

Zeal Educational Services Pvt. Ltd.

The Third Way: Scenes from Three Classrooms

Here are some scenes from three different classrooms.

Act 1: The teacher wants to teach students some ideas regarding shadows.

Scene 1: The Government school: The teacher points to the first student and asks her to read the first paragraph from the textbook. With a lot of hesitation and wrong pronunciation (which the teacher does not bother to correct) the student manages to read one paragraph. Another student is then asked to read the next paragraph. In this way, the lesson is read. The teacher then reads out the questions, makes the students mark the answers. The lesson is over!

Scene 2: A modern school which believes in activity-based, learner-centred education: The teacher explains how shadows are formed, the meaning of the umbra and the penumbra, how the shadow becomes more and more indistinct as the object becomes farther from the screen, how it becomes larger and smaller as we move the object and so on. She has many teaching aids on her table, which she uses to demonstrate her points. Students try their hands at forming shadows and playing with the teaching aids. The class is lively and students look forward to the class. As soon as the teacher enters the classroom, students look eagerly at what she is carrying.

Scene 3: A school which believes in The Third Way: The teacher poses a series of problems for the students to solve. For example, she switches on the light and asks students to create monster

shadows of themselves. She hands over a common object (e.g., a pen) and asks students to study the shadows formed by the pen. Students form small groups and solve the problems; at the end, they present their findings to the teacher. She writes the main findings on the board and summarises them properly, using the correct words to describe what the students have discovered. The class is noisy, with students eager to tell the teacher what they have discovered, but the noise is due to exuberance, not due to mischievousness.

Act 2: The teacher wants to teach children the theorem that “Two sides of a triangle together measure more than the third side”.

Scene 1: The Government school: The teacher comes to the class, writes the statement of the theorem on the board and gives the proof of the theorem. Students learn the proof by rote and reproduce it when asked.

Scene 2: The modern school: The teacher states and proves the theorem. She then asks students to draw various triangles on paper and measure the lengths of the sides. Students verify that the theorem is valid.

Scene 3: The Third Way school: The teacher has a box of strips which can be joined together to form triangles. The strips are of different lengths. Each group of students is asked to pick out some strips and proceed to make triangles out of them. Soon, there is a cry from one group, “Ma’am, the triangle is not happening!” More students come to the same conclusion but others show that triangles can be formed in some cases. The teacher encourages them to see why this happens: sooner or later, students respond that the shorter strips are not long enough. The teacher then restates their finding in mathematically precise language and proves the theorem.

Act 3: The teacher wants to teach children the rules for formation of plurals.

Scene 1: The Government school: The teacher tells the students the rules and asks them to learn them by rote.

Scene 2: The modern school: Essentially the same as above, but with more examples, done more leisurely and in such a way that students enjoy the class.

Scene 3: The Third Way school: The teacher lists a number of words along with the plurals. Students look for patterns and realise that plurals add 's' to the singular. The teacher then gives more complex examples: students come up with another rule: add 'es'. Yet other examples are given and on each occasion, students come up with rules. The rules are listed on the board by the teacher; she then poses the next problem, how do we decide which rule to apply? Students come up with various rules and finally arrive at a step-by-step procedure for forming plurals. If possible, they use Logo to write a procedure for forming plurals of words.

On first reading, it would appear that Scene 2 and Scene 3 are not too different. In both cases, the students are active and enjoying the class. The difference is that in Scene 2, they are verifying what they have been taught, while in scene 3, they are discovering new facts, which are then summarised by the teacher. In one case, the teacher teaches and then the students test; in the other, the students discover and the teacher summarises. In one case, we produce clerks who are capable of doing what we want; in the second, we produce innovators, who will tell others what to do. What type of citizens do we want for our country?