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The form and meaning: When English language teachers learn to teach through drama

Li Ding

This article investigates the challenges teachers experience while learning to teach English through drama in an action research project. Through closely examining the fundamental causes, it discerns the knowledge constituents crucial for successful learning and implementation of drama for English teaching. Difficulties are identified from three aspects: text selection and interpretation, translation into drama activities, and classroom implementation. Referring to Shulman's teacher knowledge construct (1986, 1987), the author argues that drama pedagogy for English teaching demands a changed perspective on language regarding its form and meaning and also on drama as both subject and pedagogy. Only then can teachers effectively link language and drama and create a meaningful learning experience.

1 Introduction

Whilst teachers are considered the agents of change in implementing a drama-based education (Beaven & Alvarez, 2014), writings about teachers' learning to apply drama in English classrooms are scarce in Chinese literature, particularly in mainland China. Of the 108 articles found in CNKI[1] on the topic of drama and primary school English, only a few have partly addressed teacher training in this field (for example, Yu, 2019; Lin, 2016). Based entirely on teachers' feedback upon a five-day intensive drama workshop, Yu (2019) argued for drama as a novel and effective teacher training model for developing their language and teaching abilities. Lin (2016) proposed a similar model, where teachers experience drama warm-up activities, skills needed for dramatisation of play scripts, and watch and reflect upon theatre performances, implying that teachers can immediately apply drama techniques in English teaching.

Shulman's concept of teacher knowledge developed from 1986 onwards provides a convenient framework to capture what the above-mentioned practices suggest about the knowledge required for successfully implementing drama in English teaching. Shulman reorganised his originally seven-category teacher professional knowledge into three main domains: content knowledge - the concepts and structures of the subject taught, pedagogical

[1] CNKI, short for Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure, is the most comprehensive database for Chinese journals.

knowledge - the management and organisation of classroom activities, and knowledge of students learning, and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) - the integration of the first two (2004). PCK represents "the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organised, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). Viewing the above teacher-training practices against this knowledge construct, the kind of teacher knowledge focused for development is that of content knowledge with regard to the subject of drama — characters, props, and speeches, and that of pedagogical knowledge such as drama activities including mime, role-play, and hot-seating. Whereas PCK, which "distinguish(es) the understanding of the content specialist from that of the pedagogue" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8), is missing. In educational drama for language teaching, this kind of knowledge is described as teacher artistry across both drama and language disciplines (Dunn & Stinson, 2011). PCK foregrounds the ability to select effective pretexts for framing dramatic contexts, devise meaningful drama activities in the macro planning process, and balance between multiple roles while teaching (Dunn & Stinson, 2011). Yet, this teacher artistry is more focused on the drama domain. What constitutes the knowledge of language when applying drama to English teaching and how this knowledge impacts teachers' pedagogical choice of drama is yet to be answered.

This article seeks to fill the research gap by investigating the challenges language teachers are confronted with while learning to teach through drama. Based on the data from an action research project, it aims to discern the knowledge constituents crucial for successful learning and implementation by examining the fundamental causes underlying such challenges. For a clear and organised discussion, Shulman's (1986, 1987) perspective on teacher knowledge is referred to when identifying knowledge components pertaining to both disciplines of drama pedagogy and language teaching.

2 Research background

The English-through-Drama (ETD) project took place in 2020 at the Affiliated School of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. The school is known for its English education achievements, and its students are active and advanced in English as they began English learning in kindergarten. At the end of May 2020, the researcher visited this school and conducted a 90-minute workshop on English-through-Drama with students. Meanwhile, the workshop was observed by English teachers and school leaders. The headmaster soon decided that all his English teachers should, with the assistance of the author, learn drama pedagogy in order to establish the English-through-Drama curriculum in his school.

A team consisting of 18 primary school English teachers soon took shape, led by the researcher and assisted by Tian, head of the school's English subject. It was, in Wenger's terms, a "Community of Practice" in which people are mutually engaged for a joint enterprise and develop a shared repertoire, the kind of communities that "hold the key to real transformation" (1998, p. 85). Informed by the school's particulars, the researcher decided to take the ETD project as an action research inquiry, which "aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously" (Gilmore et al., 1986, p. 161). In this case, while assisting the school to develop an integrated drama and English curriculum, the researcher sought to delve into the complexity of teachers learning and applying drama pedagogy. By so doing, the researcher was motivated to observe and monitor teachers' progress to provide meaningful support, which may inform future teacher development programs for language teachers on drama pedagogy.

3 Project design

The drama approach for this study is best described as participatory drama, a term preferred by Winston and Lin (2015) to refer to the interactive drama pedagogy that connects students with texts (Wang, 2016). Each teaching unit began with a literary text, such as a picture book or a classic tale. The highlights of the chosen text, for example, its rhythm, subtext, or narrative gaps, were explored through drama activities, thus generating varied opportunities for language learning.

The project lasted for one year, with the author-researcher providing on-site support in the first half when teachers needed the most assistance and continued in the form of online coaching in the other half. The researcher trained the participants through workshops, conducted demonstrative lessons, assisted them in selecting suitable texts and developing lesson plans, and observed their teaching practices that were later reflected upon together. Adhering to the advice from Leung (2012), Qian and Wu (2010), and Dunn and Stinson (2011) that school-based research projects require long-term professional support and that results could be best achieved if the teachers have "conceptual input in action" (Leung, 2012, p. 252), the research project included four phases (Table 1).

Phases	Time	Content	Details
1	June -August 2020	Preparation	Teachers read children's books and books about drama, attempt to translate the selected books into drama lesson plans with language learning in mind.
2	August-September 2020	Workshops & Modelled Teaching	Teachers receive training on drama and how to combine with English teaching through workshops, and adapt the workshop content for use in real classrooms.
3	October - December 2020	Supported Practice	Teachers develop their own lesson plans with the help of the researcher and try them out.
4	January - June 2021	Semi-Independent Practice	Teachers as a learning community continue the practice and reflect accordingly, with little interference of the researcher.

Table 1: ETD Project Outline

ETD Class was quickly placed within the school's curricula since the new semester began in September 2020. After two days of intensive training, teachers paired up for the teaching practice, each pair covering approximately four 40-minute sessions every week due to the large student body. They mainly taught in regular classrooms and other times in the open hall when it was available. To ensure active participation, open classes were organised in the way that each week teachers in pairs taught one session which would be observed and reflected on by the rest of the community. The participants kept a weekly journal that documented their teaching highlights and problems for the researcher to review at the end of each week. Also, the author had an on-campus office and was able to observe their classes flexibly. Throughout the project, the researcher was not an unbiased passive observer but a "planner, leader, catalyser, facilitator, teacher, designer, listener, observer, synthesiser, reporter" (O'Brien, 1998, p. 18). Moreover, the four-phase study is not a linear process. Instead, each phase is a cyclical, spiral research cycle of constant "diagnosing, action planning, taking action, evaluating, specifying learning and diagnosing" (Susman, 1983, as cited in O'Brien, 1998, p. 3).

Both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected with the hope that the study would not only provide a general picture but also dig into the specifics of the process. Two scaled questionnaires were administered, one before phase 2 and the other at the end of phase 3. The first sought to understand the participants' preconceptions and previous practices of drama, while the second aimed to register students' learning progress and possible perspective changes. Qualitative instruments included transcripts from semi-structured interviews, meetings and teachers' weekly journals. The researcher also kept a research diary to record emerging issues and moment-to-moment interpretations. The lesson plans devised

and practiced by the participants, the naturally occurring data, were also collected and carefully scrutinised.

4 Findings

Most of the participants had some experience with drama pedagogy in the form of preparing students for stage performance. By the end of Phase 3, teachers developed 18 lesson plans (units) and tried them out with about 1,500 students. Each drama unit was devised from a text, such as a story or a picture book, and consisted of three to four lessons to foster English speaking, text appreciation, or writing whenever it applies.

During the course of study, a few key challenges have been constantly brought up, explained, explored, and debated, issues such as text selection and interpretation, translation into drama activities, teachers' role in a classroom, and the limited English language ability of both teachers and their students. The coding categories, i.e., text selection and interpretation, translation into drama activities, and classroom implementation, emerged as certain types of issues repeatedly occurred in teachers' practice and during the coaching sessions. In particular, they integrated features specific to the text-based participatory drama approach adopted for the drama project. In what follows, the writer will decode these issues by referring to Shulman's knowledge construct and strive to uncover the underlying causes. Moreover, throughout the discussion, the teachers' names are pseudonyms for privacy concerns.

4.1 Text selection and interpretation

Initially, teachers had chosen texts from Lisheng English and the Chip and Biff stories from Good English.[2] These stories generally lack the structure of a story -- and if they do, they are too close to students' daily routines to offer a light-hearted, playful atmosphere (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Teachers looked more at the difficulty level of language, for example, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, while overlooking the story and its connection to students' cognitive level and interests. To realise such language goals, physical imitation and line memorisation were most commonly adopted. Teacher Fong commented:

> My focus when selecting a text is whether it offers opportunities for active dramatisation or has plenty of roles and enough lines for everyone to join and speak. But I never thought about encouraging critical text

[2] Both Lisheng English and Good English readings are selected from Oxford Reading Tree series that highlight reading through phonetics. Lisheng English is introduced by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press of China, and include series such as Songbirds Phonics, TraditionalTales, and Snapdragons. Good English assembles series such as Floppy's Phonics, Biff, Chip and Kipper ClassicStories, and TreeTops Fiction.

> interpretations. As long as everybody was acting and speaking, that was good for me. (Interview notes)

In other words, she prioritised the forms of language and drama, if not completely neglecting the aspect of meaning. In the field of linguistics, this prioritisation represents the traditional focus on forms (FonFs) approach founded on structuralist language theories and behaviourist learning models (Long, 1998). Long criticises that FonFs tends to reduce pedagogic materials to "the basal reader variety" with little communicative L2 use (Long, 1998, p. 37). Nonetheless, drama is generally perceived as a communicative language approach that focuses on meaning (FonM), the second position to language teaching. FonM is underpinned by the sociolinguistic theory which perceives "language as a function rather than a form" (Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018, p. 9).

Beginning with the form of language has been criticised for lacking the potential to generate drama action (Dunn & Stinson, 2011). Drama practitioners highlighted the meaning potential of a text, or more accurately, a pre-text for process drama work, that it should

> raise questions for the 'reader' of the text; provoke our emotions and intellect; have an element of ambiguity; offer open-ended possibilities; involve or infer a group of people; indicate a future or a past; generate strong visual images beyond the original text; and have an inherent tension or beauty. (Dunn & Stinson, 2011, p. 625)

The quality list exhibits a meaning orientation in text selection by accentuating the text's ambiguity and tension to engage the readers' response. And these two textual features are also key to drama. A greater dramatic tension fosters a deeper and more lasting learning experience (O'Toole & Dunn, 2002, as cited in Piazzoli, 2012). Rather than mere physical imitation and line repetition in form-oriented drama teaching, learners are scaffolded to participate emotionally, physically, and intellectually in a meaning-oriented drama class — the participatory drama class in this context. They experience, identify, and empathise with what happens in the drama and remain at the same time as critical spectators as the drama unfolds. The engagement of emotions hence enhances students' "vocal interpretations" (Chang, 2012, p. 33). By solely focusing on the forms of language, the participant teachers inevitably reduced their selection of texts to simplified reader series that are largely bereft of tension and otherness. This pre-conception also leads to their preference for formalistic drama activities in the form of repetitive line drills and physical imitations, activities that may fail to engage learners at a deeper level of communication.

The other hindrance pertaining to text selection for drama work stems from what teachers read into the story, or in other words, the perceived meaning. Heavily influenced by the dominant Marxist literary criticism in Chinese literary education, teachers tend to analyse literary works from a "single and limited literary horizon" by emphasising the social significance of literary works, such as social morals, while "overlooking their aesthetic value" (Wang, 2016, p. 33). For example, the book *The True Story of Three Little Pigs* suggested by the researcher frustrated Teacher Liang deeply. The story is told from the wolf's (Alexander T. Wolf) point of view, which offers opportunities to encourage students to speak and write from contrasting perspectives, i.e., the perspectives of the three little pigs and the wolf. But Liang believed that the story teaches his Year 4 students to lie and excuse themselves from their mischief, even though "the point … is not to believe a word written by the so-called author as everything he says is undermined by surrounding, counterpointing, images" (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 44). Liang's concern about a teaching text's morality is shared by many participants in this research, a similar concern that motivated Plato to banish drama from his 'perfect' Republic.

However, the wolf's twist of the story are situations of "moral ambivalence" (Winston 1998, p. 104) that open up a dramatic space for children to debate and speculate upon the right and wrong, the true and false, in an authentic language context. The fear that children would be led astray denies such dialogues fundamental to an effective drama class. Such self-censorship regarding text interpretation further restricted teachers' choice of texts, which caused more issues when they translated the texts into drama activities.

4.2 Translation into drama activities

The activity of transforming literature texts into participatory drama work can be framed as a type of translation (Wang, 2016). The idea is based on Jakobson's definition of "intersemiotic translation", that is, "the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (1992, p. 145). The concept of translation is employed in this study to refer to lesson plan design, because a translation activity demands, though debatable, absolute fidelity to the original text or a "dynamic equivalence" (Wang, 2016, p. 48).

Translation from text to effective drama activities is regarded as one of the most challenging tasks by most participants from the beginning (85%) to the end of Phase 3 (52%). In the process, teachers were constantly set back by one or more of the three major difficulties:

1. Determine the meaningful elements of a text;
2. Combine the elements with effective drama activities;
3. Limited knowledge of drama.

The first category is specific to text-based drama approaches. Its cause has been partly discussed in the previous section, for instance, the participants' tendency to prioritise the text's language forms in terms of vocabulary and grammar. This preconception of language impedes them from a broader appreciation of the form of the text, including language styles, narrative patterns and rhythms, and how the chosen form relates to meaning, because "the patterning of form still inevitably generates meaning" (Cook, 2000, p. 48). For example, Yuan reflected on working on Julia Donaldson's *The Gruffalo* (1999):

> At first, I focused my planning on performance, like selecting some key moments for students to act out by themselves. But after talking with Ms. Ding (the researcher), I noticed the rhythm and how to connect it with the characters' movements. So I shifted my teaching focus to language… I hope I can find out the buried treasure in each picture book in the future instead of reducing teaching to a mere formality. (Weekly teaching journal)

Yuan's reflection represents the other end of a pendulum swing typical to all participants at the early stage of learning to teach through drama, since they tended to view drama to be all about acting out scenes and sharing interpretations. Despite that drama has been mainly associated with FonM, it would be "equally single-minded" (Long, 1998, p. 38) and "insufficient" (p. 40) if we cast away language form altogether, especially when the form is a crucial part of the storytelling in the chosen text. Long conceives a third option, focus on form (FonF), to deal with the limitation of FonM by briefly drawing students' attention to linguistic elements in communicative contexts. FonF has been developed since the late 1990s by Long himself and others such as Ellis (2016) to include both incidental and preemptive attention to form in an interactive or non-interactive way during a primarily meaning-focused activity. It is incredibly significant in foreign language contexts where explicit language input is highly expected (Ellis, 2016). In light of this, participatory drama applied to English teaching demands that practitioners be aware of the unique language forms and integrate them in meaningful ways to foster the development of form-meaning mapping.

Rhythm is a distinctive language feature that is likewise prominent in verses and children's books (Cook, 2000). Famous children's authors, such as Dr. Seuss and Julia Donaldson, are known to play with rhymes and rhythms in their storytelling to achieve the language's poetic function (Jakobson, 1960). However, it is automatically discarded by the participants because, as Linji remarked,

> We placed too much emphasis on language being a communicative tool but overlooked the beauty of language or its associative meaning. Sometimes we did sense something about the language, that it's fun, but never

> considered teaching this to our students or how to. (Private consultation notes)

Linji's comment discloses another cause for teachers' struggle in discovering meaningful elements - they emphasised the communicative function of language while overlooking its associative meaning. The idea of language function and meaning is worth close examination here. Her understanding of English as a communicative tool, typical of all participants, is somewhat narrow in that they equate language function with referential function (Jakobson, 1960), which focuses on the literal meaning of the message. While a functional view of language, as necessitated by drama, denotes seven types of meaning that can be put into three categories: "the conceptual, the associative, and the thematic" (Leech, 1990, p. 23). An expert English teacher working with a text, as portrayed by Shulman (1987), would be expected to work in and out of four levels: its literal meaning, associative meaning, interpretation, and reality application. Whereas teachers in this research context often stopped at the first level or, as discussed earlier, skipped to Marxist literary interpretation.

For instance, by habit, Yuan neglected the meaning potential of the sentence "Come and have lunch in my underground house" from The Gruffalo. It is not a typical form-driven textbook sentence that points to a literal meaning, nor does it only serve an invitation function. Instead, it is the kind of language play that refers to an "alternate reality" (Cook, 2000, p. 169). It contains a subtext where the "real" drama occurs (Leach, 2008, p. 36), which requires critical speculation upon the real meaning and a pause to guide students to wonder what awaits the little mouse in the fox's underground house. Students would be allowed to interact with language at a deeper level and draw on their life experiences in the sense-making process. It is the kind of language game that differs from decontextualised communicative exercises in traditional language classrooms. It is also the kind of language understanding demanded by drama pedagogy for a richer context to be created so that students can become or talk to the characters in the story before committing it to memory (Fleming, 2006). To this end, what underlies the participants' frustration in determining useful text elements is their existing perception regarding language form and meaning, for example, neglecting rhythm as a meaningful language form and regarding meaning as limited to the literal-referential level. It is an understanding incompatible with the language conception substantiating a text-based participatory drama pedagogy. The content knowledge of English language, in line with Shulman's knowledge construct (1986, 1987), is thus insufficient.

On the other hand, the second struggle while transforming texts into meaningful drama activities can be seen as resulting from a lack of PCK (Shulman, 1986). To explore texts through drama, teachers are expected to present the intended learning objective, linguistically and drama-wise, while taking into consideration students' needs and characteristics. Picture books

can be taught in various ways, but teachers must focus on one way that best befits their teaching context. Teacher Zhou's handling of Max the Brave (Vere, 2014) sheds light on this observation. The picture book tells the story of Max the kitten who wants to find and chase mice without knowing what a mouse is. The narrative begins with the question-and-answer pattern between Max and the animals he encounters along the way - "Are you Mouse?" "No, I'm Fly/Fish…". Such repetitive patterns of language and plots are classical of children's picture books and provide immediate drama opportunities for children to play. Teacher Zhou used role-play with her Year 1 pupils for this part of learning. She divided the whole class into five groups, tasked each group to perform one meeting scene. The session turned out quite disappointing because the children were not actively responding to her, and many could not stay in their roles as part of a can or a fish tank. In this case, Zhou failed to reckon the characteristics of lower primary schoolers and the big class size. It would have been more efficient to grant each group a collective role as Fly or Fish. In doing so, every single member of the group shall be able to converse with kitten Max, who is, at the same time, the teacher.

The limited knowledge of drama in the third category partly chimes with Shulman's idea of pedagogy knowledge (1986). Partly, since the unique feature of drama, that it relies on tension and is a shared experience, commands us to perceive it as both a subject and a pedagogy. We need to understand what activities are available and why they can be applied in particular ways for particular language teaching. In other words, teachers should be familiar with both dramatic forms and their underlying, inherent meaning. Without such understanding, teachers would tend to apply drama activities to language teaching "in an ad hoc manner" (Dunn & Stinson, 2011, p. 618). The way teachers treated drama games in class epitomises this observation. For example, the participants often employed games as stirring activities without linking them to the lesson contents, thus considering them a waste of time (e.g., Teacher Chu).

The awareness to integrate games with meaningful learning has grown till the end of Phase 3. One example is teacher Huang's creative use of the Lion and Antelope game to introduce a new plot of *The Magic Paintbrush* (Hunia, 1988). The same game was played during the teacher training workshop to explore the idea of tension and conflict. At the heart of this game is the predator-prey conflict, and the way it is played intensifies such conflict by using three pairs of dramatic contrasts - light and darkness, silence and sound, and stillness and movement. Huang recognised the similar predator-prey relationship in the story of The Magic Paintbrush: the predator is the powerful and greedy emperor while the prey is the poor boy. According to her lesson design, students would be guided to experience the conflict in a playful yet meaningful way before verbalising the characters' feelings and debating, both as the characters and themselves, whether the boy should abide by the emperor's greedy demands.

4.3 Classroom implementation

The unique nature of drama pedagogy entails particular classroom features, such as collective individual participation, social interaction, quality of spontaneity, and emotional engagement (Leung, 2012). According to the findings of the post-intervention questionnaire, less than one-third of the participants expressed difficulty in handling such complex classroom dynamics towards the end of Phase 3. All of the participants considered themselves competent in eliciting effective responses from students. Over 90% of the teachers reported that they were able to give clear instructions, and 82% of them said that they were able to provide constructive feedback. Nonetheless, promising results as they seem, these numbers do not reveal much about the particularities constituting teachers' learning progress. The following writing looks at the qualitative data from teachers' classroom implementation and their reflections to provide a more concrete and meaningful account.

Teachers must have extra classroom PCK, the knowledge to explore key and meaningful moments, conceptualise the experience, and handle a new teacher-student relationship (Leung, 2012). It indicates that teachers in this type of classroom are not mere instructors of knowledge, but directors, actors, playwrights, and teachers (Bowell & Heap, 2017). The spontaneity of interaction and the multifold roles teachers must juggle with in a drama context have brought about many difficulties for the participants, manifested in their class structuring. During the first few weeks, teachers sometimes controlled too much, while other times intervened too little.

One example of teacher dominance is their effort to scale down the unpredictability of students' responses while conducting more open-ended drama activities, such as hot-seating or meeting-in-role. Teacher Lili organised a persuasion-in-role activity for teaching Brothers Grimm's The Gold Children. Students, in the collective role as the fisherman's wife, were tasked to persuade the fisherman played by the teacher to reveal his secret of sudden fortune. For her first teaching practice, Lili gave each group a slip of paper written with sentences "for reference" before sending them to rehearse, for fear of her students "not being able to produce good answers" (After-class talk). When they met again as the fisherman and wife, the drama observed by the researcher was very flat — students simply read from the paper and there was not much variation in each group's interaction with the teacher. The spontaneity was lost and so was her students' interest. It was only when Lili taught the same lesson again, without the aid of the reference notes, that she met her "Aha" moment and was brought to realise the power of drama. The language students used this time was not particularly advanced, however, the effort with which they transformed their own understanding of the drama situation into words they possessed, and the emotions they conveyed through physical and verbal interaction with the teacher, mattered to all within the drama world. Eventually,

the teacher-student interaction altered the class dynamic by moving the teacher, the traditionally authoritative figure in a classroom, to change her fixed agenda:

> I was deeply moved when my students were trying so hard to convince me. They were very emotional as the fisherman's wife, saying something like 'I'd kill myself if you don't tell me the secret'. And seeing that I was still holding the truth, more of them volunteered to jump into the wife's role and persuade me. Their bodies were shaking, and I felt that, I as the fisherman, I had to reveal the secret. I didn't plan to do that actually. That was the first time I dropped my plan without feeling scared. The fact that I wasn't forcing them to do something, to learn, but that they were doing it so passionately, made me realise the power of drama and that I should try to try more in my class. (Lili, open-class discussion notes)

Whilst with some other activities, teachers were found to be lacking the role of a director and a teacher. When Linji first taught Little Beauty (Browne, 2013) with Year 2 students, the moment the zookeepers took away from Gorilla his kitten friend Beauty was seized. Children were tasked to present the reasons through a "performance carousel", which allows each group to present their still or moving images in turn (Baldwin & John, 2012, p.38). Students brainstormed a myriad of possibilities, and Linji, very pleased with her students' active participation, received every response with an affectionate "Good!" before quickly turning to the next one. With the command "Now, let's act out why the keepers took away little Beauty", students were put into groups of six right away to rehearse. The eventual presentation went quite disheartening based on the researcher's observation and the teacher's own recount — every group's work was nearly identical and did not fulfill the task, with a lot of messing around.

In this case, it is the absence of teacher intervention or scaffolding that has led to disappointment. When organising the performance carousel, teachers failed to provide a solid framework and specific requirements for the young actors to refer to. Children, particularly those from Year 1 and Year 2, do not possess the high-order cognitive skill of generalising their experience. Teachers, therefore, should assume the director and teacher role through paraphrasing or categorising and motivate students to think beyond the obvious, eventually guiding them to form conceptual understanding. Moreover, the way teachers interacted with children was very formal - though the question asked was referential, it was treated as a display pseudo question, the answer to which was disregarded and hence devoid of meaning.

In retrospect, the two teachers remarked that it was a lack of teaching objectives and their insufficient knowledge of activity organisation that had prevented them from responding and guiding effectively. In addition, performance activity, in their rooted perception, did not require much structuring. For some, it was good enough as long as students were kept busy

in a controllable way - another manifestation of formalism. Such is a very typical feature of teachers' early practice. Teacher Fong's observation captured it perfectly:

> We were simply running from one task to another, worrying if we could finish all activities in time, without paying attention to their purpose and inherent logic.

When structuring a class with drama, teachers should be able "to change direction suddenly, to move with the group, to be responsive to their needs, to reinstate a lost mood or to rebuild lost tension" (Dunn & Stinson, 2011, p. 628). In this short description, teachers must take on quadripartite roles as director, actor, playwright, and teacher (Bowell & Heap, 2017). Teacher talk, mainly through questions and explanations, takes up almost two-thirds of the total speech turns in traditional classes (Myhill et al., 2006). While in English classes taught through drama, students take about 20% more turns than the teacher (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). In light of teachers' quadripartite roles and students' active involvement, the narrative of a language class using drama is thus shaped by both parties and its discourse types and registers will certainly vary.

To a certain extent, the inefficacy of both Lili and Linji's initial teaching practices described above results from the absence of PCK in classroom talk. The first, caused by teachers' fear of spontaneous classroom discourses, reduced the supposedly genuine conversation to an unauthentic scripted dialogue. The second is due to teachers' oversight regarding clear instructions and inexperience in providing spontaneous feedback, which would have invited students to clarify their meanings, challenged them to be more creative or sensible, and channelled their contributions, linguistically and drama-wise, to the ongoing classroom narrative.

5 Conclusion

This article draws on data from a teacher training project which involved the author as a teacher trainer and researcher in a Chinese primary school. As an effort to identify the knowledge constituents required for teachers to successfully apply participatory drama to English teaching, it investigates the inherent difficulties and the underlying causes encountered by the participants in their learning process. Three challenges are identified: text selection and interpretation, translation into drama activities, and classroom implementation. Teachers' prioritisation of language form in terms of vocabulary and grammar and their moralistic preference concerning story interpretation were found to be responsible for their difficulty in text selection. Translation into drama activities was challenging due to a biased view of form and meaning across both drama and language fields. Implementing drama in an

English classroom distressed the participants as they had to juggle with the quadruple roles of director, actor, playwright, and teacher in the classroom.

Referring to Shulman's construct of teacher knowledge, this article argues that teachers should be equipped with a changed perspective of form and meaning across both domains of language and drama. The text-based participatory drama used in this context focuses on language meaning and negotiation, but it does not completely disregard language form. Rather, teachers should recognise language style, narrative pattern, and rhythm as part of language form besides vocabulary and grammar as text features; and that language meaning as explored through drama happens at both communicative and associative levels and they should not be interpreted only from moralistic perspectives. Likewise, drama needs to be treated as both subject and pedagogy, which demands teachers to not only know what drama activities to use and how to conduct them in class but also comprehend the inherent nature of drama underpinning activity design and development. Only when they are equipped with these appropriate subject content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge can they effectively link language and drama (PCK) and create a meaningful learning experience.

However, the difficulties reported in this article should not be regarded as all that might hold English teachers back from learning drama pedagogy. Affective factors, such as teacher emotion and identity must have also played a significant role in the learning process, which could be of interest to future research. Moreover, the findings may not be generalisable as it is based on one single research project. For instance, moral concerns may not be an issue in other cultures in the selection of texts. Meanwhile, the challenges presented in this study are specific to the particular approach of participatory drama that highlighted the integration of literary texts. A different drama approach may bring about distinct challenges that demand a renewed PCK regarding drama and language.

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