International Online Journal of Educational Sciences, 2013, 5 (2), 330-338

iojes

www.iojes.net

International Online Journal of Educational Sciences

ISSN: 1309-2707

Embedded Rules in Sociodramatic Plays: To Determine the Approaches of Preschool Teacher Candidates*

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received 05.05.2013
Received in revised form 15.06.2013
Accepted 18.06.2013
Available online 05.08.2013

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to determine the approaches of preschool teacher candidates to the embedded rules in the sociodramatic plays. The qualitative research pattern was used in the study and the work group was determined within the limits of the criteria specified by the researcher. 44 preschool teacher candidates participated in the research. 3 sociodramatic play scenarios created by the researcher and in which there were different sex dyads were used as data collection tool. The results show that the approach which is most frequently exhibited by preschool teacher candidates about the embedded rules in sociodramatic plays is the rule-centered participation approach.

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Keywords:
Embedded rules in SDP, Vygotsky, teacher candidates' approaches

Introduction

Children's plays forms a rich basis for the researches of early childhood education. In the related literature, there are some controversial evidence about the tendencies to benefit from this rich bases. File and Kontos (1993) stated that kindergarten teachers spare %15 of free play times to support children's plays in the classroom environment. According to Celowski (1997), teachers regard playtime as completing paper works or as an opportunity for telephone calls. Moreover, various researches (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2001; Keating, Fabian, Jordan, Mavers, & Roberts, 2000) indicated that teachers present play (e.g. subsequent to a work completed) as an award. When it is considered that the social climate was established in accordance with the attitudes and actions of teachers (Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 1996), it is seen that to increase the quality of the play which is an indispensable element of education of, early childhood environments, is associated with the beliefs, experiences and resources teachers have (Ashiabi, 2007).

The participation of adults in children's plays is sometimes perceived as an interference made for the play (Korat, Bahar, & Miriam, 2002/2003). However, the participation of adults may have positive and negative effects on the play. At this point, *how* the teachers interact with children during the play is more important than *how much* they interact with them (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999). A number of researches indicated that the active participation of teachers in play, helped the children to elaborate the play scenarios (Hewitt, 2001) and the counseling presented by means of helping children for their play plans during free play, by following through the plans of children and by evaluating the actions of children, supported self-regulation of children (Yang, 2000).

*This study was presented at the 3rd World Conference Learning, Teaching & Educational Leadership (WCLTA-2012) 25-28 October. Brussels, Belgium.

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According to Synodi (2010) depending upon whoever has control, it may be child-directed, teacher-directed and mutually directed by both teacher and children. In the approach of child-directed play, teachers take a facilitated role by providing the children's plays with a stimulant environment, by helping them to become a part of the play of other children and solving the problems together (Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2004). In case that the control of the play is taken over by the teacher, that is to say, in the approach of teacher-directed play and in case that the play is intervened by the academic purposes, the play is damaged in general (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999). In mutually directed approach, teachers bring the play to a more complex situation by helping to solve the problems that appear in children's plays (Synodi, 2010).

Sociodramatic Play and Embedded Rules

Children generally prefer dramatic play, computer play and block play centers in period of free play (Hanley, Tiger, Ingvarsson, & Cam, 2009). In the related literature, sociodramatic play (SDP) named as "social fantasy play", "social imaginative play", "social make-believe play" and "social pretend play" (Levy, Phelps & Schaefer, 1986), is defined as a dramatic play in which two or more children make a verbal contact about play (Ashiabi, 2007; Isenberg and Renck Jalongo, 1997: 56). There is a distinctive beginning, mid and end point in sociodramatic plays (Yawkey, 1983). According to Smilansky (1968), a fully developed sociodramatic play contains five elements. These are (1) role playing (2) make believe transformations (3) social interaction (4) verbal communication and (5) persistence.

Children may have conflicts concerning toys, play field, casting or playing rules in the process of sociodramatic play. In such cases teachers can apply various strategies such as helping children to develop detailed play scenarios (Hewitt, 2001) and to express their needs and desires by choosing correct words, presenting sufficient material to share, creating useful play environments and giving children to solve their problems (Ashiabi, 2007; Isenberg & Renck Jalongo, 1997). Moreover, as a model teachers can help the persistence of plays that children make, by presenting various clues, producing ideas, and contribute to enrich these plays (Sevinç, 2004) and thus, they can create an opportunity to make Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

When the writings of Vygotsky are examined, it is seen that he limits the definition of play to the dramatic and make-believe plays of children during the preschool period or elementary education (Bodrova & Leong, 2010). According to Vygotsky (1978), play contains the condensed form of the whole developmental tendencies and is the primary source of the development (Brewer, 2007). Vygotsky thinks that children imaginarily present their desires that cannot come true through play. Children create a symbolic reality in their own plays like artists (Vygotsky, 2004). When Vygotsky describes the play, he emphasizes the presence of three key elements that are related to each other. These are (a) creating an imaginary situation (b) taking a role and (c) following the embedded rules in imaginary situations (Nicolopoulou, 2004; Aral, Gürsoy, & Köksal, 2000; Bodrova & Leong, 2010). Every play has certain rules and consists of certain behavior, framed by the roles in the play or imaginary scenario (Bodrova & Leong, 2010). The embedded rules that the dramatic play has by its nature control castings, behavior and events in the play (van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2007).

As children stage the rules, they come to understand that they have to endeavour to follow social norms and expectations (Berk, 2006). With this aspect, plays a significant role in the development of self-regulation defined as an activity of controlling one's own thoughts, feelings and behavior (Olaussen & Brate, 1999; Hoyle, 2006) in the sense that it presents an opportunity to gain experience about controlling individual's behavior and reactions (Fox & Riconscente, 2008). Elias (1999) conducted his thesis study, in which he researched whether the quality and quantity of SPD or both of them had an association with the self-regulation behavior or not, together with the children of 3-4 years old included in 53 middle income groups and 23 low income groups. The findings indicated that SPD was important for the self-regulation developments of children who had difficulty in impulse control. Again Elias and Berk (2002) stated that the complexity and persistence of SPD were positively associated with the self-regulation acquisitions as a result of the longitudinal study in which they researched the link between the quality and quantity of SPD and the self-regulation behavior of children of 3 – 4 years old.

The rules in sociodramatic plays become apparent with the violation by children included in play (Bodrova & Leong, 2010) and threaten the persistence which is one of the primary elements of the sociodramatic play. Hence the approaches of teachers concerning play to assure the quality of sociodramatic plays established in early childhood education environments have gained importance.

In the light of the information above, the objective of this research is to determine the approaches of preschool teacher candidates to the embedded rules in sociodramatic plays. In parallel with this purpose, the questions that the research look for an answer are as follows:

1) What is the approach of preschool teacher candidates to the implicit rule in the sociodramatic plays composed by 2 boys?
2) What is the approach of preschool teacher candidates to the implicit rule in the sociodramatic plays composed by 2 girls?
3) What is the approach of preschool teacher candidates to the implicit rule in the sociodramatic plays composed by a boy and a girl?

Method

Qualitative research pattern was used in the study. The qualitative researches depend upon perceptions, experiences and evaluations of the individuals included in the study (Islamoglu, 2011).

Participants

To determine the participants of the research, as the relevant group was a heterogeneous structure, criterion sampling method from the intentional sampling methods was used. The criterion sampling method requires to study all of the cases which meet the criterion series prepared beforehand or by the researcher (Yıldırım & Şimsek, 2006). Within the scope of this research, 4 criteria were determined for the sample choice. These are: (1) to be successful at Play Development course that contains the topics such as play theories, basic concepts related to the play, play in early childhood and play processes connected with the development of child, discipline for maladaptive behavior in play environment (2) not to be included in any certification program (3) not to take a task of teachership or an assistantship of a teacher in a preschool educational institution and (4) to be voluntary to participate in the research. 44 preschool teacher candidates who continue 8th half term of Preschool Teachership Undergraduate Program, Faculty of Education, Sakarya University, constitute the sample of the research. The age range of the teacher candidates included in the sample is between 21 and 25 (M = 22.75; SD =1.01).

Data Collection Tool

In order to collect data, Personal Information Form and interview form made by the researcher (Embedded Rules Form) were used. In the standardized open-ended interview form, there are three sociodramatic play scenarios made by using sex variable as base and there is a question based on an assumption related to the violation of the rule in each scenario. Sociodramatic play scenarios were organized in consideration of 3 basic elements which Vygotsky used while he described the play (See Table 1). The sociodramatic play scenarios were evaluated by 2 Ph. D students in the field of preschool education, and then they were presented to 12 teacher candidates. The expressions which led to misunderstandings were arranged in accordance with the responses of the teacher candidates. The duration of the interviews made with the teacher candidates is between 9 and 13 minutes.

Table 1. Details of scenario.

Scenarios	Roles	Embedded Rule
Scenario 1 (boy-boy)	Police-Thief	Runaway thief
Scenario 2 (boy-girl)	Supercargo-Driver	To prevent the driver from getting on board although she has a ticket
Scenario 3 (girl-girl)	Mother-Child	To get out of shopping list

Data Analysis

The raw data collected with an open ended interview form were put down on paper word by word. As an analysis unit, the methods in the expressions of the participants to solve the violation of rule in sociodramatic plays were determined. The data obtained were encoded according to categorises reorganized by using Synodi's (2010) classification as base. These are (a) rule-centered approach, (b) teacher-directed approach and (c) mutually-directed approach. Rule-centered approach expresses the emphasis on the behaviour framed by the roles that exist in play or the embedded rules in play during the interaction of teacher candidate with children; teacher-directed approach indicates that teacher candidate bends the embedded rule violated, changes with a new rule or finishes the play; mutually-directed approach states the inclusion of the teacher candidate in the play with an alternative role. The content analysis and frequency analysis were used in the analysis of data. The codes which were fit for the categories organized in accordance with the nature of the research during the analysis of the raw data obtained, were grouped according to the theoretical nature and similarity gaps.

Reliability and Validity

The raw data obtained with the open ended interview form were recorded in detail with the purpose of validity and it was given place to the views of participants through direct quotations in the findings of the research. For the operation of categorization of the data and transformation into systematic data, the categories Synodi (2010) used were adapted and employed in this research (See Table 2).

With the purpose of reliability, Cohen's Kappa measurement of agreement was calculated. The coding was made by the researcher and 1 doctoral student who was taught by the researcher. The inter-coder reliability correlation among the encoders was calculated as .76 for Scenario 1, .81 Scenario 2 and .77 for Scenario 3. It was seen that the level of Cohen Kappa reflected a quite high adjusment among the encoders.

Table 2. Coding list.

Categories	Codes
Rule-Centered Participation Approach	To emphasize the behaviour framed by the roles
	To emphasize the symbolic object
	To emphasize external reality
Teacher-Directed Participation Approach	To bend the embedded rules
	To change the embedded rule with a new one
	To end the play
Mutually-Directed Participation Approach	Participation in play with an alternative role

Findings

When the approaches of teacher candidates to the embedded rules in sociodramatic plays are examined within the framework of the hypothetic scenarios, it is possible to assess them under these topics:

- It can be stated that the approach which is most frequently exhibited by preschool teacher candidates about the embedded rules in sociodramatic plays is the rule-centered participation approach.
- It is seen that the approaches of preschool teacher candidates to the embedded rules in the sociodramatic plays formed by two girls generally indicate a teacher-directed participation approach.
- It can be stated that the approach which is exhibited by preschool teacher candidates at the least throughout all of the sociodramatic play scenarios is mutually-directed participation approach.

The Approach to the Embedded Rules in Sociodramatic Plays Formed by Two Boys

When the approach of teacher candidates to the embedded rules in sociodramatic plays was assessed by using different sex dyads (boy-boy, girl-boy, girl-girl) as base, it was seen that 33 teacher candidates (T1, T3,T5, T7, T9, T11, T14, T15, T17, T18, T19, T21, T22, T23, T24, T25, T26, T27,T28, T30, T31, T32, T34, T35, T36, T37, T38, T39, T40, T41, T42, T43, T44) exhibited rule-centered participation approach in the sociodramatic plays created by two boys. As phrases that exemplify this situation, T34: "*I would ask them to relate the rules of the play and then remind that they must obey to the rules of it.*" T5: "*I would ask how the students determine the rules of the play … I reorganize the rules of it and tell them to play again*.", T14: "*I would want children to review the rules of the play*.", T19: "*I would remind the rules of the play, if they couldn't deal with the probem*," T26: "*First of all, I would ask both of the students about the rules of the play*.", can be shown. Moreover, it was seen that 2 teacher candidates (T14 and T17) who exhibited rule-centered approach in the sociodramatic plays formed by two boys, used certain phrases to elaborate the scenario of the play, especially to explain the features of the symbolic object in the play. It was seen that 7 teacher candidates (T2, T4, T6, T8, T12, T20, T33) in the sociodramatic plays formed by two boys, exhibited teacher-directed participation approach. As phrases that exemplify this situation, T2: "*I would say that the ones who do not do the necessary of their roles , might be out of the game and play another game*.", T6: "*I would go to the children and tell them that Dogukan must be out of the play because he violated the rules.*" can be indicated. It was detected that the teacher candidates used the phrases to finish the play in accordance with these phrases. Within the scope of this scenario, only one teacher candidate exhibited a mutually-directed approach.

The Approach to the Embedded Rules in Sociodramatic Plays Formed by Two Girls

It was seen that 7 teacher candidates (T9, T25, T27, T28, T31, T40, T42) exhibited rule-centered participation approach in accordance with the embedded rules in the sociodramatic plays formed by two girls. As phrases that exemplify this situation, T27: *I would direct the children by saying "Let's take a look at our shopping list. Oh, there is no banana. I think we cannot buy it at this time. We shall not forget to add it in our shopping list.*", T28: "*I would explain that if there is a list determined beforehand, we should obey to it.*" can be shown. It was understood that while 5 teacher candidates (T9, T25, T28, T40, T42) were exhibiting rule-centered participation approach, they used certain phrases to emphasize the symbolic object in the play. It was seen that 21 teacher candidates (T1, T3, T6, T7, T8, T10, T15, T17, T18, T19, T20, T21, T22, T23, T32, T33, T34, T36, T37, T38, T43) exhibited teacher-directed participation approach about the embedded rules in the sociodramatic plays formed by two girls and mostly used the phrases to bend the embedded rules. The exemplary phrases for these are as follows: T3: "*I would say that the cake could be made with banana or without it.*", T10: "*… I would tell that the mother could buy the banana that her daughter wanted.*" T23: "*I would tell the child in the role of the mother that the banana is the thing the child wanted and could be bought even if it was not in the list in fact*." Within the scope of the scenario, it was seen that only two teacher candidates (T2, T11) were included in the play with an alternative role by exhibiting mutually-directed participation approach.

The Approach to the Embedded Rules in Sociodramatic Plays Formed by a Girl and a Boy

Depending on the statements of the participants, it can be said that 30 teacher candidates (T1, T3,T4, T5, T7, T9, T10, T11, T12, T14, T15, T16, T17, T18, T20, T21, T22, T26, T28, T29, T30, T31, T34, T35, T37, T39, T40, T41, T42, T43) have exhibited rule-centered participation approach about the embedded rules in the sociodramatic plays formed by a girl and a boy. T3: *"I would tell Ali to adopt the behaviour which is the rule of the play. If Buse gave the ticket, I would warn her playmate to allow him to pass.",* T21: *"I would want children to remember the rules of the play."* And T35: *"I would approach to Buse as a mediator as follows: Ali looked at the ticket in your hand and told you not to get on board, didn't he? Because this ship goes to Kadikoy, but your ticket was Eminonu, my dear. Come on, change your ticket now. What will Ali tell you."*These phrases can be shown as examples. It was detected that 5 teacher candidates (T6, T8, T24, T38, T41) exhibited teacher-directed participation approach about the embedded rules in the sociodramatic plays formed by a girl and a boy. T3: *"I decidedto tell that who will take which role."* and T6: *"I would tell Ali that he should be out of the play because he violated the rules and destroyed the play."* These phrases can be shown as examples for this. Within the scope of

this scenario, it was seen that 2 teacher candidates (T2, T44) were included in the play with an alternative role by exhibiting mutually-directed participation approach.

Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendation

It is known that more than half of the academic articles written about play theme which were published in child development or early childhood education journals are based on the observations of free play time performed in the classroom environment. When it is thought that the children generally choose block play center, computer play center and dramatic play center in free play time, which dramatic play quarter has a special importance, emerges. A lot of studies conducted show that the preschool teachers share the view that play is a significant field in terms of development and learning. However, the fact that there are researches in a limited number which present information about the in-class practices of the preschool teacher candidates for play is conspicuous. Kemple (1996) in his research claims that the preschool teachers do not give the necessary support to the sociodramatic plays by putting these type of plays into practice. The active participation of adults, as in other play centers, in child-initiated plays in dramatic play center elaborates and enriches the play, contributes to the formation of Potential Development Field and supports the self-regulation developments of the children. Moreover, the views that Vygotsky asserts express that there is a predictive relation between the sociodramatic play observed during the preschool period and academic skills in the future (Hanline, Milton, & Phelps, 2009).

The theoretical base of this research depends upon Vygotsky's views on play. Vygotsky mentioned about a paradox that the play contained: Children of preschool period seem to do what they like in their plays, but pretend plays require that children act against their sudden drives (Berk, Mann, & Ogan, 2006). Vygotsky argues that to follow the rules of the plays a key role to make children obtain a sense of satisfaction from the play (Elias & Berk, 2002). In this study, the approaches of the preschool teacher candidates to the implicit rules in sociodramatic plays were examined on the base of sex variable. In this context, when it was compared to other sex dyads, the teacher candidates exhibited prominently less rule-centered participation approach about the embedded rules in the sociodramatic plays formed by 2 girls and the phrases used were the ones to bend the rules, can be defined as a remarkable finding of this research. It can be thought that this result obtained is resulted from that the role (mother) has a different meaning in terms of gender role for the scenario used in the research. However, this research is not organized as a gender-focused study. Sex, gender and gender roles are the concepts used as synonymous but they are different from each other. The concept of sex corresponds to a dual classification (Dökmen, 2004, p. 6) and it emphasizes the biological aspect of gender. The concept of gender is established by the culture in which people live and formed with all the elements this culture has. Gender roles state the expressions such as behavior, attitudes etc. named as masculine or feminine (Gander & Gardiner, 1998, p. 296). Given the roles in the structure of the sociodramatic play, the relation of the roles assumed by preschool children in plays with gender roles and the effect of this relation on sustainability of play is a subject which is worth examining.

The fact that the teacher candidates, who have a teacher-directed approach about the embedded rules in the sociodramatic plays formed by 2 boys, used certain phrases to finish the play, reinforces the idea that the approaches of preschool teacher candidates differ in the sex base. Furthermore, when it is thought that one of the determinants of the play skills of high quality is the sustainability of the play; it is significant that the teacher candidates, who have exhibited teacher-directed participation approach in the sociodramatic plays formed by 2 boys, used the phrases that threaten to continue the play. In this context, it can be proposed to elaborate the approaches of the teacher candidates to the embedded rules in the sociodramatic plays formed by boys for future researches.

Another result achieved within the scope of the research is that a part of the teacher candidates have emphasized the symbolic objects in the sociodramatic plays in order to support children to manage their own behavior. According to Vygoysky, when children realize that the symbols are different from the external reality, they use these symbols to overcome their drives and to manage their behaviour (Berk, Mann, & Ogan, 2006). In the light of this information, it is possible to say that the teacher candidates benefit from the rich background that the sociodramatic plays create for self-regulation development in a limited way.

It is possible to present some suggestions by discussing the theoretical and methodological structure of the research with the information above. It is possible to mention many theories under the titles of classic and theoric play theories about the children's plays. Vygotsky's views that form the theoretical basis of this research are among the modern play rules. In future studies, to determine the approaches of the teachers or teacher candidates to the sociodramatic plays the use of Bateson's Metacommunitive Theory as a theoretical basis, which claims that dramatic plays and fantasies among the modern play theories serve at a great degree to cognitive development of children (Saracho & Spodek, 1995), gives strength to the studies in this aspect and contributes to determine the approaches of teacher candidates.

The data in this research were collected with an open-ended interview form in which there were sociodramatic play scenarios composed hypothetically. The hypothetical scenarios used in the research are limited to two different roles. The future studies, the discussion of the number of roles in plays as a variable will present enlightening information about the approaches of teachers or teacher candidates to play. Furthermore, it is seen that the hypothetical cases, especially in the researches that preschool teachers/teacher candidates form the sample or the work group, are rarely used (e.g. Arbeau & Coplan, 2007). When the relevant literature is examined, the fact that different data collection tools are used in the studies directed to determine the attitudes of preschool teachers to play and the roles of them in the play is conspicuous. For example, Einarsdottir (1998), in his study that he examines the roles of adults in the dramatic plays of nursery school children, camera and survey are used in the data collection process. van der Aalsvoort, Prakke, König, & Goorhuis (2010) in the study they compare the attitudes of preschool teachers and students in the Netherlands and Germany to play activities, video recording parts of five minutes and a question list that there are questions about these videos are used as a data collection tool. To determine the approaches of teachers or teacher candidates to play, the fact that different measuring tools are used and the consistency among these measuring tools is examined, will present information about effectiveness of the use of hypothetical scenarios in teacher education in terms of practical applications.

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