

A Study on the Integration of Somatics and Mask Applications in Junior High School Performing Arts Curriculum

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Summary

This study explores the application of Somatics combined with masks in junior high school performing arts courses and analyzes its influence on enhancing adolescents' body awareness.

In professional theater mask performance and training, "masks" carry strong symbolic meanings. The colors and lines of masks allow performers to break free from the limitations of their personal identities, enabling actors to explore different character states from the outside in, embodying the other to act on behalf of the character. However, in the artistic learning and application of adolescents, masks become a medium that guides them through the organic interaction between body and mind, leading to a heightened understanding of body perception and self-awareness.

Theoretical foundation

This study is based on the theories of Somatic scholars Feldenkrais (1972 / 2017, 2010 / 2017) and Mei-Chu Liu (2005, 2000, 2010), who propose that awareness is the starting point for change. By increasing awareness of one's movements and breaking habitual patterns, individuals can reorganize their self-image, which improves behavior, physical and mental states, and develops more efficient movements and thought processes that align with personal needs. Additionally, this study analyzes the mask applications of Jacques Lecoq (2002 / 2018, 2006), focusing on the performance exercises of neutral masks, larva masks, and expressive masks. Lecoq sought masks

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that truly belonged to theater—those that conveyed human nature and facilitated transformation to achieve specific performance levels. This method not only serves to create character, but also aligns with this study’s focus on body awareness in adolescents, indirectly fostering deeper learning and self-discovery.

Research methodology

To address the research question, this study adopts participant observation, implementing a 14-session body awareness performance course at the researcher’s school totaling 630 minutes. The course uses “masks” as a medium, incorporating activities such as body awareness exercises under masks, improvisational training, and physical theater games.

During data collection, the observer (researcher) must immerse themselves in the context of the observed, interacting closely to deeply experience, listen, and observe, thus understanding the meanings behind phenomena, behaviors, or events. Using triangulation enhanced objectivity, gathering data from multiple perspectives—including the researcher, students, and experts—to minimize bias.

Research results

In the curriculum design of this study, Body Awareness Under Masks, which consists of three stages: neutral body awareness phase, character reflection awareness phase, and body awareness creation phase, the foundation is based on Somatics studies. Using the neutral mask, larva mask, and expressive mask, the design emphasizes returning to the origin of the body. Diverse activities such as body movement guide adolescents to explore the connection between the body and emotions, further enhancing the application of body awareness:

1. Neutral body awareness phase: Centered on neutral masks, this phase helps students perceive the essence of movement, initially exploring self-awareness and opening the body awareness process. Activities include an introduction to global mask performances, human body structures, and numerous physical theater games to explore relationships between people and space, people and objects. Exercises such as Awakening, Elemental Journey, and Texture guide students to observe movements and recognize their bodily states, and to discuss the significance of the body in daily life.
2. Character reflection phase: This phase applies larva masks and expressive masks, encouraging students to learn from the physical actions of characters while reflecting on their own body states. This process explores the similarities and differences between character and self, using

masks of different personalities to understand why characters move. Activities include larva mask exercises such as birth, movement and learning human movement logic to explore how and why newborn creatures move. Additionally, exercises with half-face/full-face expressive masks guide students in reflecting on their body awareness in daily life. At the end of this phase, students create their own half-face expressive masks using papier-mâché and lightweight clay, which are used in the next phase.

3. **Body awareness creation phase:** Building on the first phase's use of neutral masks, this stage introduces the seven levels of tension and farewell situational exercises, alongside advanced physical theater games such as continuously sculpting human statues, mirrors and shadows, and the three states of water. These activities integrate the half-face expressive masks made in the second phase, exploring body variations in different postures. The course culminates in life spectrum, reflecting on the entire 14-week program.

Research results show:

1. **When masks serve as a medium, they effectively reduce adolescent anxiety and refocus attention on the self, enabling awareness through movement.**

Masks become a powerful tool for exploring the body's dynamics and fostering creative expression. By concealing facial expressions, masks amplify bodily sensations, enhancing students' body consciousness and positively impacting self-perception.

2. **The integration of Somatics and masks enhances and improves adolescents' body awareness, relieving academic pressure and discomfort from prolonged sitting.**

Through the Body Awareness Under Masks curriculum, students gradually adjust and refine their self-image, promoting holistic physical and mental balance.

3. **Neutral masks help adolescents clarify self-image and movement fundamentals.**

By stripping away emotions and character traits, students focus solely on body structure, movement intent, and execution, leading to an improved awareness of breath, muscle dynamics, and bodily structures.

4. **Larva masks and expressive masks enable adolescents to perceive bodily changes from an external perspective, enhancing self-reflection.**

Through theatrical scenarios, students embody and experience another's physical state, indirectly improving their awareness of their own bodily conditions and refining self-perception.

Conclusion and recommendations

The body and the world are interactive—our bodily movements shape the world, and in turn, the world influences our bodily perceptions. This interaction forms an inseparable whole. Masks allow adolescents to recognize and control their bodies through different character movements. By covering their daily identities, masks enable adolescents to temporarily detach from themselves, offering new perspectives for self-examination. Whether neutral masks, larva masks, or expressive masks, all contribute to enhanced body awareness and self-identity development.

Thus, incorporating Somatics and masks into junior high school performing arts curricula provides adolescents with an inspiring and integrative learning experience. This approach not only enhances body awareness and self-perception, but also strengthens their ability to regulate physical and mental states in daily life. Through an understanding of human nature and self-concept, adolescents can make meaningful changes in their lives. This innovative curriculum empowers students to carry the lessons learned beyond the masks.

The following suggestions are provided:

1. Teachers applying Somatics with masks should provide clear instruction and allow sufficient time for body awareness, for the greatest effectiveness.
2. Teachers should encourage students to discuss and reflect after lessons, using dialogues or class journals to clarify their body awareness experiences.
3. Teachers should tailor learning activities to each student's unique characteristics, ensuring personalized body awareness experiences that suit individual needs.