

UNEARTHING RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES USING MOVIES

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Abstract

Teaching - learning scenarios have long since moved from a conventional mode of chalk and talk to a more learner centred approach using a wide range of teaching resources. This study highlights the use of such teaching resource, which is a movie clip, in helping the learners develop and expand their knowledge base. The purpose of this study is to explore the use of a movie clip in an Action Research course. A movie clip from the Hindi movie, Taare Zameen Par, was used in this study. This movie clip was used to determine whether course participants could identify a research topic and data collection procedure. Twenty-four course participants attending a continuous professional course were involved in this study. Seven research topics were presented by the course participants after viewing a 2.27 minute scene depicting a classroom. Using an unstructured interview, the course participants' views feelings and opinions were captured. The findings indicate that movies could be used to create an avenue for course participants to practice the principles of Action Research.

Key words: *movies, teaching, learning, research*

Introduction

Conducting research and teaching research are distinctively two different forms of experiences. The former entails learning through applying research principles and practice into action whereas the latter involves teaching or transmitting the knowledge of research to an individual embarking on research. The teaching of research is a complex process since it encompasses the content of subject matter well as research skills.

Twenty-four teachers took part in this study. Sixteen of them are teaching in the primary school while the remaining are secondary school teachers. These teachers were enrolled in a 14 weeks continuous professional development course consisting of 7 modules; each module is about 2 weeks in duration. For every module, two trainers were assigned. We were assigned to the module 'Introduction to Action Research'.

Action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully using the techniques of research. This is believed to enable teachers and educators to be more effective in assessing their own work and bring improvement and enhancement for the benefit of the learners. These research participants are practitioners and they will have the best information and knowledge to issues and problems that exist in the course of their profession and work related matters. Hence, they would be the most appropriate to address these issues in order to attain more meaningful and effective learning achievement. Action research provides an excellent platform for practitioners in the teaching fraternity to identify, analyse and address concerns related to their profession.

The course participants possess varied levels of familiarity and understanding on the subject matter; Action Research. The sample consisted of 24 course participants. Only 6

course participants have had experience in conducting action research. The rest of the course participants have limited exposure and knowledge on Action Research. As such it seems that there were two diverse groups in the training session.

During the initial days of training, we realised that the course participants were not able to engage on the research components particularly in generating research questions. we realised that they were not familiar with common procedures pertaining to conducting research; such as generating research questions, gathering data and others. It seemed that they needed more support on this area and hence we needed to look at other avenues or ways to help them deal with their lack of knowledge on the areas mentioned.

Novice practitioners in the field of action research just as it would be in the case of other conventional researchers may find the procedures and process rigorous and challenging which may invariably discourage them from being involved in action research. One way of encouraging these novice researchers would be to put them through a guided course or programme where they are mentored by experienced researchers. This will provide them with the confidence and enthusiasm to be able to conduct their own researches subsequently. The course should be phased well to enable course participants to grasp the vital essence and ingredients of the integral parts of the action research and execute them effectively in practice.

The course participants can be broadly divided into two groups. One with experience/ some level of understanding in Action Research, and the other as novice or beginners in the field of action research without any experience. As such the challenge was to conduct the course and meeting to the diverse needs and levels of competency between the two groups. We felt that to bridge the differences, it would be good to harness their personal teaching experiences and link these experiences to the concepts and principles of Action Research. At this juncture, the idea of using movies became an option we wanted to eradicate the feelings of anxiety amongst the CP. Through the use of movies, we hoped that the CP would be able to acquire pertinent information about teaching and research action in a more interesting and vivid manner. Being in the course, some may feel the subject matter rather daunting and tedious and subsequently lose interest. Movies can help rejuvenate their interest and create a more dynamic and realistic learning environment.

Based on the above, Experience Based learning, could be one of the ways that could help these course participants. Experience Based learning helps a person to understand their learning using their experiences as a main source of learning. Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis' (2000) stated that Experience Based learning 'provides guidance for applications to helping people improve their learning processes in education and development'. We felt Experience Based learning model would be the most suitable. The Experience Based learning model learning provides a holistic view of how reflection, experiences and teachers' beliefs are formed. It allows combining some elements of cognitive learning theory too. In cognitive activities, thinking, perceiving and remembering the learning is given more emphasis than the content (Stash, 2007). As such through experiencing, feeling and thinking (See Figure 1), the objective of this course could be achieved.

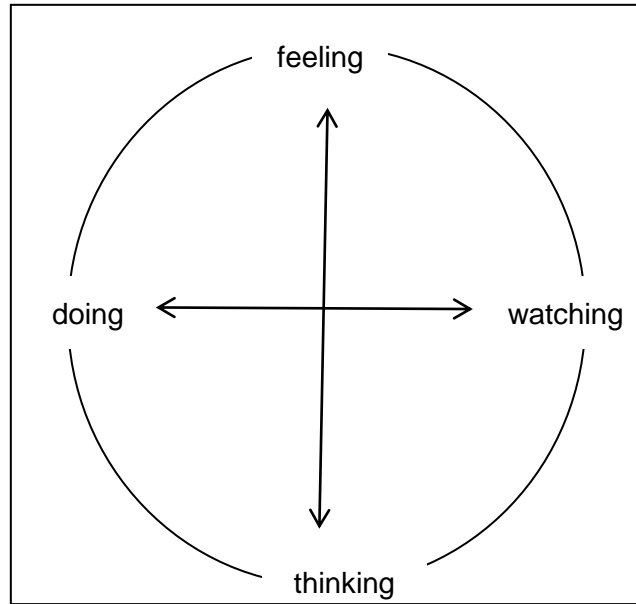


Figure 1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (Kolb, 1984) – adapted for this study

We felt the course participants must be exposed to the two types of experiences Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis (2000) suggested i.e Concrete Experience and Abstract Conceptualisation. Concrete Experience occurs when an individual involves directly in a particular action; and in the process observes the effect of the action. Meanwhile Abstract Conceptualisation will allow a course participant to think about the experience and eventually if given the chance might try out their ideas to see whether it works, Thus giving a course participant to work independently. Figure 1 shows the dimension of experiential learning, which could be used to teach this course.

But now the concern is the implementation of experiential learning. Question was how to put into action experiential learning. We had two choices; either to provide input on research methodology or provide activities that would indirectly lead the course participants to the content in research methodology. The notion of using a movie clip became an option as we felt that these were participants who needed to be convinced that research study is not a daunting process. We felt that the anxiety and lack of confidence in the class must be addressed through the use of non-threatening learning resources. Rather than course participants being inundated with a technical jargons and research based concepts, we felt that movie clips can be utilised to help our course participants and eventually attain our teaching–learning objectives.

Hence we decided to use a movie clip for this study. However selection of movie is crucial. Though film could be used as an educational tool, improper use of it could picture a negative light on the user (Smith, 2009). Suitability of a movie could influence the outcome of this study. Previous research had shown that, wrong choice of movie could side-track a lesson. Instead of learning, students could view the movie more as an entertainment. Ideally Featheringill (2000) suggested that the theme of the movie should be in accordance with what the teacher had in mind.

The focus of the study here is to establish meaningful learning using movies as a learning tool. As such the subject matter concerned is research methodology and through the exploration of the subject matter concerned, course participants undergo experiential learning in which they are able to use the movie as a tool to generate learning outcomes.

The main aim of this study is to use movie clips as a learning resource to help course participants understand the concepts of action research, particularly in generating research topics. The process of viewing the movie clip and generating the possible research topics becomes a rich learning experience as these respondents infuse their own personal perspectives and views on the clip.

As such, the focus of this study is to see whether course participants could practice the research principles that they were taught in this course. Kolb (1984) equated this to experiential learning i.e. integration of theory and practice. Specifically, we would like to know whether course participants can ascertain a problem in a classroom and describe approaches in answering the problem.

This study aimed to determine whether course participants could

- i. identify a research area based on a classroom setting
- ii. develop a data collection procedure related to the selected research area

Method

In this section, procedures used in this study are described.

Preliminary Investigation

At the initial point of our training session, we briefed the aims and objectives of the course to the course participants. Being adult learners, we felt it would be more meaningful that the course participants are given the overview of the course. The course looks into the research methodology and it involves a fair amount of theories and principles pertaining to research study.

Table 1

Course Overview

Week	Topics to be Covered
1	Identifying and generating Research Topics
1	Classifying Research Topics
2	Analysing and Presenting Quantitative Data
3	Analysing and Presenting Qualitative Data
4	Interpreting and writing discussion based on the data
5	Writing Reflection
6	Writing 'Abstract', 'Acknowledgement' and "Recommendations For Future Research"
7	Citation Style

We started the—initial training session by providing input on the features and significance of research questions. However, we felt that the course participants were not able to grasp the content of the session. Once there was a course participant, who asked “Dr, can I formulate my research questions after I have collected my data?”. This is indeed a concern as the course participants were clearly not aware of the research protocol and procedure. Steps needed to be taken to ensure that basic knowledge of principles and techniques of research are clearly delineated

Intervention

Our aim was to help the course participants develop an understanding on how to generate research topics as well as formulate a small study using the principles of research methodology. Since the course participants were unable to grasp the principles and mechanism of research, we decided to use the movie clips to lessen the intensity of the subject matter, making the learning more meaningful and manageable.

Preparation prior to the intervention

Learning Material: we chose a Hindi movie - Taare Zameen Par (Like Stars on Earth) (See Appendix 1 for the synopsis) to be used as a learning tool in our training session. The actual length of the movie was three hours. We decided to use a small segment of the movie. We selected a classroom scene lasting about 2.27 minutes.

In this scene, the lead character (Ishaan Awasthi) was asked to leave the classroom by his English teacher (she was teaching grammar-adjective) for not paying attention and unable to answer her question. The whole conversation in this scene was in English, thus avoiding the necessity to have an interpreter to narrate the scene.

Task: It is crucial that the course participants are made aware of the task in order for the training session to take place effectively. Prior to playing the movie, we explained to the course participants of the task. (See Table 3).

Table 2

Task Instructions

<p>Imagine you are the teacher in the movie. You intend to do an Action Research based on the scenario viewed. Your task is as follows:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. identify a research topicii. classify your research topiciii. explain how you would collect data to explore the research topic you have identified
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Implementation of the intervention

We played the movie three times. The first time was meant to allow the course participants to get an overview of the scene. After viewing it for second time, each course participant wrote down the research topic. Finally, to establish their respective notion, the movie was played for the third time.

To encourage sharing and eliminate anxiety in learning we grouped them into seven groups. Each group was asked to produce a common research topic and identify the approach which they could use in gathering data.

Outcome

During the group discussion, we noticed there were a lot of discussions. We were glad to see course participants putting forth their arguments in a very constructive manner.

The seven groups presented their suggestions. The course participant suggestions could be divided into two categories, which are in line with the “Concrete Experience” and “Abstract Conceptualisation”. Table 4 shows the course participant’s observations after viewing the movie scene. Table 4 shows the research topics generated by the teachers.

Table 3

Students' Research Topics Generated during the Discussion

Pair	Research Topic
1	How to improve students' attention?
2	How to identify students with learning disabilities in normal classroom?
3	How to teach grammar using ICT?
4	How to increase liking (especially for grammar in English)
5	How to control temper?
6	How to use teaching aids effectively?
7	How to address students who mis-behaviour?

To determine whether the course participants were able to formalise their 'abstract conceptualisation', we asked them to discuss on how they plan to collect data pertaining the identified research topics. Table 5, shows their views on this. It can be divided into two approaches i.e qualitative approach and quantitative approach.

Table 4

Students' Presentation

Pair	Research Topic	Data Collection	
		Quantitative	Qualitative
1	How to improve students' attention?	Number of students paying attention in class.	Enthusiasm shown by the students during and after the class
2	How to identify students with learning disabilities in normal classroom?	-	Identify and establish reasons why students cannot read (as the character in the movie)
3	How to teach grammar using ICT?	Number of students showing interest.	Types of mistakes students do.
4	How to increase liking (especially for grammar in English)	Students' attendance during English lesson.	-
5	How to control temper?	-	Keeping a reflective journal.
6	How to use teaching aids effectively?	-	Students attracted to the teaching aid/s
7	How to address students who mis-behaviour?	-	Case study – by selecting a student (who has behavioural problem)

Findings

The choice of using movies in class has its own share of success and failure stories.

At times, students who had watched this movie spoke on the merits of the movie instead of focussing on the objective of the lesson. (Note; This movie won numerous award and was the first Indian film distributed by Walt Disney International Distribution in 2010). When this happens we had to interject students' presentation and put them back on track. Featheringill (2000) stressed teachers must do this, for failing to do so could cause students to go off on a tangent.

We realised this is part and parcel of innovation teaching. We believed, diversion should be allowed, as long as the objective of the lesson is achieved. Table 4 and 5 highlight the responses of the course participants which are indicative of their learning on how to identify a research topic and to collect data.

The movie clip allows viewers to interpret what they see and present the views based on their perceptions. The best part of using movie in a classroom is students' opinion could be accepted as long as they manage to explain it. It allows students to view the movie from their eyes, for there is no right or wrong answer to a particular movie (Bue, 1984).

This was evident by the variety of research focus emerged for a 2.27 minutes lesson. The diversity in the research topics generated by the course participants obviously showed that there are many angles in which a researcher can study the subject matter or the scene presented in the movie clip.

Most importantly the selection and focus of the research area must be meaningful, relevant and significant in terms of adding new values to learning in general. The number of topics is almost unlimited. It is up to a teacher to prioritize the research topic. One should realise the purpose of why incorporate movie clips – to improve teaching and learning. And if the course participants in our class were able to understand the purpose, then the objective of introducing Action Research to them is achieved.

Recommendations for Future Research

Movie clips are indeed a valuable tool for teaching and learning. In terms of unearthing research opportunities, movie clips can be used as a versatile tool in varied ways.

For example, movie clips can be utilised across subjects such as literature and research methodology. In addition movie clips is a good source for teaching and learning language, in particular pragmatics aspects of the language.

However one needs to consider a few factors before embarking on the use of the resource for teaching – learning. Firstly the selection of the movie clip must be apt to the aims of objectives of the teaching-learning session. Selection of the movie clip must be carried out meticulously to ensure that the clip contains the necessary and appropriate learning opportunities for the viewers.

Secondly, the teacher or facilitator must be able to facilitate and frame the discussions to meet the demand of the learning objectives or outcomes. Using movie clips can get out of control especially when the clip contains many levels of interpretations. A competent facilitator or teacher can guide the viewers to the desired learning outcomes without compromising on the quality and quantity of information.

It would be interesting to see how duration of the movie influences the outcome. In this study, we played a movie scene which is only about 3 minutes. By playing the whole movie, which is about 3 hours, the outcome could be different.

Besides the outcomes, duration of the movie has other logistics hurdles too. For example, the session could last 4 hours i.e. 3 hours to view the movie and another hour to attempt the task. Hence this could pose a problem in completing the remaining course content.

Experiential learning promotes reflective thinking. This form of thinking is the basis for the entire process of an action research where it is instrumental not only in surfacing the issue to be researched, but in observing and monitoring the process and in finally evaluating and drawing up the conclusions.

There are two steps that take place in the process of reflective thinking.

- i. A state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates.

- ii. An act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity. (Krim, 2009)

Both these doubts are integral part of learning. To improve professional practice, one will have to go through these 'doubts'. As teacher educators, it is important to experience these 'doubts', as there is no substitute for experience.

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