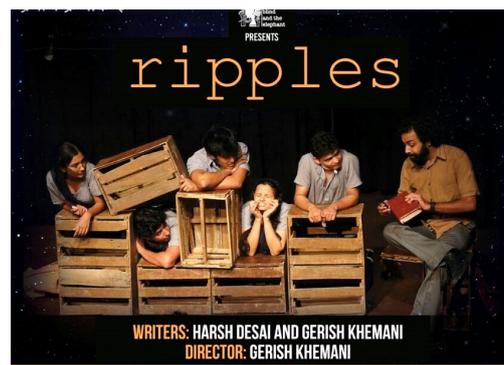
CREATING RIPPLES: THEATRE COMES TO COLLEGE

Experiment in Theatre Pedagogy

Theatre can be an interesting medium of achieving some educational goals and objectives. Under theatre pedagogy there was an interaction between professional theatre group The Blind and the Elephant and student teachers of two B.Ed. Institutes – St. Xavier’s Institute of Education (SXIE) and Bombay Teachers’ Training College (BTTC).

The theatre group, The Blind and the Elephant, came to St. Xavier’s Institute of Education (SXIE) with their talents of young budding actors and ubiquitous but kaleidoscopic props. The auditorium of SXIE overnight transformed itself from a formal, regular auditorium into a dynamic space of live theatre. Right in front of our eyes, the creative writer-director reversed the face of the auditorium and changed it into a stage that lend itself to highlight the performance of the actor, accentuate the impact of light and sound as well as to distinctly drive home the subtle message of theatre pedagogy and the context of a learner.

The play Ripples was scheduled for 4th March 2017 keeping in mind the convenience of school students and B.Ed. Students. The Manager Fr. Blaise D’Souza and the I/C Principal Dr. Vini Sebastian along with faculty coordinator Ms. Kalpana Chavan took keen interest in overseeing the arrangements and getting the ambitious project actualised.



Setting the Stage:

Months before the actual performance of the theatre group, the contextual relevance, significance and implications of the play on the student teachers were brainstormed and streamlined. The proceedings were finalised with several meetings between the writer-director Mr. Gerish Khemani and SXIE I/C Principal and faculty coordinator. To ease over financial viability and to expand the scope of the play to wider audience, talks happened with Principals of other B.Ed. colleges. Eventually, Bombay Teachers’ Training College Principal Dr. Mintu Sinha joined hands with SXIE for a collaboration of putting up the play. Dr. Meenakshi Lath was delegated as the faculty coordinator for BTTC, to coordinate the schedule, presence and follow-up assignments of their first year and second year B.Ed. students.

On the eve of the play, the entire crew of artist, with the director, equipment manager, lights sound manager were taking arduous efforts to make the auditorium into a professional stage. It was a long struggle to give the set-up of an actual theatre like stage, but finally to the relief of all, by late evening things had taken shape and were readied for the next day’s performance.



Eve of the play: Setting up the stage

Stage on Fire:

On the day of the play, students from both the colleges accommodated themselves in the available space in the hall; faculties of both the colleges, Manager of SXIE Fr. Blaise were seated. The play started on time with small introduction and instructions to the audience. The play Ripples was about school students of 13-14 years adolescent girls and boys and their teacher who recognised their individual differences and the drawbacks of the traditional teaching learning methods. The fears, inhibitions, the cultural baggage, the past experiences of the children were depicted in expressive and heart touching manner. The teacher in the play used dynamic teaching approaches and methods of teaching suitable to the learners' context, background and age. The use of symbolic, metaphorical props like the well, the boxes, and the simple stationeries made the play even more in-depth and grounded in meaning. The play was not at all preachy about what education or teaching should be, actually in the layers of adolescent jokes and mischievous antics, profound yet hard hitting realities were brought out. The use of word association, stories, dance, facial expressions, sometimes silence were also a part of the theatre pedagogy, making their connections to the student teachers. The play ended with a symbolic way of how the teacher shows the path to students, opens up a world of freedom at the same time is freed from his tangles of fears and inhibitions by his own students. The actors took a bow in the midst of loud applause and cheers.

Minds on Fire:

After the play, usually audience get up and go, sometimes meet the actors and the director, congratulate them and leave, but as a part of the theatre pedagogy the play was followed by discussion and reflection. The actors and the director sat with the audience and invited the house open to discussion, their views, opinions and reflections. The house buzzed with interesting candid observations, experiences, reflections, appreciations, feedback and even questions. The director and actors accepted all of it with openness and answered the questions and even put forth reflective questions to the audience. It was a true learning experience. It was also heartening to see the teachers of today and tomorrow so sensitised and passionate about teaching, learning and the system of education. As much as the play this reflective time was loaded with emotions, expressions and essence.



Theatre Pedagogy: Reflection and deliberations

Later, in the foyer the actors and the director mingled with the audience and even answered their personal questions, listened to their life experiences and gave their views on it. The captured moments of the reflections were not limited just to the cameras in the mobiles but were etched in the minds and hearts of all.

Take-away

Last but not the least, after all the audience had left, the director and the actors sat in a circle and discussed on the happenings of the day, their areas of success and even spaces of improvement, they reflected on the follow-up discussions with the audience and how they can enhance their play with the proceedings.

Even the students, first years of both the colleges submitted their assignments in their course of Enhancing Professional Capacities (EPC) of Drama and Art and second years had a follow up activities and assignments as a part of their Understanding Self EPC tasks. It was a learning experience and linked to their course material thus, having a win-win situation of linking knowledge to practice and learning through experience.

The play was thus truly a theatre pedagogy giving access to participants' own ideas and impulses, expanding the avenues of communication and interaction with the self and one's sociocultural environment.

Reviews: The students gave raving feedback of the play and our experiment with our efforts to making teaching learning joyous and creative. One sample of feedback of our student gives voice to all others:

"I left the auditorium INSPIRED, TOUCHED and AWESTRUCK! and when I say awestruck by the message put forth ... I truly mean it (coz I even forgot to eat my lunch this afternoon). There were some beautiful and absolutely raw scenes... The beginning when Manya described his friends looking at the stones was something so simply put forward but it became beautiful on so many levels the moment he said 'each one was needed to created music' 🙌 The dialogues in the play were very very relatable and closer to reality, more than I would like to imagine. I was blown away by the last scene when the students read out the Teacher's diary... As the teacher slowly constructed a wall - crumbling to the ground due to his past!

And when the students came to rescue... Slowly tearing down the structure... Piece by piece! Aah that was the most touching thing I've seen! That scene was so beautifully performed I couldn't help but feel shivers down my spine... My eyes filled up with tears as the teacher was depicted as being soooooooooo human... And the students even more!

It's always this thought that THE TEACHER HELPS THE STUDENT... But that last scene.... It's the TEACHER WHO IS HELPED BY THE STUDENTS!!! 🌍🌍🌍".

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