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Drama Pedagogy in Character and Citizenship Education

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Abstract

This paper argues that Drama in Education (D.I.E) is a valuable pedagogy, specifically in the teaching of moral education. Research has shown the usefulness of drama to enhance learning but a paucity in local research called for this study. A qualitative study involved two teachers from a primary school located in the East region of Singapore, who used drama pedagogy in their Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) classrooms. Analysis of lesson observations and transcripts of teacher and student interviews with the researcher demonstrated the effectiveness of using drama pedagogy. It is found that students developed greater engagement (affective) and participation (cognitive) with the use of drama. Although it is noticed that language proficiency is pivotal in drama pedagogy as students need communicative skills to express themselves, students' recorded responses indicated that values were nevertheless acquired when they encounter drama experience. In order to realise the potential of drama pedagogy, teachers called for training as an enhancement to their professional development. This study encourages further exploration of drama pedagogy and consider possible implications of its implementation in the school curricula.

Key words: drama in education, engagement, participation, CCE, primary,

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to research into how Drama in Education (D.I.E) can be used effectively as a pedagogical approach in delivering Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) lessons in a primary school setting. It is recognized that using D.I.E as a pedagogical approach in delivering CCE lessons will create a greater impact on students' learning. However, this approach is often overlooked and undervalued as a valuable medium for moral pedagogy. Furthermore, a paucity in local research about D.I.E in school curricula necessitate this study in which the objectives centred on (1) exploring implementation ideas as well as (2) evaluating students' experience and teachers' perception on the use of drama. Student experience is viewed in two aspects - affective and cognitive - achieved by investigating engagement and participation level of students respectively. By realising the potential of D.I.E, teachers can integrate values teaching in intriguing and making the discussion and

learning of values come to life. The improvisation aspect of drama gives students opportunities for developing their communicative skills in authentic and dynamic situations. D.I.E is an alternative pedagogy to complement conventional ways of teaching values in order to help students acquire social-emotional competencies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dorothy Heathcote, a pioneer in the field of drama (as cited in Ozbek, 2014), explained: "Drama is not stories retold in action. Drama is human beings confronted by situations which change them because of what they must face in dealing with those challenges." Aligned with this, Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory which forms the basis of this research, proposed that social interaction is key to which children make meaning of their learning. It is through play-interacting and interpreting his situation- that a child is able to construct knowledge. (Tan et.al, 2017)

Previous researchers have confirmed the usefulness of drama strategies to teachers of many curriculum subjects (Morgan & Saxton, 1987) and more recently, the usefulness of drama strategies to enhance moral consciousness. According to Belliveau (2007), the use of drama to address social justice issues "created a conducive and rewarding learning environment". He explained that student participants "felt comfortable expressing their ideas vocally and physically" and while addressing the issue on bullying, drama "encouraged empathy development". However, the proclaimed educational value of drama may not necessarily mean that it is given due recognition in school practices. A group of 40 teachers admit that the use of drama is instrumental due to numerous reasons; yet only 4 actually implemented drama in their classroom. (Linnell, 1982). This may be due to the lack of academic attention and scholarly research to affirm its practicality and advocate its use in an educational context.

SINGAPORE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Singapore in recent years has placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of moral education, even more so than in the past. Today, our education system underpins the 21st Century Competencies Framework and Desired Outcomes of Education, driven by policies like 'Every Teacher a CCE Teacher' and programmes like 'Values-In-Action'. It is not surprising why Singapore is harping on character-building, given its dependence on human resource for survival.

With reference to the CCE syllabus (Ministry of Education, 2014, p.29) and CCE modules taken at the National Institute of Education, efforts by curriculum planners to instil drama in the teaching of CCE, if any, is limited to role play. Yet, D.I.E has a plethora of strategies that can be explored and practiced at large by schools. As Singapore's education system continues to devote moral education as a curricular subject, drama as a pedagogical

approach may come in useful to enhance the learning of values and consequently, nurture students of character. Hence, it is timely that teachers are well-read and equipped with the added knowledge to the field of D.I.E in the teaching and learning of values.

METHODOLOGY

The study follows a qualitative research approach, involving a series of lesson observations followed by semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaire. It involves a descriptive examination into D.I.E implementation ideas as well as teacher perception and student experience. Participants involved two Mother Tongue Language teachers with different years of teaching experience and 30 students of varied profile and language proficiency. Lesson observation comprises of six 60-minute sessions, involving two classes of Primary 2 and Primary 5 students respectively, with each class consisting of on average 15 students. Video-recording were taken by the school's Technical Assistant for review purposes. Consent forms were issued to students and parents before lesson observations were carried out. All student participants completed a survey questionnaire which consist of five multiple choice and open-ended questions. Data is computed based on a summary of student response. Interviews however, were limited to 10 subjects due to time constraints involved in interviewing and subsequent data analysis. The semi-structured style of interview had open-ended questions carried out in a conversational style and tape-recorded for transcription purposes. Ongoing literature review and data analysis took place throughout the study.

BACKGROUND OF PRIMARY SCHOOL

The target school participating in this research is selected due to its excellence in arts education, character education and curriculum innovation. Its long-standing achievement in the Performing Arts is testimony to its vision of nurturing leaders of character. As the school is known to the researcher as having incorporated drama conventions in teaching and learning, hence the decision to invite the school to participate in this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research findings are discussed based on implementation ideas, students' experience in terms of engagement and participation, and finally, teachers' perception. Comparison between lower and upper primary students are drawn when noticed.

1. IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

The teachers applied several drama conventions (Table 1) which differs between lower and upper primary. Both teachers however conducted 'Teacher-in-role'.

Level	Drama Conventions Used
Lower Primary	Freeze Frame Teacher-in-role Thought Tracking
Upper Primary	Role Play Teacher-in-role Mantle of the Expert

Table 1: Drama conventions used by the two teachers

It is observed that the teachers selectively implement drama conventions which are age-appropriate. While Freeze Frame and Thought Tracking are perceived as more suitable for younger audience, 'role play' and 'mantle of the expert' catered to more matured audience. This implies that certain conventions require higher order level thinking and language proficiency. 'Teacher-in-role' when improvised accordingly, offers an interactive student-teacher discussion regardless of age. Hence, it is not surprising that both teachers utilized this strategy.

1.1 Freeze Frame and Thought Tracking

Freeze frame is constructing "an image with their bodies to demonstrate a moment in time, idea or theme" while Thought Tracking prompts the speaking aloud of thoughts of the character (Wells & Sandretto, 2017).

In the lesson, Teacher M used these conventions as a warming-up activity where students imagined themselves as their favourite animal. When students are thought-tapped by the teacher, they speak out their thought bubble while being in role. These conventions give students access to knowing a character's inside out by portraying themselves as one.

1.2 Teacher-in-role

Teacher-in-role (TiR) is assuming a role in relation to students to present "challenging and controversial points of view and to stimulate thought, discussion and action" (Farmer, 2018).

In the lesson, Teacher M used TiR to engage students to brainstorm ways to help a character solve his problem. The teacher wore a prop to step into the role of Dr. Bubbles who created conversations with students. It is demonstrated that when the teacher herself participated in drama, students are motivated to join in the 'make-believe'.

1.3 Role Play

Role play is "embodying a character or a "type" and reflecting the character's thoughts and feelings". (Ozbek, 2014).

In the lesson, Teacher N used role play to enact a conversation between a child labourer and a concerned friend to evoke empathy. The teacher noted that her "*pupils get to learn about other people's life and what they do*". Through role play, students developed a more sensitive understanding of a global issue, aligned with

CCE's learning outcomes about becoming a more informed citizen.

1.4 Mantle of the Expert

Mantle of the Expert (MoE) is "taking on the roles of experts engaged in a high status project for a fictional client" (Ozbek, 2014).

In the lesson, Teacher N used MoE to elicit suggestions from students who took on roles of government officers, volunteer groups and business entrepreneurs on how to combat child labour, having in mind their "client" which was a child labourer by the name of Pharady whose case study was shared earlier by the teacher. In this way, students feel empowered to contribute ideas as they are playing real people in potentially real situations.

2. STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

2.1 Engagement (Affective)

Engagement level looks into **verbal and non-verbal cues** demonstrated by students during the lesson. This information is used to interpret student's behaviour towards drama pedagogy. Interview responses are used to substantiate the observations made.

2.1.1 Verbal cues

Verbal cues are obtained from student responses in the survey questionnaire and interview. Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses by students to the question on whether they enjoyed the lesson. 85% of students from the lower primary and 100% of students from the upper primary said 'Yes' as their answer.

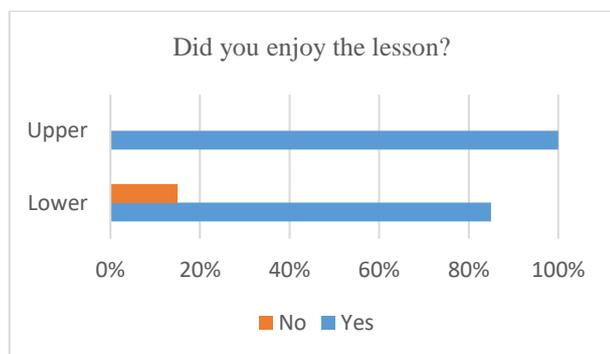


Figure 1: Bar graph showing a distribution of student response to the question 'Did you enjoy the lesson?'

The researcher went on to find out the reason(s) why students gave a 'Yes' as their answer. The following table shows some of their responses.

Level	Q2	Why did you answer 'Yes'?
Lower Primary	S1	It is not boring
	S2	It is fun to act in front.
	S3	It helps me to learn more Malay.
	S4	I like the story because it is funny.

Upper Primary	S1	I can better understand others' thoughts and feelings.
	S2	I learn a lot about child labour and how I can help them.
	S3	I can learn about others' feelings through drama.

Q = Question S = Student

Table 2: Table showing reasons for lower and upper primary students' enjoyment participating in drama

From this table, it can be concluded that students are generally engaged during a drama-based lesson. Keywords such as "fun", "interesting" and "like acting" are repeatedly used in students' response.

However, 2 students recorded that they did not enjoy the lesson. Both gave a similar reason which is, 'I did not do drama'. The researcher found out that they understood drama as solely role-playing which is not a strategy used by the teacher for that particular lesson. This implies that students are still unfamiliar with the term 'drama' even though they participated in drama activities. As Ozbek (2014) noted, "it is important to highlight that drama is the name of the whole process" and not specific to any one particular strategy used.

2.1.2 Non-verbal cues

Non-verbal cues are obtained through researcher's own observation of student's **reaction** while participating in drama activities as well as students' own account of their **emotions** as recorded in their survey response.

Account of Event	Student's reaction
Teacher introduces the story on 'Dr Bubbles and the Chair maker'	Students paid attention to the story and read in chorus with gusto.
Teacher tells students she is about to invite Doctor Bubbles into class.	Students were looking around the classroom for Dr Bubbles.
Teacher explains that the ugly chair has now turned into a colourful one and asks 'So who wants to sit on this chair?'	The room was filled with laughter. Students raised their hands frantically in order to be called by the teacher to sit on the chair.

Table 3: Students' reaction while participating in drama

Generally, students displayed excitement and enthusiasm during the lesson. This can be seen through their attentiveness towards the story, their curiousness to meet the character and their eagerness to participate. As Teacher M recalls, "I felt motivated to act out as the character of the story which is Doctor Bubbles since I saw my students truly enjoyed the story." Similarly, Teacher N comments, "I find that pupils enjoyed the lesson as the use of drama techniques make CCE lessons more interesting and lively."

Through drama, it is noticed that different emotions are aroused. As Belliveau (2007) maintains, “drama-based teaching and learning invites participants (students) to think and feel because ideas and emotions continually intersect”. The pie chart below records a relatively high number of students who indicated happiness as their overall emotion towards the drama lesson. A small percentage indicated sad (empathetic) and blessed in their survey response.

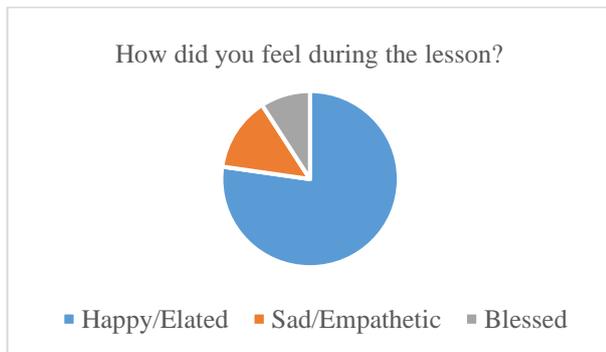


Figure 2: Pie chart showing students’ varied emotions

Students who felt happy gave reasons such as “*fun to watch my friends act*” or “*I am more confident and motivated to learn values*”. This proves a high engagement level among students. Students who felt sad and/or empathetic said: “*I did not know that there are many children who are child labourers*” or “*I sympathize with the children who has to work because they have many problems*”. This implies that through drama, students are able to build empathy. Students who felt blessed said “*I am fortunate to be able to go to school but the children can’t because they have no money*” or “*I appreciate what I have*”. This suggests that through drama, students are able to gain self-awareness about themselves and the people around them.

2.2 Participation (Cognitive)

Participation level looks into **quality** (depth of thinking) and **quantity** of students’ response.

2.2.1 Quality of response

Responses during drama activities are recorded below.

Drama Convention	Students’ response
Freeze-frame	Teacher: Which animal are you and what action are you showing? Student: I’m a cat and I’m crawling. (froze at crawling action on the floor)
Teacher-in-role	Teacher: What do I do with all these chairs? Student A: You can give it to your friends...so that your house is clean. Student B: You can paint it and then sell them. -----

Teacher: Who should I call?

Student: My sister.

Teacher: Oh, why your sister?

Student: Because my sister likes cats.

Role Play	Student: I work as a dishwasher at a chicken rice stall. I go there every day after school. I have to help my mum because she suffers Stage 4 cancer. (covers face as though sobbing)
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Mantle of the Expert	Government Officer: The law will not allow children below 13 years old to work. A financial assistance scheme will give a sum of money to poor families so that their children do not need to work
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Volunteer Group:
We will donate books, stationaries, food supplies and many more. We can also help to clean their houses once a month.

Business Entrepreneur:
We will open a private school for these children so that they can go to school. We will donate \$50 and provide basic necessities for their families every month. We will not employ under-aged children.

Table 4: Table showing student responses in drama

By analysing the students’ response, we can deduce that students were able to build upon their prior knowledge to construct thoughtful responses. A student made connections between the story and a family member when she suggested to give away the stray kittens to her sister. Students also successfully assumed themselves being in role by creating realistic narrative and relevant reasoning for their characters’ actions. For example, a student acting as a child labourer working at a chicken rice stall (local context) could see the need to work in order to earn money to pay for her mother’s medical treatment. Although this is not mentioned explicitly, we can infer this from the development of her story. This proves a great deal of depth in thinking. Moreover, as experts in their respective roles, students contributed creative and well-thought solutions to combat the problem of child labour. Students could provide more than one solution. Hence, showing a commendable depth of thinking through the use of drama conventions.

To unearth students’ cognitive process having participated in drama, a survey questionnaire on students’ take away revealed the following responses.

Level	Q	What did you learn today?
Lower Primary	S1	I learn to be a better person by helping others.
	S2	I learn how to share with people and be nice.
	S3	If we help others, others will help us.
Upper Primary	S1	I learn about the feelings of a domestic worker.
	S2	I learn that there are many child labourers around the world who are forced to work to earn money.
	S3	I learn to appreciate what I have.

Table 5: Students' take-away from the lesson

Students' responses imply that drama encourages empathy development and perspective-taking. Seamlessly, CCE's core values such as care, harmony and responsibility are incorporated and displayed by the students through their responses.

2.2.2 Quantity of response

A small percentage (3 out of 13 students) noted in the survey that they could not 'express their thoughts and feelings freely' as they are not proficient to converse in the Malay Language. This was the main reason why some students shun away from participating. The following is an interview transcript between the researcher and two students identified by the teacher.

Researcher: *Did you face any difficulty during the lesson?*

Student A: *Sometimes, the teacher's question is difficult because I don't know what it means.*

Student Z: *I don't know how to say it in Malay.*

This finding suggests the importance of language proficiency in carrying out drama strategies. Poor communicative skills is an impediment to use drama pedagogy effectively. Therefore, teachers should consider to improve students' vocabulary knowledge in the language prior to drama or allow the use of a more proficient language when expressing difficult words since CCE emphasizes values teaching and not language. As Teacher N reflected, she "*learnt to adapt and improvise the methods used*" when using drama techniques. Alternatively, students may pen down their thoughts before sharing with peers. Making improvisations to take into account students' background corresponds with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which emphasises that culture influences cognitive development (Tan et al, 2017).

3. TEACHERS' PERCEPTION

Teachers' view on drama pedagogy revealed both usefulness and challenges.

3.1 Usefulness

The interview transcript below captured the conversations between the researcher and the teachers.

Researcher: *Did you observe any difference in students' participation when you carry out drama?*

Teacher M: *The difference is more students would want to share their response...Students are more excited and participative while using drama techniques.*

Researcher: *Are there any benefits of using drama as compared to other conventional ways of teaching values?*

Teacher N: *Using drama makes lessons more interesting and the teaching of values impactful and effective. It is the teaching of values in an indirect manner through role playing for example, pupils learnt to empathize others.*

Since drama offers a fictional context for students to voice their opinion and engage in perspective-taking in a safe environment, it is not surprising that Teacher M observed her students becoming more receptive and willing to participate. With reference to Table 5, students' take-away from the lesson supports Teacher N's claim that the use of drama to teach values is impactful and effective. Consequently, teachers' perception towards D.I.E has shed light on the usefulness of drama in boosting engagement and participation level.

3.2 Challenges

Regarding students' responses which were out of context, Teacher M noted "*I had to validate their response as an attempt of trying. However, I will need to guide her to answer according to the storyline*". There is no doubt that drama offers multiple perspectives and points of view. Even so, teachers as facilitators should maintain control to direct students' thinking as a form of scaffolding.

There is also a dearth of training provided for language teachers to pursue their knowledge and hone their skills in the field of D.I.E. Teacher M called for workshops where teachers can explore "*different drama techniques...to experience the journey (process)*" and Teacher N welcomed more learning circles in this area so that teachers would be "*more equip and confident to implement drama*". This implies that training is necessary to augment teacher's proficiency in the implementation of drama pedagogy. Since drama is a relatively new approach to teaching, providing a good grounding for teachers is highly endorsed.

CONCLUSION

In this research, drama pedagogy has been presented as an effective tool for education. If teachers maintain drama pedagogy in their classrooms, students' positive

engagement and participation would likely increase their intrinsic motivation to learn. By presenting content which is relevant and fun, curriculum objectives are met and students' learning is heightened.

As a form of professional growth, teachers showed interest to deepen their expertise in D.I.E. Hence, training is imperative in order to uncover the potential of drama pedagogy in the curricula.

This research has only addressed a partial account of D.I.E due to limited time and resources. Because of the limitations in the research design, it is not possible to make generalizations to other educational institutions. Further research should explore schools of various profiles to allow for a more complete assessment on the effectiveness of drama pedagogy.

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