

A Self-determination Theory Perspective: How the 'Drama in Education' Can Boost Students' Motivation of Learning

Han Wu

Educational studies, Med. University of Glasgow, UK
Email: 2528474w@student.gla.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Improving students' intrinsic learning motivation is a topic that educators pay close attention to and constantly explore in teaching methods. In particular, China's education environment has always adopted the rules of exam-oriented education, which means paying more attention to results, just as China's primary education used to. In recent years, with the continuous advancement of quality education, it is imperative to improve students' learning enthusiasm and explore more effective teaching methods. This article attempts to put forward a drama teaching method, which is educational drama, as an idea to provide some pedagogical reflections. At the same time, the paper will be based on the perspective of self-determination theory, looking for the theoretical support of educational drama in the direction of psychology. It will cross-check how educational drama as a pedagogical method can contribute to students' motivation through specific pedagogical methods and the psychological theories embedded in them.

Keywords: self-determination theory, drama in education, motivation, pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

Transient psychology has a long past and is embedded in various human cultural activities, and Drama in Education(DIE) is one such field. Unlike Drama Education, which is used to train choreographers and directors, and stage artists, DIE is an educational approach that uses theatrical forms to guide perception and development. This pedagogy has no ready-made scripts at all; all participants are scriptwriters, creating and performing in the classroom as they go along. It is widely used in reading comprehension, writing, constructing gender roles in European and American educational practice, eliminating racial prejudice, preventing substance abuse, and many other areas. DIE was introduced earlier in Hong Kong and Taiwan in China. In recent years, the development and exploration activities have become increasingly active in mainland China.

On this basis, exploring the psychological mechanisms in DIE is an essential channel for advancing its educational function, a window to understanding human higher psychological activities, and a way to study

the psychological development mechanism of psychological development.

2. WHAT IS DRAMA IN EDUCATION?

Drama in Education(DIE), also known as drama pedagogy, has been prevalent in Europe and America for many years. In particular, from primary school to higher education, it runs through almost all the learning stages of the British teaching system ^[3]. The use of drama as a teaching method formed the early concept of DIE, which originated from Harriet Finlay Johnson (1871-1956), a British primary school teacher. He published a book called *Drama method of teaching* in 1991. Harriet ^[6] believed that drama stimulates children's desire to learn. Therefore, she uses drama as a tool for learning other knowledge to increase children's interest.

Meanwhile, in 1917, Caldwell Cook(1886-1939) ^[4], also put forward the concept of 'playful dramatic method of teaching' in his book *The Play Way*, thinking that drama is a kind of game for teaching English. Later, Dorothy Heathcote(1926-2011), a British drama education scholar, summed up the concept of 'educational drama'. She integrated drama, teaching, and her children's learning model into a new teaching method ^[7]. This

makes drama an effective medium for teaching and learning.

2.1. The Essence of DIE

The theory of Drama in Education is based on the French thinker Rousseau's fundamental interpretation of educational practice. The two core points are "learning in practice" and "learning in drama practice" [9]. In this way, DIE was introduced into schools and classrooms, enriching the existence of teaching practice.

As a comprehensive art, the drama brings together various cultural elements, including literature, performance, music, dance, and so on. Drama integrates typical contradictions and critical events in life with conflict, focuses on contradictions, refines details, presents the whole process of events to the audience, and makes the audience personally present [14]. In addition, drama plays a vital role in propaganda, education, and cultural entertainment. On the other hand, DIE introduces elements and methods of drama into the field of education. Participants and audiences can acquire knowledge and skills through drama, and form positive emotions, correct attitudes and reasonable values. In addition, DIE is a process as well as an outcome. The participant is a performer and a spectator at the same time, and the process of learner participation is at the same time a process of reflection. Thus, Heathcote(1991) describes this process as 'self-spectating'.

2.2. The value of DIE

DIE takes drama goes beyond the level of artistic and aesthetic education and uses it as a tool for learning and cognition, with its outstanding contribution to education being the deeper excavation and attention to the meaning of the learner's body [10]. Through role-playing, learners 'experience' what has already happened but which they have not yet experienced, or what they are about to face or experience, and through their connection with others in the drama process. They constantly examine and reflect on themselves and others. This kind of physical experience also expands the learner's life experience and becomes an essential source of knowledge construction.

Furthermore, student learning in DIE is a process of re-organization. Performing a specific role temporarily disengage the student from his or her original understanding and puts him or her in a temporary ambiguous understanding.

This learning is different from the usual classroom teaching in that it is not repeated with a clear purpose, and therefore learning in educational theatre is more like common sense or natural learning. This is because natural learning and understanding are obtained in a specific subject-object relationship, which requires the individual to experience a prosperous life. DIE can therefore create

such an atmosphere and provide resources. For example, children may discover in the drama that the historian is like a detective; what the scientist does is test the truth; the police are real people; the hero has shortcomings, and so on [2].

2.3. DIE in China

Drama in education did not come into the scope of Chinese education until the 1980s. It has been developing for over 20 years, although it is still not well known and is still in its infancy. In contrast, in the UK, the characteristics of drama education have already been developed and are very well established. It can be seen in classroom practice at all levels of education, from primary school to university. In China, there are still significant challenges and obstacles to the localization of DIE.

Combined with my own experience, DIE may be a treasure trove of pedagogy for today's Chinese students. I, myself, have had deep experience in both fields. Having studied drama at an art school from the age of ten, my ten years of study provided me with ample expertise in theatre. After graduating, I worked in an art school with all drama majors and worked part-time in a regular primary school, teaching drama-oriented classes. It is easy to see that both art students and ordinary students face the same problem: suffering from learning pains. This is not a problem unique to Chinese students but a worldwide topic: how can we improve students' motivation to learn? Drama teaching pedagogy may provide a good answer, so let us go to the field of psychology for more answers.

3. THE CONCEPT OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro theory of human motivation and personality that deals with people's intrinsic growth tendencies and innate psychological needs. SDT focuses on the degree of self-motivation and self-determination of human behaviour [12]. In the 1970s, research on SDT originated from studies comparing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation [15]. It was not until the mid-1980s when Edward L. Deci and Richard Ryan wrote a book entitled *Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation in Human Behavior*, that SDT was formally introduced and accepted as a sound empirical theory.

3.1. Intrinsic motivation

According to Deci & Ryan's [11] self-determination theory, there are two types of motivation, those based on intrinsic interest in the activity itself and those based on receiving rewards other than the activity itself, such as praise.

In technical terms, intrinsic motivation is an activity that is done 'for its own sake' or intrinsic interest and enjoyment ^[12]. For instance, people are intrinsically motivated to play a game or an instrument simply because they enjoy doing it. Intrinsic motivation is likely to be the reason why learning dominates throughout a human's life compared to externally enforced learning and instruction ^[5].

In other words, intrinsic motivation refers to behaviour motivated by interest, enjoyment, and satisfaction with the activity itself. Students who are intrinsically motivated tend to learn willingly and to derive pleasure and enjoyment from it. An interest in the task itself drives intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is driven by an inherent need to prove one's ability. When people are free to do something of their choosing, they will seek out situations best demonstrate their abilities. They strive to meet challenges and, by overcoming them, they develop a sense of confidence in their abilities. Intrinsic motivation is seen as an act of high self-determination because the reason a person chooses to do something is only related to their positive and affirmative emotional attitude towards doing it ^[1].

3.2. Extrinsic motivation

In contrast to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation refers to the external factors that motivate a person's activities ^[11]. These external factors may include praise from teachers, parental approval, promises of rewards, high marks in examinations, competitive victories, or even the threat of punishment. Behavior stimulated by extrinsic motivation is not due to an intrinsic interest in the activity itself but rather to achieving some utilitarian purpose. The control of behavior is extrinsic to the activity itself.

However, the fact that a person is extrinsically motivated does not mean that the behavior he or she performs lacks self-judgment. Instead, often the actor chooses to do something because he or she believes that it is worth doing and sees the value in doing it ^[13].

4. INTRINSIC MOTIVATION IN DRAMA IN EDUCATION

Intrinsic motivation is a central motivator for education. Under the traditional indoctrination model, one-way knowledge transfer prevents students from efficiently acquiring the relevant knowledge and limits the development of students' sense of independent learning, which harms their social adjustment. Students must be effectively motivated to take the initiative in learning.

Piaget has pointed out that children do not naturally relate to and identify with reality, life and learning without the intervention of adults, reflecting the

understanding of child development and education that development does not come naturally and needs to be guided and supported, which is the function of education ^[8]. In fact, 'guidance' and 'initiative' are in a sense contradictory. An educational system that enables the two to coexist requires a high degree of logic between the contents of the teaching and learning and is relevant to life.

It is also strange that parents who raise excellent children always think that their children are excellent because they have a good education. Parents do make great efforts to educate their children, but not only to receive positive education from their parents, making their children better depends more on their consciousness and the correct influence of things than others. Parents only need to create an open environment for them to accept the diversity of things and get improvement from it.

For this reason, DIE is a sustainable teaching methodology that allows 'guidance' and 'initiative' to coexist. According to Dorothy Heathcote(1991), a British educational drama master, drama can precisely determine what students know but do not realize. Rather than asking students to act out a play or spoon-feeding them information, DIE consciously uses elements of drama to guide students to discover what they already know and to apply it. Through DIE, it is possible to maximize the 'return' of subjectivity to the students. In the process, the intrinsic motivation and the input of knowledge and skills gradually create a magical chemical reaction, increasing interest and motivation and making learning more effective.

5. CONCLUSION

In developing teaching and learning policies and programs, we repeatedly emphasize the need to cultivate creativity and active learning in concepts, but we found it challenging to achieve this effect in practice. Everyone's creativity is not abstract but an ability to deal with specific problems or situations. Therefore, students' creative abilities can only be developed in concrete situations through personal experience and practice. When pupils feel the sensations of an experiential and exciting learning environment, they are at the same time effectively motivated.

Artists always say that life inspires them, and they need to go back to it to find inspiration. However, it is difficult to devote all our energy to our limited teaching time's actual social life experience. Nevertheless, educational theatre offers us the opportunity to return to the 'lifeworld' and to 'feel' it for ourselves.

Heathcote(1991) advocates slowing down the pace and allowing students to reflect on and become aware of their inner consciousness in the process of DIE. This process is an essential way of promoting students' self-

awareness, social development, and personality development. Furthermore, this is also the essence of DIE: the focus is on the process of education rather than on the outcome of the performance. This pedagogical approach focuses on the educational process while at the same time being more concerned with the inspiration of students' self-awareness. It is a breath of fresh air in today's impetuous and overly result-oriented educational ecology.

REFERENCES

- [1] ACKERMAN, C. 2020. Self-determination theory of motivation: why intrinsic motivation matters. *Positive Psychology*.
- [2] BOLTON, G. 1985. Changes in thinking about drama in education. *Theory into practice*, 24, 151-157.
- [3] BOLTON, G. 2007. A history of drama education: A search for substance. *International handbook of research in arts education*. Springer.
- [4] COOK, H. C. 1919. *The play way: an essay in educational method*, New York, F. A. Stokes.
- [5] DI DOMENICO, S. I. & RYAN, R. M. 2017. The emerging neuroscience of intrinsic motivation: A new frontier in self-determination research. *Frontiers in human neuroscience*, 11, 145.
- [6] FINLAY-JOHNSON, H. 1912. *The dramatic method of teaching*, Ginn.
- [7] HEATHCOTE, D. 1991. *Collected writings on education and drama*, Northwestern University Press.
- [8] HUITT, W. & HUMMEL, J. 2003. Piaget's theory of cognitive development. *Educational psychology interactive*, 3, 1-5.
- [9] JACQUES, R. J. 1996. *Emile ou de l'éducation*. Paris, Edition Ganier Flammarion.
- [10] OLSON, D. R. 2007. *Jerome Bruner: the cognitive revolution in educational theory*, London;New York;, Continuum.
- [11] RYAN, R. M. & DECI, E. L. 2000a. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary educational psychology*, 25, 54-67.
- [12] RYAN, R. M. & DECI, E. L. 2000b. Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American psychologist*, 55, 68.
- [13] RYAN, R. M. & DECI, E. L. 2020. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 101860.
- [14] TURNER, V. W. 1990. *By means of performance: Intercultural studies of theatre and ritual*, Cambridge University Press.
- [15] VANSTEENKISTE, M., LENS, W. & DECI, E. L. 2006. Intrinsic versus extrinsic goal contents in self-determination theory: Another look at the quality of academic motivation. *Educational psychologist*, 41, 19-31.