



An Action Research of Drama-in-Education in the Course of Ancient Chinese Literary History in Application-Oriented Universities

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Abstract. Drama-in-Education (DIE), as a method of integrating drama elements into teaching, is very advanced in the application of the course of Ancient Chinese Literary History. This paper adopts the research method of action research, takes N University as a representative case, and observes this professional course after the reform through questionnaire data and interview research. The study found that the undergraduate students had a high degree of acceptance of DIE, and their enthusiasm for learning did not decline completely with the growth of grade. In terms of learning motivation, most students agree that DIE has aroused their enthusiasm for learning, but this does not mean that it can directly improve their academic performance. In terms of learning ability, this teaching method still has space for improvement in training students' critical thinking and problem-solving ability compared with innovative thinking, teamwork, communication and expression ability. In terms of learning effect, soft effect is better than hard effect. At the level of learning experience, students think that fun is more important than usefulness. At the end of the paper, based on the above findings, the author puts forward suggestions on the application of DIE in the Ancient Chinese Literary History course to guide a new round of education, teaching and action research.

Keywords: Drama-in-Education · Ancient Chinese Literary History · Action Research · Reform in Education

1 Introduction

The culture with Chinese characteristics and excellent traditional culture will not fade with the development of the times. Today, the cultural confidence we emphasize comes from the understanding and grasp of traditional culture, understanding its spirit and meaning.

As an important professional course, the Ancient Chinese Literary History “includes all kinds of national and ideological views of the sages that can be learned and inherited, and has a very important impact on carrying forward the essence of Chinese national thought and cultivating the national patriotism” [1]. However, with the development of social environment and market economy, the teaching mode, teaching method and teaching effect of traditional disciplines need to be adjusted accordingly.

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Drama teaching method emphasizes students' experience and participation in the course. As an imported method, it has been proved to be helpful for English speaking students to improve their language application ability. In order to create a diversified space for teaching and learning and better meet the training needs of application-oriented talents, this study takes Ancient Chinese Literary History as a pilot course, hoping to explore the availability of this method in traditional course teaching through investigation and analysis.

2 Research Questions

In September 2016, N University was selected as a pilot university for undergraduate transformation in Guangdong Province. In recent years, in order to build a first-class application-oriented private university in China, N University has actively advocated "student-centered and practical education". The Ancient Chinese Literary History is an important reform course under this background.

At present, the course is still "crossing the river by feeling the stones" in the aspects of teaching content, methods, objectives, assessment, etc. In order to further improve students' ability of self creation and turning works into their own use, teachers plan to combine the Ancient Chinese Literary History with the Selected Works of Ancient Chinese Literature in the teaching content, and roughly divide the teaching content into two parts in the design of the curriculum system: teachers' lectures and students' self reading.

This research intends to apply the DIE to the course of Ancient Chinese Literary History with the method of action research, and immediately carry out a questionnaire survey on students' learning after the teaching activities, to clarify students' learning motivation, learning ability, learning effect and learning experience in the DIE, so as to guide the teaching activities and research of the course of Ancient Chinese Literary History in similar application-oriented universities.

3 Concept Interpretation

Drama-in-Education (DIE), also known as "educational drama", can be traced back to the 19th century, the famous educator J. Rousseau's idea – "learning through dramatic practice". In 1930, Winifred Ward, an American drama educator, wrote the book "Creative Drama Techniques" and formally named this method as "Creative Drama in Education". In the 1960s, British educational scholar Dorothy Heathcote integrated drama teaching method into many teaching fields such as humanities and art. Under the influence of this educational trend, Britain gradually established a systematic, multi-level and all-stage drama teaching system (from primary school, middle school to university and postgraduate education).

DIE in China started late and developed slowly, which originated in the early 20th century [2]. Tao Xingzhi, Lu Zuofu, Zhang Boling and others advocated the popularization of education by means of drama, which made a beneficial attempt in the cultivation of students' personality and interpersonal communication. Now, due to the constant extension of the use scene, the term generally refers to "drama as a means of education"

in China's educational reality [3]. Professor Li Yinning defines it as: "a drama form that is different from stage performance and focuses on process. Under the guidance of the participants, they use imagination to mobilize their own experience to open up, develop, express and exchange ideas and feelings with each other in the drama practice, so as to achieve the purpose of opening up intelligence, increasing knowledge and activating the body and mind" [4]. We should note that this concept is quite different from the "Drama Education" of "cultivating professional drama talents".

Wu Ge believes that the purpose of Drama Education is to transfer drama knowledge and cultivate performance ability. The content of education is drama knowledge and ability. DIE only relies on the way of drama, and the content can be any knowledge and skills [5]. Based on this, the DIE used in this paper emphasizes the integration of scenes, roles and other elements in the historical culture and moral education of ancient Chinese history, so that students can play roles with the help of situations, deeply understand the essence of ancient culture, cultivate innovative and practical thinking modes, and achieve the goal of application-oriented talents.

4 Research Design

4.1 Respondents

This paper takes N University, the No. 1 application-oriented university in Guangzhou as an example, and selects the students majoring in Chinese language and literature who have studied the "Ancient Chinese Literary History" for one semester as the survey object. Since "Ancient Chinese Literary History" is listed as a required course for freshmen of this major, the survey objects are mainly concentrated in freshmen and sophomores.

In 2020, the Chinese language and literature of N University was rated as a key major in Guangdong Province. This study focuses on the development and construction of traditional majors in local application-oriented universities. Selecting this sample frame has certain representative significance.

4.2 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was completed after consulting four teachers and two pedagogical experts with reference to relevant literature and the actual situation in the process of education and teaching. The content is roughly divided into six parts: basic information, learning motivation, learning ability, learning effect, learning experience, and open questions (Table 1). There are 19 questions in the questionnaire, 17 single choice questions and 2 open questions. Among them, learning motivation, learning ability, learning effect and learning experience are all designed with Likert's five subscales, namely "very disagree", "disagree", "general", "agree" and "very agree". The scoring method is "1-5". To ensure the scientific meaning of statistical analysis, each dimension is not less than 3 questions.

The reliability and validity of the questionnaire results were analyzed with spss software, showing that Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.980 (>0.9), with good internal consistency, which can be used for further analysis. KMO (Table 2) was 0.957 (>0.9),

Bartlett's sphericity test reached a statistically significant level ($p < 0.05$), and the cumulative contribution rate of variance was 78.076% ($>50\%$), which proved that the validity of the questionnaire was very good, the information content of the research item could be effectively extracted, and the questionnaire design was reasonable and effective.

4.3 Investigation Procedures

Considering the convenience of data recovery, the questionnaire is in the form of electronic questionnaire. After the completion of the first design, a pre survey of a pilot class was conducted. Then, based on the preliminary results of 35 students and the suggestions of two education experts, we adjusted the words of individual question stems and re integrated the items of concepts that are easy to be confused. The questionnaire has been distributed in the last week of the course, lasting one week (2021/12/26–2022/1/2). 287 valid samples were finally recovered, which met the basic requirements of statistical analysis.

5 Research Analysis

5.1 Basic Information

The number of boys and girls participating in this survey is quite different, including 235 girls and 52 boys. The number of girls is 4.5 times that of boys. This is consistent with the enrollment of this major. In addition, as mentioned above, there are 191 freshmen, accounting for 66.55%, 46 sophomores (16.03%), 49 sophomores (17.07%) and only one senior (0.35%). Therefore, the analysis results of this teaching situation have a targeted role for researchers to master the learning situation of freshmen's professional courses.

5.2 Learning Motivation

Learning motivation refers to the motivation tendency of motivating and maintaining students' learning behaviors towards a certain goal [6]. Learning motivation affects students' behavior and inspires cognitive mechanisms [7], so it is considered as a key factor in determining learning performance [8]. Compared with the middle school stage, the pressure of entering a higher school and preparing for the examination is much reduced in colleges and universities, and the "Spoon Feeding" teaching has also spawned a large number of "Smartphone Addicts". As an innovative teaching form, will DIE promote students' learning motivation?

It can be seen from the Table 3 that in this survey, students generally believed that this method would help to enhance their interest in learning the history of ancient Chinese literature ($\bar{X} = 4.171$), which is far higher than the theoretical average of 3. In terms of learning confidence, the statistical mean also exceeded 4.0. Most students expressed their determination to explore the mysteries of ancient literary history in this way. As for the achievement, the students showed a slight lack of confidence, and some students were cautious about obtaining high scores in this course through drama teaching method. As

Table 1. Questionnaire Design and Results

| Dimension | Investigation on the DIE in the Ancient Chinese Literary History | CITC | Cronbach α |
|---------------------|--|-------|-------------------|
| Learning Motivation | 1. DIE has improved my interest in learning the ancient Chinese literary history. | 0.795 | 0.980 |
| | 2. I hope to express my understanding of the history of ancient Chinese literature through DIE. | 0.825 | |
| | 3. I believe that I can overcome difficulties and use DIE to complete the interpretation of classic texts. | 0.786 | |
| | 4. I am confident that I can achieve good results in this course through DIE. | 0.794 | |
| Learning Ability | 1. I think the DIE has improved my innovative thinking. | 0.928 | |
| | 2. I think DIE has improved my critical thinking. | 0.843 | |
| | 3. I think the DIE has improved my teamwork ability. | 0.894 | |
| | 4. I think DIE has improved my communication and expression ability. | 0.914 | |
| | 5. I think the DIE has improved my problem-solving ability. | 0.891 | |
| Learning Effect | 1. DIE has deepened my understanding of ancient literary texts. | 0.925 | |
| | 2. DIE makes me deeply remember the classical texts of ancient literature that I learned. | 0.892 | |
| | 3. DIE has improved my diversified understanding of ancient literary texts. | 0.901 | |
| Learning Experience | 1. I think the application of DIE in this course will help me to increase my knowledge. | 0.893 | |
| | 2. I think DIE is interesting in this course | 0.922 | |
| | 3. I think it is important to understand the knowledge of ancient Chinese literary history through DIE. | 0.924 | |

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's test

| | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|
| KMO | 0.957 | |
| Bartlett's test | chi-squared approximation | 5821.714 |
| | <i>df</i> | 153 |
| | <i>p</i> | 0.000 |

mentioned above, due to the high importance of this course in the talent training program for Chinese language majors, the traditional written final examination still accounts for

Table 3. AVG and SD of Learning Motivation

| Topic | AVG | SD |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| 1. Learning interest | 4.171 | 0.846 |
| 2. Expressing intentions | 4.049 | 0.895 |
| 3. Overcome difficulties | 4.045 | 0.845 |
| 4. Achieve high scores | 3.983 | 0.883 |

50% of the total course score, while drama performance and ordinary homework only account for 20%. If students want to get high scores in this course, they must give consideration to the acquisition of basic knowledge. According to the self-worth theory, the internal motivation for individuals to pursue success is to protect self value [9]. The process of students' learning is the process of protecting and showing their self-worth. When the performance is considered as "high ability" and "high value", in order to avoid others' doubts about their own ability, individuals may have a series of negative coping mechanisms [10]. Lowering the expectation of examination results is one of the manifestations, so as to weaken the attribution of insufficient ability.

Freshmen also said that they had less exposure to such learning tasks in senior high school. When they just entered the university, they were not familiar with the group students, which made it difficult to carry out effective interaction; Second, the performance on the stage was still stiff and worried that the performance would be poor due to excessive tension, which would eventually affect the performance. DIE recognizes the individual differences of students. Some students are naturally outgoing and lively, and have strong desire to perform. Some students are relatively introverted and calm, and are not good at performing in public places. There are differences in the extent to which they enjoy the course.

5.3 Learning Ability

The questionnaire on learning ability is designed to investigate the students' completion of the ability goals proposed by the teachers at the beginning of the semester after the completion of all the courses of ancient Chinese literary history. The design of Table 4 refers to mature research and combs the improvement of drama teaching method on students' learning ability into: innovative thinking, teamwork, communication and expression, etc. The survey results show that students have a positive attitude towards the improvement of learning ability of DIE.

Among them, "innovative thinking ($\bar{X} = 4.185$)", "teamwork ($\bar{X} = 4.171$)" and "communication and expression ($\bar{X} = 4.129$)" are the abilities that students benefit most from. A total of 136 people (47.39%) agreed that drama teaching method improved their own innovative thinking, and 106 people (36.93%) chose "very agree". Even though some studies have shown that the phenomenon of "unfriendliness, non listening and non sharing" sometimes occurs in cooperative learning [11], it is undeniable that today's social production puts more emphasis on interpersonal communication and the cooperation opportunities that may be brought about by it. In the survey, 236 students (82.23%)

Table 4. AVG and SD of Learning Ability

| Topic | AVG | SD |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|
| 1. Innovative Thinking | 4.171 | 0.846 |
| 2. Critical Thinking | 4.049 | 0.895 |
| 3. Communication & Expression | 4.045 | 0.845 |
| 4. Achieve high scores | 3.983 | 0.883 |

positively affirmed the DIE’s improvement of team cooperation ability, and only 12 students (4.18%) opposed it; A total of 229 people (79.79%) agreed that their own communication and expression had been significantly improved, and no student expressed extreme opposition to this item.

In contrast to the syllabus, this course emphasizes the use of critical thinking to examine literary works, explore literary and cultural phenomena, and form students’ individual understanding of literature and culture. It can be seen that critical thinking and problem-solving ability are higher level ability requirements than the other three, especially the ability of “analysis” and “evaluation”. It is reasonable for students to give a little lower score in a short time. DIE requires students to be both actors and audience when participating in performances. On the one hand, they need to play in real situations, on the other hand, they need to independently decode the surface and deep meaning of the text, identify and reflect on problems in a timely manner, build personal knowledge, and repeatedly invest in the “presentation -expression – feedback” link.

5.4 Learning Effect

In the measurement of learning effect, the statistical results have little difference in AVG (Table 5). The highest average score was “DIE improved my diversified understanding of ancient literary texts” ($\bar{X} = 4.18$). Through the student survey, it can be clearly found that, compared with “deepening understanding” and “improving memory”, they prefer this innovative teaching method to open their multi-dimensional perspective of understanding traditional texts. DIE emphasizes “soft effect”, that is, participation and process [12]. If the evaluation criteria of “deep understanding” and “deep memory” are relatively fixed, “multiple cognition” emphasizes the subjective feelings of their own experience. “Scene setting”, “role play”, “theme deepening” and “meaning discussion” give students full space for free perception and free expression, break through the class mode of “focusing on specific knowledge and limited cognitive effect”, and restore students’ learning autonomy. In addition, the theory of multiple intelligences also provides a theoretical basis for the learning effect of drama teaching method. Howard Gardner believes that the distribution of individual intelligence is not unique, and “all-round” education and training can help to maximize individual potential [13]. The difference in intelligence will have an impact on students’ learning style, acceptance speed and academic performance. The application of DIE in the ancient Chinese literary history has laid a foundation for students to realize language intelligence from the perspective

Table 5. AVG and SD of Learning Effect

| Topic | AVG | SD |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|
| 1. Deepen the understanding | 4.115 | 0.783 |
| 2. Critical Thinking | 4.132 | 0.804 |
| 3. Diversified cognition | 4.185 | 0.737 |

of memory; Through watching excellent works, creating actions, choosing music, cooperative interpretation and many other aspects, students have been helped to improve their musical intelligence, spatial intelligence, kinesthetic intelligence and interpersonal intelligence. While conforming to the objective learning rules, drama teaching method helps to develop the intellectual space. In the teaching of professional courses, it takes into account the needs of quality education and liberal education for truth, kindness and beauty.

Combined with the last question, “Do you think there are any literary genres that are not suitable for performance through drama teaching method?” It can be seen that 48 students can give insightful answers based on their own courses. For example, 12 students mentioned poetry genre, 4 students mentioned lyric prose, and 7 students directly cited examples such as Historical Records and The Book of Songs. Other students seem to have answered the question seriously, but they actually confused the concept of “genre” and “theme”. For example, 8 students spontaneously expressed the difficulties encountered in the interpretation of the grand historical background, 2 students thought that war works were not suitable for interpretation, and 1 student thought that works with strong political significance were more difficult to interpret, unable to understand the mood of the characters. The heterogeneity of the answers actually reflects the effect of students’ learning in this course, and better help teachers and researchers who carry out action research to grasp students’ learning situation, properly adjust the focus of education and teaching in follow-up courses, and clarify the key meaning of confusion in students’ learning.

5.5 Learning Experience

Learning experience has long been neglected by teachers, schools and parents in the rigid framework of measuring academic performance. In Table 6, “interesting” has the highest score ($\bar{X} = 4.213$). A total of 131 students (45.64%) chose “Agree”, 112 students (39.02%) chose “Very Agree”, and only 7 students were against it. It can be seen that using DIE to carry out the teaching of ancient Chinese literary history will help to enhance the level of the class and the readability of the text. However, it is particularly important to note that through the analysis and research of student interviews and open materials, it is not difficult to see that many students reflect that they will still face the situation of excessive interest that leads to loss of control in important occasions such as group discussions, rehearsals and even performances. “Some students are too active, exceeding the limit of drama demand, which makes the whole process more interesting than informative” (student A). Too much entertainment in the class will not only disrupt

Table 6. AVG and SD of Learning Experience

| Topic | AVG | SD |
|----------------|-------|-------|
| 1. Informative | 4.129 | 0.781 |
| 2. Interesting | 4.213 | 0.757 |
| 3. Important | 4.059 | 0.828 |

the learning rhythm and rehearsal rhythm, but also make students focus too much on technical expression, and lose their understanding and innovation of the text.

The second is “Informative” ($\bar{X} = 4.129$), and the last is “Important” ($\bar{X} = 4.059$). It is worth noting that a total of 57 people (19.86%) believed that DIE did not significantly improve their understanding of the ancient Chinese literary History.

In order to further clarify the root of the problem, the researcher re examined the open-ended question: “Do you think there are any shortcomings in using the DIE in this classroom? If so, please explain.” The answers are summarized as follows: Due to the limited time and space in the classroom, some scenes are inconvenient to carry out, which makes the effect poor; Students need to bring their own props and recite their own lines, and their financial resources and energy are affected; The hardware cannot support the performance (the microphone has no power, and the light control is poor). Most of the students only pay attention to the texts of their own groups. They have little understanding of the texts involved in the presentation of other groups’ courses, and sometimes they are even misled by individual performance forms; The students failed to properly understand the essence of the classics, and the innovation was inappropriate... In addition, some freshmen said that as they just started to learn professional courses, their understanding of key texts is still in the process of exploration, “it is easy to leave regret if the innovation is too small, and it is difficult to see the original history if the innovation is too large, which confused the memory of the classic content” (Student B).

5.6 Supplementary Analysis

The research team also conducted an analysis of variance on the results shown by the respondents of different genders and grades. The data shows that the male students in the sample box of this survey are more active than the female students in learning motivation, learning ability, learning effect, learning experience and other aspects ($p < 0.05$). In general, only the difference between “Learning Interest” ($p = 0.044$) and “Memory Enhancement” ($p = 0.021$) was slightly weaker than other items ($p > 0.01$), but from a statistical perspective, this result did not affect the overall performance of both sexes on this issue. This may be due to the differences in personality between male and female students. For example, the society has always believed that men are bolder, more confident and more fearless in self-awareness, while women are relatively gentle and stable. In addition, it cannot be ruled out that the overall number and proportion of male and female students in this survey are very different, which may lead to errors in the data results. Interestingly, no matter what grade of college students, there is no significant difference in the choices of learning motivation, learning ability, learning effect and

learning experience ($p > 0.05$). Although some teachers say that senior students are not as enthusiastic and active as junior students in learning, the results of this survey also mean that undergraduate students have a high overall acceptance of the application of innovative teaching methods in class, and their learning enthusiasm do not decline completely with the growth of grades. Actively changing teaching ideas and daring to innovate teaching methods are easily welcomed by students of different grades.

6 Discussion and Reflection

6.1 Reasonable Task Design

In view of the negative coping mechanism based on self-worth protection that students may have in the learning process, teachers should adhere to the difficult-easy collocation in the setting of learning tasks, and control the level of learning motivation in a reasonable range. In the actual teaching of the history of ancient Chinese literature, teachers' explanations and students' self-study articles are suggested to adopt the problem driven method of difficult to match gradually. For example, the teacher focuses on explaining the changes in the literary history from the Pre Qin Dynasty to the Han Dynasty, so that students can clearly understand the evolution trend of poetry style from pure to complex, the development path of prose narrative from simple to sophisticated, and the historical outlook of literary thought from single to multiple. And introduce key chapters such as "The Book of Mountains and Seas", "The Book of Songs", "Zuo Zhuan", "Historical Records", "Han Shu", etc. Students' self-study mainly focuses on the teaching content, and encourage students to complete the in-depth understanding and grasp of the historical context from such chapters as Guoyu, Warring States Policy, Zhuzi Prose, and Chuci. The ladder type task design is appropriate in difficulty and ease, which is conducive to the continuous accumulation of confidence. Therefore, the students' scoring of learning motivation is still possible to improve.

6.2 Focus Strategy Design

"In drama teaching activities, the most common mistake is that we try and design too many positions in a short time and space." This is a reflection written by a teacher in his diary. The same problem also appears in college classes. After many freshmen are used to the teacher led courses, they cannot quickly adapt to the heuristic teaching in the university. They are prone to deviate from the center when interpreting the text, and are full of randomness in the connection between the theme and the details. When preparing lessons, teachers often connect the whole lesson with question awareness, so as to achieve the integration of various teaching contents. Although the DIE returns the lesson to the students, the role of the teacher as the inspiration and guide should not be underestimated. The results of this survey also remind us that if the DIE does not have a clear focus, it is easy for students to fall into aimless confusion.

6.3 Open Space Design

In most colleges and universities, the course of ancient Chinese literary history is still arranged in the traditional classroom. The teachers are “on top” and the distance between teachers and students is far. The arrangement of tables and chairs “sitting in rows” not only fails to make the interaction between teachers and students, students and students, but also brings the high concern of “performing on the stage” to the students being shown, and increases the discomfort of some introverted people. In contrast, movable desks and chairs are more suitable for drama teaching method. Teachers can arrange seats according to needs and use physical activities to transfer tacit knowledge [14]. In addition, schools should consider the needs of courses, open students’ sensory perception with the help of multimedia elements, and complete the capture and enlightenment of diversified intelligence.

7 Conclusion

Drama teaching method emphasizes enriching life experience and sublimating morality and feelings through education. This coincides with the basic value of talent training in application-oriented universities in the new era. The course of ancient Chinese literary history plays an indispensable role in the overall education design. Through this action research, teachers and students found that drama not only exists in the field of art, but also is the form of class education and the carrier of knowledge dissemination. In the future, it is necessary to continue to revise the existing curriculum results through action research, so that the DIE can better serve the course of Chinese ancient literary history in application-oriented universities.

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