

# The value and application of educational drama in teaching revolutionary-themed texts in primary school Chinese

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**Abstract.** Revolutionary culture refers to the distinctive cultural form created by the Communist Party of China, under the guidance of Marxism, together with the Chinese people in the course of the New Democratic Revolution. It plays an irreplaceable role in enhancing students' core competencies, advancing the "Four Histories" education, and promoting Chinese modernization. However, several problems remain in the teaching of revolutionary-themed texts in primary school Chinese: students often struggle to grasp the deeper meaning of the texts due to limited knowledge and experience; teaching methods lack innovation and therefore fail to fully highlight the value of moral cultivation embedded in the subject; insufficiently integrated teaching resources weaken instructional effectiveness; and a disconnect between teaching and real-life contexts hinders the development of students' ability to integrate knowledge with action. In response to these challenges, this paper proposes the flexible use of educational drama in the teaching of revolutionary-themed texts in primary school Chinese. By coordinating multiple stakeholders, leveraging digital technologies, supplementing materials through interdisciplinary collaboration, and selecting appropriate texts, educational drama can significantly enhance the effectiveness of teaching in this domain.

**Keywords:** educational drama, revolutionary culture, core competencies

## 1. Introduction

The Chinese Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the "new curriculum standards") stipulate that "learning content across different themes should be coordinated according to the characteristics of each grade level. Works reflecting fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture should account for 60%–70% of the total" [1]. Among these, more than forty texts related to revolutionary culture are included in the nationally compiled primary school Chinese textbooks, carrying the important mission of preserving and promoting patriotism.

The difficulties currently observed in the teaching of revolutionary-themed texts not only impede the educational function of the Chinese language curriculum but also, at a deeper level, affect the inheritance and development of revolutionary culture in the new era. Against this backdrop, exploring the pedagogical potential of educational drama is of both practical significance and profound contemporary value, as it offers an innovative approach to improving classroom instruction and fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education.

## 2. The connotations and characteristics of educational drama

The concept of "educational drama" originated from the foreign practices of DIE (Drama In Education) and TIE (Theatre In Education). It developed in the early twentieth century in the United Kingdom after drama was incorporated into the school curriculum [2]. Educational drama emphasizes applying theatrical techniques in classroom settings, where students learn through activities such as role-playing and improvisation. Theatre in Education, by contrast, presents relatively complete theatrical performances with a theatrical character. The plot may pause at any time as performers engage the audience in discussions about real-world issues related to the storyline, making the experience highly focused and thought-provoking [2].

Educational drama encourages students to express actions through their bodies and to experience characters situated in different historical contexts through inner feelings. By actively placing themselves within the world of the text [3], students gain a heightened sense of engagement. Compared with merely receiving information through listening, this embodied approach more effectively supports students' holistic development [4].

## 3. Difficulties in teaching revolutionary-themed texts

### 3.1. Students' limited knowledge and experience hinder their ability to grasp deeper meanings

Revolutionary-themed texts are tied to specific historical contexts and contain complex historical relationships. Primary school students, lacking the necessary background knowledge, often struggle to achieve a deep understanding based on their existing cognitive frameworks. Children in this age group are generally in Piaget's "concrete operational stage" (7–11 years old), in which thinking relies heavily on concrete objects or imagery. Today, children's living conditions have improved significantly, and their life experiences are relatively limited, making it difficult for them to relate to the social conditions of the past.

For example, in the first-grade Chinese textbook—Never Forget Who Dug the Well—the concept of a "well" appears. Most students cannot grasp the hardships of water scarcity or understand the significance of having access to water for the people of Shazhouba. Nor can they fully comprehend the deep sense of gratitude and respect the villagers felt toward Chairman Mao. The gap in lived experience prevents students from forming emotional resonance with the characters.

### 3.2. A lack of innovative teaching methods limits the subject's capacity for moral education

Chinese, as a core subject that nurtures intellect and shapes character, carries unique educational value. Revolutionary-themed texts aim to help students develop correct values and cultivate patriotism. However, many teachers still rely on traditional lecture-based methods, following rigid teaching routines. Much of class time is devoted to mechanical tasks such as explaining pronunciation and word meaning, leaving little room to address students' developmental characteristics or provide spiritual guidance.

The new curriculum standards emphasize that "the unity of instrumental and humanistic attributes is a fundamental feature of the Chinese language curriculum" [1]. When teaching focuses excessively on instrumental skills while neglecting humanistic value, students' understanding of revolutionary spirit becomes superficial, preventing genuine internalization and practice.

### 3.3. Insufficient integration of teaching resources reduces instructional effectiveness

Revolutionary-themed texts span a wide range of historical events and social contexts. Some teachers, constrained by limited instructional time, cannot offer comprehensive background explanations and thus rely solely on the text itself. They fail to fully make use of the auxiliary components embedded in the textbook and

do not effectively guide students in whole-book reading, weakening the organic link between the text and external resources. As a result, students develop only a shallow understanding of the deeper meaning of these texts.

Additionally, some teachers do not integrate local red cultural resources into their instruction, leading to fragmented student knowledge about revolutionary history. This diminishes the educational value of revolutionary culture. Therefore, it is essential to improve instructional design and integrate multiple teaching resources to enhance learning outcomes.

### 3.4. A disconnect between teaching and real life limits students' ability to integrate knowledge with action

The contemporary relevance of revolutionary-themed texts is significant, as they provide valuable resources for moral education and for shaping students' values. However, some teachers remain confined to the textbook and, after explaining the text, do not guide students to appreciate or practice the noble qualities embodied by the characters.

For instance, in the second-grade Chinese text Uncle Lei Feng, Where Are You?, some teachers focus merely on surface-level explanations without connecting the lesson to real-life examples of helping others. This may lead to misconceptions among students, causing them to overlook the contemporary meaning of Lei Feng's spirit and fail to translate these values into real-world actions.

Only when revolutionary-themed texts are meaningfully linked with students' lived experiences can their full educational impact be realized—allowing students to internalize revolutionary spirit and express it through concrete actions.

## 4. Reflections on the value of educational drama in teaching revolutionary-themed texts in primary school Chinese

Against the backdrop of ongoing reforms in foundational education, and guided by the concepts of holistic education and the integration of the five key domains of student development, the cultivation of well-rounded individuals has become a central goal. Drawing on situational teaching methods and project-based learning, educational drama can help realize the dual objectives of moral education and cultural confidence. This calls for a renewed examination of the exploratory application of educational drama.

### 4.1. Flexible and diverse teaching forms effectively address individual differences

Each student is an independent individual with unique learning styles. Teachers should therefore adapt instruction according to students' strengths. In 1988, American psychologists Richard Bandler and W. McDonald proposed the VAK learning model, categorizing learners according to their cognitive styles into three types: Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic [5].

Visual learners are attracted to knowledge presented through images or written materials. Auditory learners are more responsive to sound-based information. Kinesthetic learners prefer hands-on activities that engage tactile experiences. Educational drama accommodates these individual differences: visual learners can observe classmates' performances to capture information visually and step into the characters' inner worlds; auditory learners can interpret the text using varied tones and attentively listen to dialogues, understanding content through language input and output; kinesthetic learners can undertake hands-on tasks, using bodily engagement to reinforce learning. In this way, educational drama allows all three types of learners to leverage their preferred learning modalities to master knowledge effectively.

#### 4.2. Contextualized practice promotes integrated development of core competencies

The new curriculum standards state that "the core competencies cultivated by the compulsory education Chinese curriculum reflect a comprehensive integration of cultural confidence, language use, thinking ability, and aesthetic creativity" [1]. Educational drama, by enacting revolutionary culture, allows students to deeply appreciate the unique beauty and richness of Chinese traditional culture, thereby enhancing cultural confidence.

Moreover, educational drama creates a rich language environment. When communicating, students must consider intonation, the logical sequence of sentences, and emotional expression, ensuring that their spoken output is coherent and emotionally resonant. This process implicitly develops students' language organization and expressive abilities.

During the implementation of educational drama, students are the primary agents in preparatory work, while teachers act as facilitators, minimizing intervention to provide ample space for cognitive exploration. After the performance, teachers encourage students to reflect on problems from multiple perspectives, rather than accepting established views uncritically, thereby fostering critical thinking and independent reasoning [6].

#### 4.3. Supports cross-disciplinary knowledge integration and transfer

The Compulsory Education Curriculum Program (2022 Edition) specifies that all subjects should dedicate no less than 10% of instructional time to interdisciplinary thematic learning [1]. As a cross-disciplinary teaching model, educational drama inherently integrates multiple disciplines. Specifically, revolutionary-themed texts from primary school Chinese textbooks serve as the core, establishing a connection between Chinese language and history; costume design and selection engage knowledge of color theory from art; performers' facial expressions and body movements incorporate elements of dance.

Thus, educational drama effectively overcomes common shortcomings in interdisciplinary teaching, such as "simple accumulation" or "mechanical transplantation." It enables students to perceive connections across disciplines, concretize abstract concepts through a structured knowledge framework, and apply knowledge more effectively [7].

#### 4.4. Role interaction promotes students' social development

Educational drama is a group-based activity involving both participants and facilitators, providing a social environment that encourages interaction among students and fosters a sense of belonging [8]. Teachers guide students to listen to others' opinions, resolve ambiguities using appropriate communication skills, and express their own ideas effectively, thereby enhancing social skills and interpersonal communication.

During preparation, students must assume specific responsibilities and cooperate to ensure the successful completion of the performance. This process nurtures collective consciousness, social responsibility, and leadership skills, all of which benefit students' future adaptation to social life [9].

### 5. Application pathways of educational drama in teaching revolutionary-themed texts

#### 5.1. Coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders to form a systematic educational force

The Opinions of the Ministry of Education and Twelve Other Departments on Improving the Collaborative Education Mechanism Among Schools, Families, and Society emphasize that schools, families, and society should jointly assume responsibility for student development and strengthen educational synergy. In this

regard, relevant authorities or schools can encourage parents to participate in educational drama, collaborating with children in script creation, offering constructive suggestions, and providing timely encouragement and support.

Schools should provide appropriate venues and necessary infrastructure for educational drama, and encourage teachers to adopt innovative drama-based teaching methods. Teachers are expected to integrate local red cultural resources and utilize historical sites and patriotic education bases to implement venue-based education, creating immersive theatrical experiences that bridge historical and contemporary contexts and overcome spatial and temporal boundaries.

### 5.2. Leveraging digital technology to enhance the effectiveness of educational drama

In today's digital era, the Opinions of Nine Departments Including the Ministry of Education on Accelerating Education Digitization advocate the comprehensive promotion of intelligent technologies to support educational transformation. Integrating digital technology with educational drama can effectively leverage the strengths of both.

First, teachers can use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create intelligent avatars of revolutionary figures, allowing students to engage in remote dialogues with historical pioneers. This approach enables students to actively explore the stories behind historical events and develop a deeper understanding of the moral qualities and spirit of revolutionary predecessors, enhancing their identification with revolutionary history.

Second, teachers can encourage students to employ AI-based text generation tools to compose impromptu revolutionary-themed poetry inspired by the texts. Additionally, Virtual Reality (VR) technology can overcome physical space limitations, reconstructing historical or fictional scenarios. Immersive experiences through VR can heighten the expressive power and educational impact of drama.

### 5.3. Integrating interdisciplinary resources to deepen understanding of revolutionary culture

The Guidelines for Incorporating Revolutionary Tradition into Primary and Secondary School Curricula state: "Revolutionary tradition education primarily involves moral and legal education (ideological and political education), Chinese, and history, with targeted integration of arts subjects (music, visual arts, etc.), and organic permeation into other disciplines, forming a comprehensive '3+1+N' coverage across all subjects." This interdisciplinary design not only emphasizes collaborative educational functions across subjects but also provides multidimensional pathways for implementing revolutionary tradition education.

Revolutionary-themed texts inherently reflect content from the "Four Histories" (the history of the Communist Party of China, New China, reform and opening-up, and socialist development), providing a natural alignment. Therefore, teachers can integrate "Four Histories" content into the teaching of revolutionary texts to broaden students' knowledge and promote knowledge transfer and application.

For example, in the second unit of the sixth-grade primary school textbook, the poem Seven-Li Poem: The Long March is studied. Teachers can have students draw a map of the Long March route, using painting to visualize the arduous journey and internalize the spirit of perseverance embodied in the march. Additionally, teachers can design related hands-on activities such as "making straw sandals," having students weave traditional straw shoes and try walking in them. Through this embodied experience, students gain a tangible understanding of the hardships faced by the Red Army, fostering a deep appreciation of the resilience and revolutionary optimism of their predecessors, thereby achieving unity of knowledge and practice in revolutionary cultural education.

#### 5.4. Respecting historical facts and selecting texts appropriately

Revolutionary-themed texts carry specific revolutionary cultural values, and the spirit they embody has inspired successive generations. Teachers should guide students to respect and honor historical facts in drama adaptations, avoiding arbitrary changes to historical settings or distortion of character portrayals in pursuit of dramatic effect. Primary school is a critical period for shaping students' worldview, life values, and ethical understanding; misrepresentation can lead to historical misconceptions and undermine the teaching effect. Respecting historical authenticity, on the other hand, enhances the credibility and persuasive power of the drama.

Moreover, teachers should consider students' learning levels and developmental characteristics when selecting texts for educational drama. Some revolutionary texts are short and focus primarily on emotional expression or theoretical explanation without concrete, vivid narratives, making them unsuitable for dramatic adaptation.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, integrating educational drama into the teaching of revolutionary-themed texts in primary school Chinese can enrich the instructional formats of Chinese classes and break the limitations of traditional teaching. While mastering the core content of the texts, students' moral and spiritual qualities are also cultivated. The integration of these two aspects enhances students' core competencies, thereby realizing the full educational value of the Chinese language curriculum.

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