

Case Study of School-based Curriculum Development on Drama in Taiwan

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Abstract: There is a new curriculum reform in Taiwan, the arrangement of Grade 1-9 curriculum, encouraging “bottom-up” curriculum development by primary and secondary schools. This article presents the procedures and the results of “School-Based Curriculum Development, SBCD” in a primary school, from the viewpoint of an action research consultant. The target primary school, located in Tainan County, Taiwan, develops drama as a school-based curriculum. While analyzing the SBCD with regards to drama, the author has found the problems, the value conflicts, and the curriculum development dilemma. In order to solve these problems, this article suggests some solutions for teachers.

The target school has endeavored to implement SBCD for one and a half years, from August 2002 to January 2004. The results are that SBCD focused on pupils’ creativity, which is obviously increased by using the drama curriculum. Through drama skills, integrated in the school curricula, pupils make progress in creativity as confirmed by their teachers’ teaching records and creativity assessments. The pupils love the drama courses.

Keywords: Primary Schools, Grade 1-9 Curriculum, School-Based Curriculum Development, Drama Curriculum, Creativity, Action Research

Background of Study

Curriculum Reform in Taiwan

A typical “top-down” model curriculum development has dominated the compulsory education curriculum in Taiwan for many years. In 1998, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, the central educational authority, enacted a New National Curriculum, Grade 1- 9 Guidelines for Primary and Junior High Schools (Ministry of Education, 1998) . It formed the curriculum standards of primary schools and junior high schools in 2001. Drama became part of the new integrated curriculum in the Field of Arts and Humanities, which became effective for first graders since September 2001. The Ministry of Education makes many curricular policies of the Grade 1-9 Curriculum Reform. Especially, a kind of new curriculum development model, that is “bottom-up” curriculum development, is proposed. “School-Based Curriculum Development, SBCD” that can be termed “grassroots reform” has been highly appreciated, because the

autonomy is given to schoolteachers (Hwang, & Chang, 2003; Marsh, et al., 1990; Sabar, 1991; Skilbeck, 1984; Tang, 2003). Teachers can decide 20% of the pupils' learning hours, and make their own curriculum designs, which do not exist before. Therefore, each schools can develop its own characteristics, as a result of the new curriculum reform and the decentralization of school decision-making in Taiwan.

Drama is for the first time integrated into the Field of Arts and Humanities in Taiwan. Thus this course is a new kind of course for primary teachers. Many teachers are not trained in drama during their pre-service teacher preparation. Most of them don't have the necessary skills to teach drama. That is a difficult situation for schools. In order to solve this problem, some schools develop drama curricula and improve teachers' professional ability by in-service teacher education.

In this article, the author used a case study method to choose one typical school, which we had participated in, as an example to discuss. The primary school that is located in Tainan County, Taiwan. The target chosen school applied to the Ministry of Education for a creative project that combines the notions of SBCD and the Dramatic Arts. The goals of the project on the drama courses are to develop pupils' creativity potential, to increase teachers' professional knowledge, and to harmonize relations between teachers and pupils.

As being an action research consultant from the university outside the primary school , the author identified and analysed the example of Dramatic Arts of SBCD in Taiwan, describing the target schoolteachers' action research processes and results of the drama curricula from August 2002 to January 2004. The details of the different grades' drama curricula will be mentioned and discussed in this article.

Drama Curriculum: One Alternative of SBCD

The primary schools in Taiwan develop various different topics of SBCD. One topic chosen by the target school is Drama, because of its flexibility and creativity opposite to the fixedness of other subjects. There are many goals in common between drama and education, which are easy to achieve at the same time.

Teachers are interested in using drama to make their teaching more creative because good drama creates vivid imagination (Winston, 2004). Drama involves participants more than other

activities: intellectually, emotionally, physically, verbally, and socially (McCaslin, 2006). It is a concrete example of multiple intelligences, otherwise known as MI. Recent studies represent a growing interest in the way young pupils develop their MI and have suggested that people have multiple intelligences (Sternberg, 2000). In Howard Gardner's book, *Frames of Mind* (Gardner, 1983, 6), he discusses seven kinds of intelligences, a concept that is relevant to education: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intra-personal. Later he adds one kind of intelligence, natural, to the other intelligences (Gardner, 1999). He defines intelligence as the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural setting.

The application of MI theory to schools is a process that does not permit quick fixes. The effort to take the differences among individuals, and to recast curriculum, instruction, and assessment in light of those differences, requires significant teamwork over several years (Hoerr, 2000).

In Taiwan, like other Asian countries, gives high priority to linguistic and mathematical abilities. If we reconsider intelligence in Gardner's terms, we could expand our view of language and the arts, thus opening the door to greater understanding and respect for the culture background and values of others (McCaslin, 2006). Hence Drama can facilitate creativity from MI theory.

Drama, which is sometimes used to mean a play developed creatively by a group, is a form of recreation (McCaslin, 2006). The dramatic forms of expression are included: dramatic movement, mime, choral speech, storytelling, dramatization, puppetry, choric drama, readers' theater, story theatre, playmaking, and group drama (Albert Dept. of Education, 1985). In detail, while "creative drama" adopted by many teachers refers to informal drama, Drama-in-education (DIE), which is a means of teaching other subject areas, is also used by teachers (McCaslin, 2006). The former refers to the drama, which is created by the participants, that includes playmaking, process drama, and improvisation. The latter means that the drama has great application as a learning tool in other areas of the curriculum, and offers sample activities which integrate drama into the basic subjects: language arts, social studies, math and science (North Dakota State Dept. of Public Instruction, 1990). Moreover, the drama curriculum can be defined as an "expressive orientation" within an arts curriculum (Lorenzo, 1996).

In this article, the target schoolteachers adapted the notion that drama was a play, a creative drama, and a Drama-in-education. Specifically, these dramatic techniques could be used to teach any subjects. These schoolteachers used drama as a means for personal and professional growth, focused on 2-6 grade class pupils achieving an understanding of self and others, Thus pupils could acquire some knowledge, skills or attitudes of other subjects rather than playmaking. They also could achieve some good attitudes, too, for example, courage, cooperation and kindness, etc. Furthermore, the target primary school established a teachers' teaching team to develop a school-based drama curriculum. A long-term project was executed for one and a half years. From August 2002 to July 2003, this school developed Drama curriculum as its SBCD for one year that was a successful example. However, from August 2003 to January 2004, the final period of this research was filled with instability, conflict, and illusion that will be discussed later.

According to the curriculum practicing of the target school, it could be divided into three periods. Different participants took part in the project. Many kinds of research techniques or methods were used in the present study.

Method

The participants—School administrators, Schoolteachers, Part-time teachers, Pupils, and University Professors

During the experimental years, the Director of Teaching Affairs of this target school, Mr. Wang, was the key person who led the SBCD project. In addition to the target schoolteachers, there were some children drama actors, coming from “the Little Tea-Pot Drama Group”, who served as part-time teachers to teach drama curricula. In the meantime, many other professors working in different universities participated in the SBCD project as technical consultants and gave advice to the school staff in order to adopt the project.

Financed by the central government, this target school had more possibility than others to develop its own curricula. For example, the school administrators used this fund to pay part-time teachers' salary and university professors' consultative fee. Pursuant to the principle of school-based management, the target schoolteachers could decide autonomously 20% of the total teaching hours. They also had SBCD teaching autonomy and could assess their pupils in a more autonomous way. In the study, the SBCD focused on the pupils' creativity by drama curricula, which was obviously improved during this year.

On an informal and voluntary base, the Director of Teaching Affairs, Mr. Wang asked for volunteers to participate the project. In the beginning, only two sixth-grade teachers volunteered to take part in; then the participation was gradually extended to second grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade teachers. Besides school administrators, altogether nine teachers were involved in this project. In spite of the differences of their background and motivation, in the first year, they all worked, read, and discussed together in a harmonious atmosphere. At the end of practicing the drama curricula, reports were written by all participants in order to share their experiences to others.

Data Collection and Analysis

There were many methods used in this project to collect data and to achieve the goals by the schoolteachers. The university professors provided the main supports of the research methodology. The author also taught these schoolteachers some methods as follows.

Using videotapes to record pupils' performance

To present pupils' creativity, schoolteachers sometimes used cameras to record the drama teaching processes and children's drama performances. They also kept some records when possible to analyse their pupils' creative development.

Holding action research meetings to plan action projects and to solve problems

The research assistants made records in each meeting for university professors and schoolteachers, in order to plan the next action and to activate the research. We played a role as an action research consultant, and formally came to the target school to meet with schoolteachers at least six times. We gave them the suggestions about how to collect data and how to write teachers' action research stories (NcNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2001; Sagor, 2005).

Applying a psychological assessment to test pupils' creativity

The quality resources and the quantity data were both emphasized in this project. In the concrete, a "Creativity Assessment Packet(CAP)", produced by F. E. Williams, was implemented before and after the drama curricula practises. At the completion of this research, the target schoolteachers could compare the data from different resources and write their reports to share their experiences.

Interviewing schoolteachers to interpret the consequences

We informally interviewed the schoolteachers about the final and following results of the

Drama SBCD in July 2004 and April 2005. That was a follow-up to the research after the end of the project in order to analyse the impact and effects of the Drama SBCD.

Implementation of the Drama Curricula

There were nine schoolteachers and their pupils involved in this project, including 4 second-grade, 2 fourth-grade, 1 fifth-grade and 2 sixth-grade schoolteachers and their classes. Meanwhile, the author took part in the project as a problem-solving consultant and helped the teachers to investigate their teaching in class.

The project, which lasted for one and a half years, was divided into three stages. The first stage was from August 2002 to January 2003. The second stage was from February 2003 to July 2003. The third stage was from August 2003 to January 2004. The Drama SBCD procedure of the target school is described in the next section.

The First Stage of Implementation

In the first stage of the curriculum project, the target school invited educators from different universities to instruct the schoolteachers. These specialists introduced foundational concepts and skills of creativity and research methods. The author suggested a concept framework for the project and some methods of performing the action research. The purpose of this stage was that schoolteachers could understand what the project was and how to execute the project during the first two months.

During the next four months, the project leader invited “the Little Tea Pot Drama Group” teachers, who were theatre professionals, to demonstrate drama skills for teachers during the first semester. At the same time, the schoolteachers played the roles as teacher assistants in class management and equipments providers. The part-time teachers helped schoolteachers to become skillful in drama teaching in order to demonstrate the drama skills in the second stage.

The Second Stage of Implementation

The second stage is to gain a deeper understanding of the principles and processes of SBCD and to implement the drama. The teachers could not only design their own curricula, but also do the research to interpret the relation between pupils’ creativity and the drama curricula.

During the implementation of SBCD, “the Little Tea-Pot Drama Group” teachers came into

the target school to teach drama curricula twice a week for eighteen weeks. They applied different kinds of skills to teach drama, such as game, movement, pantomime, role-playing, and theater play. Each time they spent a 40-minute period in class, in a total of 80 minutes per week. The drama teachers who served part-time teachers also made the teaching plans. Both the drama teachers and the schoolteachers put the lesson plans into practise. When the drama teachers taught, the schoolteachers also observed the interaction between these teachers and their pupils, and took notes in order to collect research data. Furthermore, the schoolteachers performed the drama skills in their classes in the second semester, from March 2003 to July 2003.

In addition to formal drama curricula, there were different strategies to improve pupils' creativity and to assess pupils' performance. The summer drama camp open to all pupils in the target school was held on the 1st-4th of July 2003; that was an enrichment of a lot of fun, vividness, and creativity. The effect of the drama camp was to share the drama experience from a part of participators to the whole school, and to construct the base of SBCD in Drama.

In order to finish the project successfully, the administrators were as facilitators to arrange time schedules, performance places, and equipment for the teachers and pupils. Besides, they represented the role of curriculum leadership, provided the Williams Creativity Assessment Packet, and required the schoolteachers to implement the creativity assessment before and after the drama curricula to collect the pupils' quantitative data of creative performance.

During the school year, the author came to the target school several times, helped teachers do an action research, and encouraged them to collect research data and to write the final reports in which they could share their experiences with others. Basically, clarifying the goals of teachers who attempted to achieve, and applying the suitable methods to organize the research, were the main purposes for me as an action research consultant.

As to the school administrator, Mr. Wang, he played an important curriculum leader role on SBCD to push and encourage teachers to finish the research in this stage. Most importantly, the team teachers motivated by the curriculum reform, even without receiving any extra pay, were willing to spend much more time to design their curriculum and to teach drama with enthusiasm. This stage was the peak of the research for all participators. However, the next stage consisted of an increasing decline. The result came to a conflict. At the end of the project, the schoolteachers reconstructed the new meaning of SBCD to find their own way to develop dramatic art curricula.

The Third Stage of Implementation

This stage presented the teachers' teaching and research products.

Building up a school's web site and sharing the SBCD experience with others was very important works for the administrators. The target school' web (<http://comm.creativity.edu.tw>) was constructed by the schoolteacher, Mr. Jian-Ming Liu.

At the end of the project, the Director of Teaching Affairs, Mr. Wang, leading the SBCD project, changed his position at the school. With lacking of communication in curriculum leadership and less taking care of the participators' workloads led to a conflict, and thus stumbled at human relationship between the schoolteachers and the administrators during the third stage of this project. Both of them had trouble with curriculum development of SBCD. Although the schoolteachers knew drama curricula really did promote their pupils' creativity, the participating schoolteachers were in low spirits. In the last semester of the project, from August 2003 to January 2004, the teachers were influenced by their low mood. They fought against the new curriculum leader in a silent way. Though the schoolteachers seemed to lack for team goals when the project was finished, they still applied drama skills in their classes, not for the project leader, but for their pupils and themselves. They tried to find a suitable way to develop their own curricula, and thus renewing their professional abilities. The schoolteachers succeeded in fulfilling themselves both as pupils' creativity facilitators and as school drama curricula developers.

Results and Discussion

The different grades schoolteachers' action research results were described and analysed. These teachers' concrete drama curricula, teaching strategies and some of their problems have been specified as follows.

The Second Graders

Four female teachers in the second grade participating in the project formed two teaching teams. Two teachers were in pairs, playing different but flexible roles. If one teacher was the main teaching leader who planned the teaching content and put it into practise, the other observed and managed pupils when her partner was teaching (Chen & Kuo, 2003).

These four second-grade schoolteachers sometime applied the drama play into their classes to

motivate their pupils' learning. During the research period, they focused on pupils' imagination and creativity through instruction plans provided by "Little-Tea Pot Theater Group". Meanwhile teachers did some action research, focusing on analyses of pupils' creativity, such as fluent, flexible, unique, and elaborate thinking. The classroom teachers found that pupils' performance of creativity would be affected by many factors, like the class atmosphere, pupils' characteristics, and family background (Chen & Kuo, 2003).

These teachers spent time to compare and to interpret pupils' performance after class. They also reflected that they were exhausted in taking account of both the drama instruction and the action research. Reflexly, they were successful with their drama teaching, but as researchers they failed. The teachers were not so good at research presentation. Thus they were still interested in teaching, not doing research.

The Fourth Graders

There were two classroom teachers who participated in the project. Each of them adopted different approaches in presentation of dramatic strategies. One teacher tried to integrate Dramatic Art into the Social Studies curriculum to train his pupils' oral expression and body language expressing, in which they were appointed to explain the history of "Chung-Yan Temple" building that was one unit of "Genius Community Reporters" (Lai, 2003). At the end of the class, these pupils performed well. They could explain the historical story orally and smoothly than before.

The other teacher made use of a story with a beginning, middle, and an end. His pupils as players created dialogue in the social studies class, whether the content was taken from a well-known historical story, "Bow Hshiang Tain" in the Song Dynasty of ancient China. This teacher intended to cultivate his pupils' creativity and to present children learning results (Zhan, 2003). He began the session with a situation but led to a discussion for pupils to understand the historical story, and thus slowly built a historical background. Then his pupils were divided into three groups. Each group made out their own drafts of drama that was adapted from this famous historical story. Both two four-grade teachers then amended and corrected the scripts.

The process took time, but by working in this way, the groups expanded a body of information, deepened their understanding, and developed a richer and more interesting interpretation and enactment. Through dramatic enactment, the pupils opened their minds and

were encouraged to express. They also explored, developed, and expressed ideas and feelings freely. Obviously, the improvisation had an important place in the drama. The emphasis was on learning through drama. The fourth graders enjoyed the integrated curriculum of Drama and Social Studies.

The Fifth Graders

The fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Huang had more experience in drama than the other eight teachers. The cooperative sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Lin, majored in Fine Arts, helped Mr. Huang to perform a formal children drama.

Mr. Huang chose the main roles in the play from fifth graders and trained them to participate in the children's drama play. That was a form of children's theatre referred to formal production for child audiences. He directed the children's theatre and asked some pupils to memorize dialogue. The other pupils who did not act would make scenery as directed by Mr. Lin. Those pupils, who were not assigned as actors, helped with costumes and usually played an important part.

For further challenge, Mr. Huang organized a "Ho-Shi" theater to perform and to take part in an English drama contest outside. Although the children play "Ugly Duckling" did not get the prize, these two teachers still had confidence in pupils' creativity and were satisfied with their dramatic instruction. The schoolteachers, H.S. Huang and J.B. Lin (2003), examined the results of the fifth graders between the Creativity Assessment Packet (CAP) used as a pretest and teachers' observation. They found a few pupils' performance seemed incoherent. However, after going deep into analysing the different resource data, their pupils' actual performances were better than the CAP results. After all, as proven by the CAP results, 95% of the fifth-grade pupils was interested in drama. The peers, teachers, and pupils were really aware of the progress in creativity as shown by the drama curricula presentations.

The Sixth Graders

Mrs. Wang, who was a 34 sixth-grade pupils' class teacher, devoted herself to her drama class. Wang (2003) designed a drama-teaching project and an action research process, which consisted of preparation, appreciation teaching, story creation, performance, and reflection. She kept writing observation diaries, applied the CAP, designed a questionnaire to collect her pupils' opinions, then analysed the data, and interpreted their learning results. By filling out the

questionnaire, her pupils could understand their change in their abilities of thinking, remembering, imitating, imagining, observing, oral expressing, and body language expressing. Besides, they could choose whom the best actor was and who in the class was making progress in their performance after the end of the teaching units. Mostly, her pupils had positive responses to drama curricula.

According to the quantitative results of the questionnaire mentioned above, her pupils have learned not only drama skills, but also good moral conduct principles, like friendship (28/34), trust (21/34), consideration (15/34), kindness (15/34), initiative (22/34), cooperation (33/34), concentration (23/34), good learning attitude (30/34), and diversity (34/34)(Wang, 2003). Importantly, they improved in creativity, too. These pupils felt happy, flexible, and since did not have pressure in the drama curriculum; they learned actively and were able to express themselves freely.

Conclusion and Suggestion

From the above analysis of the schoolteachers' curriculum action research reports, we can draw the following conclusions.

Schools are best fitted to plan and design the curriculum, and to construct the teaching and learning of specific programmes. The SBCD on the drama curricula is one example in Taiwan. The forms of the SBCD are miscellaneous. There were many styles of representation for the teachers in the target school. All teachers wanted to reinforce their professional ability and to foster pupils' creativity.

Firstly, drama can be separated from or integrated into school courses. By applying drama skills, teachers can help children develop creativity in many courses. As a matter of fact, the application of the Drama SBCD is very flexible. It can be applied in any field. For example, the target schoolteachers applied drama skills not only to the field of Arts and Humanities, but also to Integrated Curriculum, Social Studies, and Language. There is no limit; none of the learning subjects are excluded. Schoolteachers suggested that a well-planned session in drama was very important. It provided exercises in critically thinking as well as an opportunity for creativity. These schoolteachers suggested that they should follow the drama curricula not only in adopting the part-time teachers' lesson plans, but also in attempting to design integrated curricula in order to satisfy pupils' needs and teachers' professional growth.

Secondly, sensitive, capable teachers are the key to effective teaching. In the process of implementation of both drama skills and curricula, the target schoolteachers did their best to create a pleasant, free atmosphere. They encouraged pupils to express their ideas and feeling, without giving any criticism or judgments. They accepted any form of presentation from the pupils regarded as one kind of multiple-intelligence. Moreover, they inspired pupils to show themselves. All kinds of creativity were encouraged, such as uniqueness, fluency, imagination, curiosity, adventure, etc.

Thirdly, SBCD enables schools to be responsive to their pupils' and communities' educational needs and interests. The Drama SBCD provided by the target school satisfied the pupils' needs and fostered their creativity. During experimental periods, the target school children showed high interest in drama curricula. They expected the drama courses to be taught once a week, not twice a week. New teaching materials, different teaching methods, part-time teachers, team teaching, and different combinations were welcome, since they could attract much more pupils' attention. Pupils could gradually perform individually, and thus express themselves. Through drama, the imagination could be stimulated the pupils' everlasting pleasure and profit enhanced. The schoolteachers provided pupils' opportunities to participate in creative drama in a comfortable and no pressured classroom. Using imagination to create some scenes, pupils have had the fun of seeing, hearing, feeling, touching, tasting, or smelling something that was not there. The pupils found that their creative capacity grew quickly. Through drama, an opportunity is offered to children for helping them to think and to plan.

Fourthly, the schoolteachers used many kinds of methods to record and evaluate pupils' performance. For example, videotapes, photography, pupil learning sheets and teachers' observation journals were used to evaluate the children' learning results and creativity. When they reviewed the growth of their pupils as individuals and as members of the group, the focus was shifted from product to process. Teachers considered using paragraph reports rather than grades, a practise that was particularly appropriate for evaluating pupils' work in the arts. When looking at the children's creativity as well as their improvement in communication, expression, and cooperation with other children, the schoolteachers focused on the processes and products of teaching and learning. They would prefer not to give grades at all and assess both individual and group progress by observation and records.

Limitations and Further Suggestions

There were still some problems as the teachers did their action research.

The problem in this research is that it is hard to interpret the relationship between the CAP results and the children's performance while using the drama curricula, as the CAP results and the children's real performance did not coincide in some cases. Until now, this contradiction has not been resolved. We are aware that the classroom teachers didn't have much experience in the field of performing arts and that some part-time teachers lacked experience with children. The schoolteachers reflected these problems when they implemented strategies to improve their pupils' creativity. They doubted that children's creativity was inborn or was acquired by education. After group discussion, these teachers came to a conclusion that both factors were important to creativity; although individual differences existed among children, it was the teachers' responsibility to educate these children. In this action research, overall, the cause and effect of creativity is not certain. The schoolteachers agreed that the drama curricula facilitated their pupils' learning and fostered their creativity.

There is one thing that must be remembered by other teachers who will use the drama curricula. Typically, the target schoolteachers found children didn't like to write learning sheets and to be asked to answer the same questions after drama classes (i.e. Do you like drama activities? What do you think drama performance yourself?) The solution of the problem is to apply other methods to collect necessary data, such as observation, children's diaries, questionnaires, etc. These efforts can reduce the routine work, but will be an extra burden of teachers. It is a dilemma between teachers as instructors and as action researchers. Not surprisingly, teachers have difficulty in collecting data, analyzing research results, and writing reports. To solve these problems, we adopted a story-writing strategy. By using a 500-word summary to a whole story, the target schoolteachers could finish a story about their own children and about what happens in drama classes. It really works. Now all teachers have done the reports, which are already available on the target school website.

The last important thing we must be concerned with is that creative drama needs no special equipment, no studio, and no stage. Time, space, and an enthusiastic, well-prepared leader are the only requirements. Actually, the SBCD varies from single teacher to the whole school and from one time to a long-term plan; but teachers really need to be supported by the school system and to give them an opportunity to develop their professional knowledge and skills. Encourage

teachers and children's performance will give teachers much satisfaction. The more capable teachers they are, the more their children's creativity will be improved. Let teachers have a chance to offer suggestions and be involved in the SBCD is the key element in an effective project.

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