ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK TO ENGAGE STUDENTS' MEANING MAKING IN SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

Technology has become an integral part of everyone's life. Students nowadays are adept at using technology especially online social network such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and so on in their everyday life. This has helped them to connect and communicate with friends and relatives easily. It also helps them to develop and connect meaning from their inner world to the outside world. It is important for teachers to take this opportunity to integrate online social network in the teaching and learning processes as it may encourage engagement and enjoyment among students. In the case of introducing Shakespearean drama in literature lessons, technology in the form of social media can become an effective platform for students to become active meaning makers. Through a case study of twenty teacher trainees, this paper uncovers how Shakespearean drama can be taught and learnt through online social network in particular Facebook. The findings generally show that when students got to express their thoughts and feelings through Facebook they were able to develop their linguistic, cultural and personal competence as they connect and communicate personal meaning openly which in turn encouraged participation in classroom learning.

Keywords: *online social network, Shakespeare, drama, engagement*

INTRODUCTION

Today, our students grow up in a borderless world that is heavily depended on technology which allows them to connect, experience and socialise. They depend much on laptops, MP3s, I-Pads, smart phones, and social networking sites to support their interactions with others and with the world around them. They are technology savvy and they spend a lot of time with these technology tools which they enjoy doing. Their desire for immediacy is palpable: they multitask or Google a subject rather than wait for an explanation from the teacher (Diana, 2005). Therefore, technology has had a striking impact on the students and their learning process.

Since technology has become widely used in education and research has revealed numerous interesting findings about its usage in language learning (Pramala, 2006), teachers should use technology in the teaching and learning processes. In the case of teaching literature, teachers can use technology to engage students in co-operative learning in order to develop students' interest in literary work (Norlida, Nuradyani and

Puteri Rohani, 2004). Technology can also encourage the exchange of ideas and students' participation (Vethamani, 2006).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Malaysian context, there have been numerous studies on teachers' approaches and students' perceptions on the teaching and learning of literature (Kaur, 2003; Siti Norliana, 2003; Kumar, 2003; Hwang and Mohamed Amin, 2007; Tina, et.al., 2007; Marzilah and Sharifah Nadia, 2010). Research has revealed that teachers prefer teacher-centred activities in the literature classroom which cause students to be passive and unable to respond critically (Kaur, 2003; Siti Norliana, 2003; Kumar, 2003). The findings by Hwang and Mohamed Amin (2007) showed that the teachers often act as a dominant figure who read, retell and explain the story, ask questions and give answers based on literature component. Teachers often focus on information gathered about the text to enable students to discover the 'correct answer' rather than their own perception or personal response to the text (Tina and Zaidah Zainal, 2008).Teachers also only focus on the language part of the literature i.e. grammar and vocabulary while neglecting other essential aspects of it like the appreciation of the literary works (Marzilah and Sharifah Nadia, 2010).

Moreover, students on their part prefer language-based approach that help them in understanding the lesson as they have limited access to the language and it is hard for them to express their opinion (Zubaidah and Shaidatul, 2010). They also do not fully understand what they have learned and they do not know how to appreciate literature (Marzilah and Sharifah Nadia, 2010) while the linguistic and cultural barriers that exist between their knowledge and the texts prevent them from studying literature (Zubaidah and Shaidatul, 2010).

Drama in Shakespeare's language can be difficult, even baffling (Frank, 2000). This is obviously so for students coming in four hundred years after Shakespeare' time, so the language itself is unfamiliar (Frank, 2000). This has posed problems to the students when they study Shakespearean drama. Furthermore, Shakespeare's complex sentence structures and use of now obsolete words lead many students to think they are reading Old or Middle English (Amanda, 2000). When they read the language that they think is in Old English and full of 'hidden' meanings that they have to interpret themselves, they find it difficult to understand the text.

Another problem in studying Shakespearean drama is its unfamiliar culture. In a study by Mukundan (1993), he concluded that many students had "problems dealing with foreign cultural elements in the (literary) text." This means that students who read texts with too many unfamiliar, foreign elements may encounter difficulties in understanding the texts. When they read Shakespeare's drama which is written in Elizabethan time, they may find it difficult to understand and connect to the cultural elements in that time. In order to assist students in the teaching and learning processes, a specific pedagogical strategy would need to be used in order to help them with Shakespearean drama. So Facebook is a

good platform to help to promote active learning among students in understanding Shakespearean drama.

English literature can introduce students to a range of aspects, not only of the English language but also of English culture. Carter and Long (1991) proposed the use of literature in ESL and EFL contexts to achieve three main learning objectives, namely, (1) language model, (2) cultural model and (3) personal growth model.

When studying Literature, students can learn not only language aspects such as vocabulary items but also but it improves students' main language skills, especially reading and writing (Collie and Slater, 1987). This language that they have learnt can be used for specific and aesthetic purposes. Familiarity with the concepts of beat, metre and rhythm can improve their own writing as students are able to appreciate and apply these ideas.

Moreover, studying literature does not confine the students to the traditions of England but includes the possibility of introducing them to traditions which inform English literature, such as the study of ancient Greek drama, and also literature in other contexts, such as American literature and local literature. In Malaysia, literature in English includes various literary texts from various genres (novels, dramas, short stories and poems) and it is taken from local (Negeri Sembilan dan Kedah) and foreign texts (England, Jamaica, Jakarta). By studying this local literature as well as foreign literature, it enables students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space, and to come to perceive traditions of thought, feeling and artistic form within the heritage the literature the literature of such cultures endows (Carter and Long, 1991). Literature is an excellent vehicle for communicating ideas across cultures. Writers from around the world speak from their own experiences and write about what is related to their own land. By reading the literature from other countries or different areas of our own country, students can learn so much about how others view life.

Finally, literature can be beneficial for the students' personal growth. An enjoyment and appreciation of literature will give students the ability to develop this into an interest in books and reading as they move away from their studies and into their adult lives. They will have the confidence to approach and tackle new forms of books and writing, since they were exposed to a range of literature during their school days. It also provides the students with an alternative to the pervasiveness of "television culture" and technology gadgets such as handphones and MP3.

Drama engages students to use natural, conversational English in a meaningful context (Vani Chauhan, 2004). It gives a context for listening and meaningful language production, forcing the students to use their language resources and, thus, enhancing their linguistic abilities. Students are able to connect the meaning in literary texts and improve their language skills through it. Since literature is made from language, if students are exposed to works of drama they will develop their 'literary competence' (Carter and Long 1991) especially when they use drama techniques. They can learn and improve not only the language aspects such as vocabulary items but also the main language skills

(Collie and Slater, 1987) especially listening and speaking when drama provides situations for practising these two language skills. They can use these skills in a more meaningful and real context and the language of the outside world can be brought into the language classroom when the students express their thoughts and emotions (Vethamani, 2004). In a research done by Ru-Chu Shih (2011) on a group of 23 first-year college students at a technological university in Taiwan, the findings showed that students improve their English writing skills and knowledge not only from the in-class instruction but also from co-operative learning through Facebook integrated instruction. In addition, this significantly enhances students' interest and motivation.

Drama also allows students to communicate with and understand others in new ways. As literature preserves cultural and artistic heritage, it allows students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space (Carter and Long, 1991). In the Malaysian secondary schools, there were only two dramas in English literature component: Rumpelstiltskin in Form Two (a fairy tale taken from Germany) and Gulp and Gasp in Form Four (a melodrama taken place in British). By studying these foreign texts, students get to understand and appreciate how others view life. They become better able to put themselves into others' shoes and relate to them.

This understanding can be beneficial for the students' personal growth (Carter and Long, 1991). Rosli (1995) asserts that studying literature, for example, drama, motivates and encourages students to make a connection between the themes of a text and his or her personal life and experiences. Hirvela (1996) also explains that responses are personal as they are concerned with students' feelings and opinions about the literary text. An enjoyment and appreciation of drama will be developed as students are able to connect and communicate meaning in literary texts.

Drama often activates in students information which they have understood implicitly and allows them to verbalise what they have discovered (Vethamani, 2004). Therefore, drama can be used to promote active learning - to give students a kinesthetic and emphatic understanding as well as an intellectual understanding of a topic. The classroom experiences can provide students with a shared learning experience on a topic. Through active learning like drama, students can share responsibility to participate and collaborate, take advantage of each participant's strengths, and rely on each other for good project management and effective learning.

Drama also provides students the opportunity to explore and interact with the text and to portray their perceptions in a new and imaginative way (Vethamani, 2004). When they involve in preparing and designing costumes and props for their drama performance, they become creative while developing a deeper understanding in drama.

In view of the benefits of using drama in the teaching and learning processes, it is proposed in this paper to integrate the use of technology to help students to study Shakespearean drama. The use of technology tool such as online social network allows teachers to revolutionize the way they connect with others and the way teachers improve their way in teaching students. It allows teachers to connect one-to-one and one-to-many

(Michelle, 2010). This is very useful for a classroom with many students as teachers may not have the time to communicate with all students.

Technology not only provides the students with development in linguistic and socio-cultural expertise, but also ICT-related skills through the target language. According to Kaspar (2000: 106), students "must acquire linguistic competence in a new language and at the same time develop the cognitive and socio-cultural skills necessary to gain access into the social, academic, and workforce environment of the 21st century."

Technology tool such as online social networks are very popular among the students. Walsh (2011) discussed the seven reasons to leverage social networking tools in the classroom: (1) engagement, (2) social learning, (3) use time outside of class better, so teachers can use class time better, (4) provides opportunities for writing and writing assessment, (5) encourage dialogue, reach more students, (6) help students to get ahead of the professional curve and (7) build connections. This tool is useful for a classroom with forty or fifty students when the teachers are not able to give individual attention to each of them.

This paper proposed the use of online social network in particular the Facebook to teach Shakespearean drama. It is the most popular network tool among the students. It is more open and connected with more than 500 million active users all over the world (Facebook, 2011). Many people use it to communicate, interact and socialise with each other. It helps people to manage a range of interpersonal interactions with others, for example, by means of text, image, video, 'wall' spaces, status updates, news feeds, photosharing, tagging and so on (Lankshear and Knobel, 2011). It is an effective tool for teachers to employ as students are using it frequently and it can help students to understand Shakespearean drama easily.

The conceptual framework in Figure 1.1 of the present study was developed by the researchers to establish the relationship between the meaning of connection, communication and creation with the tool of social online network to engage meaning making.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Based on qualitative methodology through a case study, content analysis was used to examine the students' responses when using Facebook. The advantage of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive (Jack and Norman, 2011). A researcher can "observe" without being observed, since the contents being analysed are not influenced by the researcher's presence. In this study, the content analysis were based on the students' responses in the Facebook under three main themes: connection, communication and creation of meaning in the drama class.

Rosenblatt (2005) stresses the importance of the reader's role in interpreting literary texts. Rather than relying on a teacher to give them a single, standard interpretation of a text, he holds that the individual students learn to construct their own meaning by connecting the text to issues in their lives and describing what they experience as they read. The responses of fellow students also play a pivotal role. Through interaction with their peers, students move beyond their initial individual reaction to take into account a multiplicity of ideas and interpretations, thus broadening their perspective. By using Facebook, it provides the students the opportunity to help one another to learn and understand when they gave responses, comments and feedback through their posts. Therefore, students become active learners.

Research Instrument and Participants

Besides the content analysis based on students' responses on Facebook, a survey questionnaire was distributed to all students at the end of the course. The results of the survey questionnaire were analysed in three categories: connecting meaning (items 1 to 4), communicating meaning (items 5-8) and creating meaning (items 9 to 12) in Shakespearean drama through the activities done in the classroom.

The participants were a group of twenty students who took the course "Drama in English" (TSL1064) in the second semester in the foundation course at an Institute of Teacher Education Campus in Johor, Malaysia. In this course, they had to read one Shakespearean drama in detail.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were discussed based on the content analysis with the three main themes: connection, communication and creation of meaning in the drama class. Activities discussed in this study were watching the movie, attending drama workshop, role-playing Shakespeare's other plays and drama performance.

One of the activities students enjoyed was watching the movie "Hamlet" by the actor Mel Gibson and the actress Glenn Close. After the lecturer posted the question on their views of the movie, two students commented that the movie was difficult for them to understand. But other two students commented that the actor's expression was great and extreme. Then, one student commented that maybe Shakespeare's play was meant for a stage play and poor for a movie. Here, we could see that the students connect and communicate their meaning of Shakespearean drama through Facebook. Later, we would see how this movie give them ideas on creating meaning in their drama performance.

As for the drama workshop, the students gave long comments on what they had learnt from the workshop. The comment quoted in the study was originally from students without any changes to spelling and grammar. One of the comments given was,

"This workshop raised my awareness on the skills or techniques in acting out a drama. i knew that the skills and techniques exists, but i never knew how to apply them. the workshop was very practical as we could apply what we have learned immediately (through the performance). i think this is one of the most beneficial and useful workshops i've been to in a very long time."

Other students also communicated their ideas about the workshop. This drama workshop has really helped students to connect and create meaning in the literary texts to their drama performance at the final stage.

Instead of waiting for the lecturer to post question, the students had also posted their own questions through the Facebook. One student posted his question regarding the play that the different group had chosen for the role play. The other groups responded and gave their answers. Again, the use of Facebook is an effective tool for students to exchange information in their communication.

In this activity, the students had to choose a character from Shakespeare's other plays to role play. They need to design costumes and props for a selected scene of the play. The students had shown their creativity in that they sewed the costumes themselves. There were two boys who played their roles as girls and they borrowed their blouses, skirts, scarves and wigs from the girls. They also did their own props when they made their own crowns and drew trees on polistherene. This had proved that the students were able to connect and create meaning in Shakespearean drama from the activities done in the classroom.

It seemed that the students enjoyed this activity very much. This could be seen in their comments to one of the lecturer's posts after their drama performance. The comments given were "Enjoyed!", "Drama class is the best class" and "yep!!! I enjoyed it too!!!" This post received 21 "like".

In a post by a student named Anderson, he posted the group photo after one of the drama classes and gave a comment "Drama in English class, Filled with fun!" This post received 56 "like". Also, at the end of the drama performance, a rap was done by the students for the play, a comment given was "OMG, so funny!" This showed that the students really enjoyed the activity done in the drama classroom.

The results had shown the students' attitude were highly positive as their comments of "enjoyed" and "fun" were found in their responses and posts. This motivates and encourages them to read literature especially Shakespeare's drama.

The 12 items in the questionnaire had mean scores ranging from 4.45 to 4.80 on a 5-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=not sure; 2=disagree; 1=strongly disagree) with standard deviation ranging from 0.03 to 0.33, indicating the students agreed or highly agreed with the statements on the survey questionnaire (Table 1). Additionally, the statistical results of a one-sample t-test show that all 12 items on the questionnaire had

mean scores significantly higher than 4, indicating the students' attitudes and perspectives towards the use of Facebook in a drama classroom were in highly consensus.

The statistics shown in Table 1 indicated that the students agreed that the drama class and the use of Facebook engage them to connect, communicate and create meaning in the learning experience.

Table 1 Results of the Questionnaire

No	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I improve my language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing after this course.	4.50	0.14
2	I improve my understanding of the others' culture after this course.	4.50	0.07
3	I experience personal growth after this course.	4.55	0.07
4	I am able to understand the meaning of the elements (setting, character, theme, etc.) found in a drama after the course.	4.65	0.06
5	I enjoy sharing information with the lecturer and friends through learning on Facebook.	4.55	0.33
6	I enjoy communicating with the lecturer and friends through learning on Facebook.	4.70	0.33
7	My interaction with the lecturer and friends is enhanced through learning on Facebook.	4.80	0.03
8	I am able to complete my coursework through learning on Facebook.	4.70	0.05
9	I am able to design costume and props for the drama performance after this course.	4.65	0.12
10	I am able to act confidently in a drama performance after this course.	4.70	0.22
11	I am more creative (for example, create a rap) for a drama performance after this course.	4.45	0.13
12	I am more confident to organise a drama performance in the future after this course.	4.80	0.03

The findings had shown that the use of Facebook is beneficial as it enhances learning not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. When students got to express their thoughts and feelings through Facebook they were able to connect and communicate personal meaning openly which in turn encouraged participation in classroom learning. This promotes active learning (Edgar Dale, 1946). Active learning is a process whereby students engage in activities, such as reading, writing, discussion, or problem solving that promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content. Therefore, teachers can utilise Facebook to engage students in active learning in addition to PowerPoint lectures, multimedia and movies.

Through the activities done in the classroom, the students were able to connect the meaning of the drama to enhance their language skills, understanding the others' culture and experience personal growth after the drama course. They were also able to understand the meaning of the elements (setting, character, theme, etc.) found in a drama.

The drama class also helped the students to create meaning from Shakespearean drama through their performance in the final project for the coursework. They were able to design costume and props and act confidently in a drama performance. They were also

more creative, for example, they could create a rap at the end of the drama performance. Therefore, the course had gave them more confidence to act in a drama in the future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the evidences disclosed in this study, the lecturer and students can interact with one another easily through Facebook. It saves time and space as the lecturer and students do not need to meet face-to-face in a classroom to give all the instructions, input and guidance. Therefore, it is important for teachers to employ this technology tool which provides the diverse of modes of communication in the language learning process so that the students are able to participate in this global world.

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