Creativity Cultivation in Primary School Drama Courses: An Exploratory Case Study

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Abstract. This study delves into the symbiotic relationship between drama education and the cultivation of creativity. By integrating insights from teaching practices and educational trends, it proposes novel teaching methodologies for drama courses to enhance creativity development. These courses emerge as potent tools for nurturing students' creative potential, employing professional and standardized guidance methodologies. Rooted in principles like drama element training, core literacy-focused teaching, thematic instruction, and organic integration, these methods collectively form a comprehensive framework for enriching drama education. Drama courses not only provide an effective educational avenue for fostering creativity but also offer aesthetic solutions that counteract the limitations of exam-centric education. By incorporating creativity-driven teaching practices inspired by national educational initiatives, these approaches aim to instill holistic and lifelong learning outcomes. This research underscores the transformative power of drama education in fostering creativity and enhancing educational practices, ultimately preparing students for the challenges of a dynamic and evolving world.

Keywords: creativity; drama courses; teaching practice.

1. Introduction

Creativity is a form of ability that stems from intricate mental processes and results in innovative outcomes (Heinert, 1986). There exist two tiers of creativity: one pertains to innate talents, while the other relates to self-realization (Xu, 2002). Special talents are inherent qualities, whereas self-actualization is cultivated through education and social interaction. Within the context of primary school drama education, the term ‘creativity’ refers to students' self-realization and the psychological processes they undergo, leading to the generation of new ideas in the classroom.

The drama curriculum serves as a platform for creativity. Teachers are required to infuse creativity into each lesson, while students are encouraged to express their creativity as well (Liang & Li, 2004). In drama classes, students are at the forefront of creativity. Throughout the teaching process, students develop various performance aspects such as observation, attention, imagination, sensibility, thinking, adaptability, expressiveness, realism, imagery, humor, and rhythm. Each of these abilities demands students to independently strike a balance. Embracing creativity in these skills accelerates students' learning and fosters their creativity.

Drama classes stand out as optimal environments for nurturing students' creativity. Acting as guides in the classroom, teachers lead students in enhancing their creative abilities, embodying the essence of creative teaching in drama education (Füsun & Uysal, 2020). The methods for students to enhance their creativity are practical, thoughtful, direct, and indirect, encompassing a wide array of training pathways within the drama classroom.

2. Methodology

Conducting a case study within drama courses provides a rich opportunity to delve into specific phenomena within the realm of theater and performance studies. Secondly, researchers are suggested to choose a specific instance or example that will serve as the focus of the study (Yin, 2018). In this study, the examples are the specific drama and practical drama classes. The case of the study should be relevant to the research question and provide insights into the broader topic. I made the case in

primary school into the teaching approaches of cultivating creativity to ensure that the case offered rich information relevant to innovation nurturing.

During the fieldwork undertaken at Unity Elementary School on drama education, the author employed a case study research approach. Drawing upon fundamental theories of drama education from both national and international contexts, the objective was to illuminate the core aspects of fostering creativity and exploration, and to explore their interplay with drama education. Given the dearth of practical research outcomes with direct applications in the field of drama education, many practitioners often resort to implementing theories of dramatic performance in real classroom settings.

In this practical study, I engaged in teaching research within authentic classroom settings, delving into the pedagogical dynamics of drama education by observing the interactions between educators and students in their natural learning environments. Thematic analysis was utilized to discern patterns, themes, and relationships inherent in the gathered data. The research on creativity cultivation and exploration within elementary school drama education classes provides significant applied value for teaching practices in drama education. Through summarization and reflection, it also offers innovative teaching strategies to drama educators and supports the development of school-based curricula for drama education in primary and secondary schools, backed by applicable research theories.

Prior to commencing the study, necessary permissions were obtained from Grade-5 students at Unity School, with meticulous attention given to confidentiality and informed consent. This encompassed securing consent for activities such as class video recordings and interviews, which were vital for data collection in this research endeavor.

3. Findings

Drawing on the positive interaction between the teacher and Student A, the cultivation of creativity within the drama classroom emerged as a collaborative educational endeavor involving active engagement between educators and students. In this setting, students not only served as expressive participants on stage but also as improvisational performers showcasing their creative acumen during presentations. This underscores the significance of personalized development in the realm of drama education.

Creativity plays a pivotal role in fostering a harmonious alignment between the mind and body. Through the character-building dimension of drama education, students engage with emotions and cultures, navigating a delicate balance between ‘embodiment’ and ‘disembodiment’ (Liang & Li, 2004). This nuanced experience offers students emotional and cultural enrichment, molding their unique modes of thought and behavior, thus nurturing their individuality.

In my teaching internship, an observation was made regarding Student A, who exhibited a tendency to disregard classroom rules and struggled with completing assignments but displayed genuine enthusiasm for drama class. Leveraging his lively demeanor, the author assigned him quieter roles to enact. Following multiple stage performances and receiving accolades from peers, Student A demonstrated improved compliance with class rules by the semester's end, actively participating in discussions and engaging positively with the teacher.

3.1. Tailored Teaching Approaches to Match Individual Talents

Differentiated instruction, as well as teaching according to individual talents, involves tailoring teaching methods and materials to meet the unique learning needs and abilities of each student. In the actual teaching environment, I observed instances where certain students displayed reluctance to participate in on-stage performances despite repeated guidance and demonstrations yielding minimal results. Interestingly, these same students exhibited great enthusiasm when engaged in backstage roles. Recognizing these disparities among students is crucial: some students may excel in lead roles, others in crafting scripts, while some shine in supporting backstage tasks for productions.

Acknowledging and leveraging these differences can optimize student engagement and performance outcomes.

Other intern teachers and I showcased children's drama productions that exemplified positive values and organized group-based competitive activities like ‘Charades’. Meanwhile, core competencies served as the bedrock for students' creative development levels. Variations in students' key traits and abilities stem from their individual differences, impacting their creative potential. It is unrealistic to anticipate all students to possess high-level core competencies leading to advanced creativity.

3.2. Thematic Drama Education Facilitating Student Exploration of the Aesthetic

During the teaching internship at Unity Elementary School, I had dual teaching objectives: one aimed to instill an appreciation for drama in students, while the other sought to guide their emotions, attitudes, and values in a positive direction. I organized a session for a fifth-grade class to view two children's plays centered on the themes of "Nurturing Virtue and Building Character." One play, "The Story of the Chicken Farm," narrates the protagonist's journey of perseverance and unwavering determination towards the sea. The second play, ‘I Will Always Love You’, explored themes of maternal affection and the warmth of family.

Drama education can enhance students' psychological resilience and levels of happiness (Bayram, 2024). Following the class centered on appreciating "I Will Always Love You," students developed a deeper comprehension of parental discipline and life's challenges. That day, the drama appreciation session transformed into a space of reflection for students, marking a successful endeavor in uncovering the beauty of familial bonds and immersing in its essence. Reflecting on this teaching experience, the author posits that the "beauty" of drama within the framework of the "Nurturing Virtue and Building Character" educational philosophy transcends mere superficial aesthetics, vivid visuals, or sensory gratification. Instead, it embodies an elevation of the spirit, evoking profound emotional connections and fostering noble emotional encounters in students. The meaningful appreciation class was one that enables students to authentically unearth true aesthetic.

3.3. Integrating Educational Drama Principles with Drama Education Teaching Methods

In drama education, this reflected the teaching concept of situational creation, the cultivation of a self-constructed student perspective, and the promotion of equal cooperation between teachers and students (Fu, 2018). Direct experience and adherence to natural laws created a ‘chemical reaction’ in teacher-student collaboration, enhancing students' creativity exponentially. Allowing students the freedom to play was not a waste of time but a form of educational wisdom. In a drama element training class, the author introduced a chalk box as a prop for student performances and creations. Initially, students limited their interpretations to items like chalk brushes, cameras, bricks, and cigarette cases. The teacher then encouraged them to think beyond these constraints, leading to a burst of creativity with interpretations like spicy strips, hats, and gems. These unexpected outcomes showcased the students' growth and diverse abilities, forming a dynamic and colorful educational environment.

The Drama Performance Class in Unity Elementary School was the 12-week basic drama performance courses designed for fifth-grade students. The course aimed to teach and master the fundamentals of drama performance, equip students with a rich vocabulary of expressive techniques, and cultivate their dramatic performance thinking and aesthetic appreciation. Through theoretical lessons, students will learn basic drama knowledge and stage performance content, enabling them to master performance skills and bring their ideas to life through practical actions. Additionally, the course fosters teamwork, teaching students to consider others and enhancing their team cooperation and communication skills, with an emphasis on team spirit and responsibility during rehearsals. The Table 1 showed the detailed information about the course syllabus.

Table 1 Drama Performance Class Course Syllabus

Drama Performance Class Course Syllabus	
Course Category	Basic Drama Performance Course
Grade Level	Fifth Grade
Duration	12 Weeks
Course Objectives	1. Learn and master the fundamentals of drama performance. 2. Equip students with a rich vocabulary of expressive techniques, cultivate their dramatic performance thinking and aesthetic appreciation, introduce basic drama knowledge and stage performance content through theoretical lessons, and enable students to master performance skills and showcase their works, transforming ideas into reality through practical actions. 3. Foster a sense of teamwork among students, teach them to consider others, and enhance their team cooperation and communication skills, emphasizing team spirit and a sense of responsibility during rehearsals.
Key Points and Challenges	1. Script performance training, basic drama theory, imagination exercises. 2. Dialogue practice, scene rehearsals, drama appreciation. 3. Creative performance planning, presentation of performance outcomes.

3.4. Enhancing Students' Aesthetic Literacy Through Developmentally Aligned Drama Classes

At the onset of the teaching internship at Unity School, I initiated drama games with the students. One memorable game involved students using body parts to spell out their names. Student E, for instance, impressed his classmates by spelling his name with his tongue. In another game centered on enacting animal-related idioms, Student A and his partner animatedly portrayed the idiom ‘to take a sheep along casually’, sparking laughter among their peers (refer to Table 2).

Table 2 Fifth Grade Drama Course Schedule

Week	Course Units	Class Objective	Key Points	Teaching Methods	Assignment Instructions
1	1. Basic Understanding of Drama and Performance 2. Self-introduction and Performance Showcase 3. Observational Life Exercises	[1]. Character-Centered Approach: [2]. Understanding the meaning of "everywhere is life." [3]. Gaining an understanding of drama and performance	● Practical Actions and Self-Presentation: ● Using bodily actions to present oneself reasonably. ● Imitating people or animals around	Practical experimentation and application	Observing the people around and the interesting things that happened
2	1. Mimicking Common Expressions 2. Mastering the essence of mimicry performance.	Imitating animals to liberate children's natural acting abilities. Mimicking scenes from films and TV shows.	Understanding Narrative and Endorsement Recognizing that performance is a process of energy release and expression of viewpoints.	Lecturing and Practical experimentation	Select a funny incident from campus life and practice mimicking it.
3	Watch a Short Children's Play to understand the Author's Thematic Choices	[1]. Discuss the Causal Relationships Expressed in the Play [2]. Explore the connections that establish cause and effect within the play. [3]. Comprehend That Drama Is a Form of Artistic Performance with Multiple Values and Unity, Grasping the Core Essence of Playwriting	Understand the ideological and aesthetic values of the theme and subject matter in the play	Lecturing and Practical experimentation	Students attempt to analyze the embodiment of ultimateness, multivalued, and unity in "The Story of the Chicken Farm".

4	Dialogue Fragment Practice	Understand the Language and Structure of Scripts Grasp the Key Points of Dramatic Dialogue	Comprehend the Importance of Dialogue Delivery and the Components of a Script	Practice	Students practice their dialogue delivery skills using online films and TV shows.
5	Drama Context and Imagination Training	Understand the Characteristics of Prescribed Situations, Including Stage Events, Stage Direction, Music, and Sound Elements	Understand that the subject of dramatic performance is people and their specific relationships, not events.	Lecturing and application	To imagine, write, or rewrite, and integrate the material from life into performance .
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During the appreciation of the children's play "The Story of the Chicken Farm," Student F proposed an unconventional idea. He suggested that the protagonist Xiao Lan should refer to a map and board a plane to reach the seaside, arguing that it would be implausible for a young chick to trek to the coast. He emphasized the importance of not overly anthropomorphizing the plot of the play. Student F's distinctive viewpoint on drama appreciation, coupled with his rational analysis, left the teacher astounded by the students' creative aesthetic acumen.

Fifth-grade students possess the capacity for concrete operations and exhibit a heightened awareness of tangible concepts compared to younger elementary students. However, they still encounter challenges in comprehending abstract notions accurately. When selecting teaching methodologies, the focus is on tangible objects to facilitate the intuitive transmission of abstract theatrical concepts. For example, drama exercises incorporate everyday dialogues, thematic elements revolve around concrete objects, and assessment criteria involve describing specific actions executed by classmates and sharing personal reflections. Through hands-on learning, active observation, and performing with feedback, educators offer real-time guidance on students' assessments, refining their understanding. This approach aids students in transitioning from simple to complex aesthetic encounters, fostering creativity within the realm of aesthetic engagement. The Classroom Episodes exemplified ‘Breakthrough’, where students truly became the subjects of the class. Following each "breakthrough," the classroom atmosphere often peaked in liveliness, as if the students' minds had been ignited, their playful natures unleashed, and their creativity nurtured.

3.5. Revitalizing Drama Education through Creative Teaching

There exists an imbalance in merging the fundamentals of drama with theatrical performance. While students possess acting skills, they struggle to convey them accurately. In a particular class, the teacher tasked a student with a decent artistic background to perform on stage by playing the piano. The student stood beside the podium and lightly tapped the keys a few times, believing her rendition to be flawless. Following a verbal evaluation from the teacher, the student, unable to grasp the essence of the performance, felt resentful towards the critique. This incident highlights the necessity for teachers to translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills, guiding students towards detailed observations and authentic emulations.

The teaching of the drama courses demanded structured and logically coherent approaches, akin to the scaffold. Directly applying traditional teaching and demonstration methods from core subjects yields fewer classroom benefits compared to the engaging impact of drama games and performance activities. While the former may lack engagement, the latter sometimes disrupts the basic order within the classroom setting.

In a drama game where students inscribed their names using body parts, student E astounded his peers by scripting his name with his tongue. During an animal idiom performance game, student A and his partner humorously enacted the idiom "holding the sheep by the hand" through symbolic gestures, eliciting laughter with their innovative approach. When critiquing the children's drama "The Story of the Chicken Farm," student F suggested that the protagonist Xiaolan should consult a map and fly to the beach, reasoning that a chicken walking to the shore seemed implausible. Student F's distinctive perspective on drama appreciation, coupled with logical analysis, left teachers in awe of his aesthetic ingenuity, showcasing how students truly become the focal point of the classroom. The emergence of students' whimsical ideas epitomizes the peak of engagement in the classroom, emphasizing that creativity flourishes through students' intrinsic playfulness.

Drama teaching should not only involve students in games but also impart rules and techniques. While engaging in drama games is a surface-level classroom activity, the underlying objective is for students to internalize and adeptly apply the methodologies and regulations of these games. Mastery of these game dynamics equips students with a solid understanding of the principles and techniques fundamental to drama. Teachers in drama education should adopt a "teach them how to fish" approach, imparting overarching principles and methodologies applicable across the subject, thereby empowering students with versatile problem-solving strategies for intricate and unstructured challenges. This creative teaching method, akin to "teaching to fish," hinges on the collaborative interaction between teachers and students, where educators provide guidance while students independently construct and create. The creative teaching environment of the drama classroom stimulates student interest through performance scenarios, allocating ample classroom time for students to actively engage in practice and application. By involving students directly in the learning experience, this "teaching to fish" approach facilitates the establishment of procedural knowledge, fosters the integration and advancement of practical and cognitive skills, and serves as a conduit for students' autonomous growth and self-realization.

4. Discussion

4.1. Refining and Standardizing Guidance Approaches for Drama Teaching Educators

The utilitarian teaching and learning concept of exam-oriented education influenced every elementary school to varying degrees. While students excelled in theoretical learning, they often encountered practical operation gaps, necessitating standardized and professional guidance from teachers. In the drama element training class, the teacher provided two or three lines of dialogue, prompting students to contemplate the scenario. By presenting a specified situation, the teacher encouraged students to consider the communication and dialogue of the characters. The teacher also offered a snippet of the story, asking students to think about events preceding and following it. This process of drama element training enhanced students' creative literacy in thinking and action.

During the drama game, the teacher supplied a chalk box and instructed students to envision it as other objects in their lives, embodying them accordingly. Students amalgamated life experiences into the game to break free from functional fixations, think innovatively, and stimulate greater creativity. In play rehearsals, it was deemed inadvisable to rely solely on the script understood by the students for practice; attention should be paid to the methodology. Students took to the podium to organize rehearsals, with the teacher providing assistances. They engaged in small group discussions and selected representatives for on-stage performances.

Building upon basic element training to expand abilities, the teacher guided students in analyzing the plot and characters of the script. Students linked the narrative in a single role-play, progressing

from fragments to a cohesive whole and from imitation to self-creation. In this process, the focus was on acquiring methodology and fostering creativity.

4.2. Principle of 'Teaching to Fish Rather Than Giving Fish'

Instead of simply providing answers, educators should concentrate on teaching students how to learn, embodying the principle of 'teaching someone to fish instead of giving them fish.' The core of "teaching to fish" in creative education lies in imparting fundamental principles and methods that are applicable across disciplines. This equips students with a broader range of solutions when facing complex, ill-structured problems. Creative education of this kind is closely linked to fostering creativity and exploration, characterized by reciprocal interactions between teachers and students. Here, teachers guide the creative process while students autonomously construct their own outputs. Drama classrooms exemplify ideal environments for such creative teaching.

Teachers in these settings spark student interest through enacted scenarios, allowing ample time for active engagement and practical application during lessons. The methodology of "teaching to fish" in creative education integrates direct experiential participation from students, aiding in the assimilation and enhancement of procedural knowledge, operational skills, and cognitive abilities. This approach acts as a conduit for students' autonomous and self-directed growth. Creative teaching within the ‘teach to fish’ framework prioritizes processes and methodologies, diverging from traditional instruction by empowering students. A comparison between didactic drama knowledge exposition in third grade and creative drama segment productions in fourth-grade groups revealed the positive impact of student-centered, role-reversal game tasks, and similar creative educational approaches on teaching quality.

4.3. Enhancing Core Literacy in Drama Curriculum Teaching

The core literacy in drama education primarily encompasses aesthetic discernment and a strong personality. The development of Chinese students' core literacy is built on the fundamental principles of scientific ability, contemporaneity, and national identity, with a focus on fostering holistic human development. This development is structured around three key aspects: cultural foundations, independent growth, and social engagement, cultivating students' artistic knowledge, aesthetic sensibilities, and creative abilities through the integrated art of drama. (Core Literacy Research Group, 2016) Students are introduced to the captivating realm of dramatic art, where they absorb the enriching hues of humanism, delve into diverse lives on the theatrical stage, explore emotions, portray character sentiments, and gain deeper insights into life's significance.

Drama, as a comprehensive art form and refined expression, interweaves its course content closely with students' direct encounters, extending from their personal lives. It serves as a vital avenue for students to shape their life values. Within acting classes, students commonly emulate various professional roles such as teachers, police officers, doctors, as well as common animals like cats, dogs, pigs, and sparrows. Dialogues form a staple component of drama classes, fostering interactions within semi-open or thematic scenarios, enhancing students' communication skills, and gradually encouraging reserved students to express themselves. This ritualistic setting of the drama classroom nurtures and unleashes creativity, enabling students to embrace their cultural identities through peer interactions.

The "Fundamentals of Dramatic Performance" posits that actors and characters share an interdependent relationship, where the connection between the external and internal aspects symbolizes the superficial layer. Applying the theatrical concepts of "pretending," "playing," and acting, teachers involve students in character dialogues and drama games during drama classes. The author observed students C and D, who actively collaborated and employed a series of physical movements to portray the animal ‘crane’, emphasizing its distinctiveness within a flock. During the performance of prescribed situational excerpts, they transcended their original student identities, embodying a range of social roles. In the subsequent rehearsals of the scripted play from the textbook, they demonstrated exceptional stage management skills. The author noted significant improvement

in students C and D over the semester, highlighting how student creativity enriches the drama classroom, rendering it more effective and underlining the societal value of drama education.

Through such personal experiences, students undergo subtle emotional and cultural education, merging their self-constructed experiences to shape their unique thought processes and behaviors, fostering the development of their personalities. In the author's teaching, student A, known for disregarding classroom rules and neglecting homework, exhibited enthusiasm for drama class. Recognizing his lively and active nature, the author assigned him a relatively subdued role. The positive interactions between the teacher and student A underscore the belief that nurturing and harnessing creativity in the drama classroom constitute a reciprocal educational endeavor between teachers and students. Students serve as both the objects of free expression on the classroom stage and the agents of improvisational wisdom in performance.

5. Conclusion

The utilitarian concept of exam-oriented education influences elementary schools, resulting in strong theoretical knowledge but practical gaps. To address this, teachers provide standardized guidance, using drama elements to enhance creative literacy. In drama classes, teachers present scenarios and encourage students to think critically about dialogue and plot sequences.

During drama games, students use props like chalk boxes to stimulate creativity by imagining alternative uses. Rehearsals focus on methodology rather than mere script memorization, involving group discussions and student-led performances. Building on basic training, teachers guide students in script analysis, promoting progression from imitation to self-creation. This aligns with the principle of "teaching someone to fish instead of giving them fish," fostering problem-solving skills and student autonomy.

Creative education emphasizes interactive scenarios that encourage active participation. Methodologies include direct experience, enhancing procedural knowledge and cognitive abilities. This approach promotes self-directed growth and empowers students. Core Literacy in drama education focuses on aesthetic discernment and character development, fostering cultural foundations, independent growth, and social engagement. Students explore humanistic themes, enhancing communication skills through role-playing and dialogue. Through drama, students experience emotional and cultural education, shaping their thoughts and behaviors. Creative teaching fosters mutual educational growth between teachers and students, making students active agents of improvisation and expression.

Holistic Education encapsulates the humanistic essence of learning, focusing on the holistic development of individuals towards self-improvement and the cultivation of distinctive characteristics. (Gardner, 1983) Within the realm of aesthetic education, as exemplified by drama education, the primary objective is to nurture individuals who embody completeness, self-affirmation, empathy towards suffering, and a profound love for life. On the other hand, Lifelong Education represents the cumulative learning experiences acquired throughout one's lifetime, serving as an essential pathway towards fostering a culture of continuous learning and problem-solving capabilities. The author posits that Holistic Education is the art of realizing life's intrinsic value, while Lifelong Education serves as the methodology for actualizing this value. Positioned at the intersection of Holistic Education and Lifelong Education, drama education emerges as a gateway through which the value of life can be comprehended within the framework of continuous personal growth.

Educators are urged to consciously relinquish conventional notions of idealized behavior, such as the archetype of the "good child," which often acts as a constraint on children's development. The pursuit of being a "good child" and the expectation of obedience from educators can stifle a child's natural creativity. This underscores the importance of integrating positive mental health guidance within the drama classroom, utilizing aesthetics as the means to unlock students' latent life values. Drama instructors should infuse life values into the teachings of Holistic Education, shedding obsolete paradigms associated with exam-centric education, and instead focus on nurturing students'

overall development to contribute to the establishment of a comprehensive lifelong education system in China.

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