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Assessment of Drama Courses from the Preschoolers' Point of View

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***Abstract*—**Creative drama which interconnects with the concepts of play, theatre, animation and role playing is a field which can only be learnt and expressed through experiencing. This study about assessment of the drama teaching in preschools by children was conducted in 3 preschools in Ankara with participation of 12 children of 6 ages who had taken drama learning courses. Qualitative research approach and semi-structured interviewing technique were employed. The results of the study indicated that all of 12 children defined drama as a game and entertainment.

***Keywords*—**Creative drama, preschoolers, drama courses

I. Introduction

CREATIVE drama which interconnects with the concepts of play, theatre, animation and role playing is a field which can only be learnt and expressed through experiences. Neither defining nor describing drama is not easy. One of the simplest definition of drama according to Ozi, a participant in this study, "Drama should not be described but played…". In the literature several benefits of the drama are mentioned in several dimensions such as from creativity to aesthetic development, from critical thinking to social skills, from self-confidence to improvement of power of imagination, from empathy to diversity of living, from problem solving to morality development [1]. However, realization of those benefits can only be possible by means of involvement of it into life as a need for basic art training as well as teaching it of through aesthetic, artistic, cultural and educational supports.

According to Mc Caslin [1], drama teaching starts at the age of 5-6. Concepts of creative drama and role playing can be used instead of others. Drama is not held for audience. Costumes and decors are not necessary. According to Heathcote [2], once the children experience the feeling of seeing and hearing a thing in drama while in fact such thing does not exist, they start their journey in the world of images. Actors/actresses and the audiences are the same people in drama. The aim is not to show participation of members is important. In drama courses, a concept, a theme, an object, a voice, a smell, a moment, a picture, a sculpture, a fairy-tale, a story, a poem or a figure can be used for creativity [3]. A classical drama studying starts with the warming-up exercises. After warming up, children role play or pantomime by enjoying. Visible or invisible, known or unknown objects, concepts, situations and thus images are created, as again stated by Tweety who was one of the participants of the study "….. we made shapes and gave them to our friends during the play. That is we pretended as if we had made and given them, in other words we had nothing in our hands indeed.", which describes the aspect of the drama that can be explained as pretending. The game is developed and completed with the group. This typical classification may not necessarily develop in the same way. Classification may vary depending on availability, wishes, participation of the group and approach of the leader.

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II. METHOD

This study of assessment of the drama teaching in preschools by children was conducted in 3 preschools in Ankara with participation of 12 children of 6 ages who had taken drama learning courses. The quality research [12]approach and the semi-structured interviewing technique were employed [4]. It can be said that there are two types of approaches in preschool drama: Using of drama by the classroom teacher as a method or drama courses delivered by drama teachers [5]. In this study, we studied assessment of drama given by drama teachers as separated courses. The interview questions are given below. When the questions were not understood by the children, the interview was supported by similar questions. Following seven questions were prepared to get the views of the children about the drama courses in preschools:

1) What is Drama?
2) How is done in drama?
3) Would you like to be a drama teacher? What would you do if you were a drama teacher?
4) Are drama courses boring or fun? What kind of experiences did you have in the drama courses?
5) Which games did you enjoy in drama courses?
6) Can a preschool be without drama courses?

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7) Which of the followings would you like to choose the most: drama, painting, music, chess, gymnastics?

During the interview, the order given in the title of questions was followed although sometimes it was needed to change the order. When a question was not understood, the same question was asked by use of similar expression. For instance, instead of "what is drama", it was asked as "what is drama in your opinion", "how can you explain drama to a person who does not know it". For the selection of the schools, the only criterion was if the preschool had drama teaching given by a separate drama teachers in their curriculum. The study group was selected randomly among the children at the age of 6 who take drama education in those schools. Before starting the interview, the children were explained that some questions about drama would be asked to them and they were asked if they would like to answer them. During the interview, a tape recorder was used to record the interviews. The participants' permission was taken before using the tape recorder. As the children would not be called by their real names during the interviews, they were asked to choose a nickname for themselves. The Table 1 indicates the names of the children, interview dates and times.

After the interview data were transcribed, they were edited in computer format. Each answer of the children was assigned a line number to code. Two cassettes included the sound records were randomly selected by a field expert and verified with the written form in order to ensure the reliability of the study.

The study data were analyzed by using of induction method. In the inductive analyzing method, the data were divided into main themes to provide a meaningful structure [4]. The interview data were divided by an expert according to the assigned codes and themes and thus agreement with study themes were ensured.

The themes were found as follow:

First theme: what is drama, definition of the drama, 2nd theme: how do they perceive contents of the drama, 3rd theme: children's suggestions that might replace the drama, and their suggestions for content of it, 4th theme: playing, entertainment aspect of drama and other experiences of them, 5th theme: which games they like and dislike, 6th theme: importance of drama for children, 7th theme: their drama preferences. In the section about the main findings, the expressions of the children were cited and indicated with the line numbers. No previous study about the point of views of the children about drama has been seen in the literature.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first theme of the study was about definitions of the 12 children for drama. All of 12 children defined drama as a game and entertainment:

- "Like a game, hide-and-seeking, blind man's buff " (Ebruli)
- "Something like a game" (Jerry)

TABLE I
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Participant No	Nicknames	Date	Time
1.	Ebruli	9.9.2003	13^{30}-13^{40}
2.	Jerry	9.9.2003	13^{40}-13^{50}
3.	Ali	9.9.2003	14^{00}-14^{10}
4.	Ozi	9.9.2003	14^{30}-14^{40}
5.	Irmak	10.9.2003	13^{00}-13^{05}
6.	Tweety	10.9.2003	13^{06}-13^{12}
7.	Damla	10.9.2003	13^{13}-13^{20}
8.	İlayda	10.9.2003	13^{20}-13^{25}
9.	Popeye	11.9.2003	10^{35}-10^{43}
10.	Mert	11.9.2003	10^{45}-10^{53}
11.	Melis	11.9.2003	10^{53}-10^{59}
12.	Barbie	11.9.2003	11^{01}-11^{07}

- "Playing a game, doing something as if playing baseball, football" (Ozi)
- "Playing like pretending that something exists" (Ozi)
- "Something like playing game and entertainment" (Temel Reis/Popeye)
- "Drama, you have fun. There are other nice games like that" (Mert)
- "Means being nicer and having more fun" (Melis)
- "Drama means a nice game" (Tweety)

Two of the children defined drama considering teaching aspect of the drama: "They teach different things" (Ali).

While saying "I may explain drama or may be teach it because I prefer teaching to telling" (Ozi), he means that drama is based on showing and creation more than telling. Perception of drama as a game and entertainment is not wrong. Classical definitions of drama include such concepts too [6]. Games and entertainment are inevitable and serious tasks of living in all education systems and levels. The basic purpose of drama is to provide teaching through games and entertainment. Satisfaction of the children's needs of playing and entertainment through drama is also meaningful. It is seen that there are still some problems in application regarding teaching through drama. Ali points out the creativity aspect of drama by stating that "they teach different things".

The second theme of the study is to see the perception of the contents of drama by children. The content of drama is usually determined by the teacher. What are done in drama? What does the drama teacher do in drama courses? Thus the

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opinions about performance, contents etc. of drama lessons were obtained:

- "First of all we say our names and then start the game" (Ebruli)
- "We were playing games of some countries" (Ebruli)
- "We read stories and animate them" (Ebruli)
- "We played musical instruments" (Jerry)
- "We were painting" (Ali)
- "We danced to different music styles" (Ali)
- "We were singing songs, having fun, standing up, counting, listening like that" (Ozi)
- "I remembered, playing etc. A story was told, we animated it" (Ozi)
- "We were playing any roles we liked by changing our dresses" (Irmak)
- "We made various shapes, gave them to our friends during play. I mean we pretended as if we had made, given, we had nothing in our hands indeed" (Tweety)
- "We were running around, listening to the music" (Tweety)

The more the drama language is learnt the more skills such as role playing, finding images, making up, and pretending in drama improve. Running around is a part of warming-up activities, while music, dancing and actions are used to establish drama language [7]. Ebruli's expression of "we were reading a story and animating it" indicates that a full perception of common language based on playing and animation by the children.

Ozi's expression of "everybody takes and plays a role in the story" indicates that role playing content was understood by the children. "For example, I was playing a plant and another one was the person cultivating it..." (Ozi) means that the major or minor aspect of the role is not important in the drama as it is in theatre plays.

- "Once we were snowballs… sun" (Ilayda)
- "I was mermaid..."
- "We were train wagons" (Popeye)

The statement of "you think of something by yourself. You say something when the music stops" (Barbie), can be interpreted in terms of creative thinking. The music is a mean. Thinking of something by themselves indicates the theme of subjective, imaginative products based on improvisation.

The 3rd theme was about the place of the drama for children. The children participated in the study stated that mostly they think of becoming "decorator, doctor, gym teacher". Four of them stated that they might become drama teacher, and the majority considered drama as a hobby, a lesson, an activity.

The recommendations of the participants about contents of the drama as a part of 3rd theme are as follow:
"I would teach dancing, painting, doing sports, entertainment, and playing funny and nice games. The suggestions indicate that drama should be integrated with other arts in terms of art education.

The 4th theme was to find out if drama is boring or funny for children. None of them stated that it was boring.

- "When we have drama, we have fun" (Irmak)
- "Something lovely, I like it" (Ali)
- "No one know what drama was and surely in the end we learnt that it was something very funny."
- "We were the first to suggest the drama, to have more fun" (Ebruli)

During the drama education participated by adults, they mostly find it very funny [6]. The perception that it is a funny game does not change its importance. Only a few educators have the opportunity to teach through games and fun [8]. Therefore, the drama teachers have also been very lucky in this respect.

It is seen that the children have different experiences and feelings in drama. Their statements are as follow:

- "We have nice time with everybody in drama" (Jerry).
- "I sometimes have nice feelings, sometimes bad feelings" (Ozi)
- "It was nice so. As long as you not tired" (Ozi)
- "We were looking forward to drama" (Irmak)
- "Everybody is funny. That day is a very happy day" (Tweety)
- "I felt very nice things" (Ilayda)
- "I was thinking of playing with everybody" (Melis)

It is seen that the participants have experienced nice feelings in drama and looking forward to it. The sub-meanings such as "experiencing very nice feelings", "having good time", "exciting", "loving" indicates the effectiveness of its aspect of aesthetics. Drama also provides aesthetic education. It improves the participant's taste, aesthetic satisfaction feelings.

The 5th theme is to see favorite games in drama lessons. The children stated that they liked "drawing, playing native dances, dancing. Dancing to multi-sounds and battery musical instruments, hiding and seeking, competing and talking with their friends, sometimes making fun of each other is shaking imaginative ship".

The answers indicate that more instruments; dances, music, musical instruments, drawing, games, sometimes racing games etc. should be used in the drama teaching. One of the solutions can be giving an integral art education or enriching the drama teaching with other arts [9].

The 6th theme of the study is to find out if a preschool can be without drama lessons. The drama leaders think that drama is inevitable factor of living. The answers of the children are as follow;

- "Not so important" (Mert)
- "Can be without drama" (Tweety)
- "It doesn't matter for me" (Ilayda)
- "Theatre and gymnastic can be given instead of drama" (Barbie)
- "It can be nice even without it. I got used to living without drama when I was younger. And now I got used to drama" (Ozi)
- "I will also get used to it if there is no drama lesson in primary school" (Ozi)
- "Doesn't matter if there is no but we are having fun when we have" (Irmak)

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• Preschools can be without drama" (Melis and Damla)

The answers given to this question measuring the place of drama for the children indicate that the children are of the opinion that a preschool can be without drama. They have nice time and fun in drama lessons but they can be without drama too. The reason for this can be the fact that the drama teachers are not among the school's teachers but from outside of the school. The drama lessons are given on a certain week day and at a scheduled time. The drama teachers can be unaware of the life and process of the children and may not be interested in such processes. For the children the life spent with their friends and teachers in the preschool is the inevitably essential. Another reason can be the fact that the children are not able to see it as a need. It is early for them to see it at this age. Another possibility can be the fact that the meaning of "being without anything" may not seem reasonable for them. Maybe if the question had been asked in a different way, the answers would have been different.

The 7th and the last theme of the study is to find out their preference for drama among other activities or the place of the drama in comparison to other activities. Only one of the participants preferred drama. Instead of drama, gymnastics, theatre, military training, chess or "another teaching way, that is activity" (Ozi) were suggested. The answer was surprising and sad for the author. The children do not think that drama given by a teacher from outside once a week is very necessary. May be they consider the drama lesson as only a funny game and not serious activity. In addition, the result indicates what the participants need and can't satisfy and replace drama with. One of the participants wanted to get addresses of the places giving gymnastics and theatre education. It is understood that the children need more activities, games, different "tasks/hobbies", and school education is not enough. Drama programs can be enriched in this respect. Parents and schools are also liable to satisfy those needs.

IV. Conclusions and Suggestions

As can be understood from the findings of the study, drama primarily satisfies children's need of playing games and entertain them. Playing game and having fun is serious task or action in education [8].

Drama education in preschool should be addressed as an aspect of cultural, artistic and aesthetic education. Multi-directional demands of the children can be satisfied through an integral art education. Drama is a field of art education where experiences, feelings, senses and images intersect. Art education in preschool stage can be effective if it is based on experiences, practices, emotions, senses and games [10].

Drama lesson should be an inevitable lesson in preschools as it improves children's imagination and role playing and expressing, and should be a teaching technique used effectively by preschool teachers. Drama teachers should draw attention to use of drama as a method.

Drama teachers should establish a closer communication with the school. If drama becomes an integral part of the whole, the children may think that "a school must not be without drama".

Game and entertainment function of drama has been emphasizes intensively in this study. Drama researchers should focus on educational and teaching aspect of the drama in their studies.

The drama was approached through the children's point of view in this study. However, the study may be in a more integral nature if it was approached through points of views of drama teachers and field specialists.

In this study, mainly the children from upper and middle classes of socio-economic were interviewed. The future research can also be enriched by including children from other socio-economic status.

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