

“Classroom Pedagogy: Using Insights from General Semantics”

Jointly Organised by

Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences, Vadodara, Gujarat

&

Karanjia Autonomous College, Karanjia, Odisha

Venue: Karanjia Autonomous College, Karanjia, Odisha

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Concept Note

Merriam-Webster defines pedagogy as the “art, science, or profession of teaching;” it broadly refers to the “interactions between teachers, students, and the learning environment and the learning tasks.” It includes how teachers and students relate together; the implementation of instructional package in the classroom, including teaching styles, feedback, and assessment. The traditional teaching techniques, the ‘content-based’ lecture-method in particular, have broadly focused on ‘what’ to think rather than ‘how’ to think. With the rising impact of mass media, “information explosion” and consumerism, and progress in the field of science, effective pedagogies need reorienting and involving a range of other techniques such as structured group work, and individual activity with a focus on developing higher order thinking, making good use of dialogue and questioning. We cannot return to the Socratic era to create an environment of ‘free conversation’ and creative thinking in the classroom, but we can adopt skills conducive to creating such an ambience. Teaching, Neil Postman suggests, is a “subversive activity,” and the teacher, a ‘life-long learner’ ready to evolve new techniques in conjunction with the learners. Teaching-learning is a transactions-process and not discrete or separate events. General Semantics, developed by Alfred Korzybski in the post-war period as a system-discipline and a life-skill focuses on “human engineering” and establishment of ‘sanity.’ It has the potential to be used as a survival-skill to enable humans meet the challenges posed by change of moral-socio-politico-cultural values today, and help study great affairs and problems from a scientific-mathematical, engineering, impersonal and objective point of view. In the “learning-unlearning-relearning” process, we must shift from ‘who’ and ‘what’ to ‘why’ and ‘how’ and adopt a scientific enquiry method as classroom pedagogy. Our education system including the technologies used must keep pace with the progress of life and science to bring about a cognitive revolution. Students ought to be taught to base their beliefs upon observation and inference as impersonal and objective, devoid of any dogmatic bias as much is possible for human beings. An extensional orientation, a consciousness of abstraction, an awareness of the “Map-territory dichotomy,” and scientific use of language are some of the skills today’s students need to avoid confusion and misunderstanding in their relation with the self and the other. More than a ‘Lamplighter,’ ‘Gardener,’ ‘Personal Manager,’ or ‘Muscle Builder,’ teacher is a “medical man and expert at crap detecting;” and a guardian of civilisation ready to subvert attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that promote chaos and hopelessness. The methods suggested by General Semantics could help teachers and students develop a built-in, shockproof “crap detector” as basic tools for their survival.

The course shall introduce General Semantics as a scientific discipline; and its various principles and devices – ‘time-binding,’ the ‘abstracting process,’ use of ‘extensional devices,’ ‘map-territory’ confusion, the process of languaging and meaning-making and critical thinking etc. – shall be explained through lectures and PPT presentations. The presentations shall be around pedagogy, classroom teaching techniques, teaching of poetry, drama, fiction, language and the WRLS skills, and academic writing etc. Some of the participants will also make short presentations.

Registration

Students and teachers willing to participate are required to register by paying Rs. 1000 (One thousand) to the Balvant Parekh Centre or the local coordinator. However, students of Karanjia Autonomous College can register by paying Rs 600 (Six hundred) only. The Registration Fee could be paid through a bank draft payable to “Balvant Parekh Centre for GS and OHS” on any bank in Baroda. For instructions about transferring the fee directly into Balvant Parekh Centre’s account, do get in touch with Mr. Ajay Menon, the Fiscal and Admin Officer (menonajay1953@gmail.com). The last date for receiving the registration fee is 05 January 2021. The fee will take care of the course material and food during the programme and is non-refundable. Study materials will be sent to the email of registered participants only after due registration. Participants have to make their own arrangements for travel and accommodation. If needed, they may contact the Local Coordinator for any facilitation.

Contact

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