

An Innovative Practice of Storytelling with Kamishibai: A Preschool Teacher's Educational Journey around Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Kamishibai is a street performance art that originated in Japan in the 1930s. It is a visual, auditory, and highly participatory storytelling performance medium. With the prevalence of modern multimedia and virtual reality technologies, Kamishibai has gradually attracted the attention of storytelling educators because of its unique empathetic characteristics. This study briefly reviews the trend of Kamishibai's storytelling activities in Taiwan over the past decade. The storytellers are a group of early childhood education preschool teachers and their instructors. The Kamishibai Children's Theatre, which they have voluntarily established, undertakes an annual educational journey around Taiwan. Over six years, Kamishibai Children's Theatre has given over 600 live performances at 250 different institutions, including schools, non-profit organizations, communities, libraries, and local storytelling centers. They have enriched preschool teachers' storytelling skills, promoted reading culture, and inspired many kindergarten and elementary school teachers to use Kamishibai for innovative teaching. In this study, Kamishibai's innovative teaching contributed to developing interdisciplinary skills for young children in the creation, writing, and performance of storytelling techniques. These skills also extend to young children's language learning, oral expression, and artistic and aesthetic skills.

Keywords: Kamishibai, Participatory storytelling, Preschool teacher competence, Educational journey.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 KAMISHIBAI - A RENAISSANCE OF STORYTELLING

Kamishibai is a street performance art that originated in Japan in the 1930s [1]. Performers ride their bicycles and carry wooden stages into the streets and call out to people, especially children, to come and watch. The performance is free to watch, and children buy candy from the performers after the performance. In those days of war and chaos, the stories and the candy after the show were undoubtedly the children's favorites. Kamishibai was one of the most popular daily entertainment for children in the days before television was invented. As a highly interactive form of storytelling, Kamishibai has not fallen out of favor with the prevalence of digital technology and media today. In recent decades, Kamishibai, a retro and contemporary storytelling medium, has brought about a renaissance of storytelling

in various applications such as environmental education and mass communication [2-4].

For example, Japan's TBS News has received great reviews for its highly interactive news production using the Kamishibai. In today's Japanese kindergarten classrooms, preschool teachers are even more skilled at using Kamishibai as a storytelling and reading literacy teaching tool.

1.2 Kamishibai's Renaissance in Taiwan

Since Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule for about 50 years, Kamishibai, a unique form of storytelling, also entered Taiwan [5]. However, with Japan's defeat in World War II, Kamishibai, a form of education with Japanese cultural characteristics, gradually disappeared from Taiwan's schools. It was not until 1980 that Taiwan's Shinmin Early Childhood Education Company translated Kamishibai, an educational genre published by Doshinsha in Japan, into Chinese. They reintroduced Kamishibai to Taiwan under "Children's Picture

Theater." Since then, Kamishibai has been used as an educational tool in kindergartens and has been gradually promoted by teachers. From 2010 to 2016, Professor Chin-Ching Chen of the Asia-Pacific Institute of Creativity (APIC) in Miaoli County, Taiwan, further developed the "Kamishibai Storytelling Skills" program under the Early Childhood Teacher Training Program. This program focuses on training preschool teachers to tell and perform a variety of stories as one of the core professional competencies of preschool teachers [6-7].

In addition, the students in the program voluntarily established the "Kamishibai Children's Theatre" and started an annual educational trip around Taiwan. (Figure 1) Through the storytelling activities, the students were able to get out of the classroom, which was confined to the university classroom (Figures 1(a)-1(b)). Over the course of six years, Kamishibai Children's Theatre has been invited to give more than 600 live performances at 250 different institutions, including schools, non-profit organizations, communities, libraries, and local governments. Through this educational journey, which extends over time and space, Kamishibai Children's Theatre cultivates rich storytelling skills in preschool teachers. Through this educational journey, Kamishibai Children's Theatre has also significantly promoted a culture of reading. They have also worked with many kindergarten and elementary school teachers to innovate and reform their teaching and pedagogy using Kamishibai (Figures 1(c)-1(d)).

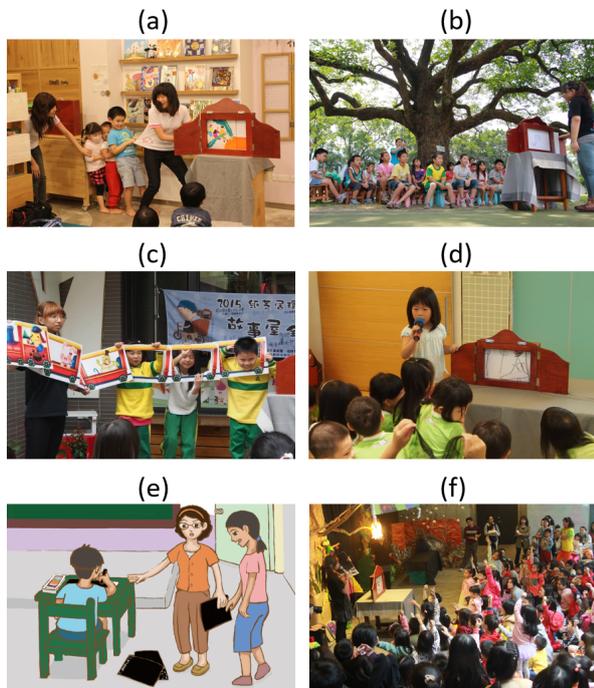


Figure 1 Kamishibai Children's Theatre in Taiwan.

2. FROM SCHOOL TO COMMUNITY - EMPATHETIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DRIVEN BY KAMISHIBAI

From a historical perspective, the main reason for Kamishibai's fading from view was the introduction of television into the lives of the masses. Paradoxically, Kamishibai's renewed popularity is also due, in part, to the over-consumption of television culture and the lack of "empathy" that Kamishibai offers [8]. There are three levels of sympathy: (1) the audience's response to the work in the moment of the performance, guided by the performer; (2) the audience's shared feelings in the moment of the performance; and (3) the shared memories of the people or community. The following is a brief introduction.

2.1 Kamishibai's First Level of Empathy

The first level of "empathy" occurs in the moment of the performance. From a design perspective, the creator of Kamishibai's work must design and arrange the story in such a way as to provoke or attempt to provoke empathy in the audience. The performers follow the instructions of the story script to evoke the audience to interact with the work. For example, in the story "The Cook with a Bad Mood," the story progresses to the sixth picture card, which shows the chef's back to the audience [9]. At this point, the performer invites the audience to chant and ask Mr. Chef to turn around. In response to the audience's shout, the performer pulls back the card and presents the following picture of the chef turning around to face the audience with a smiling face. The performer plays the role of a medium throughout the performance, allowing the audience to respond to the work as they watch.

2.2 Kamishibai's Second Level of Empathy

The second level of "empathy" refers to the different feelings generated by Kamishibai's performance and the reading of picture books. Generally speaking, reading a picture book is more of a personal experience. On the other hand, Kamishibai is performed in front of a large audience. The audience can feel the ups and downs of emotions as the story develops and the performers perform, either sad or happy, or even with the story characters. For example, in the story "Yan, who loves to draw," Yan, who loves to draw, keeps drawing black cards at first, and no one knows what Yan is drawing (Figure 1(e)). One day, he met a group of children (meaning the audience). So, the audience was arranged by the performer to put together the black cards that Yan had drawn earlier. It dawned on the audience that Yan was drawing a big whale, a gift for his father fishing at sea. In the end of the story, the audience understands the heart of Yan and his love for his father [7].

2.3 Kamishibai's Third Level of Empathy

The third level of "empathy" refers to the shared memory of Kamishibai. Because Kamishibai performances easily evoke "shared feelings," there are common topics and memories for those who have seen Kamishibai performances before. In recent years, many community development leaders have sought to preserve the history and culture of their communities by writing stories about them. Creating Kamishibai, which is based on the theme of community development, the highly interactive, collaborative, and participatory nature of the process has allowed these community stories to be recreated and preserved. Whether as a creator or audiences, people can create their own stories by creating, performing, or watching Kamishibai. In the case of the Dream Community in Shiji, Taiwan, members of the Community Development Association write and draw stories about the community and perform them to create a shared memory [7]. In creating and performing these stories, they once again created and owned the community's shared memories (Figure 1(f)).

3. TRAVELING WITH KAMISHIBAI CHILDREN'S THEATRE - A JOURNEY FROM 2010 TO 2016

For the second semester since its inception in 2010, the teachers and students have been working together since December 2010 to plan and promote a self-supported tour around Taiwan. To raise funds for the event, the theatre group has also published Kamishibai's story for sale. This was the opportunity to publish Kamishibai's first work, "The Caterpillar with the Snail's Skull". Two college students, Liang Ya Wen and Xiao Hui Wen, brought their luggage and four sets of Kamishibai stories with them on a 21-day, 43-performance tour around Taiwan.

As the members of the theatre group have accumulated experience in performing, the group has not only played the role of training storytelling talents, but also connected with organizations interested in the promotion of Kamishibai during their performances around Taiwan. In addition to public and private kindergartens, national elementary schools, libraries, and local storytellers, the troupe was invited to perform at three universities and affiliated kindergartens. Notably, these three universities include National Central University, Chung Yuang Christian University, and National Pingtung University, all have a preschool teacher program [7]. By the end of 2013, educators in Taiwan had gradually recognized Kamishibai's storytelling performance, and is expected to be used in storytelling or reading teaching activities for young children [7, 10-11].

In addition to educational institutions, Kamishibai Children's Theatre has also received attention and

cooperation opportunities from environmental and ecological protection, energy education, and animal conservation organizations. From 2014 to 2016, Xiao Lu Culture Press, a long-time picture book publisher, collaborated with the Wildlife Conservation Shelter and Kamishibai Children's Theatre to publish two animal conservation-related Kamishibai stories, "Firefly" [12] and "Bobcats and Bobcats." [13]

In short, Kamishibai Children's Theatre tells stories in this face-to-face, traditional and retro way. The purpose is to convey the truth of life through storytelling. The emphasis on interactive storytelling and performance also enhances the oral expression skills of the participating children. Through this win-win storytelling model, the preschool teachers act as storytellers and interact face-to-face with the children. On the one hand, the participating preschool teachers can improve their professional skills during the storytelling process around Taiwan. On the other hand, it also benefits many children who love to listen to stories.

4. CONCLUSION

Kamishibai, a popular storytelling culture that originated in Japan in the 1930s, has achieved more than 600 performances around Taiwan in six years from 2011 to 2016 through the voluntary storytelling initiatives of preschool teachers [7, 14]. This record is a profound milestone, a touching educational footprint, and a valuable experience promoting and educating storytelling through Kamishibai. The essential conclusions are summarized below.

4.1 An Unplugged Miniature Mobile Theater

Kamishibai's tour around Taiwan reaches as far as the Cao Shan Branch of Siding Elementary School in Chiayi County and as far as Renhe Elementary School in Nantou County. Students in these areas usually have little access to outside arts and cultural performances. It is also not easy for performing groups to have the time and resources to come and perform. However, Kamishibai's performances can usually be performed by one person. In addition, Kamishibai's stage weighs no more than five kilograms and does not require lights or electricity. The Kamishibai's stage's mobility and convenience give children in rural areas a chance to experience the charm of storytelling.

4.2 An Empathetic Classroom Without Walls

Kamishibai's educational journey around Taiwan takes students out of the classroom. As performers, children's theater group members go to kindergartens, elementary schools, public libraries, and other venues to speak and perform to different audiences. Through performance after performance, they accumulate experiences and valuable reflections. In addition, the

organization of each event and the collaboration with publishers, public libraries, and non-profit organizations outside of the school have greatly expanded the scope of learning and the resources available outside of school education.

4.3 Enriching the Creation of Kamishibai's Story

As a result of Kamishibai's activities around Taiwan, the theatre's instructors have been inspired to create more stories. From the beginning, the Kamishibai Theatre has only four stories of their own. Since then, they produce new stories every year. They also collaborate with the Wildlife Conservation and Shelter Center to create two stories related to the environmental education and animal conservation. In performing around Taiwan, the theater's instructors are also observers and witnesses of the event. The authors of the stories observe the audience's reactions. The audience's reactions inspire the authors to revise and create their stories as an immediate literary activity.

In summary, this study briefly describes the development of Kamishibai storytelling education in Taiwan in the last decade or so. The rise of Kamishibai may seem anachronistic given the current wave of emphasis on digital technology in primary and kindergarten schools. Surprisingly, Kamishibai has a unique empathetic characteristic that attracts the children's attention and brings the teacher and the recipient closer together.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

C. C. C. contributes significantly to performing Kamishibai field studies and prepares the original draft. H. C. C. contributes to the analysis of this study and the manuscript preparation and editing.

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