Effectiveness of Multi-Layered Teaching Methods and their integration in MBA Pedagogy with Special Reference to Middle Level Business Schools

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Abstract

The hallmark of any Educational Institution is its academic excellence. Academic excellence stems from the pedagogy followed by the Institute, the types of learners therein and the academic ambience that is imbibed by the teachers. MBA education has now gone beyond simple methodologies like chalk and talk, guided instructions and the like. All premier MBA institutes have standard teaching practices like, case study evaluations, discussions and in depth analyses by the students and faculty alike.

But for middle level Business Schools, from tier- two cities, most of such sophisticated methods do not always bear fruit. For such schools, success in academia results only if they employ certain strategies to engage and improve their students. The Institutions need to evolve and customize their pedagogy and teaching style to suit the learners and their levels of understanding.

The researchers have used their experience of teaching in an MBA College in Nagpur as a base of research for this paper. The Researchers have tried to institute innovative ways to instruct the students on an experimental basis. This paper covers the policy changes that the Institution also incorporated to uniformly customize their pedagogy.

The researchers have used certain case studies to draw out the various changes that took place in the personalities of the students and also the effectiveness of the methods that were used.

This paper also tries to understand the type of learners and the methodologies that can be used to enhance personal effectiveness of each teacher.

For the organization, this exercise was a strategic policy to become more dynamic and student friendly.

Key words: Policy, Strategy, pedagogy, experiential learning

Introduction:

Change is the most permanent feature of any growth. World economies and social cultures are undergoing a sea change because of various systemic factors. The Indian subcontinent is also going through its share of growth pangs, as an economy and as an academic powerhouse. India as a nation is going through a very dynamic phase, economically, socially and intellectually. A gradual paradigm shift is evident in all socio-cultural aspects of the country. Evolution of social and intellectual thought has occurred with the passage of time; but the speed of this thought evolution has made it difficult for this generation to keep pace with it. The education sector is the designated custodian and thought leader in any economy. It cannot hence be relegated to a high pedestal without any contact with the masses. It can never remain aloof from the changes in the Diaspora.

The educators have to manage a fine balance of simplifying methods of learning, popularizing learning and also ensuring that the correct knowledge, values and ethics are passed on to the learners.

Keeping such social changes, in mind the researchers have tried to analyse the needs of the learners and have tried to use multilayered methods to teach complicated phenomenon by considering the various facets of the learners like their backgrounds, their motivation to learn and their inclination to do so.
Literature Review:

Education systems have evolved over time and have been set up in a particular context for particular purposes. To enhance the contribution of education to innovation, education and training systems must undergo changes to become more innovative themselves, taking various factors into account such as structure, resources, stakeholder involvement in learning environments, culture, teaching methods, and learning methodologies. Education and training systems consist of multiple layers and a variety of organisations and institutions. A sustained transformation effort is likely to be needed in diverse contexts and with the involvement of a large number of different factors. Change management experience is one of the sources to turn to. In policy making, futures thinking and scenario methodologies have been widely applied to create out-of-the-box thinking concerning challenges and uncertainties ahead, particularly in technology policy making. (Hanne Shapiro, Jens Henrik Haahr and Ida Bayer Danish Technological Institute and Patries Boekholt Technopolis, 2007)

Expectations towards students in higher education have changed over time. Learning cannot be considered as a passive knowledge-consuming process anymore. Students are expected to be more autonomous and more self-regulated in their learning (Boekaerts, 2006). They have to be prepared to be lifelong learners. In order to foster the development of these competences on a student level, learning environments and teaching approaches in higher education need to be supportive in this respect. Students gradually have to be provided with more freedom in their learning process (Vermunt & Verloop, 1999). Innovation of instructional and learning strategies is one of the basic issues of learning in teaching at all levels and systems of education (Barica Marentič Požarnik, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia). Implementation of innovations is the necessary condition for improving teaching standards. (Axelrod, R., Cohen, M.D 2000).

The main aspect of the teacher's role refers to the preparation of a context, i.e. creation of an encouraging environment including preparation of learning materials through various paths and canals and creation of social situations for learning and ways for an individual to attain insights and understanding of problems occurring during learning. The main features of a teacher have been pointed out: self-reflexivity, being able to encourage and care for the student and not to be too authoritative. All this implies constant innovations of procedures in pedagogic-didactic competence of a teacher, (Grozdanka Gojkov)

Research Objective:

The research objective was to study and typify the students or learners into various categories depending on their social, economic, academic and intellectual backgrounds. The researchers tried to understand the impact of these differences on their capacity and motivation to learn.

The other objective was to understand and utilize various methods to ensure that all learners are brought up to a common level so that learning is more effective. The researchers also tried to experiment with various combinations of teaching methods and problem solving techniques.

The researchers tried to map the effectiveness of some methods commonly used in entirely different scenarios like “Circle time” in Kindergarten, complaint boxes or worry boxes in industries, speech competitions in middle and primary schools.

Through such a combination of multilayered methods, the researchers tried to communicate and convey uniform as well as subjective instructions to the students.

Methodology:

The researchers have used a case based approach towards this study. They tried to typify the students to understand their backgrounds and through their backgrounds, understand their needs for learning. Each of these cases was taken as a representative sample and the methods of effective instruction were mapped. The sample size used for this study was two batches of 180 students each. The students/learners were classified according to their communication skills, their intellect, and their social, family and economic backgrounds.

To simplify the notion, numerical data was used for typifying the students into various categories.
Sources of Data:

The sources for primary data were actual figures from the administration office; scores of assessment tests of the students, their academic performance and other related data.

The secondary data was collected from various papers, journals, books and interviews of experienced faculty members.

Background Note on the Learning Environment (College):

The learning environment or the College is, “Tirpude Institute of Management Education”, (TIME) Nagpur. Nagpur is a tier II city with an approximate population of 24,05,400 people. Amongst other features, Nagpur is fast emerging as an education hub for all nearby towns and cities. Nagpur boasts of 3 – 4 Medical colleges of national repute, around 35 – 40 engineering colleges and 40 – 50 MBA colleges both affiliated to the University and private institutions. Students from all surrounding areas flock to Nagpur for graduate and undergraduate studies. MBA is by far one of the most popular courses which attract the students from the neighboring towns. TIME is one such college, that is a top ranking institute offering BBA, BCCA and MBA programmes. The admission procedure is standardized through the Common Entrance Test, which relies on Aptitude, Group discussions and Panel Interviews.

Student databases show that the group of learners are a healthy mix of genders, social and academic backgrounds.

The following graphs depict the composition of the student groups.

The Male : Female ratio is 56 : 44 percent, as shown in the graph. This data was sourced from the admissions office.

The next step was to segregate the students according to their performance in Academics.

The data was sourced from the admissions office, the test and assessment records and class performance. An average of percentages of Graduation marks and Semester marks was used to form this graph. It was found that students with an average score within the range of 35 – 40% was 15% of the total. Those with an average score within the range of 40 – 69% was 65% of the total number. The brighter ones, scoring 70% and above as an aggregate were 20% in all.
Another parameter for segregation was their domicile. It was observed that the environment where the student studied and lived made a great difference to his outlook towards professional education.

This data was collected from the admissions office to understand the cities / towns / villages that the students belonged.

Tier I cities were the metropolises, like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and the like. This particular sample did not have any student from these cities.

Tier II cities were Aurangabad, Jabalpur, Raipur, Bhilai and Nagpur from which nearly 30% of the student population was sourced.

Tier III cities include Wardha, Akola, Buldhana, Bhandara, Amravati, Gondia, Chhindwara

Tier IV cities and townships would include Pulgaon, Hinghanghat, Umri, Balaghat, Rajnandgaon, Pandharkaoda etc

**Time Period**: The time period for this study spans two semesters; i.e 10 months.
The researchers have segregated the students according to their various characteristics and have used one indicative sample for each subgroup or classification. These samples have been developed as caselets to ensure simplification and understanding.

**Theoretical background:**

The research has revolved around Jenny Mosely’s Circle Time as the base of this study. More specifically, the researchers used Jenny Mosely’s Circle Time which is primarily a concept used for Kindergarten children to enhance effectiveness of learning in an MBA milieu.

**Jenny Mosely’s Circle Time:**

*Quality Circle Time is a democratic and creative approach used to consider a wide range of issues affecting the whole school community.*

It was developed in response to England's Primary schools' need for a whole school Behaviour Policy as a part of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). *Quality Circle Time is based on the promotion of self-discipline and self-esteem. Students learn and understand the consequences of their behavior and begin to take on responsibility for themselves and their immediate and wider community. This has been shown to gradually shift responsibility for discipline from the teacher to the children themselves.*

*At the heart of the Circle Time Model is a class meeting which involves the whole class sitting in a circle to look at issues relating to personal, social, moral and health education. The circle meetings aim to encourage the development of positive relationships, self-discipline, conflict resolution, assertive communication and democratic group processes alongside the skills of speaking, listening, observing, thinking and concentrating.*

Circle Time follows a clear structure over half an hour:

- **Opening game:** pulls the group together, provides a sense of fun and enjoyment, used to teach learning skills, moral values and codes of conduct
- **Round Table:** gives everybody a chance to speak. A speaking object such as a conch can be used to enable a focus on the speaker and indicate that all others must listen. It is this section of Circle Time where scripted sentences are often used. Examples might include: I find it easiest to work in class when... I get fed up when... I was pleased with myself when...
- **Open Forum:** an open, free discussion phase which can be used to discuss and solve problems and set targets
- **Celebration of successes:** a chance for pupils to thank others, both children and adults, for acts of kindness etc. during the past week
- **Closing game:** brings a sense of closure and bridges into the next part of the school day
- **The structure is designed to build a sense of class community and the teacher acts as a non-authoritarian facilitator, encouraging co-operation and creating a climate of emotional safety.**

Jenny Mosely, [www.circle-time.co.uk](http://www.circle-time.co.uk)

Circle time was facilitated by the class teacher who used a collaborative approach to solve problems, initiate discussions and make the learners aware about their problems.

**Worry Box:**

Worry Box was a concept derived out of Jenny Mosely’s QCT (Quality Circle Time). The Worry Box was a decorated box that would be passed around during or before a QCT session so that students could anonymously post their worries, complaints or grievances. The Worries generated out of the Worry Box were used as prompts in the QCT discussions.

**Speaker of the Day (SOD):**

A lot of feedback from circle time, vindicated the belief that the students lacked verbal skills as they were not practiced speakers. They needed a comfortable platform to hone their public speaking skills.
This initiative was called SOD, where one student would be earmarked for speaking for 2 minutes at a stretch on a subject close to his / her heart.

The students were assessed for every speech they gave on pre set parameters. These scores were further compiled and communicated to the students as cues for self improvement. The parameters included- Confidence, content, Body Language and Communication. A sample of the SOD marking card is given below.

Sample of SOD marking card.

The breakup percentage of the students according to their performance on the SOD parameters is evident in the following graph. Each student was given 4 chances to be the SOD and his scores were averaged and then collated.

The following cases are representative of each of the criteria discussed above. The researchers have coined indicative phrases to typecast each group.

Case 1:
Background:
Name of Student: Vinita Arora
Student belongs to Amravati, Tier III city, 45%
SOD scores- Confidence- low – 20% of total; Communication- high – 25% of total
Group type: Confidence Seekers

Vinita Arora belongs to a conservative Punjabi family. She is from a joint family with joint family business. Vinita was brought up in a very protected environment, where the girls are groomed to become home makers and remain indoors with minimal interaction with the competitive world outside. She was never encouraged to participate in extra curricular activities till her graduation. She was a quiet girl not knowing about her potential and did not dare to think beyond the wishes of her family. Coming from such a background and taking up a formal course in management, the environment in the college was new to her. Being an introvert she did not interact much with her peers but she was a regular, attentive and sincere student.

Circle time was introduced in her class and was facilitated by the class teacher.

She found her classmates interacting with the faculty openly and discussing various issues concerning them. She was one of the few who would use the worry box very often. The worry box ensured that her worries were heard anonymously but solved unanimously. This brought about a change in Vinita she slowly started interacting in between with others. Due to frequent interaction with the faculty member and her classmates in an informal environment, she gradually mustered confidence to be able to speak about her wishes at home as well as in the college environment. Now she has become one of the most responsive members in her class. She has started participating in extra curricular activities in the college. This has favorably affected her learning as well.

Due to family pressure, she was engaged to be married, but now has at least had the courage to speak up for herself and got the permission to complete her PG and then get married.

Circle time was a useful intervention to ensure that a positive change was brought about in such students.

Case 2:
Name of the student: Karan Paunikkar
Domicile: Pulgaon; Tier IV city / township 25% of total;
Aggregate Academic performance: 63% - 65% of the total;
SOD scores: Confidence – low; 20 % of total; Content- Average, 50% of total; Body Language- low; 18% of total; Communication – low; 35% of total

Group Type: The Vernac

Karan Paunikar is an average looking boy who has studied in Marathi Medium till his graduation. He hails from a lower middle class family. He is a timid and shy boy who wants to improve. He is sincere and hardworking but still is unable to perform well in the class. He tries to participate in various activities but is unable to succeed. With a wide gap in the background he belongs to and the college environment he is unable to adjust or get accustomed to the environment.

After attending a few classes especially CT he started talking about his worries with the facilitator. His worries were genuine but with proper guidance from the facilitator he started working upon his weakness i.e. communication and English language. He now participates in all the activities where he is required to communicate and give presentations in English.

The worry box, circle time and SOD further heightened his confidence, wherein his participation increased in all activities.

Case 3:
Name of the Student: Priyanka Thakur
Domicile: Raipur; Academic Performance: 75 %; 20 % of the above
SOD scores: High Scores on all parameters.
Group Type: The attention seeker

Priyanka Thakur is a beautiful girl. She belongs to a business family. She is arrogant, stubborn, nasty and rebellion. She never completes her work, does not follow instructions and enjoys troubling and disturbing everyone. She does not pay attention in class and is disinterested in constructive activities.

Priyanka was a nonchalant participant in CT, initially. But her reactions to the Worry box problems always confused the facilitator, where she was found to be very observant and insightful, especially when it came to matters of career, education and empowerment of women.

The facilitator finally realized that Priyanka was subjected to a lot of gender bias at home and her opinions were discarded or subjugated against those of her brothers. She exhibited such untoward behavior in class only to seek attention from her peers. The facilitator realized that she was suppressed at home. Through her, it came forth that nearly 10% of total girls faced this problem at home. Priyanka’s behavior was then modeled by counseling interventions.

Case 4.
Name of student- Suresh Mendhe
Domicile – Hinganghat; Tier IV city / township; 25% of total
Academic Performance – 65% - 69% of Total.
SOD Scores: Low on all parameters; extremely low attendance

Group Type: The megalomaniac

Suresh Mendhe hails from Hinganghat, a small town near Nagpur. His father is a farmer. He has done his schooling and graduation in Marathi medium from his home town. He has moved out of his house on his own for the first time in his life. He is doing his specialization in agribusiness. He is uncomfortable in the college environment. He is irregular in college, does not attend the classes. He has not made many friends in the college and hardly interacts with other students. He is unable to complete his assignments on time. Whenever there is a holiday in the college he visits his home town as it is just about an hours drive. His visits are prolonged and he returns late to the college.

The initial breakthrough with Suresh was after observing his SOD performances and constant absenteeism. He learnt of CT through the student grapevine and approached the teacher through the Worry Box. He was coached by the facilitator to communicate and express himself better. With continued attendance in CT it was observed that his engagement with the college also increased.

Case 5
(All rounders with high exposure – 5%)
Name of student- Akshara Singania
Domicile –Nagpur; Tier II city; 30% of total
Academic Performance – above 65% - 69% of Total.
SOD Scores: High on all parameters; low attendance

Group Type: The Off-track

Akshara Singania has been a top ranker all her life. She belongs to a cultured and educated family. She is a hardworking, enthusiastic and intelligent girl. She is good in studies and extracurricular activities as well. She participates in all the activities carried out in the college. She is a very regular student and popular among the faculty members. She takes initiative in all the assignments and activities. Even though she is good at everything now her performance is declining. Her percentage is going down and there is no growth in her personality.

In this case, Akshara’s reactions to CT activities were monitored. It was observed that she would be an eager organizer but a reluctant participant. Through CT, it was found that she did not feel
engaged enough. She was then asked to moderate and initiate CT and monitor SOD for her lesser skilled classmates. CT turned out to be an engagement activity for her and she started attending class regularly. It also increased her empathy and receptiveness which led to better learning.

Case 6 (High comfort level – 5%)
Name of student- Shreyas Gupta
Domicile – Nagpur; Tier II city; 30% of total
Academic Performance – 65% - 69% of Total.
SOD Scores: High on all parameters; except Content; extremely low attendance

Group Type: The Heir Apparent

Shreyas Gupta belongs to a rich business family. He is an intelligent, smart and good looking boy. He is friendly with all his peers and is popular among them. He is carefree and happy go lucky. He is not bothered about anything. He does not take anything seriously and does not perform well in academics as well as extra curricular activities.

As he is from an affluent background, he is not too bothered about placements, or a job for himself.

Shreyas was another reluctant participant to CT, he was cynical about the concept and thought it to be extremely foolhardy. But as he observed the worry box, his interest was piqued, his interest in people around himself increased. He showed interest in attaching himself to the placement team and helped establish contacts with local business men through his own networks.

An observation of all such cases proves the utility of QCT and its allied tools as successful interventional methods for any level of students and learners. The researchers have successfully integrated multi layered teaching methods in MBA pedagogy to enhance the learning capability of eth students and make them more responsive and receptive.

References: