

Adaptation and Selection of High School English Mini-Drama Scripts through Task-Based Learning Framework

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Abstract: Modern education strongly emphasizes fostering students' holistic development, with a dual focus on nurturing character and talent. There has been a growing trend in domestic and international research on how drama influences language learning in recent years. Existing research has discovered that drama effectively enhances students' language skills, boosts their learning motivation, facilitates cognitive development, and enhances their humanistic literacy. Based on previous experiences, this study seeks to investigate methods of selecting and adapting scene-based short drama scripts for senior high school English teachers. Its goal is to provide insights into their daily teaching practices.

1. Introduction

General Senior High School Curriculum Standards English (hereafter *New Curriculum Standards*) emphasizes authentic and meaningful contextual teaching in English classrooms,^[1] stimulating learners' learning motivation and cultivating their good moral character.^[2] However, in today's English classroom, some teachers lack attention to the authenticity of speaking activities. The context of activities is still detached from students' real lives, ignoring their cognitive background and personal experience.^[3]

In order to minimize such weakness, mini-drama is a suitable method. In effect, the integration of drama into English teaching has been the subject of theoretical research and practical exploration for many years in foreign countries. English-speaking countries have widely used educational drama in primary and secondary school teaching practices. However, the theory and practice of educational drama have yet to be given extensive attention in China.^[4] Most existing research has focused on primary school and college sections. In addition, there are few studies on selecting and compiling mini-drama scripts for senior high schools. Therefore, this paper will explore this issue in order to provide references for high school English teachers.

2. Literature Review Abroad and at Home

In foreign countries, drama teaching started earlier, with various research directions. As far as scripts are concerned, either the scripts are adapted according to the specific learning situation of the students, such as classic fairy tales, folk tales, etc., or the existing teaching materials are used, such as *Creating Drama with 7-11 years old*, *Drama for Students* series, with a variety of selected materials

and detailed activity guidance. Regarding related empirical studies, some studies have proven that drama can improve non-native English students' language skills effectively: (1) They can improve communication skills, enhance the accuracy and fluency of oral expression, and reduce anxiety in verbal activities.^[5] (2) They are able to increase interest in writing and improve writing skills such as creativity and logic.^[6] (3) They can enhance learning motivation within experiential learning contexts.^[7] In addition, some other empirical studies focus on the function of drama teaching on students' moral development and find that students can develop good character through drama performance.^[8]

In China, integrating drama into English teaching has been a new rising topic. Scripts are often adapted from classic literary works, such as Chen Yao and her team developed teaching materials based on the classical English fairy tale play *The Little Mermaid*.^[9] Existing empirical studies have concentrated on the development of drama courses to improve students' English core literacy. For example, Wang Qiang's team found that drama can indeed enhance primary school students' core literacy, learning interest, and self-confidence through three years of learning.^[10] Drama in junior high school English classrooms can improve students' language skills, creative and critical thinking, and multicultural awareness.

In conclusion, domestic and international studies have focused on the selection and compilation of drama scripts and their practice on language enhancement. Concerning script adaptation and selection, domestic and foreign studies pay more attention to extracurricular materials, ignoring the materials from textbooks. Compared with foreign studies, domestic studies focus on developing students' language skills and neglect the humanistic value of drama teaching. In addition, most existing studies are oriented to curriculum development, and there is still much room for research on mini-drama in the classroom.

3. The Concept of Mini-Drama based on Task-Based Teaching

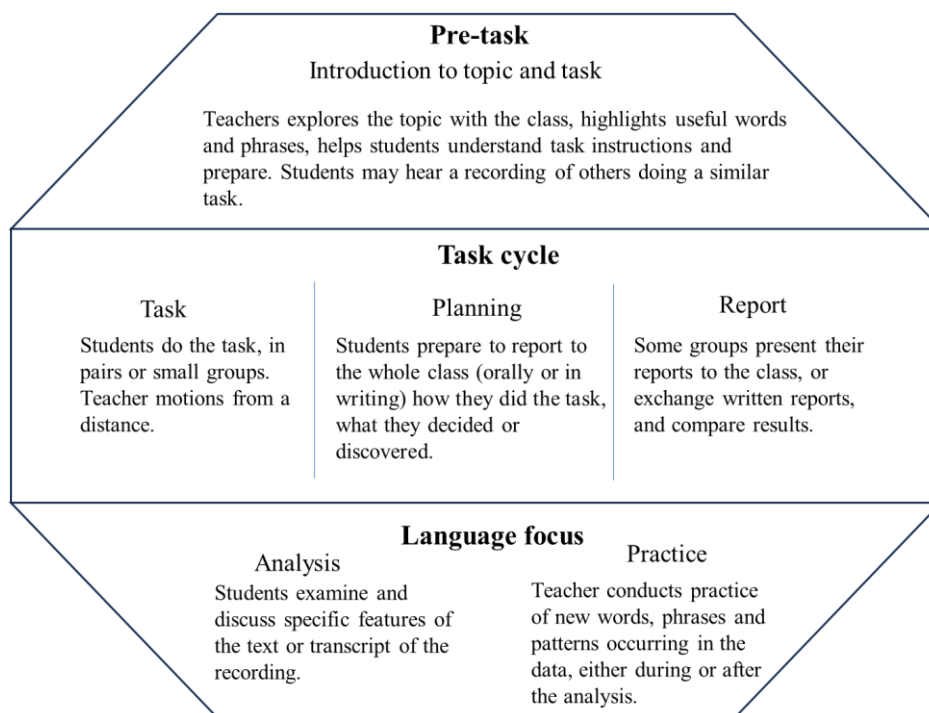


Figure 1: Task-Based Learning Framework by Jane Willis

Effective language learning should satisfy three conditions: “exposure to a rich but comprehensible

input of real spoken and written language in use; use of the language to do things; motivation to listen and read the language and to speak and write it.”^[11] Combining mini-dramas and task-based language teaching can create an effective language-learning environment.

The Task-Based Learning (hereafter TBL) framework proposed by Jane Willis consists of three phases: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus, and the task cycle is subdivided into three stages: task, planning, and reporting (see Figure 1 for details).

The pre-task phase introduces the teaching topic and task and activates relevant vocabulary and phrases. This phase ensures that students are always in the target language environment. In addition, textbooks can provide rich materials. Both satisfy the first condition for effective language learning.

The primary purpose of the task circle phase is to encourage students to use their language knowledge to complete tasks and to improve their language skills under the guidance of the teacher by completing the task report. Tasks are composed of five components: goals, input, procedures, teacher/learner roles, and settings. Objectives of a task should be student-centered, and the input should be authentic. The subsequent planning and reporting stages provide a good platform for students to listen, speak, read, and write the target language. Concerning the mini-drama scripts, textbook users can either adapt the materials from textbooks or select extracurricular materials, which ensures the authenticity and attractiveness of the task’s input materials. Additionally, mini-drama is an observable performance, which is one of the best ways to assess whether the task’s goal is achieved or not. TBL and mini-dramas complement each other to create opportunities for students to practice the language and enhance their motivation to use the language.

The language focus phase helps students to understand the different features of language forms. Moreover, they can deepen their understanding of language knowledge through analysis and practice.

To recap, TBL provides an explicit teaching scaffolding for English mini-drama, while the authenticity, diversity, and attractiveness within mini-drama scripts pave the way for the implementation of TBL. Both complement each other and make an appropriate context for students to learn the language effectively.

4. Ways of Producing Mini-Dramas’ Scripts

New Curriculum Standards underscores that teachers should pay attention to creating authentic situations, guiding students to understand the meaning deeply, and choosing appropriate language forms to express their personal feelings and opinions effectively. English mini-dramas can create a natural communicative environment to help students enhance their language skills and humanistic qualities. One of the keys to effectively performing the functions of mini-drama is that the scripts should satisfy students’ learning needs.

This study attempts to integrate mini-drama into the daily high school English classrooms. Due to the limited class duration, the adaption of scripts must consider their length. There are two main paths: adapting texts in textbooks or picking extracurricular English plays. The texts abound in English textbooks. They have various themes and rich content, which are excellent materials for mini-drama. Exploring scripts of mini-dramas with the help of TBL enhances the clarity and logic of the overall teaching framework on the one hand. On the other hand, it reduces the difficulty of the activities and improves the students’ learning motivation by subdividing the tasks.

4.1 Adapting Texts from Textbooks

The path of adapting scripts from textbooks’ texts is designed based on Jane Willis’ TBL framework (see Table 1 for details). Overall, in adapting the text, the teacher acts as a guide to help students complete various tasks, create a script, and finally complete a mini-drama performance.

Table 1: The Framework of Adapting Mini-Drama Scripts Based on TBL

Phases	Instructions
Pre-task phase	The teacher and students peruse the text and sort out language knowledge.
	The teacher introduces tasks; students are clear about the procedures.
Task cycle phase	
Task stage	Members in same groups read texts again and adapt them.
Planning stage	Different groups exchange ideas and learn from each other.
Report stage	Students perform according to adapted scripts. Teachers and other students give feedbacks.
Language Focus	Students follow the teacher's instruction and analyze the language features.
	Students finish exercises and solidify language knowledge.

In the following, this study takes the reading text "A Journey to Peru" from Unit 2 of *New Senior English for China Volume I* published by People's Education Press, as an example to illustrate this path.

Pre-task Phase: re-reading the text and organizing language knowledge

Due to the limited class duration, students should complete a comprehensive understanding of the content and thematic meaning of the text under the teacher's guidance before adapting scripts. Afterward, the teacher can guide students to sort out the key language knowledge with the help of the worksheet and clarify the objectives and requirements of each task so as to pave the way for the task circle phase.

"A Journey to Peru" is presented as a travel brochure. It describes four famous sites in Peru: the Amazon rainforest, Machu Picchu, Cusco, and Lake Titicaca. The travel brochure mainly consists of the length of the trip, how to get around, and the famous places to visit. The students can follow the mind map to sort out valuable expressions and learn about the customs and traditions of Peru so that they can accumulate materials for the script adaptation.

Task Circle Phase: working in groups to adapt the text and perform the mini-drama

During the task cycle phase, students work in small groups (no more than six is recommended) to progressively adapt and rehearse the script according to the order of the tasks.

In the task stage, groups are required to (1) study the text and identify basic elements such as situations, characters, and relationships between characters. John O'Toole argues that these three elements are driven by dramatic tension and are represented in the time and space set to make up a story. Actors play different roles and express emotions and characteristics through speech and movement.^[12] (2) assign members different roles. Members process and embellish their roles wisely. Based on the understanding of roles, they adapt the text with discussion. During this process, the teacher should remind them to highlight the theme and language knowledge learned in this text.

When students adapt the text, the teacher can appropriately construct a learning scaffolding for them to reduce the difficulty of the tasks and alleviate the fear of carrying tasks. Firstly, groups peruse the text again carefully and decide the thematic situation of the target script. "A Journey to Peru" is associated easily with the following situations. For example, a tour guide leads tourists from different countries to visit four attractions in Peru. Tour groups promote a trip to Peru. Once the situation is clear, the teacher can provide the groups with a character sheet to assist them in creating and embellishing their roles. The character sheet consists of three main sections: personal information, personality traits, and actions. Personal information includes name, age, and physical appearance.

The personality traits are the basis for the subsequent behavioral and verbal outputs. Based on the identified personality traits of the characters, the group members try to figure out and determine the dialogue and behavioral interactions between the characters.

The second task requires a discussion of the dialogue. In this task, the teacher needs to provide concise examples of scripts (including essential elements such as scenes, acts, etc.) in order to reduce the difficulty of the task appropriately. In this task, the groups only need to fill in the script's structure with previously prepared material in the first task. Afterward, the teacher provides a checklist in which the control entries can be designed in terms of both content and structure. For example, in terms of content, "We used new vocabulary and sentence structures in the script." "We tried to use knowledge from the past units we had learned in the script." "We covered all the basic dramatic elements of the script." In terms of structure, "We try to imitate the structure of the example provided by the teacher."

In the planning stage, the teacher can provide another checklist, mainly including language form (grammar, vocabulary, sentence pattern) and language content (whether the character's speech and behavior align with their personality traits; whether the theme is novel). Moreover, groups are encouraged to discuss and give advice to each other and to learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses.

In the report stage, each group performs the script, and finally, teachers and students evaluate both the content and performance.

Language focus phase: reviewing language forms and consolidating language knowledge

In the language focus phase, students need to concentrate on learning the different language features in the texts and deepen their understanding through analysis and practice. Taking "A Journey to Peru" as an example, there are many complex sentence patterns. Teachers can focus on analyzing the complex sentence structures in the text. For example, the sentence, "Inca builders cut stones to exact sizes so that nothing was needed to hold walls together other than the perfect fit of the stones." is presented in a passive voice, and "so that" represents the causal link. In addition, the sentence, "Stay in the local hotel, visit the museums, admire the architecture, enjoy the excellent local food and go shopping at the local markets." follows the same sentence pattern: verb following an object (VO). Finally, exercises related to this text, such as fill-in-the-blanks and imitative writing, are assigned to help students consolidate the knowledge learned in class.

Moreover, George Belliveau and Won Kim have curated a selection of websites aimed at facilitating lesson planning for teachers, offering valuable materials and support:

- Bringing Language Alive through Process Drama: SYLLABUS: <http://drama2010evo.pbworks.com/f/Bringing+Language+Alive+through+Process+Drama+SYLLABUS.pdf>.
- Drama Education Network: www.dramaed.net.
- Improve Encyclopedia: <http://improvecyclopedia.org>.
- ESL Flow Role-Plays: <http://www.eslflow.com/roleplaysdramatheatre/games.html>.
- Drama in the ESL Classroom: www.esldrama.weebly.com
- Resources for Teaching Drama: <https://www.msu.edu/~caplan/drama/biblio.html>.^[13]

4.2 Selecting English Scripts

Although the teacher can guide students to adapt texts, some passages in textbooks take work to adapt. Hence, teachers can select English mini-drama scripts written by native speakers with high relevance to the text's theme. It not only expands students' input of the authentic language but also provides teachers with an avenue for ideological and political education to further enhance students' humanistic literacy.

New Curriculum Standards emphasizes the need for the English curriculum to not only focus on its instrumentality but also to perform its humanistic function, i.e., to help students enhance their humanistic literacy comprehensively. Wang Qiang also pointed out that teachers need to attach equal importance to both intellectual and moral education in their daily teaching.^[14] Integrating ideological and political education into class teaching meets the need for realistic teaching, which is also an essential practice for fostering virtues through education.^[15] *New Senior English for China*, published by People’s Education Press, contains rich themes for integrating ideological and political education. Teachers can search for English mini-drama scripts with the same themes written by native people to improve students’ humanistic literacy. *New Curriculum Standards* proposes humanistic literacy includes, but is not limited to, strengthening national identity and patriotic feelings, firming cultural self-confidence, establishing a sense of a human community of a shared future, establishing morally sound values and outlook on the world and life, and forming a good character of self-respect, self-confidence, and self-improvement. Accordingly, this study chooses “character development” as the criterion for selecting scripts. It identifies six categories of moral qualities: friendship, honesty, patriotism, perseverance, gratitude, respect for nature, and respect for culture.

Considering the balance between intellectual and humanistic development, selecting scripts not only focuses on the theme and its value for moral education but also needs to take students’ learning conditions into account, guaranteeing the difficulty level is within students’ acceptance. This study concentrates on mini-dramas. Hence, it is necessary to pay attention to the following criteria in selecting scripts: (1) The number of characters should not be more than six; (2) the length of the plays should be controlled within 5 minutes. (3) The number of random vocabularies is controlled within 6. (4) The dialogue should not include too many dialect words. Following these criteria, Table 2 showcases various scripts that meet the above criteria.

Table 2: Selection of English Scripts Around the Character Development

Themes	The Title of Mini-dramas’ Scripts
Friendship	<i>King Arthur and the Witch; Two Alien Friends</i>
Honesty	<i>The Honest Woodcutter; Honor the Truth</i>
Patriotism	<i>Fallen Hero; The Legend of Besty Ross and the First Flag</i>
Perseverance	<i>The Hare and the Tortoise; Jesse Owens: Olympic Champion</i>
Gratitude	<i>The Highest Price; The Fisherman</i>
Respect for Nature	<i>The Tree and the Woodcutter; The Drying Tree</i>
Respect for Culture	<i>The Old Man and His Grandson; Beauty, the Ball</i>

The themes of the above mini-dramas have a high degree of overlap with themes of texts from textbooks, which is conducive to improving ideological and political education. Based on these scripts, students can not only have significant input from authentic materials but also experience emotions and improve their humanistic qualities by playing the roles. For example, in Unit 3 Volume I of *NSEFC 2019*, the first reading text introduces two living legends in the sports field: Lang Ping and Michael Jordan. These two celebrities share sportsmanship: they do not give up quickly in the face of difficulties and choose to persevere to get rid of difficulties. The corresponding script, *Jesse Owens: Olympic Champion*, introduces the exemplary virtues of Jesse Owens. He is among the greatest athletes in modern Olympic history, having won four impressive Olympic gold medals. He was born into mediocrity and later worked half-time to maintain his academic life, but he never gave up on his sports training and eventually sweated his way to success, as he had hoped. Students can feel Jesse

Owens' optimism and perseverance in the face of adversity more deeply by bringing in related characters.

5. Conclusion

Creating authentic situations with the help of mini-dramas provides opportunities for students to exercise their comprehensive language-use skills and effectively foster their character development, thereby enhancing humanistic literacy. This study proposes two ways of creating scripts of mini-dramas: adapting the texts from textbooks with the help of the TBL framework and selecting scripts written by native speakers around character development.

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