Drama Teaching Methods Applied to the Career LEAP Programme: a Case Study During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students have needed to use "limited" teaching methods. For example, mask-wearing means that teachers cannot observe the expressions of students or even judge their mastery. Secondly, maintaining social distance also prevents drama teaching from being physically expressed among the team. Under these heavy constraints, Prof Carmel O'Sullivan has used her years of teaching experience to circumvent these problems as far as possible. Based on traditional classroom teaching, she has introduced drama teaching methods into the classroom scientifically and systematically.

Keywords: Drama Teaching Method; Career Training; Drama Activities

1. Introduction

During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic raged globally. Under the influence of the pandemic, all walks of life were hit as never before. A "Career LEAP" programme, developed by education experts from Trinity College Dublin, was relaunched during this period. "Career LEAP is a pioneering programme based in Dublin's north inner city to help at-risk young adults aged 18-24 to build the personal, social, emotional and cognitive skills necessary for developing career identity and work-readiness" (O'Sullivan, Symonds, & Akkermans, 2018). The programme lasts three weeks; it was developed by Prof Carmel O'Sullivan of the Trinity School of Education, and draws on drama instruction and occupational psychology techniques, enabling young people to transfer the skills they gain to daily life and the workplace. Although the programme has been in operation for several years, due to COVID-19 restrictions there were new factors that needed to be considered during the development of content. This paper will discuss in depth how drama teaching methods have been integrated into the Career LEAP programme during the COVID-19 pandemic and explain it through a case study. In addition, it will explore, summarise and refine the advantages of the drama teaching methods applied to Career LEAP, identify the problems and matters needing attention in the implementation of drama teaching methods, and elaborate on related suggestions and thoughts.

2. Drama teaching methods

"Drama teaching methods, as a non-traditional teaching mode, uses drama to develop classroom teaching by designing drama programs and improving teaching effectiveness" (Heathcote, 1991). Therefore, introducing drama teaching methods into the classroom scientifically and systematically has a very high practical value. The following is a detailed analysis of Carmel's four commonly-used drama teaching methods in the Career LEAP program.

2.1 Drama games

Drama games can serve as a natural introduction to dramatic activities and as preparation for role-play, improvisation and other drama experiences (Davies, 1990). Drama games include ice-breakers, energisers and brain-teasers. In the category of DiE, drama games refer to methods that combine drama elements and skills in games and apply them to classroom teaching. In addition to the interactivity and fun of general games, drama games also have situational, performance or

role-playing properties (Farmer, 2007). It is an implementation of drama teaching methods that can be flexibly applied to all stages of the educational activity. Drama games commonly used in teaching include voice delivery, solitaire games, imitation, keyword imagination, interview surveys etc. Prof O'Sullivan has used various forms of drama games in the Career LEAP programme.

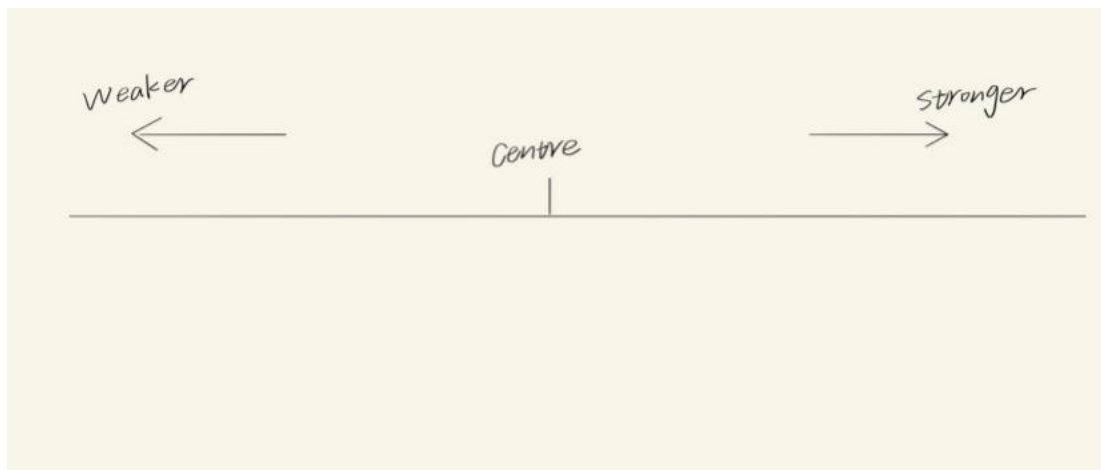**Case 1. Using a paper tape to divide the ground into two areas, as shown below**

Figure 2.1 weaker and stronger games

The further to the right you stand, the stronger your attitude. In contrast, the further to the left you stand, the weaker your attitude. Standing in the middle represents a centred attitude. In the actual development process, due to COVID-19 restrictions, this activity was divided into two groups of about five people each, and social distance was maintained.

Drama games are developed in the form of questioning and combined with training content. For example: "Question one: do you think it is important to find your value in your work and gain a sense of accomplishment? Why? Question two: do you focus on your own interests in the job search process? Question three: do you care about your salary at work? Why?", and this goes on. If these questions are answered one by one in the form of a traditional classroom, it puts tremendous psychological pressure on the students. This pressure is mainly caused by deciding whether the answer should be what the teacher wants to hear, what the other students want to hear, or the student's real inner voice. Jesse Schell's (2008) view in "The Art of Game Design" is: "Games are activities that people use to solve problems with a playful mentality." Therefore, the development of drama games helps to eliminate students' worries, because the game itself is interesting and can help students think better and express themselves actively in a stress-free or even enjoyable environment.

2.2 Role play

Role play has functional properties, tools and teaching purposes (O'Neill, 1995). It enables participants to enter a role and situation, think from different angles and strengthen their depth of thinking and criticism by entering different spaces. The advantage of role play in the classroom is that it combines learning with simulation and game activities, which easily arouse students' learning motivation (Vanments, 1983) and increase their interest. The following examples show two kinds of role play used in the Career LEAP programme.

Case 1. Role play in a situation

A situation is provided by the facilitator (teacher); for example, a participant is asked to play a job applicant's confident and unconfident states when participating in an interview. There are two participants in the activity, and the rest are observers. The participants can use their rich imagination to express their cognition of the role and present it to the observers. The observers can help master the correct interview skills by watching. In addition, the facilitator can also discuss with the students how to help the role-player solve the problems in the situation (Morgan & Saxton, 1985).

Case 2. Teacher in role

Here, teachers play a specific role to lead students into the virtual world, thereby speeding up students' psychological entry into the "this is real" experience and deepening the effect of activity exploration. Commonly used identities in "teacher in role" include people seeking help from the weak, professionals and notaries.

For example, the teacher conducts mock interviews with the participants by acting as an interviewer, so that participants can learn the correct dress, facial expressions, language, and gestures for the interview. The fictional process of drama is used as a learning medium to learn the teaching concepts and content of different subjects (Heathcote, 1995).

2.3 Role on the wall

Human figures are drawn on a wall or in a newspaper. Students can write down the appearance characteristics of the characters outside the outline of the human figures and the personality characteristics of the characters inside the outline, thereby jointly creating the roles of the characters in the play (Heathcote, 1991). This drama technique can be undertaken as a group activity or by individuals writing about their own character. They can include known facts such as physical appearance, age, gender, location and occupation, as well as subjective ideas such as likes/dislikes, friends/enemies, opinions, motivations, secrets and dreams.

In the Career LEAP programme, using the perspective of self-assessment in aiming for the characteristics of a successful job applicant, participants abstractly express their understanding of the outstanding qualities of job applicants through drawing. "Role on the wall" activities maintain a distance from the role and promote reflection and in-depth understanding of it.

3. Conclusion

For students, the most important thing in learning knowledge is the process. In this process, students' independent and creative ability is reflected. Drama teaching methods are always based on the belief that the real purpose of learning is the process rather than the result. Undoubtedly, the individual's cognition of external objects is a process (Liu et al., 2019). The aim of students' learning is to obtain results from previous studies, cultivate their ability to think, research and innovate independently in the process of learning, and learn new knowledge through their perception and internalisation. Therefore, the drama teaching methods in the Career LEAP programme are based on vocational skills learning in order to cultivate students' overall development.

The teaching process with the teacher (facilitator) is very important. The teacher must design the teaching process in an optimal way, make every link within the process as strong as possible and ensure the process is smooth. They should also leave enough time and space for students' thinking and research. The author observed the following points in Carmel O'Sullivan's class: First of all, the beginning of the teaching process must be based on the students' existing knowledge. Teachers must carefully study the existing knowledge base and situation of the students and design their teaching process accordingly, rather than basing it on their own experience or subjective judgment. Everything must be student-centred (Maclellan & Soden, 2004). Secondly, throughout the entire teaching process, students must learn basic knowledge and necessary skills and be emotionally stimulated so that their state of learning is always pleasant. Thirdly, during the process, students should be in a state of active learning and thinking. Through their thinking and discussion of problems, based on analysis and synthesis, they can learn new knowledge and achieve autonomous learning. Finally, throughout the entire teaching design process, teachers must pay special attention to students' evaluation and feedback and adjust the process appropriately in order to make it better and more complete.

All in all, teachers should first give full attention to the unique function and promotion of drama teaching methods in disciplines or training fields. Secondly, they should use drama teaching methods appropriately. No teaching method is perfect. A method needs to follow the content of the course and be used at the appropriate time. Thirdly, teachers should pay attention to student feedback and adjust their teaching process and curriculum plan in a timely manner.

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