



Application of Dramatic Performance Theory in Chinese Language Teaching

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Abstract. Under the background of the new curriculum reform, moral education and character cultivation serve as the fundamental task of Chinese language teaching, which focuses on enhancing students' core competencies. However, affected by the examination-oriented orientation, current Chinese language education is generally plagued by such problems as insufficient emotional experience in teaching, superficial interpretation of textbooks, and inadequate cultivation of students' critical thinking ability, making it difficult to truly achieve the all-round development of students' core competencies. To address this issue, this paper draws on the dramatic performance theories of Stanislavski and Brecht, and proposes two teaching forms of "experiential teaching" and "critical distance teaching" to be integrated into Chinese language classroom teaching. A dynamically adaptive model of Chinese language teaching is constructed based on the differences among school stages, and its application strategies are explored, aiming to break away from the current teaching predicament and provide a new perspective for improving the educational quality of Chinese language teaching.

Keywords: Chinese language teaching; educational drama; experiential performance; alienation performance; application strategies

1 Introduction

With the further advancement of curriculum reform in basic education, the new curriculum standards explicitly state that Chinese language teaching should commit itself to the all-round development of students' core competencies. It emphasizes fostering students' aesthetic perception in the process of reading and appreciation, and developing their thinking abilities through expression and communication. Yet under the sway of exam-oriented education, current Chinese language classrooms tend to prioritize score improvement and test-taking skills in a one-sided way. Students' reading of texts often remains at the level of superficial information extraction and formulaic answer writing. Knowledge is delivered in class, but the genuine cultivation of students' core competencies fails to be achieved. How can we guide students to truly engage with texts in their reading and gain a learning experience that is both heartfelt and in-depth, while ensuring the quality of academic learning? Based on this practical dilemma, this paper draws on classic theories of dramatic performance to separately interpret immersive

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C. F. Peng et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2026 5th International Conference on Humanities, Wisdom Education and Service Management (HWESM 2026)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 1024,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-593-5_33

comprehension and critical analysis in Chinese language teaching, thus offering a new perspective for the exploration of Chinese language teaching practice.

2 Connotation of Performance-Oriented Teaching

Performance is an art that shapes images and conveys emotions; it is not merely a skill for humans to depict life through voice, physical movement and facial expressions, but also one of the fundamental ways in which humans live and exist. Performance unfolds through interpersonal role interactions: by embodying and shaping specific roles, performers and audiences achieve self-projection and self-expression, exchange their perspectives and understandings, and in turn gain new cognitions and experiences. From the perspective of educational anthropology, a teacher's podium is a stage in its own right. By taking on the role of an instructor, teachers interpret and deliver courses to students seated below the podium, enabling learners to acquire and master practical experience in the process of attending classes, form new understandings of the course content, and transform themselves from passive audiences into active creators. This interactive process embodies the norms and transformations of social roles, the integration of diverse experiences and the generation of new knowledge, making it a uniquely performative act. As a comprehensive and practical course that unites humanistic values with instrumental functions, the Chinese language curriculum requires teachers to guide students to immerse themselves in textual contexts, conduct in-depth text interpretation, and enhance their core Chinese language competencies in particular. In the process of Chinese language teaching, both teachers and students engage with and reflect on different textual roles; through activities such as recitation, situational enactment and structural analysis of texts, they can stimulate students' imagination, creativity and perceptual ability, foster their powers of judgment, critical thinking and insight, and thus effectively elevate students' core competencies in Chinese language learning^[1].

3 Analysis of Chinese Language Teaching

3.1 Differences Among School Stages

As a course with an inherent performative nature, the Chinese language curriculum lends itself to classroom teaching that can be viewed as a form of on-class performance. Just as screenwriters and actors need to adjust their scripts and enactments in light of the audience's interests and aesthetic appreciation levels, Chinese language teachers must tailor their teaching methods to match students' cognitive abilities and physical and mental development stages. In consideration of key factors such as disparities in physical and mental development, cognitive aptitude and learning capabilities among students of different age groups, the **Compulsory Education Chinese Language Curriculum Standards 2022 Edition** and the **General High School Chinese Language Curriculum Standards 2017 Edition, Revised 2020** issued by the Ministry of Education have established distinct stage and curriculum level divisions for Chinese language

teaching in compulsory education and senior high school respectively. Specifically, the compulsory education stage is divided into four learning phases, with explicit requirements set for students in four core areas: character recognition and writing, reading and appreciation, expression and communication, and sorting and inquiry. By contrast, the senior high school stage abandons such phase-based division; instead, it features a holistic design and coordinated arrangement of three curriculum types—compulsory, selective compulsory and elective courses—thereby embodying the hierarchical progression and differentiated design of Chinese language teaching.

Table 1. Core Competency Focus by Chinese Teaching Stage

School Stages	Reading and Appreciation	Expression and Communication
Stage 1 (Grades 1-2)	Reading aloud for perception and overall experience	Situational interpretation and narration, initial externalization of experience
Stage 2 (Grades 3-4)	Silent reading for comprehension and emotional experience	Opinion-based expression and conscious language organization
Stage 3 (Grades 5-6)	Intensive reading for appreciation and comprehension of expression	Personalized commentary and opinion formation based on experience
Stage 4 (Grades 7-9)	Immersive experience and emotional resonance	Logical argumentative expression with clear and evidence-based opinions
Senior High School Compulsory Stage	Text interpretation and aesthetic perception	Critical commentary and multi-angle analysis of problems
Senior High School Selective Compulsory Stage	In-depth interpretation and critical appreciation	Research-based expression and independent construction of opinions
Senior High School Elective Stage	Independent appreciation and cultural reflection	Situational interpretation and narration, initial externalization of experience

The concrete differences between stages **Table 1** are directly reflected in the performative features of Chinese teaching and shape the teacher's role as an interpreter. Teachers should set different teaching objectives and choose suitable content and methods according to the varied focus of core competencies at each stage.

In the early years of compulsory education, teachers should adopt experiential teaching to help students gain initial and immersive understanding of the story situations and characters in texts, so as to evoke emotional experience. In the upper grades of compulsory education and senior high school, as students develop critical and creative thinking, teachers should maintain a reflective and inquiry-based classroom atmosphere. They need to design more exploratory, open-ended and thought-provoking questions to guide students to think and judge independently^[2].

3.2 Integration of Dramatic Theories and Chinese Language Teaching

This study draws on the major ideas of classical theatrical performance theories — Stanislavski's "experiential approach" and Brecht's "estrangement effect" — and classifies the performative practices in Chinese classrooms into two core types: experiential

teaching and critical distance teaching. Together, these two forms create a flexible continuum of pedagogical performance.

As Chinese language instruction progresses from lower to higher grades, classroom performance tends to shift dynamically from experiential to estrangement-oriented. In the lower grades of compulsory education (Grades 1–4), students connect with texts mainly through emotional immersion and build up intuitive experiences. In the upper grades (Grades 5–9), they move beyond passive feeling to active reflection, achieving deeper textual interpretation. At the senior high school level, students form independent viewpoints through rational critical thinking. Meanwhile, lower-grade classes can still use mild “estrangement” activities to inspire initial thinking, while higher-grade teaching may employ “experiential” performance to help students grasp characters. The two approaches interweave flexibly, adapting naturally to the educational needs of different stages^[3].

Experiential teaching is grounded in Stanislavski’s theory of experiential performance, a principle that follows the inner emotional laws of human beings. In this theory, an actor is not only an interpreter of situations and an imitator of roles, but also a person who lives authentically on stage. Starting from a given context, the actor stimulates real personal experience and emotion through immersive engagement and imagination, condenses the most essential feelings, and merges into the character while performing. When teaching on the podium, which carries symbolic meaning as a stage, Chinese language teachers reproduce and convey the ideas, emotions and values they have experienced to students as fully as possible. They aim to arouse empathy and guide students to “live in the moment”. Students integrate the characters in the story with real-life people and achieve what Stanislavski called the “dual self”. Through situational enactment and role immersion, students are no longer passive recipients of texts. Instead, they internalize the life experience conveyed in the texts into their own spiritual wealth by understanding characters and sharing emotional resonance^[4].

In contrast to the deep immersion in experiential teaching, Brecht’s theatrical theory of alienation stresses the importance of distance. In his theory of defamiliarization, the actor is not merely a vessel for expression and experience, but also a self-reflective critic. Actors must keep a clear distance from the characters they portray and avoid becoming fully merged with them. In Chinese language teaching, the alienation approach often means taking a conscious, rational view of texts and exploring their implications in depth. Alienation teaching encourages students to “live elsewhere” rather than remain fully absorbed. Students step back from emotional involvement, learn to examine texts and society with a critical eye, and develop independent thinking through multiple interpretations. While keeping their distance, students also deliberately hold back from identifying with characters or sharing their feelings. They take an outsider’s stance and even offer critical views on the roles they act out, so as to arrive at thinking that is rational and objective^[5].

The flexible integration of experiential teaching and alienation teaching in Chinese language instruction can engage every student, helping them immerse themselves in class, savor the joy of learning, and truly place students at the center of the classroom. In this way, everyone gains something through personal experience and critical reflection—transforming the once dull Chinese classroom into a vibrant, colorful space.

Teaching design should also closely align with the performative nature of the Chinese curriculum. This allows students to acquire language knowledge and skills subtly, deepen their perception and understanding of texts, and develop a critical awareness of social issues.

4 Application Strategies of Dramatic Performance Theory in Chinese Language Teaching

4.1 Immersive Experience to Arouse Students' Emotional Resonance

Experiential Chinese language teaching is often applied to lyrical prose and narrative texts that call for students' deep emotional engagement. Such texts are typically marked by sincere feelings and vivid scenarios. Through experiential teaching, students can gain a more profound understanding of the ideological emotions embedded in the texts, resonate with the authors' inner worlds, and perceive the artistic conception of the writings^[6].

Take *The Father's Back* — a classic text from the 8th Grade Volume 1 of the national unified textbook series — as an example. The teaching design of this timeless work embodies the core ideas of Stanislavski's experiential theory, where emotion stands at the very center. In the emotion-centered experiential teaching design for *The Father's Back*, teachers take "affection" as the guiding thread and sequentially develop teaching links such as scenario setting, perceiving family love, and reflecting on family bonds. Teachers pose the question: "What role does the father's back play in the text?" This prompts students to step into the story's context, engage in immersive reading, and form an initial sense of the narrative atmosphere. By combining skimming, scanning, and close reading techniques, students grasp key imagery, deepen their understanding of the text, and reconstruct the internal emotional journey of the narrator "I" through repeated attempts to visualize and locate the "back view" in the writing. After experiencing the essential emotional arc of the character, students externalize their perceived feelings through the performative act of recitation. Drawing on the background information provided by teachers, they empathize with the author's mood upon reading his father's letter and reflect on their own relationships with their parents. As emotions are awakened layer by layer, students' emotional awareness is gradually aroused, and their personal emotional experiences deepen — effectively fostering their emotional perception, empathy, and text comprehension abilities. Gradually transitioning from the role in the textbook back to themselves, students connect textual experiences with real-life encounters, ultimately completing the transformation from textual empathy to life insight. This enriches their aesthetic experiences and achieves the purification and sublimation of emotions^[7].

4.2 Cultivating a Critical Perspective to Promote the Development of Higher-Order Thinking

Critical distance teaching is generally adopted in higher stages of Chinese language

teaching, and is often applied to narrative texts and reflective lessons that call for rational examination, criticism and reflection. Taking the teaching design of *The New Year's Sacrifice* as an example, students repeatedly compare key information from the text in tables, using tables as tools of estrangement. This approach places events and descriptions from different timelines side by side, offering students a panoramic view of the text. They shift from being immersed experiencers of the story to calm observers, keeping their distance from the characters and reflecting on their own thinking. Teachers guide students to sort out the story of the narrator "I" and discuss the function of the first-person perspective. Through analysis, students realize that the story is constructed and narrated rather than simply given. They step out of emotional involvement, examine the narrator, and gradually recognize the deliberate exposure of the fictional nature of narration. Finally, students discuss the theme of the text and focus on the causes of the tragedy. Teachers raise questions such as: "Why did Xianglin's Sao's resistance not help her escape her tragedy, but only deepen her suffering and speed up her death? Should she have resisted? Who else contributed to her downfall?" Such questions lead students to break away from emotional immersion in Xianglin's Sao's tragic fate and maintain a critical distance from the text. This method helps students break free from fixed thinking patterns, understand the openness and multiplicity of textual interpretation through diverse readings and conflicting viewpoints, and gradually strengthen their critical thinking and judgment. It develops their ability in dialectical analysis, critical reflection, logical reasoning and creative interpretation, ultimately supporting the development of higher-order thinking.

4.3 Strengthening Goal Guidance to Ensure the Efficient Achievement of Teaching Tasks

Teachers act not only as role performers but also as designers of instructional objectives and guides for the teaching process. In implementing experiential teaching and critical distance teaching in Chinese language classrooms, teachers' goal-oriented guidance and assessment are indispensable. Whichever performative approach is adopted, teachers need to conduct overall planning and maintain directional control throughout the classroom. When designing instruction, teachers should consider students' grade-level characteristics and text styles, and integrate multiple dimensions including emotional expression, narrative structure, and thematic ideas of the text to set clear and operable learning objectives, so that students maintain a clear direction during learning.

In the actual implementation of teaching tasks, teachers should shape focused Chinese language classrooms according to preset objectives. For instance, in experiential teaching, teachers can use methods such as expressive reading and atmosphere creation to emphasize the authenticity and effectiveness of students' emotional expression. In critical distance teaching, teachers may apply tools including tables and mind maps to enhance students' panoramic awareness and strengthen the rigor and criticality of their thinking. It is through such a teaching mechanism that goal planning and task implementation are highly consistent, thereby fulfilling the core responsibility of teachers as classroom "performers." This approach enables students to act with clear direction in

experiential learning and retain human warmth in critical thinking, ultimately achieving the educational goals of Chinese language teaching.

5 Conclusion

In summary, based on the performative characteristics of Chinese language teaching, this study introduces Stanislavski's experiential theory and Brecht's theory of critical distance into classroom practice and constructs a dynamically adaptive model for Chinese instruction. This model enables students to enhance their aesthetic literacy through immersive engagement and develop higher-order thinking via rational critique, thus fulfilling the educational goals of the Chinese language curriculum. By further exploring the deep integration of performance theory and subject teaching, and strengthening applied research on Chinese language teaching from the perspective of theatrical performance theory, we can support the all-round development of students' core competencies. These include language use and expression, thinking development, aesthetic appreciation and creation, as well as cultural inheritance and understanding. In this way, the Chinese language classroom can truly become a "stage" for students' intellectual growth and spiritual enrichment.

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