

# *Role of Drama in Education in Aesthetic Education*

Wenjuan Fan, Shuchen Pei, Wenling Tian

*Foreign Language Department, Nanchong Vocational and Technical College  
NO.94, Hongfa Road, Gaoping District, Nanchong City, Sichuan Province, China*

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**Abstract:** In recent years, Drama in Education is one of the emerging hot research fields in arts and education circles, and it has received extensive attention in fundamental education in our country. The combination of Drama in Education and aesthetic education can make the educated have an attitude beyond material utility and enter a state of aesthetic freedom, so as to achieve the fundamental purpose of shaping the free and comprehensive development of human beings. Through the interpretation of the connotation of aesthetic education, this paper encourages teachers to use drama in the classroom, and allows students to use their bodies to release their nature in the process of drama performance. With the help of music, art, dance and other artistic elements, the students' aesthetic ability can be achieved.

## 1. Introduction

In the development history of human civilization, drama, as an important content in art education, not only trains professional drama talents, but also more extensively increases people's aesthetic awareness and aesthetic feelings, contributing to all-round personnel development. As an experiential learning and teaching medium, drama can not only help people understand themselves, stimulate creativity, and enhance the ability of expression, exchange and communication, but also support application in the classroom to assist teachers' instruction of various natural, humanistic and social knowledge. Drama is not only an art subject, but also a tool subject. It can be integrated with other art forms (music, art, dance, etc.) and used in subject teaching to develop students' intelligence, train students' independent personality, enhance students' aesthetic taste, thereby developing comprehensive humanistic quality education.

In his book "Focus on Aesthetic Education - How to Cultivate Students' Aesthetic Ability in Schools", Huang Zhongjing mentions the eight basic principles of subject teaching and aesthetic education: full feeling, rich performance, cognitive penetration, creative production, nature restoration, organic links, integrated objects, and aesthetic entirety. [1] The combination of drama and subject teaching can help fulfill these principles. Good drama experience can help strengthen students' aesthetic awareness, enhance students' aesthetic ability, so that students learn how to calmly look at life, how to face life, and how to tolerate life. Schools should seize the opportunity of "double reduction", run education with a focus on improving the quality and value of students' lives, so that education can return to science, personnel training, and happiness, making students live an aesthetic educational life that values the spirit of freedom and liberation. [2]

This paper will use somatic learning as a means to integrate the teaching approach of drama in

education into classroom teaching. Taking the cultivation of students' aesthetic ability as the starting point, this paper discusses how to implement aesthetic education using drama in education-based teaching approach.

## **2. The Connotation of Aesthetic Education**

In his book "Aesthetics" in 1750, Baumgarten, a German philosopher and "father of aesthetics", defined "aesthetics" as "the science of perceptual knowledge". Since then, "aesthetics" as perceptual science is separated from logic and ethics, embarking on a road of independence. In the book "Aesthetics", Baumgarten defines the connotation of "aesthetic education": "All aesthetic education is cultivation that examines things that appear as aesthetic objects in specific situations, which goes beyond the examination achievable in previous training. Familiarity with such cultivation successfully stimulates the natural talent of beauty and converts it into emotional aesthetic emotion corresponding to an object of aesthetic thinking." In response to the social reality of weak perceptual education in the industrial capitalist society at that time, Baumgarten pointed out that ignorance and deviation of aesthetic training will lead to "complete fall into control of passion, making one engage in careless pursuit of hypocrisy, violent competition, fraternity, flattery, bohemianism, extravagance, idleness, laziness, economic activity or simply cash [3]."

The clear proposal and systematic discussion of the concept "aesthetic education" can be traced back to the epistolary "On the Aesthetic Education of Man" written in 1793 by the German aesthetician Schiller known as "father of aesthetic education". Schiller defines the connotation of "aesthetic education" as "emotion" and "freedom". [4] His theory of aesthetic education is an ontological theory, which regards aesthetics as human nature and the only way to liberate human beings. It is also a kind of aesthetics of life aimed to overcome the split character in real life and then achieve the integrity. This is Schiller's refutation against the suppressed human nature, the split character and education distortion under instrumental rationality in the era of the industrial revolution, which calls for a new education benefiting human freedom and all-round development. Schiller believes that only aesthetic education that combines beauty and honor as a whole can make human nature complete, so that people transit from the realm of necessity to the realm of emotion and then to the realm of moral freedom. [5] In 1903, Schiller's theory of aesthetic education was introduced to China by Wang Guowei. Later, Cai Yuanpei proposed "replacing religion with aesthetic education" and "cultivating a sound personality", which created a wide impact on Chinese society, initiating the process of Chinese localization of this theory [6].

## **3. Drama in Education: The Way to Implement Aesthetic Education**

### **3.1 The Development Process of Drama in Education.**

In his book "Emile", French educator Rousseau proposed two educational concepts of learning in practice and learning in drama practice, thus first opening the door to drama in education. Afterwards, the development of drama in education in Western countries has gone through the following three stages [7]: First. Drama in education centered on teaching methods. British teacher Harriet Jonsson, an early researcher of drama in education, published her book "Theatrical Approach in Teaching" in 1912, which was recognized by drama in education theorists as the first book to introduce how to use theatrical approach to conduct drama teaching in school education. British educator Caldwell Cook first combined performance and games in English curriculum teaching, and published the book "Game Method" in 1917, making the teaching method quickly popular in public primary schools in the UK. Winifred Wald, an American drama educator, wrote and published the book "Creative Drama Activity" based on his own practice in 1930, which first

proposed the concept of creative drama, emphasizing that children construct concepts in creation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, drama in education centered on pedagogy mainly trains students' theatrical performance and presentation skills. In addition, researchers fail to define its connotation and denotation, making drama deviate from the original intention of serving teaching. Second, drama in education centered on participatory process. After World War II, the public fully expect that drama in education can treat social psychology and develop students' personalities. In 1954, the British drama educator Peter Slade published "Children's Drama" and later Brian Wey published "Development through Drama", which laid a solid theoretical foundation for the entry of drama in education into the formal school education system. Gavin Bolton put forward the concept of "drama in education" in "Understanding the Theory of Drama in Education", believing that drama in education should be extended from dramatic performance to reflective learning in the context of drama. Such learning proceeds from students' inner feelings, emotions and cognitions and combines external performance and learning content, which is a problem-solving learning model. [8] Third, drama in education centered on curriculum. In the middle and late 20th century, drama in education gradually became one course in the Western school education system. David Hornbrook of the United Kingdom believes that drama in education should belong to drama courses. Nelly McKathelin in the United States created a curriculum model based on "theatrical concept learning" and designed curriculum activities for students from kindergarten to sixth grade. In addition to the United Kingdom and the United States, Australia, Canada also gradually incorporated drama into the curriculum system. Curriculum-centered drama completely gets rid of dependencies on other disciplines and becomes an independent subject of the arts curriculum.

To sum up, the development of drama in education is a process in which drama and education are continuously adjusted and integrated. The drama in education discussed herein mainly refers to both the first and second development stages of drama in education, namely: "Drama in Education", or DIE for short, which is a way of using drama and theater skills to engage in school classroom teaching. Its outstanding features are equality, openness, and dialogue. It requires that under the planned guidance, teachers organize teaching with various performance elements of drama, such as improvisation, role-playing, drama games, situational dialogue performances, textbook play rehearsal, reading texts by roles, imitation, etc. so that participants and observers can comprehend knowledge and thematic connotations in an open, interactive and guided learning environment.

### **3.2 The Aesthetic Particularity of Drama in Education.**

Drama experience plays a special aesthetic role. The aesthetic experience of drama integrates various aesthetic processes, so that comprehensive aesthetic experience is closely combined with life, becoming an overall physical and mental experience. The literary virtual theory of the later Wittgenstein aesthetician Searle interpreted the particularity of drama aesthetics from five aspects [9].

First, the virtual stereoscopic reality. Good drama is a virtual reality formed according to the discourse template of everyday life. Students receive two-dimensional text materials through vision, and enter a virtual three-dimensional space through drama design. Based on the understanding of the text, students use physical performance to shape and display their inner world through drama.

Second, the "pretended" reality. Searle points out that the fiction of drama fosters a "pretended" reality. In drama based on educational purposes, what students experience is what Searle calls "pretended" reality, which can be called the "second reality" of human life. In this "pretended" reality, students release their nature and creativity through drama, enrich their life experience and emotions, thus completing the process of creating the world and constructing the world on their own.

Third, a different kind of dramatic language elements. The fictional nature of drama in education

injects different language elements into education. During the performance, students can read, recite, and simulate the language in the drama. An outstanding feature of dramatic language lies in the personalized condensation of dramatic conflict elements and the personalized display of specific qualities of specific roles. In the process of memorizing and perceiving language, students will deeply appreciate the infectious power and shocking power created by language. Through internalization and beautification, they can let language release its vitality and therefore truly experience the emotions of characters.

Fourth, understand the hypothesis concept in science. Drama in education lays a true foundation for hypotheses, thereby promoting the development of scientific thinking. Both science and science courses systematically train students to hypothesize in problem-solving. These hypotheses are normative scientific logic hypotheses. However, hypotheses of social life and inner life are much more complicated. Therefore, drama in education can help students improve their thinking development from another perspective, allow students to perceive social, inner hypotheses more complex than formal logic in drama. The training in this process will enable students to develop critical thinking, understand the diverse reasons why each character makes different decisions from a humanistic perspective, and understand the characters and roles more neutrally.

Fifth, serious games reality. Wittgenstein gave an example when describing the relationship between literature and serious play: when playing games, a child points to a box and says it is a house, and then interprets it as a house from all aspects of the box. For the child, the box is "seen", and the house is "seemed". It is the similarity between the two that creates fiction, and such fiction becomes the basis of the game. Like literature, drama can meet the psychological needs of students in games: real-world action games and virtual real language games.

### **3.3 Somatic Learning: Aesthetic Education through the Body.**

Since the 20th century, with the criticism on the subject-object thinking mode, body awareness and somaesthetics have gradually flourished, becoming an indispensable part of aesthetics and aesthetic education theory. In 1945, French phenomenological philosopher Merleau Ponty pointed out in his "Phenomenology of Perception" that the body is not opposed to the mind, but incarnates the mind or perception. Ponty tells us that the body and the subject are actually the same reality. Matter and spirit are unified in the body, not in a parallel or dominant relationship between the spirit and the body as proposed by Descartes. We do not feel and experience the world through pure consciousness, but through the body. This world is the only real world. The body is the subject of all perception and the general way for us to have a world [10].

Proposed at the end of the 20th century based on the concept of embodied cognition in the field of cognitive psychology, somatic learning receives continuous development. The characteristics of somatic learning mainly include physiological, emotional, cognitive and situational features. It places "body participation" at the core of learning activities, pursues the integrity and consistency of body and mind, and stresses the harmony and unity of knowledge, emotion, will, and action. Somatic learning pays attention to the role of individual cognitive, emotional, spiritual, physical and social dimensions in learning, which is also known as "whole person learning". In the article "Creating Space for Somatic Ways of Knowing Within Transformative Learning Theory", Tara L. Amann proposed a somatic learning model (Figure 1), which consists of four dimensions of movement, sense, emotion and spirit. [11]

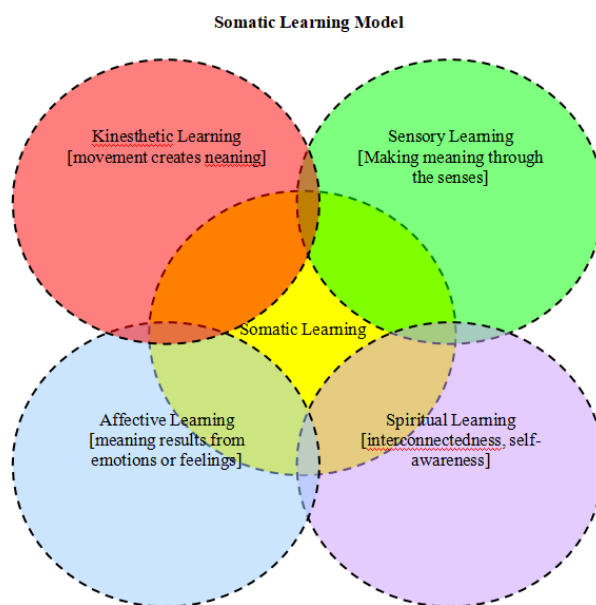


Figure 1: Somatic Learning Model

The traditional cognitive view holds that learning process is only "disembodied" mental training, which does not require the participation of the body. When students' bodies are "suspended" and experiences are excluded, students' learning is often mechanical and abstract, and their perception of subject content is limited. In drama in education, the body is the basic carrier for students to participate in drama in education activities. Drama in education advocates "imagination through body rhythm, improvisation, five senses and situational dialogue, and expression with one's own body and voice" [12]. Drama in education, as a method of education and teaching, can maximally mobilize the enthusiasm of students to participate in the classroom. By emphasizing "learner orientation", it changes the teaching model in traditional classrooms where teachers simply convey concept to students. Based on drama characteristics, teachers can direct students to deeply examine the physical meaning according to the somatic learning model proposed by Oman, thereby implementing aesthetic education in students' learning process.

Through role-playing or theater viewing, students enjoy an aesthetic experience beyond the ordinary campus life through the time-space transformation of "classroom = theater" in different dramas, and experience aesthetic scenario different from daily life in the narrative space constructed by drama. Performers can "empathize" with actors and characters by feeling with the other through performance aesthetics, thereby experiencing the feeling of "living elsewhere". For example, when drama in education is integrated into the Chinese subject, students internalize Chinese language aesthetic thoughts in the process of drama performances—the macro aesthetics of the harmony of nature and man, the balanced aesthetics of Tai Chi, the moral aesthetics of ritual and music, the symbolic aesthetics of "the three sections in the Book of Songs", the refined aesthetics of "Scholar", the local aesthetics of the folk, etc. Under the guidance of the text, students can make full use of their senses and limbs, fully mobilize their aesthetic emotions during performance, and express their understanding towards text materials figuratively with the help of artistic means such as music and dance.

After students perform drama in education in class, teachers should also encourage students to record their perceptions, feelings and thoughts amid drama performance in the form of words. By recording their own experience and perception of knowledge in a timely manner, it helps students to



internalize the learned knowledge, develop emotions, attitudes, and values, and ultimately achieve a two-way improvement in knowledge mastery and aesthetic ability.

#### 4. The Aesthetic Value of Drama in Education

In the course of human development, the research and interpretation of beauty by philosophers, thinkers and writers makes us realize that human beings have always been pursuing aesthetic value beyond utilitarianism, and that aesthetics is an important part of human spiritual life. Today, drama in education develops in full swing, displaying non-negligible aesthetic value in education.

First, drama in education makes people transit from natural people to aesthetic people. A natural person is a utilitarian person, and an aesthetic person is a non-utilitarian person. The three aesthetic functions emphasized by Aristotle: education, purification, and "purification" in spiritual enjoyment refer to the process of forgoing materialistic desires and utilitarianism [13]. Drama in education provides a very good means for "purification", so that students purify themselves in "perception" and "experience", bettering their souls.

Second, drama in education promotes people's physical and mental health. Drama in education is one important means to achieve somatic learning. Influenced by Merleau Ponty's phenomenology of perception, somatic learning emphasizes the unity of body and mind. The so-called mind is the incarnated subject that combines spirit and flesh, namely, "body-subject". Through aesthetic experience of drama performance, students reinforce the neuroevolutionary base of pleasure, thereby developing a complete harmony of mind and body, which coincides with "sincerity" in Confucianism, "heart purification" in Taoism, and "one's true self" in Zen. When a person's body and mind are united and away from worries, the body and mind are free from disease and thus achieve health.

Third, drama in education promotes people's emotional cultivation. The drama's plot and character conflict contain rich emotions. By participating in the performance, students can experience the changes of characters' emotions, perceive the elements of truth, goodness and beauty contained in emotions, and the essential characteristics of artistic beauty proposed by Hegel: unity of sensibility and rationality, unity of content and form, unity of universality and particularity, unity of necessity and contingency, unity of ideal and reality [14]. These perceptions will help students foster good emotional qualities.

#### 5. Conclusions

In the course of human development, the research and interpretation of beauty by philosophers, thinkers and writers allow us to realize that human beings have always been pursuing aesthetic value beyond utilitarianism, and aesthetics is an important part of human spiritual life. In the current context of "double reduction", our education should focus on not only scientific knowledge, but also inner development of people. Through aesthetic education, learners can release their own energy and appreciate the true meaning and value of life in the process of learning. In our education, to achieve the purpose of increasing life quality and life value advocated by Mr. Gu Mingyuan, it is particularly important to carry out moral and intellectual education in schools with an aesthetic attitude and approach. By implementing aesthetic education in all aspects of school education, it helps to shape a complete human nature and enlighten the wisdom of the soul. In the future era where "elegance has the final say", strengthening aesthetic education among students is not only a return to the essence of education, but also an important means to enhance students' core competitiveness. Education is to cultivate a beautiful life, let students live a poetic and spiritual life in work and study, make them apply aesthetic skills in work and study life, pursue an elegant spiritual world as their life goal.

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