Interpersonal Skills – A Pragmatic Approach to Promote Multi-faceted Personality among Engineering Students Employing *Role Play* as a Tool – A Report

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Abstract

Interpersonal skills are a pre-requisite for engineering students as they work in teams. A professional, working in a team needs technical expertise along with the ability to move with the members of the team to accomplish the project. It is important to balance technical expertise on one hand and orient the team on the other to accomplish the project. It requires team spirit and interpersonal skills. Unfortunately, majority of the engineering students lack interpersonal skills as they are trained to work individually while preparing for entrance examinations to seek admission. Hence, they are suffering both in their career and personal life, "Studies say 90 percent of executive failures are attributable to interpersonal competencies" (Patricia A. Wheeler, 2005). The present paper made use of a student centric activity employing *role play* as a tool to develop interpersonal skills while promoting multi-faceted personality of the engineering students.

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Key words: Interpersonal Skills, technical expertise, role play, multi-faceted personality.

Introduction

Majority of the engineers work in teams and hence Interpersonal skills have become a pre-requisite. They have to develop interpersonal skills to accomplish the project on hand as they need "goal-directed behaviours used in face-to-face interactions which are effective in bringing about a desired state of affairs" (Hayes, 2000: p.291). According to Rungapadiachy, interpersonal skills may be defined broadly as "those skills which one needs in order to communicate effectively with another person or a group of people" (1999, p.193).

Therefore, interpersonal skills are essential ingredients that every engineering graduate should possess as their work involves working in teams all through their career. Unfortunately they are trained to work individually when they work for entrance exams like EAMCET, AIEEE and IITJEE before their admission into engineering stream. The concept of working all alone was infused at a tender age so deeply that it becomes a major hurdle at every step in their work and career as professionals, if it is not addressed during their engineering course.

The concept of 'I' was infused rather than the concept of 'We', which is a primary requirement to work and flourish in career and in a team. The shortfall may be met with Interpersonal Skills. The skills may be infused among students with a student centric activity employing role play as a tool. According to http://www.skillsyouneed.co.uk/interpersonal_skills.html (2011), "Interpersonal skills are the life skills we use every day to communicate and interact with other people, individually and in groups." Hence, interpersonal skills are the need of the hour for engineering students to succeed in their life and career.

The Focus of This Paper

This research paper presents the proceedings of the role play which includes; selection of teaching material, identifying role play scenes, dialogue writing, the role of the faculty; practice and performance of the scenes by students, evaluation of

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student's comprehension with outcome of the activity which proved to be a joyful learning experience while imbibing interpersonal skills.

The role play activity is being planned to employ to achieve the following objectives. The objectives help engineering students to develop interpersonal skills while promoting multi-faceted personality.

Objectives of the Role Play

1. To develop initiative to interact with others
2. To advance the ability to share opinions with others
3. To improve the ability to work in groups
4. To promote ability to move sociably
5. To enhance the team spirit to achieve desired results in a group

To accomplish the desired objectives as stated above, the following methodology is being employed:

Methodology

1. Selection of teaching material
2. Extensive reading
3. Vocabulary discussion
4. Story outline discussion
5. Identifying the situations to role play
6. Dialogue writing
7. Practice and performance of role play
8. Evaluation of students' comprehension

Selection of Teaching Material

The short story 'Like the Sun' from the collection of "*Under The Banyan Tree & Other Stories*" (Narayan, 2009) is being adopted as the teaching material for role play while making use of the open ended Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University of

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Hyderabad syllabus 'Role Play'. The reasons for the selection of short story written by R.K. Narayan are:

1) The story presents a critical, realistic and practicable situation showcasing how important the interpersonal skills are.

2) The diction, syntax and writing style are intelligible to students and the themes of narratives are applicable at all times.

3) It provides an opportunity to develop questionnaire to seek individual responses.

4) It helps students to showcase their talent, realize the importance and hone the interpersonal skills.

The selection fulfills all the requirements according to Brown (2001) as cited in Huang (2008), "role-play minimally involves (a) giving a role to one or more members of a group and (b) assigning an objective or purpose that participants must accomplish."

Target Group of Students

The subjects for the activity are undergraduate students of Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Technology, Gandipet, Hyderabad – 500 075, studying I B.Tech. Electronics & Communication Engineering (ECE). The class of 60 students is divided into two batches of 30 each for the English Language & Communication Skills (ELCS) Lab. The activity continued for 2 – 3 lab sessions for both the batches.

Extensive Reading Activity

A handout (extract of short story) "Like the Sun" was given to undertake extensive reading. The outline of the story is;

Sekhar is a school teacher and is known as best music critic. On a particular day he feels that Truth is like 'Sun' very difficult to practice and receive. 'Life is spent meaningful' if only one practices truth at least for a day in a year. He encounters three incidents on the given day where he has chosen to practice and give truth irrespective of consequences. The incidents are; 1) the morning meal prepared by his wife, he

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could not swallow and says 'it is not good' and saw her face wince. 2) In the common room when his colleague informs that so and so died and extends pity stating that such a fine man- Sekhar cuts him short and says far from it and also says that the person passed away always appeared to him as a mean and selfish hypocrite. 3) Sekhar suggests Headmaster to stop practicing music after witnessing his full dress performance. Headmaster thanks Sekhar for free and frank suggestion. Headmaster informs Sekhar to evaluate all 100 answer booklets by the next day morning thoroughly, whereas he has given 10 days time before music performance. Sekhar feels that if I practice truth for a week, I will be left with no friend. Sekhar pays the small price of correcting 100 answer booklets in a day spending all night for practicing truth for a day.

Vocabulary Discussion

Based on the context, students were encouraged to infer the meaning of the difficult words. The response was quite encouraging and major part of the vocabulary was deduced correctly by students and the rest was discussed by the faculty giving some more clues to infer the meanings without directly giving the meaning of the words.

Story Outline Discussion

The story outline was discussed as it helps the students to comprehend the narrative better, understand how characters behaved differently in various situations and to empathize with the characters. This discussion helped them while undertaking role play of scenes from the narrative.

Identifying the Situations to Role Play

Based on the discussion of the story outline, the narrative was divided into five major scenes by students to undertake role play enactment in consensus with faculty.

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Scene 1 - the reflection of the thoughts of the Sekhar and a secret Resolution to give and receive the 'Truth' as it is for that day.

Scene 2 – the wife of Sekhar serves morning meal and the Sekhar speaks out plainly that 'it is not good' and the response of the wife.

Scene 3 – Sekhar gives truth plainly about the character of a dead person, rather bluntly, during the conversation over lunch at school with colleagues.

Scene 4 – Full dress performance of the Headmaster to Sekhar; where Sekhar, a well-known best music critic available in the town, was forced to deliver his judgment frankly and immediately.

Scene 5 – At home, at the end of the day, recollection of events by Sekhar and the response of the wife.

Dialogue Writing

Dialogues for the characters in role play are written based on the situation, text in the narrative, peer group discussion, and under the guidance of the faculty. The faculty appraised the first draft of dialogues, suggested modifications and encouraged them to undertake a revision. This activity enabled the students to furthermore empathize with the characters and comprehend the Scene thoroughly to undertake the role play in total agreement.

Role Play of the Scenes

Students are suggested to practice role play of the scenes before they actually perform it for the class. Practice of role play helps them to imbibe the feelings, behaviour of the characters, and understand the situation. It in turn helps them to perform role play and present the behaviour of the character with ease and joy as presented in the narrative.

Practice of Role Play

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To begin with, students are instructed to read the dialogues aloud for few times. In the second round they are asked to practice the dialogues as if they are delivering them in real life situation to their counterparts. Then, they are instructed to exchange the roles and practice dialogues in order to have thorough understanding of the scene and all the characters there in. Later, they are suggested to come back to their original roles and practice them again and again till they gain the confidence to perform in front of the class. In the process, the faculty practically demonstrated to students as to how to deliver the dialogues with modulation of voice, body language while exuding the spirit of the character and so on.

During the practice, students developed good rapport among the group and gave suggestions to one another to improve their performance. They started sharing their thoughts overtly and seeking feedback from the peer group. The spirits of the students were high. They have put in their sincere and best efforts to come up with the best performance. They were quite enthusiastic during and after the practice of role play.

Performance of Role Play

Students gathered all the articles required along with the costumes to take-up the role play for performance in front of the class. The event took place on 23rd January 2012. Initially, they were bit nervous. Within a span of 10 minutes they are ready for role play with the support and motivation extended by the peer group and faculty.

Performance of the role play took place while presenting the scenes meticulously from scene 1 to scene 5. All the students are engrossed in the characters and their behavior reflected the characters as described in the narrative. Delivery of dialogues reflected the feel of character with articulation. Students also took care of body language to communicate feelings, attitude and behaviour of the character. Students presented scenes actively and enthusiastically. It's a wonderful opportunity to present their innate talent. The mood was upbeat all through the session. Scene after scene was presented with joy and gusto. It was a joyful, memorable and learning experience to one and all.

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Evaluation of Students' Comprehension

In order to evaluate the student's comprehension and their improvement of abilities in terms of interpersonal skills a questionnaire was designed while collecting the details of the students. Faculty evaluated the performance of each and every student based on the following parameters (questionnaire) before, during and after the enactment of role play. The questionnaire is as follows:

For each comment, please circle <u>one</u> number on each line.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Before the Role Play					
1. Initiative to interact with others	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ability to share your opinions with others	1	2	3	4	5
3. Ability to work with others	1	2	3	4	5
4. Ability to achieve the desired objective in a group	1	2	3	4	5
During the practice of Role Play					
1. Initiative to interact with others	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ability to share your opinions with others	1	2	3	4	5
3. Ability to work with others	1	2	3	4	5
4. Ability to achieve the desired objective in a group	1	2	3	4	5
After the Performance of Role Play					
1. Initiative to interact with others	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ability to share your opinions with others	1	2	3	4	5
3. Ability to work with others	1	2	3	4	5
4. Ability to achieve the desired objective in a group	1	2	3	4	5

Figure: Characteristics to measure improvement of interpersonal skills

The response of the questionnaire indicated the improvement of their interpersonal skills. The outcome of the role play based on the questionnaire is as follows:

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Outcome

- Students started interacting with one another sharing the opinions openly.

- Improved ability to initiate a talk and share thoughts.

- Started seeking the feedback while working on the limitations.

- Improved group dynamics to work in a team to some extent.

- Understood the importance of empathizing.

- Improved the ability to move with others without conflict.

- Improved the ability to achieve desired objective even while working in a team.

- Role Play is a joyful learning experience.

Conclusion

This paper looked into one of the prerequisites of the engineering students i.e., interpersonal skills to develop multi-faceted personality. It helped them on one hand to match with the requirements of the industry and on the other to succeed in their life and career. The paper discussed an activity conducted in the ELCS Lab session using role play as a tool. The activity penetrated majority of the students including introverts. As the activity is student centric, it demanded their personal attention and performance. The outcome of the activity is encouraging and yielded good results in overcoming the inhibitions of the students to some extent. It helped them to take initiative, emerge out of their limitations to hone interpersonal skills and overcome emotional shackles while developing multi-faceted personality meeting the objectives of this paper.

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