

Incorporation of Drama into English Language Teaching and Learning in K-12 Schools in China: Exploratory Practices from the Researcher's Experience

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Abstract: Recently, the application of drama in education to other content subjects is a very popular trend. Drama in education is not only a holistic way to cultivate all-around students, but also an effective way to achieve interdisciplinary integration. The application of drama to English language teaching is proved to be a viable and effective method to promote language competence. This paper firstly introduces some related theories about drama in education. Secondly some theoretical bases and benefits of the application of drama in education to English language teaching and learning are presented. Finally, by demonstrating 4 exploratory teaching practices of incorporating drama in language teaching, this paper provides some practical implications for language researchers and instructors and points out some directions for future research.

1. Introduction

The traditional English teaching model mainly focuses on knowledge impartation and promotion of language skills, which is constantly encountered criticism. Primary school English teachers confront a crucial challenge to stimulate students' inner learning interest, improve teaching effectiveness, and create student-centered and communicative learning environment. Because of the particularity of drama, which is inextricably related to language, studies about the integration of drama into English language teaching and learning are extensively explored.

2. Related Theories about Drama in Education

Drama is a comprehensive art that integrates language, movement, performance, music, and dance. Also, drama can be widely applied to various fields, so it can be classified into various types, involving creative drama, process drama, educational drama, theater drama etc. Drama in Education or educational drama is the application of drama to education and the final objective of it is to educate.

2.1 The Definition of Drama in Education

Drama in education or educational drama originally derives from Rousseau's "learning by doing" and "learning by dramatic doing" in the 18th century. But it is not formally advocated until the 1960s

to the 1970s, by British scholar, Dorothy Heathcote, to challenge the traditional indoctrination education and teaching methods. She strongly believes that the purpose of drama is to provide children with platforms for reflection and analysis of life experiences by role playing (Heathcote, 1995). Also, drama in education is conceived as a means of teaching other subjects, which can widen children's vision and enable them to see the reality through imagination and understand the implicit meaning behind the specific behavior. Andersen (2004, p. 282) defines drama in education, that "refers to the use of drama techniques to support learning in the classroom".

Drama in education, as one type of drama, shares some commonalities with drama. O'Neill and Lambert demonstrate that drama synthesizes language, feeling, and thought, which can improve individuals' self-confidence and competence, enhance the comprehension and awareness of the outer world and enrich their inner worlds (Morgan & Saxton, 1985).

To sum up, drama in education is an ideal teaching and learning method to achieve; a full-person and interdisciplinary education through the implementation of drama techniques, conventions and strategies.

2.2 Two Basic Models of Drama in Education

Drama in education can be summarized in two basic models: product-oriented drama and process-oriented drama. Product-oriented drama centers on the classic drama script or adapted drama script performance. This model basically centers on a certain theme and teaches students in accordance with the procedures of theatrical performance, encompassing analysis of scripts, analysis of characters, rehearsals, coordination and cooperation of various departments and stage performances. When this type of educational drama is incorporated into English language teaching and learning, teachers and students spend the whole semester to create or adapt a classic drama script, and then perform it in English to audience.

Process-oriented drama does not fully focus on rehearsal and performance of the script, but on the learning process by adopting drama conventions, strategies and games to instruction. When this category of drama is applied to language class, teachers will spend most of time making use of some drama conventions or creating dramatic context to help learners promote learners' language competence.

2.3 Development History of Drama in Education in English Speaking Context and Non-English Speaking Context

Early in the ancient Greek period, drama entered children's education. But until the 20th century, drama became an integral part of education in order to challenge the conventional education model.

2.3.1 Development History of Drama in Education in English speaking Contexts

In the 1920s, Winifred Ward began the practice of combining drama with education, providing possibilities for children to develop various abilities in "doing drama" and breaking the old model of education.

In the 1960s, in the context of advocating the equal importance of art education and content subject in the United States, drama was applied to arts education and creative drama emerged. Drama showed unprecedented potential in areas such as children's special education and children's personality education.

In the 1970s, Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote, famous scholars in theatre education in the United Kingdom, put forward drama in education and explored the practices of drama in education. They are universally recognized as the most influential pioneers in the study of drama in education theory. Mantle of the expert and teacher-in-role are the two representative drama conventions of

Heathcote.

At the end of the 1980s, some western developed countries gradually established a complete system of studying and practicing drama in education, incorporating it into the standard education system. In the United States, a large number of colleges, universities and primary school started to establish drama departments and incorporate drama into curriculum.

2.3.2 Development History of Drama in Education in Chinese Speaking Contexts

The research of drama in education in Chinese speaking contexts is relatively late, but Taiwan and Hong Kong have developed rapidly and made some achievements. However, the research process of drama in education in mainland China has been faltering.

Taiwan is the forefront of Asia in terms of the development of drama in education. As early as in the 1980s and 1990s, Taiwan researchers have successively published translations and monographs on European and American Drama Education. Outstanding contributions include Professor Zhang Xiaohua, Professor Zheng Daiqiong and Professor Lin Meijun. In 2000, drama was included in Taiwan's compulsory education, and drama courses were incorporated into curriculum in 2002.

The development of drama in education in Hong Kong is more influenced by British drama. The history can be traced back to the early 1980s. According to Huang Yanling and Chen Yulan, Hong Kong's Drama in Education concept was first introduced by Chung Ying Theatre, and Chris Johnson propelled the implementation of drama in education in Hong Kong (Cao Lusheng, 2003).

In 1995, Li Yinging, an expert in drama and education, went abroad and began to devote herself to the introduction and promotion of drama in education in mainland China. Foreign experts were invited by Li Yinging to give lectures, thus started the development of drama in education in mainland China (Feng Zixia, 2015).

3. Related Theories about the Incorporation of DIE into ELT

Some theories about the incorporation of drama in education into English language teaching will be firstly introduced in this part, the benefits of that will be secondly illustrated.

3.1 Theoretical Basis for Integrating Drama in Education into English Language Teaching and Learning

Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, Piaget's interaction theory and Merrill Swain's output hypothesis provide important theoretical bases for drama-based language pedagogy.

3.1.1 Multiple Intelligence Theory

Multiple intelligence theory provides significant theoretical basis for language teaching and learning in a dramatic way. It was put forward by psychologist Howard Gardner at Harvard University in the late 1970s. Multiple intelligences involve linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence (Huang Yuanzhen, 2003).

The fundamental elements of drama in education are situation, language, role, character and relationship, space and time, voice and movements, etc. When these elements are incorporated to engage language learners in the process of learning, dramatic ways will provide learners a natural situation to promote their linguistic intelligence. Meanwhile, drama in education pays attention to the usage of space and time, thus learner's spatial intelligence will be developed. Besides, language learners use their body and voice to personalize and embody language, and they learn how to cooperate with other students, experience their inner feelings and character's feelings when they are involved in the drama-based language pedagogy. Therefore, language learners' spatial intelligence,

bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, musical intelligence, linguistic intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence can be fully explored and developed by dramatic instruction.

3.1.2 Interaction Theory

The interaction theory was first proposed by the most influential Swiss psychologist in the field of cognitive development, Piaget, in the 1960s. Piaget believes that children gradually build up their understanding of the outer world during the process of interacting with surrounding environment. (Wang Geying, 2005). Interaction also plays an important role in language learning. Drama in education benefits language learning as a means to provide learners and teachers with a variety of interactions both in role and out of role. Drama-based language pedagogy allows language learners freely try on different discourses and experiment with language while increasing students' motivation, engagement, and confidence. Also, the interactive process of drama helps students draw meaningful connections between language and prior experience.

3.1.3 Output Hypothesis

Krashen proposed input hypothesis that has a remote influence in English language teaching. But Merrill Swain found that only comprehensible input is not enough for language learners to achieve fluency and accuracy in second language acquisition. Therefore, Swain put forward output hypotheses, and claimed if language learners want to have a good command of accuracy and fluency, comprehensible input is necessary, but a lot of output plays an essential role at the same time. The output has three functions, encompassing noticing, testing and metalinguistic function.

Drama as an effective output approach positively facilitates the transformation of language competence to language performance, and helps language learners improve their language fluency and accuracy. Drama-based pedagogy creates real setting for language learning, provides opportunities to express and negotiate meaning, and facilitate the process of internalizing language knowledge.

3.2 The Benefits of Drama in Education for Language Learning

Drama-based language pedagogy help learners have a deeper understanding of target language. Firstly, language learning itself needs a situation; drama provides a natural situation for learners to use language and facilitate spontaneous communication. Secondly, various drama conventions, such as, Whoosh, teacher-in-role, collective writing and tag in role, help students strengthen their understanding towards language in a highly motivated learning environment.

Drama in education integrates both the repertoire skills of language in a natural way, and integrate verbal and non-verbal communication. Language learners read script, listen to each other's lines, speak out their own lines, and write collectively in roles. Various forms of dramatic instruction integrate four skills of language learning.

Drama-based language pedagogy brings classroom interaction to life by fully contextualizing language, cultivates self-awareness, awareness of others, self-esteem, and confidence, promotes students' motivation and engagement, and improves their communication and corporation ability. It is a holistic education to cultivate whole-person through an enjoyable experience.

4. Volunteering Teaching Practices of Integrating Drama to English Language Teaching and Learning

Drama-based language pedagogy is an effective integrating teaching method. A great number of researchers did extensive studies about the application of drama in education in various content subjects. However, because drama is closely related to language, more researchers aim to investigate

the effectiveness and practical ways of incorporating drama in education into language instruction. Four volunteering teaching practices by the researcher will be introduced in the following part.

4.1 Description of Teaching Practices

Volunteering teaching practice 1: From March to June, 2021, CXD primary school in Beijing invited one foreign drama teacher to conduct an English drama class. 23 students were involved in this class. Every week one 2-hour class was given to the 6th and 5th grade students for 16 weeks.

Volunteering teaching 2&3: From September to November, 2020, BFSU international high school in Beijing invited a Chinese drama teacher to conduct an English drama course in an English drama club. 18 Grade 1 and 20 Grade 2 students participated in this English drama club, and they were divided into two classes, every week 1.5-hour class time for each class lasted for 14 weeks.

Volunteering teaching 4: From September to November, 2020, HDMX primary school in Beijing invited a Chinese drama teacher to conduct an English drama course in an English drama club. 19 primary school students of grade 4 were involved in a typical 1.5-hour classroom period for 14 weeks.

Teaching practices of 2, 3 and 4 are the same Chinese drama teacher, and all names of school are pseudonyms. The author was a teacher assistant in these four drama-based language teaching practices and participated in the whole teaching process. Every class the author did participation observation, videotaping, and interviews with students and teachers to investigate the teaching effects.

4.2 Implementation Stages of Teaching Practices

The implementation stages of Teaching Practice 1 in a whole semester include 2-week drama activities, 2-week script learning, 9-week rehearsal, 2-week dress rehearsal and 1 week final performance. In each class the foreign drama teacher firstly did some drama-based warming up activities in a circle, such as Rubber Duck, Freeze Frames, Act out abstract objects, etc. Students were highly engaged in drama activities. Foreign drama teacher and the author cooperated to help students remember lines, correct pronunciation and direct performance in the last 14 weeks.

The implementation stages of Teaching Practice 2, 3 and 4 involve 5-week drama-in-education activities focusing on introducing story plot, 7-week rehearsal, 1 week dress rehearsal and 1 week final performance. In the first 5 weeks of each class drama teacher and teacher assistant cooperated to complete some drama-based warming up activities, such as, Whoosh, Rubber Duck, Squirrel and Tree, Puppetry, and Beanbag playing. Then the teacher introduced story plot by drama conventions, strategies and games, such as conscience alley, sculpt, thought tracking, etc. In the last 9 weeks drama teacher firstly conducted drama-based warming up activities and then directed script-based performance.

4.3 Teaching Effects of Teaching Practices

Teaching Practice 1: After a whole-semester instruction, students' fluency, accuracy, and oral communication ability are obviously improved due to the repeated memorization and correction. Also, students experience character's feelings and perform these feelings out in another language on the stage, their confidence is remarkably improved. Students communicate and cooperate with one another, as well as teachers, their communication and cooperation ability is promoted.

Teaching Practice 2&3: Because most international high school students already comprehend a comparatively high level of English, the improvement of language competence is not remarkable. But their presentational skills, cooperative, creative and imaginative ability are highly enhanced. High school students positively participate in the process of creating and co-creating the final performance with teacher. English drama club also provides high school students with platforms to show their

versatile talents.

Teaching Practice 4: After 14-week drama-based language pedagogy, primary students' language competence, along with their cooperation ability improved a lot. Especially one naughty student becomes more cooperative and starts to observe classroom rules in the last few weeks. Students' collective sense of honor is highly spurred by a beanbag warming-up drama activity, which designs to cultivate students' concentration. Also, they grasped new words as many as possible by acting out meanings with the whole body.

4.4 Reflection of Teaching Practices

Four teaching practices all use product-oriented drama to teach language, and the benefits and effectiveness are obviously seen. Students' language competence, motivation, engagement, confidence, cooperation ability are more or less improved. But there are still some problems revealed while incorporating drama in education into language pedagogy.

Firstly, two problems are revealed in Teaching Practice 1 during the process of incorporating drama in education into language teaching, one is that although the author helped to translate some directions from the foreign drama teacher, sometimes students are still confused about how to perform. Another problem is that some students' performance and the meaning of their lines are disjointed. It seems that these students do not totally understand the meaning of their lines, and they just memorize lines mechanically without in-depth experiencing characters' emotions.

Secondly, instruction time is not optimally used. In the previous weeks of drama-based activities of 4 teaching practices, students learnt many new language expressions in dramatic ways and were exposed in an environment of meaningful communication. Whereas in the last weeks of rehearsal and performance, pedagogy focuses on script-based performance, drama teacher could not direct all the students at the same time, result in some students idly lavish their learning time by chatting and playing with other students. Besides, one foreign drama class and 3 English drama clubs are all supported by school, and schools hope to see final performance. Therefore, drama teacher distribute more time on direction and rehearsal, so the effective time for language instruction is affected.

However, if instructors implement language instruction based on process-oriented drama without a final performance in daily classroom by adapting textbook will not only compensate the deficiencies exposed in these 4 teaching practices, but also optimizing the benefits of drama-based language pedagogy.

5. Conclusion and Future Research

From a pedagogical perspective, a practical achievement of these 4 practices is that it provides instructors and researchers with basic understanding of the effects and benefits of drama-based language pedagogy in different learning and teaching situations. As noted in the outset, most language teachers strive to change the traditional ways of language teaching. Thus, the implementation of drama-based language pedagogical practices gives instructors practical implications to consider how to effectively use drama to teach language and change the traditional language pedagogy.

Meanwhile, the effectiveness of teaching language by means of drama is also investigated in a lot of studies (Park, 2018; DÖNÜK, Dönercan, 2018; Galante & Thomson, 2017; Wang Qiang, 2016; Cannon, 2017; Zhang Lianyue, 2013). These studies all like the teaching practices in this paper adopt product-oriented drama approach, and a final English drama performance is the product. So it is hoped that the implementation of process-oriented drama in language instruction can be explored in the future research. Instructors can apply drama conventions, strategies and games to the whole-semester language pedagogy mainly focuses on language improvement in various aspects without final performance. Also, most researchers conduct drama-based language pedagogy in an English drama

club or a selective English drama course, thus future research will be focused on the implementation of drama in education in daily English classroom, using adapted textbook with rich story plots instead of classic drama script.

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