

# Theatre in Education as an Experiential Model for Event Management Pedagogy

Sidharth Mishra, Sumedha Dhasmana & Praveen Kumar Singh

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## Abstract

Event Management is the process of planning, marketing, producing, analysing and evaluating an event. It is a crucial part of the course curriculum for the students of Journalism and Mass Communication at various colleges and universities. In 2021, Vivekananda School of Journalism and Mass Communication (VSJMC), Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies - Technical Campus, brought an innovative pedagogical intervention in the teaching of Event Management. It integrated Theatre in Education (TiE) with Event Management curriculum. TiE is the structured use of theatrical performance and participatory drama strategies and nurtures emotional, cognitive, emotional, and social learning. In the last five years, VSJMC implemented this pedagogical experiment and created five prominent theatre productions. This paper brings forth the enhanced learning outcomes which were possible through the application of TiE in Event Management pedagogy.

**Keywords:** *Theatre in Education, Event Management, Experiential Learning, Media Education*

## **Introduction**

Journalism and Mass Communication is not just a field of study, but a mastery of skills and dexterities, where the theoretical aspects are shaped into impact through practiced precision. Practical knowledge is important in order to prepare journalism and mass communication students for the industry. Subjects that encourage reasoning, decision making and problem solving are of great importance to the students. In a subject like event management, only theory isn't enough to teach students. Experience of the actual event provides students an opportunity to work as per industry standards, make mistakes and get feedback and acquire skills that would help them later in the industry without making a big industry blunder. Moreover, it also helps students to gain confidence in all kinds of skills like situation awareness, decision making, communication, teamwork and leadership. Kolb's learning cycle suggests that effective learning is achieved by progressing through a cycle of four stages i.e. having an experience ("concrete experience"), reflecting on the experience ("reflective observation"), learning from the experience ("abstract conceptualisation" and trying out what one has learnt ("active experimentation") (Wijnen-Meijer et al., 2022).

As a part of their curriculum, Event Management Lab is being taught to the final semester students of BA(JMC), At the Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies- Technical Campus (VIPS-TC), Vivekananda School of Journalism and Mass Communication (VSJMC) organises a media festival - Spandan. This two days mega event has a variety of activities including street plays and theatrical performances every year. Among the many choices of the kind of event that they have to organise, students have the option of choosing to get into theatre production. The event under review is titled Grand Finale and is the last performance of the two-day jamboree.

1. In the first step, Students are given the assignment to select the theme and come up with a proposal for the theatre production. (Kolb's "concrete experience" & "reflective observation").
2. They later come up with their ideas and present in front of their peers and faculty members. Moreover, the comprehension about

## **Theatre in Education as an Experiential Model for Event ....**

the concept also takes place when students ask questions from the presenters as well as when faculty members also cross question the performers and the team behind those concepts. This helps students to crystallise the concept and gain more clarity on their topics (Kolb's "abstract conceptualisation"). Selected students then present their ideas to the department heads who give further clarity and help to finalise the concept to make it a concrete idea.

3. Subsequently, continuous meetings and sessions take place between the selected students and teacher-mentors who start working on things like story ideas and story plots. The faculty mentors continuously guide and improvise students' ideas and initiatives and once a script has been developed, students start with the script reading sessions that help in continuous improvisation (Kolb's active experimentation).
4. As the conceptualisation process has been concretised, then starts coordination and controlling for the production team of the theatrical performances.
5. On the day of the event, the culmination or execution of the theatrical performances take place.
6. Post event, in the process of closing out, students develop their portfolio and come up with their Event Management Lab Folder that elaborates their learning experiences and outcomes (Kolb's "concrete experience" & "reflective observation").

Students prepare for almost the entire semester for their one final production. This has so far been done for the past several years and it has helped faculty and students align and achieve feats with each project.

As stated by Gavin Bolton, "drama has a great deal to do with pedagogy because it is an art" (Bolton 1993, p. 39) The educational substratum inherent in theatre is likewise suggested by David Pammenter:

What is theatre, who is it for, and what does it say? Theatre, at its best, is the communication and exploration of human experience; it is a forum for our values, political, moral and ethical. It is concerned with the interaction of these values at a philosophical, emotional and intellectual level. (1993, p. 59)

## Mantle of the Expert

Mantle of the Expert was developed by Dorothy Heathcote in 1980's with the aim to provide a drama-based approach that could make learning easier across curriculum. Heathcote carefully planned her sessions with school students and even utilised props and costumes for making her experiments interesting. The idea was to plan a fictional set-up where students can take responsibilities and can actively engage in the learning process. This mantle provides an opportunity for the teacher and the student to work collaboratively just like members working in the same team.

This means the faculty members (inside the fiction) deliberately change their relationship with the students to one of equal power and authority. In this way decisions are made through discussion and distributed leadership. It is important to remember, outside the fiction, the teacher's authority remains unaffected. (MOE, n.d., para. 2)

Since this framework was utilised for undergraduate students, researchers have modified the framework by changing the fictional setting to a real-world setting. Students are required to organise an actual event just as they would do later when they step into the industry. Mantle of the Expert is an approach to education that is rooted in drama, enquiry and imagination. The researchers have modified the imagination part with the actual one.

## Theatre in Education

TIE, or Theatre in Education, is the name given to a particular kind of theatre, practised by professional drama companies, or TIE teams, which work specifically Theatre plays an important role in teaching students in teaching students literature (*Meghdootam*, *Othello* and *Dhruvswamini*), understand issues of military history (*Sham-e-Sipahi*) the environment (*Yaha Ke Hum Sikander*). A teacher can bring about a difference in the life of a student by introducing him/her to theatres. In educational projects to be devised at schools (Valverde, 2002).

## Theatre in Education (Tie) in the Context of Educational Drama

Theatre arts can be utilised in a variety of ways. It helps students to learn newer vocabulary; develop creative problems, work on it and create a newer set of

## **Theatre in Education as an Experiential Model for Event ....**

skill-set. It brings students to action and it help them in motivating them to think and understand the value of lifelong learning. Our plays help our students to be fit for any kind of job that they may like to take in the near future. Theatre helps students in collaboration, problem solving, communication, social and interpersonal skills and presentational skills.

These theatrical performances are a live learning laboratory for students involved in planning and execution. Theatre, by nature, demands collaboration, discipline, time management, and problem-solving, core competencies in event management. The production required coordination across diverse teams including actors, dancers, musicians, directors, choreographers, technical producers, logistics, ambience, design, and stage management.

### **Understanding Theatre in Education of Event Management**

#### **Theme and Conceptualization**

During the initial brainstorming sessions, it is the theme that is first pondered upon. Team members discuss the current happenings around the world and come up with few topics that are worth the projection. This further leads to consensus on a single theme that could relate with the purpose of the event. The theme is also decided by keeping the target audience in mind, designed in a manner that it remains engaging and yet easy to communicate. Subsequently comes the time to bring ideas to life including preparations for event ambience, cultural programmes and the theatre production.

The students get completely involved in handling the whole event. They start with a plan, get it approved, begin the coordination work, write scripts, manage resources, schedule rehearsals and ensure a smooth conduct till the final performance.

#### **Grand Finale 2021- *Sham-i-Sipahi***

Sham-i-Sipahi was a tribute to Indian armed forces. The acts were presented through depiction of three famous operations including the Battle of Budgam in 1947, Operation Black Tornado in 2008 and Operation Bandar in 2019. The narrative was set by portraying Major Somanth Sharma, Major General Abhay Gupta and Air Marshal C. Hari Kumar.

Major Somnath Sharma, the first recipient of the Param Vir Chakra was represented in the first act. His extraordinary courage and bravery during the 1947 Indo-Pak War in Jammu and Kashmir delayed enemy advances and enabled critical reinforcements. His leadership, self-sacrifice, and steadfast commitment to duty demonstrate the highest ideals of valour and patriotism, making him a revered national hero.

The second act was on Major General Abhay Gupta, who was a key figure in the response to the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, as he led a National Security Guard (NSG) team as a first responder to the terror strikes at the various attack sites. Once the government officially ordained him the role, he and his team mobilised, traveling from Manesar to Mumbai to take over the situation from local authorities and the Navy's MARCOS commandos at the Taj Hotel, the Oberoi Trident, and Nariman House (Chabad House). With his swift advancement, he observed the terrorists' detailed awareness of the hotel and Chabad House layouts, and then he meticulously planned barricades and traps for the terrorists, in order to dispose of the attack.

The third and the last act portrayed Air Marshal C Hari Kumar, the key operational planner and executor of the Balakot Air Strike, code named Operation Bandar, which took place on February 26, 2019. As the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C) of the Western Air Command, he was directly in charge of the mission that avenged the Pulwama terror attack. His contribution was crucial to the success of the high-stakes, top-secret operation, as he headed the Western Air Command, the primary command responsible for India's airspace along the Pakistan border, and personally supervised the entire planning and execution process.

### **Grand Finale 2022- *Meghdootam***

*Meghdootam* took inspiration from Kalidasa's most celebrated Sanskrit epic drama - *Meghdootam*. The whole idea was to travel through the route as described by Kalidasa in this play. In order to make it more contemporary, each act was enacted through dance drama based on Bollywood songs. The production reinterpreted the Kalidasa's classic literary text into a multimedia performance comprising drama, music and dance. Beyond the artistic merit, the production proved to be a robust specimen of theatre as an educational tool. The performance this time followed the story of exiled lover Yaksh who requests a cloud to convey his message to his wife Yakshi. Students successfully portrayed

the powerful theme of hope, emotional suffering and love in separation thereby ushering a new level of interpretation to literature.

### **Grand Finale 2023- *Kaala Chaand***

India successfully achieved soft landing of space vehicle Chandrayaan 3 on moon in 2023. Moon, thus, was chosen as the theme for the theatrical performance. This theme appropriately matched with William Shakespeare's timeless classic *Othello*, which was adapted into a script titled *Kaala Chaand*. As Zelma (2023) also underlines that this convergence of literature and theatre has long been acknowledged as a dynamic educational tool that offers an immersive experience which moves beyond boundaries of traditional classroom learning.

The narrative's central thrust is Othello who was a noble, respected Black General in the Venetian Army. Othello developed feelings for the stunning Desdemona who was a strong-willed noblewoman and was not scared of defying societal norms and even elopes to get married to Othello. Othello and Desdemona's joy was however short-lived as Iago, Othello's faithful counsel, hatches a scheme to end their union. This is taken as the background to develop a gripping storyline. The Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh served as the setting for this adaptation of Othello from an Indian perspective. The play's plot depicted the mafia and political landscape of Gorakhpur in the 1980s. The characters were a fictitious depiction of the Tiwaris and Shahs, the dominant families of Gorakhpur. A few new characters were also added in order to help the audience comprehend the play which was titled *Kaala Chaand*.

A compelling act and passionate dance performance from classical to hip-hop and whacking were utilised in the play to convey a variety of concepts to the audience. Every dance piece explained to the audience a play's unfolding event and delve further into its underlying meaning and emotions. The themes that *Kaala Chaand* further explored were the relevance of truth, patriarchal insecurity and the worst emotion of humans, jealousy. Unlike the original play which presents the tragedy in sequential form, *Kaala Chaand* kept two timelines - real time and past. Freestyle and contemporary dance forms were utilized to establish love, entertainment, conflict and jealousy.

### **Grand Finale 2024 – *Damini – Is Yug Ki Dhruvswamini***

*Damini – Is Yug Ki Dhruvswamini* was a bold and unapologetic celebration of



Indian women's resilience and contributions in history. Gender Equality, theme of year 2024, was brought to life through an artistic fusion of narration, poetry, music, drama and dance, showcasing the adaptation of Jay Shankar Prasad's Hindi classic - *Dhruvswamini* into a modern age as Damini.

*Damini: Is Yug Ki Dhruvswamini* was a bold and compelling theatrical production that captured the ongoing societal struggle between tradition, power dynamics and women's empowerment. Set against the backdrop of a patriarchal society, the play showcased the life of Damini, a courageous woman who becomes a voice of resistance in a system built to silence her. The narrative included six acts that brought forward issues like gender discrimination, women resilience and political corruption. The story moved with historical references that related with struggles of contemporary Indian women.

Emotionally charged scenes and symbolic dance sequences were the main highlight of the play. This was supported with live music and gripping dialogues that depicted protagonist's fight against women oppression. The play includes head-turning sequences like the protagonist defying societal norms, confronting her husband and exposing corrupt leaders, thereby becoming modern-day trailblazer of change. The performance inspired audience to pause and ponder on the importance of questioning deeply entrenched but illegitimate norms of the society.

### **Grand Finale 2025 - *Yaha Ke Hum Sikander***

*Yaha Ke Hum Sikander* was a captivating story of friendship, hardship, strength and self-rediscovery. The opening scene was an emotional reunion of five college friends who were already disappointed in their lives. Each one was bearing a burden like of loss of job, dream unfulfilled and disagreement with parents. This college get-together proves to be a turning point in the lives of all five as they inadvertently start a new journey together.

The reason behind their journey was an idea to visit the ancestral village of one of the characters called Rawat who was dismissed from the Army. This expedition in the mountains of Garhwal was not just physical but also a deeply personal one. Just as they were immersed in the mesmerising landscape, their peace broke with a sudden deafening noise of a dynamite explosion. Later when Rawat and his friends visited a resort looking for a job opportunity, they began



## **Theatre in Education as an Experiential Model for Event ....**

re-thinking on the entire concept of development and environmental balance in mountains.

Their visit to a nearby luxury resort confronts them with stark realities of greed, exploitation, and arrogance that endanger human life and disturb the delicate ecological harmony of the region. Rawat's grandmother became the guiding light for all five friends. Caught between conflicting forces of ambition and morality, nature and destruction, fear and courage, the five friends are compelled to make decisions that altered the course of their lives. Ultimately, on one tumultuous storm-ridden night, destiny places them before a defining test.

### **Role Allocation**

The initial script writing is done by such students who are keen on story writing, direction or being part of the core team. After the first draft of the play is worked upon, volunteer students proceed with initial rounds of audition. This way they take a step forward and actively engage with fellow students and juniors, elaborating the importance and requirement of the planned theatrical performance. Initially volunteered and actively engaged students subtly start taking charge as they go on explaining the requirement of characters, stage settings and story line. Buzz creation, informational messaging and promotion also begin at this stage which is majorly through word of mouth by this time. The immense fascination of a substantial number of students who participate in auditions marks the marketing kick-off for the event.

During auditions, keen students demonstrate their acting skills on assigned scenes while also presenting their character understanding, vocal capabilities, emotional depth and ability to adapt. Auditions enable selection of best students for various roles and responsibilities. Hence comes the opportunity to sing, act, dance or jam. Students who perform, are however a part of a small team that comes on stage. Almost twice as many students show keenness on opting for behind the scenes roles. Some of these include, script writing, direction, set design, audio visual management, on stage and back stage management, ambience, choreography, music direction, marketing, social media management, makeup and costume management to name a few. Student coordinators in affirmation with all members decide on roles and responsibilities as per one's suitability and strength. Thus, these students start

stepping into event management roles and start working and coordinating exactly in a manner as required in the industry.

## **Consultation**

After the students decide on their team and prepare a basic outline for the production, they present in front of their mentors. The mentoring team comprises the two senior most Professors and at least five faculty members teaching the Event Management paper who provide feedback and help students improve their work. This consultation is a continuous eight-week long process and helps in polishing every aspect before the final production. At a stage when actors, dance performers, vocalists, AV coordinators and directors are almost approved and finalized by the mentors, students proceed with script reading sessions that take place in presence of mentors. This helps in clarifying interpretations, sort pacing issues and building a chemistry between performers and direction team.

Mentors also ask students to prepare a budget so that the final production runs smoothly and stays within the financial constraints. They are motivated to be realistic, include all potential expenses and be prepared for any unexpected cost that may arise during the planning process. Site selection is also done during the consultation phase wherein potential venues are discussed and visited before finalization. This is followed by creation of a promotional plan and coming out with marketing materials such as posters and social media posts. Students from the social media team strategically reveal information related to date, time, location and ticket prices.

Potential risks and their solutions are also discussed in advance. This includes planned technical difficulties, backup actors or attire glitch. The team works together on an issue and quickly resolves an issue before they become major problems. This is also the phase when students are guided about fundraising and encouraged to make marketing pitches and discuss sponsorship opportunities with potential business houses. They are also trained in ticketing which is an important element of revenue generation.

## **Production**

The big day when the students present their theatrical production is carefully planned in advance. Students are guided to take proper rest a night before and come refreshed for their big day. Mentors focus on students' comfort and boosting up their confidence while ensuring that every pointer of the checklist

## **Theatre in Education as an Experiential Model for Event ....**

prepared is followed. It is on the day of the final day that a team of students work on the stage setting. Mentors ensure proper mike testing and full rehearsal is done at least an hour before. A team of students set up the registration desk and get ready for guest welcome. When the audience and chief guest arrive at the fixed time, students are let free to present their final production.

A team of students take up the responsibility of capturing the event on camera, both still and video. Students display their efficiency in handling high end cameras, record videos, capture still photographs and make reels. This helps in record keeping.

### **Post Production**

It starts with post event evaluation as it is important to review outcomes and determine what worked well and what could have been better. Evaluation helps in assessing how key elements of event management were executed. This includes reviewing the effectiveness of the marketing strategy or budgeting the event as well as understanding audience response. Social media posts don't stop after the final production and in fact post event social media posts mark the culmination of the theatrical performance. Students volunteer to prepare the post-production video which also becomes part of their final project

### **Analysis and Discussion**

On the conceptual level, the MoE model emphasises on learning by transferring the classroom learning from the teacher-led atmosphere to a student-focused 'community of practice'. By handing the baton to the students, an environment is being created to make them work and the mentors drive them to perform. Each student, with his/her uniqueness creates an environment of extraordinary creativity. They learn their hidden talents and the mentors are there to make them harness their capabilities and realise their core competencies. In this model, students operate as event planners and mentors behave like consultants as well as clients to make the students take the centre-stage in order to operate responsibly towards fulfilment of the objective of successfully organising the event at the grand scale as a team. With this model, students are provided with an engaging, creative environment that nurtures talents of students individually as well as team work also. They comprehend the significance of different professional collaboration, practical solutions to the issues being raised during the conduction of events.

Let us try to understand how the MoE model augments knowledge base in event management.

**Enhanced Student Engagement:** In this model what is being done is that the students are entrusted with the work of conceptualising and proposing their ideas as how they want to do certain activities. A team of students start planning the scale of event. Mentors guide them and enrich their proposals in a strategic manner, making it more robust and feasible. Students are empowered with everything well set. They are not just following directions from their mentors and teachers but are doing work on their own adding their creativity with much more self-determination. They are more into action with a focus on unravelling things step by step. All these processes help them learn in a purposeful way.

**Sense of Belongingness:** As students have the ownership of the event, they have a sense of belongingness in whatever is being planned and rolled out by them in the entire process of the event. They have much increased willingness and self-motivation for whatever they are attempting and working on. As everything is planned, proposed, and developed by themselves only, they have different levels of ownership of their own. They are much into their scheme of things, where they have much motivation in implementing and achieving their planned roles. As the entire budgeting and all expenses are handled by themselves, the learning becomes more effective in terms of finance management too.

**Risk Taking Abilities:** When planning is being done based on their own ideas and are being implemented themselves, with expenses being generated and spent themselves, there is a low-stake environment to commit mistakes. The learning becomes more real time as any gaffe being committed are managed at the same time and are also being covered to make it look seamless and unblemished. With mentors around and activities taking place at their own venue, the risk-taking abilities become stronger. They are ready to learn from their mistakes without any real-world corollaries.

**Teamwork and Collaboration:** In this model, the mentors and the teachers modify their role from being the giver of knowledge to accompanying in their enterprise thus sanctioning students to take on different roles like sharing authority, making decisions on collaborations and many more. Students negotiate with sponsors for generating funds. Students coordinate with different vendors in order to get a stage to be put for the show. They partner with various

## Theatre in Education as an Experiential Model for Event ....

other service providers in order to fulfil their objectives towards successful conduction of their event. Students work as a team to implement their plans and take collaborative decisions in order to meet their deadline and successful conduction of their extravaganza.

**Communication Skills:** This model also helps students in enhancing their communication skills in a much more advanced way. Starting from conceptualizing and then developing the proposal and then presenting it to their mentors. Also, while developing the storyline, the scripts are developed. The different acts are developed; role allocation is being done. The dialogues are written according to various roles and characters.

For the marketing of the event, proposals are developed in order to reach out different types of clients for sponsorship of the event and other collaborations. On a regular basis, social media creatives are being generated in order to create an engagement with the audience and other stakeholders. There is a requirement to create a buzz among the fellow students as well as the prospective clients and the audience at the large. The shared communication both in the form of written communication as well the presentations are made in order to effectively implement the plans and executive the event successfully. A high level of professional attempts is being made and a lot of new learnings are gained in the entire process.

**Experiential Learning:** This model also helps students to go much beyond the theoretical aspects of things and practically attempt things in a proficient way. They not just draw and learn the Gantt Chart , but also implement it in order to meet the timeline they create in the run up to the event. This gives students a different experience where each theoretical model is implemented in actions and thus helps in successful execution of the event.

**Contextualised Learning:** The entire practice of events, not just gives them contextualized learning, but also links them to various aspects of event management. Right from concept planning to marketing, from venue management to logistics, from stage management to vendor management, from crowd management to complete security and many more. Students learn how in well-coordinated ways things can be implemented and a new milestone created every year.

This model transforms the classroom learning into an event-centered action plan. Students implement their knowledge, guided by their mentors, into action to fulfill their collective objective. This enhances their critical thinking abilities as well as problem solving capabilities. Students are compelled to confront challenges at various stages of pre-event, during the event and post event. The various inevitable circumstances produce new set of challenges to be tackled, leading to learn the realities of event management, further making them confident and competent.

The MoE model adds to the expertise of students by enhancing their learning by positioning them as skilled professionals handling the entire process of the event management from the beginning till end as the proprietor of the event they are handling. By indulging into the process, these students team up to unscramble the real-time challenges of the event management. In the process, they develop certain skillsets which complete their professional proficiency and foster critical thinking and teamwork skills in them. They acquire the prerequisite skills of handling events of any scale from planning to rolling it out and then complete execution and the closing out process in the post event scenario.

## **Conclusion**

Event Management as a subject provides a powerful platform to students that enables learning through active class participation. Moreover, including Theatre in Education as an essential component of events engage students both emotionally and cognitively, they get involved in planning, organizing and delivering real events instead of just attending theory classes. This helps them to understand the event cycle, from planning to implementation and evaluation, and they grasp through actual world experience. Students develop skills like effective communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time management and strategic planning and on the same hand also build confidence, resilience and adaptability, which become difficult to learn from lectures alone. This also helps in diminishing the gap between academic learning and industry needs as it exposes learners to real stakeholders and also brings forward genuine risks and responsibilities involved in an event. Overall, students become more work-ready and better prepared for future careers in events and related fields.

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- i A Gantt chart is a bar chart that can be prepared on excel. It demonstrates the schedule of the event and outlines event team members' work responsibilities and deadlines.



## **Ethical Considerations**

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