

Practice of Educational Drama in Primary and Secondary Education: Review and Prospect

Yuejuan Zhou^{1,*}, Ying Chen²

¹Postgraduate in English Teaching, School of Foreign Languages, Gannan Normal University, Ganzhou, China, 341000.

²Associate Professor, Ph.D. in English Language and Literature, School of Foreign Languages, Gannan Normal University, Ganzhou, China, 341000.

*Corresponding Author, Contact:15521227437@163.com

ABSTRACT. *In this study, the content analysis method is adopted to systematically summarize the research status of classroom application of educational drama in primary and secondary schools in China from 2010 to 2020. It is found that there are a large number of practical studies on educational drama in primary and secondary schools, involving a variety of subjects, and most of them tend to be applied in liberal arts, while there are few explorations on the application in science. Practical exploration is mostly based on personal experience, lacking of support from a mature theoretical system. Noticing the deficiencies of the current research, that is, more qualitative research and less quantitative empirical research, future research direction of educational drama practice in China is put forward: More attention should be pay to the quantitative research on the effect of educational drama practice in classroom. Also, feasible and effective ways of extending drama to science subjects as well as the research field of teacher training should be explored.*

KEYWORDS: *educational drama practice, primary and secondary education, review and prospect*

1. Introduction

Educational drama originated from European and American countries in the 1950s, which is a new research field spanning drama and pedagogy. According to the definition of Taiwanese scholar Zhang Xiaohua, " Educational drama is a kind of teaching method and activity in the form of drama to engage in education, mainly to nurture the growth of children and explore self-resources [1]. At present, scholars at home and abroad both share a great interest in educational drama despite some developmental differences. For instance, educational drama in western countries has been studied earlier, with a broader scope and a more mature and perfect theoretical research system. Since the 1980s, domestic scholars began to pay attention to the

research on the basic theories of educational drama, preliminarily tried to construct the theoretical framework, and published a large number of academic papers to popularize educational drama. Topics of them include the core belief and concept of educational drama, the relationship between education and drama, the development history, the value and practical possibility, etc. In terms of practice, Hong Kong and Taiwan began to take the lead in the exploration of educational drama in 2000. In recent years, schools in Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang Province, Guangdong Province and other regions have also conducted beneficial experiments. Xu Jun [2] made a statistical analysis of the research status of educational drama from 1997 to 2017, and found that the research on introduction and promotion (about 16%) and practical application (about 63%) accounted for 79% of the total, while the research on theoretical construction was less. In view of the fact that there are many theoretical studies on educational drama in China, but few comprehensive studies summarizing the practice of it, this study aims at sorting out the general practice of educational drama in primary and secondary schools in China during the past 10 years, clarifying the opportunities and challenges faced by educational drama at the present stage, providing practical feedback for basic theoretical research, and better promoting the formation of academic framework of China's educational drama system.

2. Research on educational drama application in China's primary and secondary schools

2.1 The development process of introducing educational drama into schools

In the 1980s, Wu Yafen, a teacher of Tianjin Normal College, adapted Chinese textbooks of middle schools into textbook plays, allowing students to experience "drama" in the classroom. This can be regarded as the first Chinese localizing exploration of educational drama. Since the concept of textbook drama is more understandable than educational drama, a large number of textbook plays and school plays rehearsed by teachers and students emerged in schools. In 1997, Professor Li Yingning vigorously promoted educational drama in China, followed by a great deal of classroom practice in Shanghai, Beijing, Guangdong Province and Zhejiang Province. During this period, advanced experience from Hong Kong and Taiwan are introduced. In 2011, drama was included in Chinese Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards [3], which drew many teachers' attention to drama. Tao Xiaoying [4], Lin Cunfu [5], Tan Hong [6], Xing Yongqin [7], Liu Huixian [8], Ren Xia [9], Guan Ting [10] and many other teachers applied dramatic teaching methods to elementary, middle and high schools, covering the subjects like Chinese, ideology and morality ethics, mental health and English. Students' core competency is cultivated through students' self-written scripts, improvisational performances, etc. In recent years, Wu Yinghui [11] introduced in detail the practical educational drama activities of elementary schools in Haidian District, Beijing, to infiltrate ideological and moral education, believing that educational drama has a significant effect on primary and secondary education. In addition, some scholars such as Zhuo

Lin [12], Yang Xu [13], Liu Youqun, Fu Yong [14], etc. applied educational drama to special schools, which produced good results in educating blind children, the mentally handicapped and other special students. In terms of teacher training in this specific field, Ma Liwen and Zheng Xinrong [15], teachers from Beijing Normal University, first began to explore a teacher training mode suitable for domestic education environment. Huang Wansheng [16] proposed that the teacher training courses of "process drama" include four stages, namely games, teachers entering drama, reflection, and application. Li Qian [17] adopted a case study method to observe the teachers in Educational Drama Training Camp of Shanghai MT and found that teachers' learning of educational drama is a staged process, and that teachers gradually change from marginal novice teachers to core teachers during experiential learning process.

2.2 Current research status of educational drama application

Themes on drama application researches focus on different aspects. The first one is promoting the all-round development of children. Gong Shuxin [18], from the perspective of psychology, proved that educational drama courses produced great results in second-grade primary school students by promoting the mental health development of teenagers, improving their character, identifying their self-worth and cultivating their sense of justice. Zhang Yong [19] proposed that educational drama can cultivate "subject presence" and core values through "classroom penetration, community strengthening, school culture and parents' participation". Studying from the perspective of embodied epistemology, Zhang Yongfei [20] believes that educational drama can promote the development of students' body subjectivity, help cultivate students' subjectivity and creativity, and establish an equal and respectful relationship between students. Zhou Xiaoli [21] proved that educational drama has clear advantages in cultivating students' critical thinking in the "PLAY Project", an aesthetic drama education activity, and proposed principles of cultivating critical thinking qualities in educational drama. Wang Xiao and Wang Naiyi [22] studied how educational drama can help "marginal" students in class regain self-confidence, improve self-awareness and develop sense of value, thus returning to the center of the class.

Another popular research focus lies in educational drama practice of specific subjects. There are many applications in English and Chinese classes, covering all educational stages. Firstly, for English class, educational drama is mainly applied to elementary school. Scholars Xu Fangming [23], Xu Hongli [24], Yang Bingqing [25], Han Xue [26], and Qin Li [27] respectively explored the issues as follows: How educational drama can arouse students' enthusiasm, cultivate aesthetic, expression and imagination abilities, how to make English teaching more interesting while taking account of in-depth learning, how to use educational drama in lower grade teaching, how to improve students' comprehensive and application ability of language, and how to promote teaching using picture books in elementary schools. However, in middle and senior high schools, drama practice mainly focuses on reading and oral English classes. For example, Liu Yan [28] presented some specific

teaching cases to show how to apply dramatic methods such as “roles on the wall”, “still image”, “thought tracking”, and “meetings” to reading class of grade nine. Guan Ting [10] combined the production-oriented approach and educational drama to instruct oral English lessons in senior high schools. Secondly, for Chinese teaching, compared with middle and senior high schools, scholars have done more practical researches at elementary level. For example, Liu Jianmei [29] investigated Chinese teachers in the front and found that teachers’ accurate understanding of educational drama, teaching design, evaluation and reflection are insufficient, and gave some teaching suggestions for improvement, including hiring experts from outside the school, and conducting teaching seminars inside schools. Huang Ruiyi [30] took the English lesson, “The Poor”, as an example to demonstrate the mode of incorporating creative drama elements into the classroom. At present, there are also a small amount of classroom exploration in other subjects such as ideology and morality ethics, history, music, and mental health education. For example, Wu Chenhua [31], guided by China’s new curriculum standard (2017 edition), integrated educational drama into high school politics class to discuss why people have different values, and promote the implementation of core competence and the cultivation of students’ deep study ability by the unity of knowledge and application. Rao Yaping [32] proposed that educational drama in history teaching should focus on promoting students’ experience, participation as well as exploration, and get rid of the shackles of formalism in school historical plays. Zhang Chunxiang [33] applied educational drama to music class to enhance teaching vitality. Ma Jianfang [34] believed that educational drama can help students deal with bad emotions, cultivate healthy emotions, and get along with themselves and others in class.

In addition, scholars Lu Litao [35] conducted a qualitative research on three educational drama courses in three elementary schools in Beijing. It is found that the characteristics of drama itself, the main demands of curriculum designers, the lack of professional knowledge of curriculum as well as the standardization of target procedures have made educational drama more incline to play the role of carrier, thus resulting in deviation from the course objectives. Guo Qun and Zheng Xiaowei [36] applied educational drama to class management to promote students’ active participation and problem solving ability, so as to improve the effectiveness of class management. Ma Fengting [37] found that by using educational drama, students in conflict with their classmates can interact with each other, give full play to their imagination, express their thoughts, and finally resolve classroom conflicts.

3. Conclusion

In general, there are a large number of educational drama applications in Chinese primary and secondary schools, and the research subjects are mainly concentrated on how to promote all-round education, how to promote specific subject teaching, and how to design curriculum and improve classroom management. As for specific subjects, English and Chinese are the main applying subjects, while other subjects are few. When concerning different education stages, educational drama application gives priority to primary school. Meanwhile, the practice is not only tried in

ordinary schools, but also in special schools for blind and intellectual disabled children. However, the lack of professional drama teachers has resulted in schools not having enough faculty to instruct educational drama courses. At present, most of the relevant studies are qualitative researches and teaching case analyses, which are practitioners' summaries based on individual explorations without guidance of mature theoretical framework. This is also caused by the lack of a complete and systematic theoretical framework of localized educational drama in China. At the same time, existing studies have paid insufficient attention to quantitative research on the effectiveness of educational drama. And disciplinary applications mostly focus on liberal arts subjects, and there is very few explorations of how to apply educational drama to natural science subjects. Thus, in the future, more attention should be paid to the quantitative research to analyze the effectiveness of educational drama teaching and how to integrate drama into science class. Moreover, the teaching training field of drama education should not be neglected because of the shortage of professional teacher in China.

Acknowledgment

This paper is supported by Youth Doctor Fund Project of Social Science Planning in Jiangxi Province, China.

References

- [1] X. H. Z (2017). The teaching principle and practice of creative drama. China Theatre Press.p.9.
- [2] J. Xu. (2017). Retrospect and reflection: A review of studies on educational drama in mainland China in recent twenty years. Theatre Arts,no.1,p.101-111.
- [3] Ministry of Education, PRC (2011). Art Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2011 edition). Beijing Normal University Press.
- [4] X. Y. Tao (2013). A review of the research on the combination of educational drama and Chinese reading teaching. After-school Education in China, no.29, p. 116.
- [5] C. F. Lin (2019). The application strategy of educational drama in Chinese teaching. Shanghai Research on Education, no.5, p.81-84.
- [6] H. Tan (2017). To explore the cultivation strategies of educational drama concept for high school students' Chinese literacy. Home of Drama, no.11,p.261.
- [7] Y. Q. Xing (2016).The practical research of educational drama in the ideological and political course teaching in senior high school. Ideological and Political Studies, no.5,p.75-79.
- [8] H. X. Liu (2017).The application of creative education drama in mental health education curriculum in primary and secondary schools. Mental Health Education in Primary and Secondary Schools,no.25,p.25-27.
- [9] X. Ren (2018).A study on the application of educational drama in primary school English teaching. Sichuan Normal University.

- [10] T. Guan (2019). A study on product-oriented educational drama in oral English teaching in junior middle School. Liaoning Normal University.
- [11] Y. H. Wu (2014). Drama education: a new approach to moral education in schools. *Beijing Education (General Education Version)*, no.10,p.27-28.
- [12] L. Zhuo (2014). A preliminary study on the application of drama in Chinese education in blind schools. *Modern Special Education*,no.1,p.25-26.
- [13] X. Yang (2015). A probe into the application of educational drama in the emotional management of students with intellectual disabilities. *Curriculum Education Research*,no.22,p.185.
- [14] Y. Q. Liu, Y. Fu (2017). Practical exploration on improving the emotion management ability of students with intellectual disabilities by educational drama course. *Modern Special Education*,no.5,p.56-58.
- [15] L. W. Ma, X. R. Zheng (2011).Educational drama promotes teachers to see, talk and reflect on each other. *Chinese Teachers*,no.17,p.23-26.
- [16] W. S. Wang (2014).To see the charm of "educational drama" from a "process drama" training. *Shanghai Educational Research*,no.8,p.43-45.
- [17] Q. Li (2019). A case study on teacher learning in educational drama practice. East China Normal University.
- [18] S. X. Gong (2012). A preliminary study on education drama and cultivation of adolescents' humanistic quality. *Science and Technology Information*,no.32,p.1-2.
- [19] Y. Zhang (2013). Educational drama enables core values to cultivate "subject presence". *China's Moral Education*,no.20,p.28-30.
- [20] Y. F. Zhang (2016). From the perspective of embodied cognition: To promote the development of students' body subjectivity through educational drama. *Modern Primary and Secondary Education*,vol.32,no.7,p.29-34.
- [21] X. L. Zhou (2016). The advantages and methods of using educational drama to cultivate critical thinking: Take the experimental teaching of drama aesthetic education of "PLAY Plan" for example. *Theatre Arts*,no.4,p.31-39,137.
- [22] X. Wang, N. Y. Wang (2020). No one less: Educational drama promotes the return of the "marginalized students" to the centre of the class. *Mental Health Education in Primary and Secondary Schools*,no.1,p.58-61.
- [23] F. M. Xu (2019). A study on the application of English educational drama in primary school English teaching. *Primary School Teaching Research*,no.23,p.49-50.
- [24] H. L. Xu (2019). Educational drama makes English class more wonderful. *Primary School Teaching Reference*,no.12,p.71-72.
- [25] B. Q. Yang (2019). A study on the application of educational drama in elementary school English teaching. Shanghai Normal University.
- [26] X. Han (2019). An experimental study on improving elementary students' comprehensive English language competence by educational drama. Southwest University.
- [27] L. Qin (2019). The practice and exploration of educational drama in English picture book teaching of primary school. *Teacher Online*, no.2,p47-48.
- [28] Y. Liu (2019). A case study on the application of educational drama in junior middle school English teaching. *English Teacher*, vol.19,no.4,p.98-101.

- [29] J. M. Liu (2019). Research on the application of educational drama in Chinese teaching of primary school. Shanghai Normal University.
- [30] R. Y. Huang (2019). Educational drama offers Chinese teaching class a new idea: Take the teaching of the Poor as an example. *The Communication of Chinese Teaching*,no.3,p.33-35.
- [31] C. H. Wu (2019). Teaching practice and reflection of educational drama. *Middle School Politics Teaching Reference*,no.13,p24-26.
- [32] Y. P. Rao (2012). The effective application of educational drama in high school history teaching. *Contemporary Educational Science*,no.16,p.52-56.
- [33] C. X. Zhang(2019).An attempt to integrate educational drama into music classes. *Music Education in Primary and Secondary Schools*,no.6,p.33-35.
- [34] J. F. Ma (2018).The general mode of educational drama in cultivating pupils' mental health. *Curriculum Education Research*,no.52,p.184.
- [35] L. T. Lu, H. Y. Wang, X. Q. Li (2019).Qualitative analysis of curriculum objective design of educational drama activity : A case study of three educational drama courses in Beijing primary school. *Educational Theory and Practice*,vol.39,no.26,p.42-45.
- [36] Q. Guo, X .W. Zheng (2019). The application research of educational drama in class management of primary school. *Journal of Inner Mongolia Normal University (Education Science edition)*,vol.32,no.12,p.16-20,32.
- [37] F. T. Ma (2019). The application of educational drama in the conflict of junior high school students. *Mental Health Education in Primary and Secondary Schools*, no.19,p.57-59.
- [38] Y. Fu (2018). Theoretical and practical research on educational drama application of primary and secondary school. Shanxi Normal University.