

Study of Case Method

Mei-Chun Lin

Summary

“Theatre Arts” has become a new part in the “Art and Humanity” area in the reformed national curriculum in Taiwan since 10 years ago. However, “theatre arts” was not the major part in the pre-service teacher’s training program that teachers had little prior knowledge and confronted many problems in their own practice in the classroom. The teaching philosophy and principles of drama are quite complex, it’s even more complex to apply drama/theatre to the educational fields with different age groups. As a teacher trainer, it has always been the ultimate goal to find an effective way to do the in-service drama/performing art training program for the teachers. Therefore, I tried to use “Case Method Instruction (CMI)” in the in-service training class for kindergarten teachers few years ago.

Based on the real-life teaching situations or events, the cases are used for pre- or in-service teachers to explore, analyze, and examine representations of actual classrooms. Case Method Instruction are adopted for the teacher training program in which teaching cases are created by the teacher trainer and used explicitly for discussion and seek to include sufficient information to elicit active analysis and interpretation by teacher participants with differing perspectives. In actual practice, Case Method Instruction are widely used in education; yet, in the research field, there are only a handful of empirical studies conducted to evaluate the cases, the teaching process, and the growth from the teacher participants.

The purpose of the study is to answer the above questions-to evaluate the teaching case materials and the teachers’ responses to the materials, to investigate the teaching process in the training program and to analyze the leader’s techniques during the discussion and the growth of the participant teachers in a 18-week performing arts/drama teachers’ CMI training class.

In the research, according to CMI procedure, the first step was to select and evaluate appropriate teaching case materials. 12 case materials, which were collected and written from previous study, were selected. Then, these cases were under evaluations by 17 teachers using an adapted 5-points assessment scale. The items in the scale consists of “title”, “text”, “questions”, and “writing style” and they were scored individually on the scale. There were also open-ended questions added to the assessment sheet as the anecdotal record for further data analysis. In the second phase, another 10 teacher participants joined the CMI class, and the action research was adopted to investigate the actual teaching process through CMI procedure. The reflective teaching notes, observational records of class discussion, and teachers’ own case-analysis reports were data collected for further analysis.

The research results showed that 7 out of 12 cases were selected from the old cases and there are two kinds of cases- the “ill-structured cases” and the “exemplar cases”. It was found that the “ill-structured cases” got lower scores than the “exemplar cases”. Major reasons for higher scored cases included: “titles that are creative”, “texts that triggered interests for discussion”, “case questions that met the participants’ experiences”, “writing styles that showed the character’s inner struggles”. It is interesting to note that the lower-scored cases got more responses during the case discussion than the higher-scored cases. After the selection and evaluation of the cases, three major dramatic elements and drama lessons were introduced separately through different written cases from steps 2 to step 5. These steps are: lectures of major theories and teaching principles, presentation of cases, discussion of cases, design of extended activities. After these steps, the participants got into three groups, designed their own drama lessons and taught in the classroom. They came back to the case study group and reflected together upon their own teaching comparing to those cases read previously in the CMI class.

Through action research, the procedure of CMI was altered. Major changes in the procedure included: combining step 2 with step 4 to integrate the introduction of drama teaching principles with actual case discussion. In stead of giving pure lectures in the beginning step (step 2), the leader gradually incorporated the explanation of the theories and principles during the discussion in step 4 from the reflective notes of several case discussions. Depending on the responses from the participants, the leader tried to weave major ideas of teaching into discussion. Moreover, some detailed procedure in step 3 were

also adapted to meet the actual needs of participants such as removing the film clips that might lead to the lost of focus, eliminating some introductory questions, and adding “case analysis report” as homework before the actual case discussion. The anecdotal data revealed that the leading discussion questions might be removed depending on the participant’s experiences. For those teachers with bountiful experiences, the leading discussion can be eliminated; yet, for those without experiences, it should remain.

Features of the leader in the case discussion were investigated and the data revealed three crucial aspects in the leader’s leading style: building inviting atmosphere for discussion (open-ended questions and resolution of awkward questions), focusing in discussion (timing for questioning, temporary conclusions, and refocusing the issues constantly), and considering individual differences of the participants (various background of the teachers, layers of thoughts and experiences).

Overall, through the CMI process, the participants gained a lot from different perspectives: analytical reflective thinking ability, courage of experimenting various drama lessons, the growing ability to teach drama independently, and the collaborative partnership growing from the CMI training group.

Keywords: case method instruction, evaluation of case materials, drama, performing arts, teacher training

