

Advancing Creative Drama Through Knowledge Building in Grade 5

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Abstract: This study applied Knowledge Building to creative drama in the teaching of Grade five in a primary school in China with 37 pupils. This research tracked the process of reading Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, over one semester. We collected artifacts of the Knowledge Building activities, including mind maps, scripts, rehearsals, formal performance and reflection. The results showed that: (1) the creative drama was constantly generating and evolving; (2) Knowledge Building enhanced students' reading and understanding.

Keywords: Knowledge Building, Creative Drama, Reading Comprehension.

Introduction

Creative drama is a process-centered and non-performance form of teaching based on a certain text. It is a dynamic process for participants to construct text information meaning, generate personal ideas, express experience feelings and exchange thoughts and feelings through role-playing and imagination experience (Jed H. Davis and Tom Behm, 1978). Not used to entertain people, creative drama is used as an instructional means to improve children's learning ability and critical thinking ability (Zhang, X.H., 2004). Previous studies have proved that creative drama can promote students' deep processing of text (Shepard, 1992), can deepen students' memory and understanding of text-processing skills (Anderson, 1990), and stimulate children's initiatives (Choi, Kyoung, 2011). Luo, W. N. et al (2019) believe that there is a transformation between imitation and innovation, between individuals and groups, and between performers and viewers.

In the previous research, creative drama was mainly applied in kindergarten education, mainly "play" games or activities, most of which are topics or stories arranged by teachers, with certain flow procedures. As one of the third metaphors of knowledge creation, Knowledge Building is a principle-based pedagogy (Scardamalia, 2002; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2010) that aims to promote students' idea improvement through sustained discourse. In the process, community knowledge is co-constructed (Hong & Sullivan, 2009; Zhang et al., 2011) or artifacts are formed. Knowledge Building has proved to support the development of students' higher-level reading comprehension (Lin P.Y. & Hong H.Y., 2019) and to be positively related with reading skills (Zhang, & Sun, 2011).

The research undertaken herein tracked the process of reading Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone in a fifth grade class. It mainly analyzed the Knowledge Building process of script writing, rehearsals, formal performances and reflection. This study focused on the research questions: (1) How does the creative drama emerge in the process of Knowledge Building? (2) Will the Creative Drama improve students' reading comprehension?

Methods

Participants

The participants in the study were 37 pupils of a Grade 5 class, from Xinjiang Province of China. They have been taught by Knowledge Building instruction for 2 years and had read the novel of “Journey to the West” using the creative drama teaching method before. They were active and interested in projects and activities.

The teacher is an expert teacher, with 10-year teaching experience and has carried out reading reform of Knowledge Building for 4 years.

Pedagogical Design

Knowledge Building was adapted in the creative drama of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, lasting for one semester which reflected the principles of the real ideas, epistemic agency and rise-above. The creative drama process was divided into four phases according to Knowledge Building discourse (Lossman, 2010): autonomous reading and theme generation, group formation and script writing, role generation and drama performance, reading promotion and theoretical building, which reflects the generation and evolution of creative drama.

(1) Autonomous reading and theme generation: One of the principles of Knowledge Building is the real ideas and the real situations. Firstly, students read "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" independently during the summer holiday. Then in Grade 5 they put forward individual questions which they were interested in through the knowledge building activities. Diverse ideas were discussed with classmates in the reading exchange class. Different themes were formed, such as the theme of people, magic biology, magic objects, magic spells, etc. The students communicated with the classmates twice a week through Knowledge Building Circle, lasting for one month.

(2) Script writing and group formation: One principle of Knowledge Building was that students were epistemic agency. In the creative drama, the group was gradually formed spontaneously with the continuous inquiry of themes. After one month reading, students began to write and modify scripts.

(3) Role generation and drama performance: The roles of the director and actors were generated by the students themselves. Screenplay rehearsals and performances are the most interesting, the most engaged, the most dynamic for the students. There were 3 rehearsals in the open playground.

(4) Reading promotion and theoretical building: Students transcended the trivial and simple discussion so that the Knowledge Building could reach a higher level. So students wrote reflection after the creative drama performance. Every student wrote their ideas about drama, performance, the Knowledge Building process and so on.

Data sources

Data were collected from student artifacts, including posters, scripts and reflective diaries. Students modified every artifact several times and submitted the final artifacts (see Table 1).

Table 1: Students artifacts.

| Items | Number | Amount |
|-------------|--------|-------------|
| Mind mapper | 29 | |
| Script | 7 | 6800 words |
| Performance | 7 | 32 min |
| Summary | 37 | 14800 words |
| Reflection | 37 | 14300 words |

Results

The creative drama was constantly generating and evolving

The greatest characteristic of creative drama under the Knowledge Building environment was generative. The creative drama was spontaneously generated, including the themes, the roles and the performance. Each phase produced different artifacts, which fully reflect the generation of creative drama. Some of the artifacts were shown below.



Figure 1. Students' Mind Map.

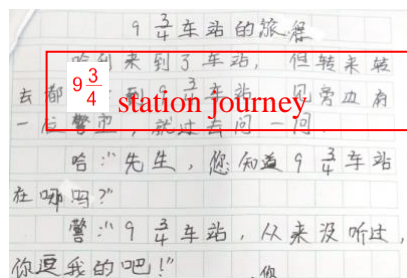


Figure 2. Students' Script.



Figure 3. Performance of the Creative Drama.

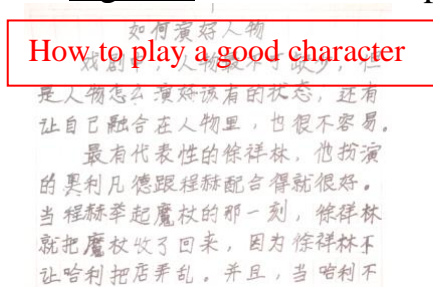


Figure 4. Students' Reflection.

Themes generating: Students became interested in different people and goods, such as Harry Potter, the Sorcerer's Stone and so on, when they read the books. Then they studied them such as the life of Voldemort, why it become a big devil and drew some mind maps. The same or similar interest merged into a theme and the themes formed.

Scripts evolving: There might be conflicts between ideas and they learned to negotiate with others, established links between ideas, and developed their ideas continually. At first, everyone wrote a drama, including 37 dramas with 11 themes. Then 7 dramas were voted to be rehearsed. Everyone could join the themes and formed research groups to modify the scripts together. The final 7 dramas were: wands, nine and three-quarters stations, yard caps, magic medicine classes, midnight duels, demon nets and double-faced men.

Roles generating: The director could be the screenwriter or be voted by the members. The actors could be selected more flexibly, 2 groups were optional roles, 4 groups were assigned by the director according the members' characteristics, 1 group is recommended by members.

Performance evolving: There were 3 rehearsals, each 45 minutes, in the open playground. Three students volunteered as presenters. The students enjoyed the joy of the play.

Theory building: As one of the metaphors of knowledge creation, Knowledge Building emphasized the sublimation and rise-above of ideas. Idea improvement and theory building were the characteristic of Knowledge Building which was the difference with other inquiry activities. For example, Why to perform the drama? How to perform a script? How to be a good actor? How to prepare props? How to relax before you get on stage? What are the characteristics of drama? and so on.

Knowledge Building enhanced students' reading and understanding

Students transformed from reading to creating through Knowledge Building. They read the novel, presented their own understanding in various artifacts and tried to write, rewrite and even create plots. Under the guidance of the teacher, students wrote summaries and reflections, which were much better than propositional composition, with both true feelings and sparks. Through sublimation, the students put forward more complex ideas. In the end the reading and understanding ability improved rapidly which was reflected in the final scores of the exam. The average score of the three classes was 87.7 in Chinese. The experimental class(class 2) was 88.9 which was the highest score among the 3 classes compared with the previous equal average (see Table 2).

Table 2: Students scores.

| Class | Num | Min | Max | Mean±SD |
|---------|-----|------|------|-----------|
| Class 1 | 35 | 46.0 | 98.0 | 86.4±9.97 |
| Class 2 | 37 | 46.0 | 97.5 | 88.9±9.74 |
| Class 3 | 37 | 70.5 | 96.5 | 87.7±6.63 |

Discussion and future directions

In this study, we examined Knowledge Building activities and creative drama improvement of Grade 5 in a Chinese class. The creative drama was developing and evolving under the Knowledge Building theory with the use of discussion, scaffolds, Knowledge Building circles, Knowledge Building walls and so on. From the initial spontaneous interest to scripts, rehearsals and so on, it fully reflected the generation and evolution process of creative drama, which was the biggest difference from other activities with fixed procedures. Under the guidance of Knowledge Building, students summarized and reflected to continually rise above their ideas. In the process, students read books actively and expressed their understanding in various artifacts. Finally, they improved the reading comprehension distinctly.

As for the learning platform, this creative drama mainly used face-to-face communication without the application of Knowledge Forum because of habits. In subsequent classes, we will try to apply Knowledge Forum in primary school in order to visualize the students notes and discussion for deeper analysis.

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