The Educational Drama in China

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Abstract. Recently, Educational Drama has been a hot topic in English language teaching in China. Educational Drama originated in Europe and America, which has a history of nearly one hundred years in western countries. While compared with western countries, domestic Educational Drama only has 20 years. Hong Kong and Taiwan is earlier than the mainland to introduce Educational Drama. Educational Drama research has gone through the pre-research stage, the embryonic development stage, the exploratory growth stage and the vigorous development stage in China. This paper summarizes the research results of Educational Drama in China based on the development process, research content and research methods, in order to provide some guidance for the further development of dramatic teaching method in China.

1. Introduction

Educational Drama refers to the teaching method with drama elements or techniques adopted in education.\textsuperscript{[1]} In western countries, Educational Drama is regarded as a very effective teaching method to cultivate students' comprehensive quality and all-round development. In recent decades, domestic Educational Drama research literature has been increasing, which has attracted wide attention of educational scholars. At the 2018 National Education Conference, president Xi emphasized the needs to strengthen school's aesthetic education and build an education system that comprehensively cultivates morality, intelligence, physique, art and laboring capabilities. The 2018 National Education Conference provides new opportunities for the development of Educational Drama in China.

The Educational Drama also called Drama in Education, which originated in Europe and the United States. It has a history at abroad and many people in favor of this dramatic teaching method. Educational Drama has mainly experienced four development stages at abroad: pre-research stage, theoretical initial stage, theoretical mature stage and booming development stage. At the 18 century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau who was acknowledged as the earliest educator putting the two words “drama” and “education” together in his ideas “learning through practicing drama”. In the USA, John Dewey’s “Additional Learning Theory” and “Learning by Doing” theories have influenced the development of Creative Drama in the USA. Finlay-Harriet, who was regarded as the earliest drama researcher in Britain. She advocated that taught English theme activities in a dramatic way, which has gotten a big influence in a British village primary school. At this time, Winifred Wald, who was the pioneer of American education. She focused on the cultivation of children's creativity. In 1930, her book “Creative Drama Technology”, proposed the concept of "creative drama"\textsuperscript{[2]}, this dramatic teaching method became popular in the United States. In 1992, the British Education Act formally
incorporated drama into English classes. It was integrated into core curriculum of national education system announced by the Goal of 2000: the US Congress passed Educate America Act in 1994. Hitherto, Creative Drama curriculum was constructed systematically throughout primary schools, middle schools to graduate universities (2014) in America. Under the impact of Britain and the USA, western countries began their localization experiments of Educational Drama, such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Educational Drama has not only been proven to play an important role in stimulating students' creativity, promoting personality development and enhancing aesthetic ability, but also improve the teaching effects of language and literature subjects.

2. The Domestic Development of Educational Drama

"Educational Drama" has not been introduced into my country for a long time. The author typed the key word “Educational Drama” in the CNKI search engine and found that there were 1154 articles in the year 2020. From the following chart (figure 1), it can be seen that since 2010, it has shown an increasing trend. In order to thoroughly implement the 2018 National Education Conference’s spirit and train learners with all-round development of morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics and labor, it can be predicted that Education Drama will become a hot research topic of school education in China in the future. This paper will give a brief introduction of Educational Drama in China based on four stages: pre-research stage, the embryonic development stage, the exploratory growth stage and the vigorous development stage.

![Figure 1. The paper number of Educational Drama.](image)

2.1. Pre-research Stage

Sun Huizhu, the earliest scholar started educational drama research in the mainland in China. His “TIE on Britain” published in 1984 was considered as the first domestic article to introduce Educational Drama. Huawen published “The British Drama Teaching Method” in 1990 and put forward the concept of DIE.[3] Unfortunately, these two articles did not attract much attention at this time.

2.2. The Embryonic Development Stage

In 1995, Educational Drama has been brought into the mainland by a famous dramatist (Professor Li). She published "British Educational Drama and Theater Education" in 1997[4], which gave a more comprehensive introduction to DIE/TIE in the UK. This article officially opened the door of Educational Drama. In 1997, Canadian dramatist published the Educational Role of Developmental
Drama[5], which systematically introduced the Canadian Educational Drama to China. “Performing Arts” has been a general art course, which enacted in Taiwan art syllabus since 2002.

2.3. The Exploratory Growth Stage

During this period, scholars began to focus on Educational Drama practice and teacher training of primary and secondary schools. Zhang Shengquan published the Exploration and Practice of Educational Drama was the first monograph systematically discussing the theory and practice of Educational Drama in the mainland. This book only concentrated on the introduction of Educational Drama and didn’t form a complete theoretical system. In 2002, Chinese national education syllabus added “drama” as an optional course in the senior high school curriculum. What’s more, Shanghai Theatre Academy was the earliest to pay attention to Educational Drama teachers training. It set up drama majors and cooperated with primary and secondary schools to build up teacher training of Educational Drama. In our country, Educational Drama was first introduced into Hong Kong. Hong Kong Education Bureau encouraged teachers to apply Educational Drama into schools education. In 2002, the sixth International Drama Conference was held in Hong Kong, promoting the development of Educational Drama in Hong Kong. Under the influence of a number of drama educationalists, such as Zhang and Lin, a systematic curriculum has exploited on the base of rich practical experience over years. Educational drama researches have been inclining to “interdisciplinary drama teaching” in Taiwan recently.

2.4. The Vigorous Development Stage

The State Council (2015) issued opinions on Fully Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools issued pointing out school Aesthetic curriculum should be constructed by integrating art curriculum into other disciplines, promoting learners’ all round development. Under impetus of this policy, a lot of scholars and teachers began to pay attention to the research of Educational Drama. At this moment, the author typed the key word “Educational Drama” on CNKI search engine and found that relevant papers have been increased rapidly, broadening people’s horizon. In 2015, the first International Drama Education Conference was held in Beijing. In 2016, the "Hope China" Youth English Education Drama Academy was established. A series of academic conferences promoted the further development of Educational Drama in China.

3. The Research on Educational Drama Content

3.1. The Definition of Educational Drama

Educational Drama was introduced to the mainland didn’t have a long history. Until now, it didn’t form a unified definition, domestic scholars mainly hold two views on the definition of Educational Drama. One was "Educational Drama =DIE", and chose other words as the upper concept of "DIE, TIE and Creative Drama". The early representatives who agreed with this view is Li Yingning, she advocated “educative drama” that referred to drama activities with "DIE, TIE and Creative Drama". Domestic scholars who approved of this viewpoint include Wu Yin, Lu Jiaying [6] and so on. Huang Aihua proposed "Drama Education" as the upper concept of "Drama in Education (DIE)", Zhang Jinmei held similar views with her. Another view supported using the term "Educational Drama" refer to a series of related dramatic activities of "DIE, TIE, Creative Drama", and chose another word to name DIE. Liu Yanhui thought using "education drama" refer to educational theatre, which included DIE and TIE, and then translating "DIE" into "teaching drama". [7] Xu Jun put forward that "DIE" should be translated into "dramatic teaching method" which is easy to
understand, he also pointed out that Educational Drama should be the intersection of drama and education, and redefined the concept of Educational Drama.

3.2. The Function of Educational Drama

Drama teaching model is different from traditional teaching methods; Educational Drama has been proved to play a positive role in promoting students' all-round development. It can not only stimulate students' imagination and cultivate their creativity, but also improve their aesthetic ability. Wang Qiang believes that drama teaching can promote the development of students' English learning ability. Yang Liu from these three aspects: cognitive effect, attitude effect and behavior effect to evaluate the significance of Educational Drama.[8] Yang Xiaobin thinks that educational drama activate in students' artistic appreciation, aesthetic sentiment, psychological guidance and emotional catharsis. It plays a significant role in shaping students' independent personality and social role. [9]Lu Jiaying discussed the psychological mechanism of Educational Drama and emphasized the cultivation of students' psychological potential in a positive learning environment.[6]

4. The Research Method on Educational Drama

4.1. Theoretical Generalization of ED

The theoretical generalization of Educational Drama can be roughly divided into two kinds, one is to introduce one country or some areas, for example: UK, America, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Li Yingning published "British Drama Education and Theatre Education" and Zhang Xiaohua’s Interpretation of Perform Art Drama Teaching in Taiwan’s Primary and Secondary Schools, these two books introduce British’s Educational Drama and Taiwan’s Creative Drama. The other is the general introduction of Educational Drama, which is not limited to a specific country or region, the representatives are Zhang Jinmei [10], Xu Jun [1] and so on.

4.2. The Practical Exploration of ED

In 2011, drama was added into the Art Curriculum Standards of Compulsory Education in China. A large number of school teachers began to focus on the application of drama in compulsory education, especially in some economically developed provinces or foreign language schools. In 2002, Shanghai Hualin Primary School launched Educational Drama and tried to explore the "3+3" teaching mode. In 2007, Ma liwen and Zhao xiaogang started an Educational Drama course at the Second High School of Beijing Normal University. The actual application of Educational Drama in China can be based on two aspects: the first is to introduce the current situation of educational drama in a certain area of the mainland. For example, Huang Ailing and Xu Dajun investigated the present situation of drama education in primary and secondary schools of Zhejiang Province [11], and Wang yifei studied the current situation of drama education about19 districts and counties in Shanghai [12]. The second is the combination of Educational Drama with specific teaching subjects, involving pre-school education, primary and secondary education (Chinese, English), higher education, special education and mental health education.

5. The Obstacles of Educational Drama in China

5.1. The Misunderstanding of Educational Drama

Although the development of Educational Drama has a history of nearly 100 years in foreign
countries, it has only been introduced into the mainland as a new thing for more than 20 years. Many educators are still very unfamiliar with the dramatic teaching method in China and they didn’t realize the importance of promoting students' cognition and personality development. Due to the lack of professional training and unified teaching materials, some teachers simply add drama elements into English language teaching during the process of practice and exploration.

5.2. The Lacking of Professional Teachers and Fund

The promotion of Educational Drama faced with a serious shortage of teachers and funds. The number of art teachers is uneven in China. Most of teachers are not professional drama majors. Educational Drama activities are mainly carried out with the form of extracurricular activities and student associations in primary and secondary schools in China, and it didn’t form a professional discipline system. In addition, the implementation of educational drama activities require to purchase specialized teaching equipment, which increased the burden of funds.

6. Conclusion

The National Medium and Long-term Plan for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) is aims at teaching every student well. Educational Drama, as a reflexive new educational mode to cultivate students' autonomy and innovation, playing a part in future education. While the obstacles shouldn’t be ignored, in order to resolve the shortage of teachers, we should strengthen the cooperation between drama colleges and normal universities, enriching their professional knowledge of drama. Some educational drama training and workshops can also be organized regularly, in-service teachers can have an opportunity to observe and learn.

Educational Drama is a new thing in China, so it is inevitable that there will be some shortcomings. Domestic scholars should actively realize the localization of Educational Drama, making use of dramatic elements and combining local characteristics to tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese culture. In addition, scholars who come from pedagogy, psychology, sociology and other fields begin to pay attention to the research on educational drama; they dig out the significance and value of educational drama to promote its further development.

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References


