

The Application of Drama in Education to English Teaching in Junior High School

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Abstract

The main purpose of English learning is to use language to express oneself and communicate with others. However, in traditional teaching pattern, English teachers pay much attention to grammar and vocabulary knowledge but ignore the application of language, which makes it difficult for students to understand the meaning and communicative function of language. Without real experience and effective interaction, the improvement of students' expression ability fails to achieve. However, Drama in Education breaks through the limitations of traditional teaching, puts students in the "center", and stimulates students' enthusiasm in English learning. More importantly, students as actors occupy the main position and have more opportunities to express, explore and learn through the whole process which can help students enhance their comprehensive ability. This paper takes "Hansel and Gretel" as an example to briefly explain the application of Drama in Education to English teaching in junior high school.

Keywords

Drama in Education; English Teaching in Junior High School; Comprehensive Ability.

1. Introduction

English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) advocates modern foreign language education should change the original language learning concepts, which only rely on rote memorization. What teachers should do is to focus on the learning process and design more realistic classroom activities, so that students can understand and acquire real language in a vivid and diverse context as much as possible, and on the basis of this to develop students' comprehensive ability. Drama in Education, as an effective teaching method, meets the requirements of curriculum standards. Teachers can integrate drama activities with English teaching to create more real-life situations, which stimulates students' interest to express themselves and engage in the learning activities. Thus, the goal of the development of students' comprehensive ability can be achieved.

2. The Definition of Drama in Education

What is Drama in Education? It holds different meanings for different people. Bolton (1979) defines Drama in Education as "a process of engaging with something outside oneself using an 'as if' mental set to activate or intensify the engagement". Holden (1981) believes that Drama in Education provides an opportunity for a person to express himself through verbal expressions and gestures using his imagination and memory. He emphasizes that students can learn and express themselves in an artificial context by means of verbal expressions and non-verbal expressions. O'Neill and Lambert (1982) define Drama in Education as "students can play different roles created according to the drama to solve problems".

3. The Application of Drama in Education to English Teaching in Junior High School

3.1. Teaching Material Analysis

This material is from PEP *Go for it* Unit6 Section B *Hansel and Gretel*. The content of the play is very interesting which can draw students' attention. Besides, it is easy for junior school students to read the play under the guidance of English teacher.

3.2. Students Analysis

The eighth-grade students have already mastered some necessary basic English knowledge and they are curious about new things. Most of students are active in class. But because of poor oral English or lack of confidence, some students aren't brave enough to express or share personal ideas in class. And most students are unfamiliar with drama.

3.3. Teaching Objectives

Knowledge objectives: students are able to describe the four basic features of play, distinguish the play from other stories and understand different personalities of different characters in this play.

Ability objectives: students can skim the play to learn about the features of the play and scan the pay to get specific information. Based on the deep understanding of the play, students can complete performance and create new endings of the play through discussing with their group members.

Emotional objectives: students can feel the good and evil of human nature and try to be a brave person like Hansel. When they encounter difficulties, they will not give up easily and try to solve difficulties. In addition, by working in groups, students can develop the spirit of cooperative learning.

3.4. Teaching Design

3.4.1. Warm up

Firstly, teacher introduces herself and tells students that when she was young, her favorite thing is that her mother told her many interesting stories, such as *The Emperor's New Clothes*, *The Little Match Girl*, *Sleeping Beauty* and so on. Then teacher explains that these stories are actually fairy tales.

Secondly, the teacher invites students to play a guessing game. Teacher shows some special pictures and asks students to guess these pictures show what fairy tales are.



Fig 1. Teacher shows some special pictures

Next, teacher tells students that today we will learn a new fairy tale whose name is Hansel and Gretel.

Design intention: The warming-up game can stimulate students' curiosity and create an active learning atmosphere.

3.4.2. Reading

(1) Skimming

Under the guidance of the teacher, students need to read *Hansel and Gretel* as quickly as possible and find out the type of *Hansel and Gretel*. The teacher asks the question "Is it a story, a letter or a play?"

Next, students are expected to read the passage again, find out the differences between the play and other stories and answer the following questions:

1. Where is this story happening?
2. When is this story happening?
3. Who are in this story?
4. What is happening to them?

(2) Scanning

Students scan the play and finish the following match.

Table 1. The match

A. The children get lost.	Scene 1
B. The children wake up.	Scene 2
C. The children cannot find the pieces of bread.	Scene 3
D. Gretel learns about Hansel's plan.	Scene 4
E. The children surprise the parents.	Scene 5
F. Hansel has to change his plan.	Scene 6
G. The children learn that something bad is going to happen.	Scene 7

Design intention: When reading the play for the first time, students understand the feature of the play and distinguish the differences from the previous reading text. And students scan the play and finish the match which can help students have a deep understanding of the play and lay a foundation for the dramatic performance.

3.4.3. Group Discussion

Table 2. Forms to be filled out

Characters	Personality	Evidence
Hansel		
Gretel		
Stepmother		
Father		
Witch		

Firstly, the class is divided into six groups. Each group needs to find out the personalities of the roles and corresponding evidence. Then they are expected to finish the sheet.

Secondly, students are expected to talk about their favorite character in this drama and give some reasons.

Thirdly, the teacher explains to students that the play has four plots, beginning, development, climax and ending. Because of no ending in this play, each group only needs to discuss and analyze the beginning, development, and climax of the play. Then teacher guides students to summarize these three plots.

Design intention: With the help of deep understanding of the roles' personalities and the plots of the play, students can complete better performance.

3.4.4. Group Performance

Firstly, teacher conducts grouping work. Each group contains five students. Because of no ending in this play, students are supposed to create an ending and discuss how to assign tasks. Each student needs to know what kind of person he is, tries to be like him and acts it out! Teacher sets an example. In addition, the teacher needs to remind students to pay attention to their facial expression and body language.

Secondly, each group performs on the stage and other students watch carefully and take some notes. Then according to language proficiency, creativity, performance ability and cooperative capacity, the whole class selects the best performing group and the best creative group.

Thirdly, teacher makes a summary. Then students are guided to recall and reflect the whole process of learning.

Design intention: During the process of performing, students take different role of characters allows them to deeply understand what is conveyed through the play. Besides, this process prompts students to naturally transition from language input stage to language output stage, and internalizes the knowledge and skills learned into language application ability.

3.4.5. Homework

Students work in groups, use their imagination to create and edit their favorite fairy tales into scripts. The next day the teacher will collect all scripts, present them in class, ask students to read and evaluate the scripts of other groups. Then students vote for their favorite script and give reasons accordingly.

Design intention: The homework allows students to use their imagination to create stories, which can cultivate students' creative thinking and pragmatic skills. In addition, when evaluating the script, students need to compare their own script with other scripts and analyze them from different perspectives, which is conducive to cultivating students' critical thinking.

4. The significance of Application of Drama in Education to English Teaching in Junior High School

4.1. Improve Self-awareness and Build Good Character

The application of Drama in Education provides opportunity for students to improve self-awareness and build good character. Because the drama in the textbook or the drama selected by teachers is positive. For example, Hansel is a brave boy. He never gives up when facing difficulties. But his stepmother is a bad person, and she wants Hansel and Gretel to go to the forest and never get back. When performing, students imitate characters, and they will more easily feel the good and evil of human nature which can help students build good character and promotes the healthy development of students' quality.

4.2. Stress Learner-Centeredness and Stimulate Learning Interest

As we all know, the acquisition of knowledge is depended on students' construction instead of merely listen to teachers' description and explanation. Students should be in an active learning position and have opportunities to express their views freely. Unlike the traditional English class in which the teacher is centered and students always passively receive what the teacher teaches, resulting in low teaching and learning efficiency, Drama in Education advocates student-center class, which meets the requirements of curriculum standards, and students themselves experience how to use language appropriately in real-life situation. Besides, teachers can utilize drama activities in their teaching, which enables students to develop their imagination and creativity, and stimulate interest in learning English as well.

4.3. Provide Real Learning Context and Realize Meaningful Learning

The application of Drama in Education to English teaching allows teachers to design various teaching and learning activities based on the learning characteristics of students and provide students with new and interesting learning methods. A relaxing and active environment is inseparable from English learning. Teachers can make full use of drama activities in English teaching to create real-life situations and provide a large number of opportunities for students to experience the language and ultimately internalize and creatively apply language. Drama in Education emphasizes that the acquisition of knowledge should happen in the meaningful context instead of only imparting knowledge and students should be the key person who constructs their knowledge structure through using language in the real situations, which can help students achieve meaningful learning.

4.4. Enhance Comprehensive Development and Develop Key Competence

The Drama in Education naturally integrates language skills-listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing, so the application of Drama in Education to English learning can help improve students' comprehensive ability and develop key competence. In addition, students can improve their ability to cooperate and communicate with others through cooperative performances. At the same time, this process of allowing students to obtain learning experience through their own exploration and performance can exercise their critical thinking, cultivate their expression ability and problem-solving ability. Finally, students' all-round development can be enhanced.

5. Conclusion

Drama in Education plays a crucial role in English teaching. Compared with the traditional teaching mode, Drama in Education has positive effects on both students' comprehensive ability and teaching efficiency. It can create a relaxing and active learning atmosphere, provide multiple real situations and opportunities which can allow students to use language in meaningful context. In addition, students' learning interest can be stimulated, and students' comprehensive ability can be developed.

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