

Meeting Traditional Korean Masks ‘Tal’

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Abstract

This study examined the process of children exploring ‘tal’ (mask) which is an element of the traditional Korean culture, analyzing information, sharing knowledge, experiencing and understanding the traditional culture, and interpreting the meaning of tals. Study subjects were 22 5-year-old children at H kindergarten in A city. The study period was for about 5 weeks from mid-October to mid-November, 2016. The project was conducted in three stages: planning, exploring, finishing and exhibiting. At the planning stage, I planned and brainstormed the project. At the stage of exploring, I was able to find out what I was curious about, get rid of, and learn about mask dancing. And we made a mask dance of our class. Finally, in the final stage, he exhibited the poetry of the bukcheonsajanoreum. The study results showed that the children showed a great interest in traditional culture, and process of digesting much information and knowledge through the Tal Project.

Keywords: tal(mask), project, early childhood

1. Topic Selection: Meeting Traditional Korean Masks ‘Tal’

Tradition is the transmission of systems from previous existing generations as shared culture between members of a group who have lived together during the same time period. Traditional culture can refer to spiritual values, conventional wisdom, or the customs of people living today, which are rooted in old traditions. Among the various types of traditional cultural education, traditional pastimes are quite valuable as an educational activity where children can learn social concepts, appreciate the value of knowledge, learn behavior pattern formation, and begin to form their own identity by engaging with their national culture through learning about these pastimes. Early childhood is a time when the decision is made between thinking naturally about traditional culture, and whether to become interested or disinterested in it. As such, projects that lead to social, cultural or developmental transformations through traditional pastimes—which can provide meaningful and enjoyable life experiences to children—are quite important [1].

Mask dances are a Korean traditional pastime that symbolically expresses Korean culture, and are a traditional art form that echoes not only real life, but also the emotions of the Korean people. Mask dances contain both the attributes of play and of the dramatic arts, and are an art form that includes musical, cultural, and physical elements[2]. The verbal element of exchanging dialogue is certainly an important part of mask dances, but learning and practicing the dance steps while following the beat, and being able to try to make one’s own mask can be fun experiences for children as well. Also, with the help of

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the masks, children are enabled to more easily express emotions that are repressed or otherwise un-expressed. Playing with masks and understanding their significance can give children the opportunity to better understand the thoughts and feelings of other people, express their own hopes and dreams, and also create a new self-image.

Tradition-related education tends to focus mainly on superficial learning that conveys historical facts about traditional culture and promotes its memorization[3]. Education, however, should be about helping students understand the importance of their ancestors and their tradition, rather than having teachers use educational activities on traditional subjects to make their students cram information as a way of learning about their traditions. Further, traditional culture education should be about using actual remaining artifacts to promote the understanding of life philosophies, as well as the values and the inner spirit contained within these artifacts, in order to explore their significance in a contemporary manner. This kind of education can help children understand the significance of traditional culture by allowing them to make inferences about life in the past, and providing them the opportunity to realistically experience traditional culture. Education that teaches traditional culture is education that helps children not only to make meaningful interpretations but also to live a joyful life.

In this light, while going through the process of learning about Korea, children can become interested in mask dances, one of Korea's tradition pastimes, and learn about various types of masks and the stories behind them. Teachers who encourage interest in mask dances can explore these masks in a variety of ways by using the project approach, which provides in-depth educational contents. Children can have the opportunity to investigate traditional Korean masks and mask dances, and achieve a deep traditional cultural experience by being involved in the dramatization of mask dances.

On the other hand, project activities help develop familiarity with traditional culture while living in today's world, promote a continuous interest in tradition, and may have a positive effect on childhood learning. Therefore, this study looks into the process of having students explore masks—one of Korea's traditional cultural pastimes—analyze information, share knowledge, experience, and understand traditional culture and the significance of Korean traditional masks.



Figure 1. Traditional Korean Masks

This study was carried out with 22 5-year old children from A-city attending H-kindergarten as participants. The study period was from the middle of October to the middle of November 2016, for a total of about 5 weeks. The mask project was carried out according to a project approach, and the whole process of the children experiencing the project was recorded, and data was collected and analyzed. In order to examine the change process in the children's experiences during the project, pictures were taken, videos and audio were recorded, and researchers took notes to conduct a qualitative analysis. The recorded videos and audio were transcribed as well. A qualitative case study analysis was carried out to examine the process of change in the children, by using a qualitative analysis method for the pictures, videos, notes, and recordings collected over the course of the project



Figure 2. Korean Traditional Mask Dance

Table 1. Mask Project Progress Stages

Stage	Details
Planning	Mask Project Planning and Brainstorming
Researching	Gathering Interesting Things about Masks Learning about Masks Making Masks Learning about Mask Dances Conducting a Mask Dance Performance in the Classroom
Closing and Exhibiting	Bukcheongsaja's Poop Mask Dance Performance and Exhibition

2. Project Plan: What is a Mask?

Gathering Interesting Things about Masks

What Comes to Mind When We Think of Masks?

The children were put in contact with masks, as Korean life themes were developed, and were asked to have a conversation about mask dances. The children soon became interested in masks, and began working on the mask project. The children then engaged in a brainstorming activity where they wrote about their respective thoughts about masks, as well as their prior mask experiences. In other words, the children's prior experiences and knowledge about masks were looked into.

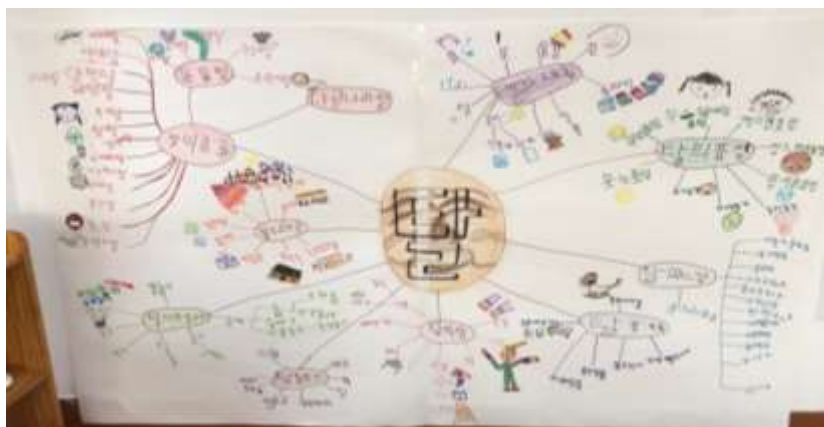


Figure 3. Brainstorming about Masks

Organizing our Thoughts on Masks

Based on the mask brainstorming, the children's concept of masks were categorized. This multilateral mask content, including materials, colors, mask dance types, and costumes, was then compiled. It was also decided that the content over which the children were curious about would be written down during the brainstorming session. First, Korean masks and masks from other countries were investigated. While masks come in different types and different names, the children were most interested in masks that were made for dramatic purposes.



Figure 4. Mask Concept Categorization

3. Project Subject Research: Let's Learn about Masks!

3.1. Learning about Masks

Let's Make Korean Masks with *Hanji* (Korean Traditional Paper)!

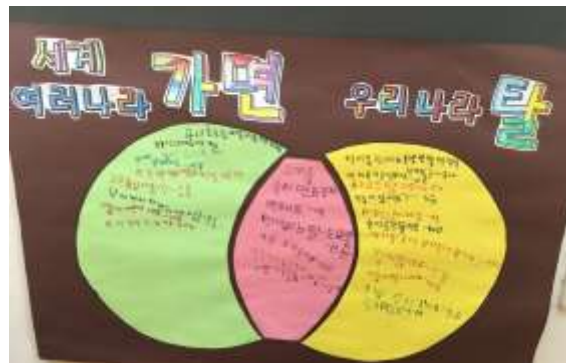


Figure 5. Venn Diagram of the Common Points and Differences

There are traditional masks from all over the world and these masks are used for various festivals and rituals. The children learned about masks from other countries, as well as the differences between them and Korean masks, while collecting detailed information about them. In particular, the children became interested in different mask shapes and their production methods. Using a Venn diagram, the children were also able to investigate the common points and as well as the differences between these different masks. They talked about which parts were similar and which parts were different in these masks.

Masks Are Different and Have Different Names Depending on Their Role



Figure 6. Drawings of Various Masks

According to the role it assumes in a play, masks have a variety of different expressions, and are decorated accordingly, to show the personalities that go along with its particular character. The children showed a lot of interest over the various types of masks. They also drew mask pictures and wrote down the names of different masks, while learning about mask features and characteristics. The masks of characters that make appearances in plays each express their own personalities. The children were interested in these masks, as they showed interest in masks that appeared in plays and drew pictures of them. They were interested not only in masks depicting people but also in masks depicting animals that appeared in the *bukcheongsajanoreum*. The children were interested in masks of lions and were also able to simulate a lion's movements.

3.2. Making Masks

Shall We Try to Make Some Masks?

While examining different types of masks and their features, the children learned how to make the masks. The masks can be made using various methods, including making them with papier- mâché, with decorations glued on them. The children enjoyed making these papier-mâché masks. They made their own masks, decorated them, and showed off their creativity through the masks they created.



Figure 7. Traditional Masks Produced by Children

3.3. Learning about Mask Dances

Watching Mask Dances Was Really Fun!

The children went to a folk village and participated in a regional event to see a mask dance, and then they were made to talk about their experience. The children's preliminary knowledge was organized and then was expressed through drawings and writings. Then the children were made to talk about what they had done.



Figure 8. Things the Children Learned after Watching Traditional Performances

In-depth talks about the mask dances were conducted, where the children talked about the masks they had seen during the performance, the kind of performance they had watched, the kind of songs that were played, as well location of the performance.

4. Finishing Up the Project and the Exhibition: Bukcheongsaja's Poop

The Class Creates a Mask Dance Performance

Wearing Masks and Performing Mask Dances



Figure 9. Performed Signboards Produced by Children - Bukcheongsaja's Poop –

The children, who became interested in wearing masks and doing mask dances, started to talk about the things needed for mask dances. While learning about various types of mask dances, the children also learned about *bukcheonsajanoreum*, and they made lion masks as well as other masks for the performance. They were also handed out roles and performed their mask dance. The children held their *bukcheon* lion masks and excitedly gave an explanation about their masks

You're Invited to the Mask Project!

The children suggested putting on a mask dance performance using the masks they had made. They made the props, selected mask dance songs, and made posters to advertise the performance. Then, they put on the performance. The children also conducted an exhibition that showed off their mask molds and the mask themselves. The children themselves named the mask dance performance and expressed their love for this performance.

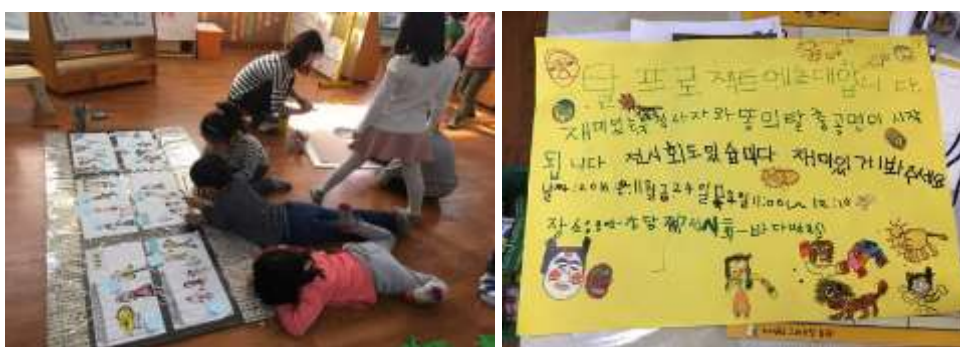


Figure 10. Create Invitations for Performances

The Tal(mask) Performance is Starting –Please Enter

The children made seating announcements for the guests who came to see the performance, and introduced the mask dances before starting their performance. Since the children previously selected their roles and practiced the mask dance performance, they successfully conveyed the meaning of the traditional mask dances during their performance. The children were incredibly nervous about putting on their performance and expressed their regret at being unable to explain everything they had done to prepare. They told their parents and siblings that they were extremely happy to be able to perform the mask dance and to teach their family and friends about the masks. Finally, the exhibition also introduced and explained to the guests the meaning of the works on display.



Figure 11. The Tal(mask) Performance

5. Implications of Traditional Culture Education Through a Project Approach

Teachers from around the world work tirelessly to teach about their country's traditional culture and worry about the proper method for teaching their students. Moreover, traditional cultural education for children, in particular, is very important for forming one's national identity and for acting on the world stage. The current educational reality of learning only through stories and pictures, however, is quite regrettable. In other studies Gong [4], Kweak [5], Kun [6], Kwon [7], Baek [8], Jeon[9], Choi [10], Hong [11], it has been shown that activities through traditional cultural education have a positive effect on children's various cultures and raise awareness of traditional culture of childrens.

Therefore, traditional culture education through a project approach is quite significant in that it provides children with the opportunity not only to directly experience traditional culture and to make their own creations, but also to create their own culture while working on their projects. Also, children are able to experience various traditional masks, and based on these experiences, are able to learn about a variety of traditional cultural expressions, including music, dress, and performances. The children, in turn, introduced traditional culture to other people through their stories, and this promoted various areas of child development. Specifically, the children developed not only language and physical skills, but also other self-expression skills.

The children's interest in masks was naturally transformed into further interest in festivals and performances. This in turn prompted the children to put on their own performance and to hold their own festival. The children created their play, prepared for their performance, and then put on the performance, exhibiting their abilities at the highest level. They were able to successfully show their parents, siblings and friends their knowledge and capabilities through the performance. During this process, the children felt a number of positive emotions, including self-confidence and a sense of achievement. They also experienced emotional development.

This project deepened the meaning of traditional culture by steadily developing in very young children an interest in masks. In particular, this project was carried out by linking activities that allow children to experience traditional culture in a variety of ways, including songs and plays, and was not limited to the traditional culture of masks and the traditional art. In a parallel way, the entire culture behind our food, clothing and shelter are not limited to just the house we live in, the food we eat, or the clothes we wear, but also includes a number of factors, such as our country's climate, its natural environment including vegetation and animal habitats, and the resulting traditional dress. All these factors form an organic relationship among themselves. In a similar way, rather than having children think about, and experience tradition in a limited manner, it is important to have them personally go through a variety of deep experiences, including experiences related to culture, climate, and philosophy. Using this as a foundation, therefore, teachers should give students broad and meaningful traditional culture experiences through a variety of means.

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