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Reader's Theatre: A Creative and Innovative Teaching Methodology Across the Disciplines

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Abstract

Background: This paper focuses on the importance of creativity and innovation in teaching methodology. Educators who are creative and innovative usually are not afraid to take the risks in trying out the many possible methods in teaching. They will always find new ideas, approaches or actions in order to make their lessons interesting, meaningful and beneficial. This is important because as educators we cannot be passive, orthodox and pessimistic in accepting new ideas. Innovation and creativity are crucial in teaching because they are interrelated. Both are needed to be implemented in the teaching and learning process because through these two concepts we can develop human capital as intended and stated in most curriculum. **Objectives:** There are many innovations in teaching methodologies that we can adopt and adapt. In this paper we are going to look at a methodology using Reader's Theatre in a law classroom to discuss and understand the judicial decisions (court case). A law lecturer collaborates with an English Language lecturer to help the law students understand better when discussing the judicial court case. This study has been carried out among the foundation law students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kuantan campus. **Results:** The findings indicated that the students responded very well to this new methodology when discussing the court case. The students when asked said that they like the Reader's Theatre activity where it could help them understand better the content of the judicial court case and thus, it promotes and motivates them reading the case. Not only the students are able to understand the judicial court case, Reader's Theatre also helps students to be more fluent in using the English Language. **Conclusion:** This collaborative effort between the two lecturers has proven that they could develop a creative and innovative teaching methodology across the disciplines.

Keywords: Innovation, Creativity, Reader's Theatre, Judicial Decision (Court Case), Interdisciplinary Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Creativity and innovation are needed in making classroom lessons interesting in order to sustain students' interest and attention. This will not happen if educators are more into teaching the subjects but not the students. Therefore, educators will definitely need to make the teaching and learning process beneficial and meaningful to the students. If not in the end they will face with the guilt that they have not achieved their goals and objectives in teaching. This guilt is actually derived from the realization that their students are not performing in the classroom and thus this will lead to high failure among them. This has been agreed by (Hargreaves, 1991) where he stated that the greatest emotional turmoil faced by contemporary teachers is guilt where they cannot meet with the expectations of producing successful students. This will lead to frustration among many educators when they realize not all students benefit from what is taught in the classroom.

One of the ways where students can benefit from what is taught in the classroom is through proper teaching methodology. There are many teaching methodologies that have been suggested by prominent researchers in the field of education. One of them where educators can employ is teaching across the disciplines. They can combine two or more disciplines in their teaching method. This can make the lesson more meaningful and students can enjoy and benefit from the learning process better. This paper discusses on teaching one of the components in the Law subject by using a methodology in teaching Reading in the English Language subject. It is proven that the Law students benefit and understand better what is discussed in the lesson taught by the law lecturer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching across the disciplines can help promote academic engagement for both educators and students and it allows the exchange of new information, a shift in intellectual paradigms formerly based on ownership of knowledge, and the pleasure of a collaborative effort (Brown and Pollack, 2003). Fabillar and Jones also stressed that interdisciplinary teaching could move teachers away from working in isolation into a valuable relationship where they learn from each other and advance their own understandings (Fabillar, and Jones, 2004). This can be seen in the study that we have carried where two lecturers from two different disciplines were involved and the collaborative effort between them has shown good results in the learning process. Here, students are not only able to understand better the judicial court case but they could also use the English Language in the classroom. They could understand the vocabulary used in judicial court case more because the lecturer can immediately explain to them after the selected students have presented the case using the Reader's Theatre activity.

It is proven that when students are engaged in any reading aloud activity it could improve their fluency and later it could develop their interest in reading (Baffle, 2005). Reader's Theatre activity helps students to be more fluent in reading because when they are reading a text aloud they are stressing more on the pronunciation of the words and this helps them to be better readers. This will also lead to the ability to recognize the words used in the text better. In our study where the court case may be difficult to be read and comprehended alone; adopting Reader's Theatre could help in improving the students' fluency and when they are fluent, it would be easier for them to read the

judicial court case text quickly and accurately. In addition, this helps them to recognize the words faster and they could focus more on the meaning of the text rather than concentrating on decoding the words in the text (Therrien, 2004) and this could make it easier for them to understand it later.

We cannot deny that fluency is very crucial and has a critical role in a student's reading process because it is just like a bridge between word recognition and comprehension (Carnine, et al., 2004). Even though fluency will not guarantee comprehension, comprehension will be difficult without fluency. Therefore, with the help of Reader's Theatre students will be fluent and this will help them to comprehend the judicial court case text better. In many situations when students constantly stop reading because they stumbled on difficult or unknown vocabulary, the meaning will be distorted and this makes the reading process long and tedious (Griffith and Rasinski, 2004). With the help of Reader's Theatre students become more interested in reading the case and this will help to minimize these problems because when they have become proficient readers, they could use the higher order thinking skills such as analyzing, interpreting, drawing conclusions, and inferring meaning from the texts (Rasinski, 2006). This could make reading a meaningful and shorter process. Thus, reading the case using the Reader's Theatre activity will not make the students feel bored reading it because it is a fun activity in the classroom.

Another good point about Reader's Theatre is that it does not demand a lot of preparations. There are no props, costumes or actions are involved. They need only the scripts of a play and they need to practise reading the scripts dramatically with proper intonation. Furthermore, they do not have to memorize the scripts. The emphasis is on the dramatic reading of the scripts, using expressive reading, setting the appropriate tone, and maintaining the audience's interest on the performance (Rasinski, 2006). This is where we could adopt reader's Theatre when discussing the judicial decisions (court case) because the text can be developed into a play-like script and a group of students can read and perform it in front of their friends. Even the most reluctant or poor readers could participate in this activity. Reader's Theatre can also improve students' motivation and attitude towards reading. This is what we hope will happen with our Foundation Law students when they are asked to read the judicial court case. It is further stated that participation in Reader's Theatre could increase students' motivation in other unrelated school tasks/works (Rinehart, 1999).

Talking about collaboration in an interdisciplinary approach in teaching, Brown and Pollack have led two workshops in 2004 where they have described their approaches and experiences (Brown and Pollack, 2003) to be very meaningful. This is also shown in our study that the two lecturers (an English language lecturer collaborated with a Law lecturer) have shared these valuable experiences where they have collaborated and successfully made teaching more fun and meaningful. Reader's Theatre can make reading the judicial court case more meaningful. and thus the teaching and learning process in this interdisciplinary approach will benefit both parties – the lecturers and students. This will be quite difficult to be accomplished if the law lecturer is using the conventional methodology when teaching and discussing the court case because students will feel bored reading it without any reading activity done in the classroom. Reader's Theatre will give and promise a fun learning experience among students because they will be involved in the performance of the Reader's Theatre.

Expressing their emotions in any kind of reading activity is known to be one way of making them understand the content better because they are directly involved in the reading process. Intertextuality is involved here.

METHODOLOGY

In this study we have adopted the Reader's Theatre activity as the interdisciplinary methodology in a Law classroom to discuss the judicial decision court case with two lecturers involved in the teaching process. One is the Law lecturer and the other is an English Language lecturer who assists the law lecturer in the Reader's Theatre activity. Our respondents were twenty-five students of group D Foundation Law students from the Law Foundation Program at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kuantan campus. In the first semester of their Foundation Law program they will be asked to read and analyze the judicial decisions (court case). A judicial court case text is taken from a court hearing and it uses the authentic language used in the court. Some of them find it difficult to comprehend the content of the court case due to the language and the law terms used in text. The normal practice of teaching methodology --is the law lecturer will ask the students to read the court case on their own first and then it will be discussed in the class. During the discussion the law lecturer will make a review on the case and discuss with the students. It is observed that students are not really enthusiastic during the discussion and only a few would participate. We feel that with the Reader's Theatre activity to be adopted when reading this court case could help promote these Foundation Law students to read and understand the court case better.

Therefore, in this study our respondents were asked to read the judicial decisions (court case) entitled PP v. Kok Wah Kuan before they watched and listened to the Reader's Theatre performance. We have selected four students among the respondents to take part in Reader's Theatre activity. In this activity the court case text is read like a play-like script. The four students selected were briefed by the Law lecturer with the help of the English language lecturer on how they are going to perform the text using the Reader's Theatre activity. They are given the time to practice before they perform in front of their friends in the classroom. When conducting the activity we can rotate turns among the students in the classroom using different court cases so that every student is given the chance to be involved in the Reader's Theatre activity throughout the semester. This Reader's Theatre activity is to reinforce the reading of the text so that they could understand the court case better and most importantly is to motivate them to read the text.

How do we conduct the Reader's Theatre activity?

In this study, we have followed the same **three steps** suggested in the Reader's Theatre activity when discussing the judicial court case in the classroom:

- **Step 1: Select a Script:**

Unlike the usual Reader's Theatre carried out in a reading classroom where we normally use a particular script from any literary text, in our case the judicial decision (court case) is used as the reading scripts. The four students selected to perform the Reader's Theatre activity will read and discuss it with the law lecturer teaching them with the help of the English Language lecturer. For this

particular activity the law lecturer has chosen the court case entitled PP v. Kok Wah Kuan. The rest of the students in the classroom were also asked to read the same court case.

- **Step 2: Rehearse the Production:**

The law lecturer helped the four students to interpret the characters they were reading from the court case. The four students were asked to practice reading the “script” during their free time before presenting it in the next lesson. The four students will be exposed to the techniques in reading aloud – voice projection, facial expressions, intonation and the pronunciation of the words. Acting in the Reader’s Theatre activity does not demand any movement, props and memorization of the script like the normal role play or drama. They are required to only read aloud the “play like script” (that is the case) in front of the classroom by using proper intonation, correct pronunciation and interacting with their friends in the group.

- **Step 3: Stage the Production:**

The four students performed their Reader’s Theatre in front of their classmates in the classroom in the following lesson. No props are used or perhaps only minimal ones. The most important thing is the “actors” must read the case beforehand and understand the case. Then only they can make the rest of the students follow the hearing of the court case. After the students have performed the Reader’s Theatre activity their law lecturer further explained the case and discussed the whole case with all the students. Students were encouraged to ask questions as they discussed the case. At the end of the lesson, a set of questionnaires were then distributed to all the students to justify our study and findings.

Results and Discussion

The findings that we have gathered from this study to justify that Reader’s Theatre can be adopted and carried out in a law classroom and accepted by the students when discussing the judicial court case are as follows:

Our data analysis is based on the SPSS cross tabulation analysis. From the set of questions in the questionnaires we have chosen three questions pertaining to our study which could justify our findings. The tables below show the analysis that we gathered from the cross tabulation analysis:

Table 4 (Q4) Do you like the activity on Reader’s Theatre (RT) that we have just conducted?

Like RT activity * Gender Crosstabulation

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Like RT activity	Yes	Count	6	17	23
		% within Gender	100.0%	89.5%	92.0%
	No	Count	0	2	2
		% within Gender	0.0%	10.5%	8.0%
Total		Count	6	19	25
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Findings: 92% of the respondents like the activity on Reader’s Theatre.

This shows that majority of the students like Reader’s Theatre activity to be adopted during the discussion of the judicial decisions court case. We observed that they are very enthusiastic and for the first time most students have paid attention to the lesson on court case. The activity has also helped them understand better the content of the court case because they could analyze it as they are listening to it. The lecturer could help them more in trying to make them understand the legal terms used in the case after the activity is done. The legal terms are difficult to some students as this is the first time they encounter such terms. Proper explanation is needed so that students will understand it better. As lawyers to be, understanding the court case is crucial because they will one day involved in the hearings.

Table 5 (Q5) Does this Reader’s Theatre activity help you to understand better the content and thus promote and motivate reading the Judicial Decision (court case) as compared to the normal teaching approach when discussing the Judicial Decision (court case)?

Understand better with RT * Gender Crosstabulation

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Understand better with RT	Yes	Count	5	16	21
		% within Gender	83.3%	84.2%	84.0%
	No	Count	1	3	4
		% within Gender	16.7%	15.8%	16.0%
Total		Count	6	19	25
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Findings: 84% of the respondents agree that Reader's Theatre activity help them understand better the content of the judicial decisions (court case) and thus it also promotes and motivates them to read the court case assigned to them.

This indicates the activity has also helped them understand better the content of the court case because they could analyze it as they are listening to it. The lecturer could help them more in trying to make them understand the legal terms used in the case after the activity is done – discussing further the meaning of the terms and words used. Here, the lecturer can teach them how to use a dictionary because a word used in the case can be from different parts of speech. The lecturer can introduce the students the different types of dictionary. One of them is the Law dictionary where all the legal terms are explained in it besides the general type – English Language Dictionary. Therefore, students will be able to use the dictionary appropriately.

Table 3 (Q3) Is the language in the Judicial Decision (court case) difficult for you to understand?

Language difficulty * Gender Crosstabulation

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Language difficulty	Yes	Count	5	12	17
		% within Gender	83.3%	63.2%	68.0%
	No	Count	1	7	8
		% within Gender	16.7%	36.8%	32.0%
Total		Count	6	19	25
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Findings: 68% of the respondents agree that the language used in the Judicial Decision (court case) is difficult.

With 68 % of the students agree that the language in the court case text is difficult to understand proves that they need this Reader's Theatre activity to help them be more fluent and this in turn could help them read the text accurately and recognize the difficult words automatically. Earlier in the literature review we have discovered that, it is undeniable that fluency is very crucial and has a critical role in a student's reading process because it is just like a bridge between word recognition and comprehension (Carnine et. al., 2004). Even though fluency will not guarantee comprehension, comprehension will be difficult without fluency. Therefore, with the help of Reader's Theatre students will be fluent and this will help them to comprehend a text better. Here, it is also proven that collaboration between the language and law lecturers works well with the two disciplines being successfully taught together. Good language is needed to understand the court case better. The lecturers could help them with the meaning of the difficult words and also help them to pronounce the words correctly. Therefore, this will help them be fluent readers.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, interdisciplinary methodology can benefit students more because they will gain more knowledge not only in one discipline but perhaps two or even three depending on how many lecturers from different disciplines are involved. The collaboration between the two lecturers in this project has benefitted the students involved more than just understanding the law content but they can be better users of the English Language. Students of law need to be very fluent in presenting their case one day and they need to be exposed to the role of a lawyer. Therefore, the role of a lawyer can be carried out and practiced in the Reader's Theatre activity. Thus, this can help students understand better their role of a lawyer during the performance of the judicial court case and this is a more practical approach to teaching where theory is supplemented by proper practical exposure.

We hope many educators will adopt this interdisciplinary methodology in their teaching because it has proven that the teaching and learning process will be more fun, interesting, and meaningful. Educators can be in any discipline to adopt such methodology. It only needs them to be more creative and innovative in their teaching methodology and they are not afraid to face any negative outcomes if there are any. These outcomes will help them to be better educators in the future. They will not know what will work unless they are willing to take the challenge. Then only they will know what is the best for their students. Teaching will be more fun and meaningful if all educators are innovative and creative in trying to make teaching a meaningful learning process for students.

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