Gender Education through Creating Internet Theatre in Education

Shu Ching Yang
shyang@mail.nsysu.edu.tw
Graduate Institute of Education
National Sun Yat-sen University, Taiwan, R.O.C. 80424

Chia-Chieh Huang
hjjjay101@yahoo.com.tw

1. Introduction

In Taiwan, gender equity and gender issues in education recently beginning to open up and become a hot topic in education. Curriculum materials are now being developed, professional publications are beginning to cover gender equity issues, a serious of professional workshops are devoting time to it, and individual teacher educators are starting to become concerned about it.

In response to the educational policy of our country, the Internet theater gender program is designed to achieve gender equity for K-5-6 primary school students. The Internet theatre project takes advantage of computer support learning community and theater education. The introduction of Internet theatre into the gender education presents both an opportunity to expand the power of teaching and learning gender issues through electronic facilitation of the Internet technology to exploit the enhanced features of interactive hypermedia and the educational, entertaining value of theatre education. It intends to give learners a safe, entertaining, intellectual and supervised opportunity to examine their own attitudes, behaviors and living experience regarding gender issues through interactive drama and discussion.

2. Rationale for Internet Theater Gender Program

The design rationales of the project are based upon a set of theory-based design principles, such as theater in education, cognitive flexibility theory (Spiro et al., 1992), situated learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989), and cooperative learning, anchored instruction with features of video-based format, narrative with realistic problems, generative format (CTGV, 1992).

It is well-documented that the educational effectiveness of drama or theater in education, such as enhancing motivation and interest, developing children’s literacy, supporting cognitive and constructive learning, enriching affective learning concerning subject matter, promoting collaborative learning through teamwork as well as exploiting Gardner’s multiple intelligences (Christie, 1980; Lillard, 1993; O’Neill, 1989; Vedeler, 1997; Winston, 1998; Wolf, 1994, 1995). The participatory nature of drama, coupled with its ability to encourage students to explore their beliefs and attitudes toward the characters and plot, evidently provides a wealth of pedagogical possibilities for developing students’ awareness of gender inequity and how to cope with them.

For the purpose of gender education, whether improvised in the classroom or scripted for the stage, the performance enactments, scenarios, or cases are well-crafted and designed to represent some situations occurring gender inequity and have learners act out a situation through role play, which further serve as the anchor for open-ended discussion for further inquiry about gender issues. The dramatic dialogue does more than simulate talk or argument between two or more children, it set the stage for learners’ immersion and interactivity in the authentic situation, and further, think about how the characters see themselves and others, their situation and crucially their future actions.

As having appropriate understanding about and attitudes toward gender-equity issues for young learners is a challenging task, learning about gender-equity issues by simply reading or hearing about them in single, simple, or abstract presentations offers little assurance that students will achieve a deep level of conceptual understanding. Spiro and his colleagues argue that multiplicity provides learners with multiple “traversal routes” or perspectives with which to “criss-cross” the topic, and enables them to highlight the complexities of certain issues and skillfully negotiate these landscapes, therefore, learners can come to understand the ill-structured concepts and flexibly apply them by experiencing them in different cases or contexts (Jacobson & Spiro, 1995).

As the gender-equity issues are often subtle, ill structured, value-laden and complex, it requires situated learning that is case-based and experienced learning in authentic contexts, rather than the simple presentation of abstract descriptions of the issues, involved (Bransford, Sherwood, Haselbring, Kinzer, & Williams, 1990). Furthermore, the instructional activities require to bridge the gap from hypothetical or theoretical to real understanding if learning is to occur and any changes in behaviors are to be made, or appropriate (attitude, behavior problem-solving) action to be taken or dealt with regarding gender equity in classrooms or social context.
3. Design Framework

The program presents various interactive scenarios or drama enactments that illustrates inequities in classroom or social interaction patterns, language, gender expectations, and curriculum etc., which have learners use the knowledge learned to think about the inequities presented in various interactive scenarios and invite students to compose, act out, reflect on and provide an online discussion-lead for further exploration. The focus of this project is to create a computer-support collaborative learning environment through theater education capable of hosting instructional activities related to gender issues.

The interface design includes stage area, role-playing platform as well as discussion form. In the stage area, the drama enactments include “situation play” and “problemsolving play, which can be created in IT (Internet Theater) by children working individually or collectively based on the script written by teachers or students themselves. After completion, the plays can be transmitted through the Internet which allows access by learners. An unfinished play or case can be transmitted through the Internet to be updated or extended by other students, establishing a process of collaborative creation through the Internet. In the role-play platform, the user can inhabit the IT interface world in different ways (or roles): as an author, a director, an actor or a spectator of plays. Inhabiting IT as an author, the learners can write the scripts about any themes for gender issues, post their line/script for each role, or give suggestion for particular role.

As the stage program, it provides a variety of video-based, script-format or animation, picture, multimedia presentation "anchors", accompanied by the learning materials, for learners’ discussion. A follow-up different theme of discussion is designed and structured to have learners reflecting and commenting on the episodes or scenarios with the best solution for the situation or puzzled questions inviting further discussion. Spectators can provide their opinions aimed at director’s scripts, come up with their best solution for the situational play or reply to other learners’ opinion toward the gender issues.

4. Future Directions

The goal of this project is to offer students the gender education by using computer-mediated drama activity. The project intends to enrich students’ understanding of gender issues by providing multiple perspectives and contextualized environment through action-oriented, dramatic approaches on the web. In this project, Internet Theater Gender Program is conceived as situated, dialectical, and cultural tools which are intended to diminish gender stereotyping and build self-esteem, raise gender-consciousness, inspiring learners toward reflective and constructive understanding of the gender issues, and further used the knowledge learned resolve inequities in their living world. It is noted that IT Gender teaching is not a pre-package instructional tool rather than more properly a set of informational resources, which designs for teachers to plan, enact, tailor and adapt for their course, and allow teachers to ink multiple sections of the same course or similar courses in different schools or areas for interesting cross-cultural discussions and collaborations. The Internet Gender Teaching Theater has been developed through a number of design cycles, creating a version, evaluating it with the help of colleagues/students, revising it and will be expanding the content and refining the interface design in the near future.

5. References


