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# Evaluating pre-school children's ability of using language and body as a communication tool by creative drama methods according to children's opinions

**Ülkü Beyoğlu ***, Osman Turkay Nursery School, Ozanköy, TRNC.

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study is evaluation of applicability and effectiveness of creative drama methods on ability of using language and body as a communication tool of 60-72 month old children according to their opinion. Pre-school education is full of experience and makes children earn scientific process abilities and basic concepts. The main objectives of pre-school education are to support improvement of children's social, emotional, physical, mental, and linguistic development and to reveal abilities of questioning and observation skills, creativity and self-confidence. Drama which planned in accordance with the purpose of education, can be expressed an action, event, emotion, various roles, poetry, animate or inanimate asset by role-play or simulation through voice and body. This study is valuable for us to get opinions from children even with little ages about their experience and education. Children's opinions are important for study data to be more qualified. Evolution properties of pre-school children are evaluated in this study. A 10-week educational package program was prepared under the supervision of 3experts. Video and audio recordings were made at each meeting and daily observations were reported by the researcher. This study is an action research and its approach is qualitative. At the end of the 10th week, study findings demonstrated that creative drama could be helpful for improvement of children's linguistic skills and use of body language.

Keywords: pre-school, creative drama, language use, body language.

*ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Ülkü Beyoğlu,** Osman Turkay Nursery School, Ozanköy, TRNC,
*E-mail address:* chali_kushu_@hotmail.com / Tel.: +0-533-858-2500

## 1. Introduction

Pre-school education is becoming more prominent each day in both our country and the rest of the world. Studies show that of mental development, which continues until the age of 17, 50% takes place before the age of 4, 30% before the age of 8, and 20% between the ages of 8 and 17. The learning ability and academic success of children during further ages are correlated with their education and experiences during pre-school years. Therefore, pre-school education has become important. Pre-school period should be well utilized for the mental development of children. The knowledge that is gained during this period is learned more easily and becomes more permanent. Moreover, pre-school period is also important for acquiring a habit of learning (Ekinci, 2001).

Pre-school education is defined as a systematic education within the integrity of primary education, providing healthy development of children 0-72 months, in mental, physical, linguistic, emotional, and social aspects, with environmental resources equipped with rich stimulants, during which the basis of positive personality traits are laid, creativity is supported, self-esteem is developed, families and educators are active, children are made aware of the cultural values of the society, and are prepared for primary education (National Education Council, 1993; Şahin, 1998).

Pre-school education in the TRNC is defined as a one or two-year period, run by the state, encompassing whole of the pre-school age group under a program (Özder, Konedralı, & Zeki, 2010).

In pre-school education, it is aimed to support the cognitive, social-emotional, linguistic, and psychomotor development of children from early ages. Various methods are used to reach these goals. One of the most important of these methods is drama (Ömeroğlu & Turla, 2001).

The beginning of drama with children comes from England and USA. Drama has begun to develop as a learning process with Harriet Finlay-Johnson using drama in the classroom in the beginning of the 20th Century (Kavukoğlu, 2008).

Drama and dramatic activities in pre-school education affects all fields of development, besides the cognitive development of the child, positively. A program in which the child is active and in the center, an environment with stimulants to feed all senses, and an educator equipped with positive communication skills and adapted to the cognitive development process of the child, are important factors ensuring cognitive development (Akın, 2002).

Cognitive development and linguistic development move forward interactively. Symbolic thinking skills of the child develop with the use of language.

Development of language, the tool of oral communication, provides the child with opportunities in dramatic activities and in using drama and language actively, and enabling the child to move. It specially provides the development of 'social language', which enables children to communicate among themselves, and the development of 'inner language', which children use to talk to themselves. Sound, tempo, accent, pronunciation etc. are used a lot and supported in drama activities (Önder, 2004; Tuğrul, 2006a).

A child recognizes his/her body and how to use it through drama and dramatic activities. He/she learns to move various parts of the body, to walk, run, jump, roll, bounce, and take big or small steps, dance, crawl, climb, stop, and freeze accompanied by music or rhythm. They succeed in using their bodies better in group activities, to be in harmony with their friends, to interact without hitting each other (Chalmers, 2007).

The child's power of expression increases with linguistic development. Thus, the child begins to state his/her feelings about events. It is important to learn the views and opinions of children in order to bring out their experiences. No matter how much teachers of parents tell of the feelings of children, it will not be as real as children expressing themselves will. Therefore, getting their own opinions on their learning and experiences from children is important for this study in order to make the data to be obtained from researches more qualitative and profound.

What are the student opinions on the applicability of creative drama method in using body and language, which are the most important tools of communication for pre-school students?

## 2. The aim and importance of the study

The general aim of this study is to determine the effect of creative drama method that could be applied in order to develop the skill of using body and language as a communication tool, in pre-school programs.

No one can talk about their experiences, feelings, and thoughts better than children themselves can. However, instead of asking them to find out their own opinions and thoughts, adults (i.e. parents, school administrators, and/or teachers) are sought for their opinions. Attempting to understand them with an adult point of view is very difficult unless they explain themselves, since children are different from adults (Punch, 2002). Therefore, this study is of importance for getting the opinions of children on their experiences and learnings from themselves, and making the data to be obtained more qualitative and profound.

Studying the applicability of creative drama method in developing the skills of 60-70 month old students to use their bodies and language as tools of communication, in accordance with Pre-school Education Program 2012, and based on student opinions is considered important for being the first such research in the country.

The education program that will be used in this study is important for being a recommendation for application by pre-school teachers.

## 3. Target group

The target group of the study is made up of 25 students in the 5-year group, having education at a state kindergarten (Osman Türkay Kindergarten) during the 2013-2014 academic year. There are 12 girls and 13 boys in the class.

## 4. Method and applications

Data for this study is obtained through semi-structured interview technique, video recording, voice recording, document analysis, and the journal that the author kept.

Documents were examined and collected; obtained data were described in accordance with the aims of the study. Interviews were carried out separately with each student after the 4th, 7th, and 10th activities, using the structured interview form. The theme of the interviews was the feelings and thoughts of the students for the drama activities.

According to the project work plan, 10 activities were prepared and applied bearing in mind the principle of from simple to complex. The activities applied were I According to You, Let's Talk without Voice, Numbers have Sounds Too, Rainbow, The Way of the Rain, Out Teeth are Thinking, What are These?, What Use is my Face, Tough Nature Tour.

### *4.1 Activity samples*

4. Implementation

Name of Activity: Rainbow

Theme: Color belt

Location: Drama room

Aim:

- Focusing attention
- Expressing feelings and thoughts orally
- Creating the needed form with the body

Equipment: Colored bags (navy blue-black-blue-yellow-orange-purple-red)

a) Warm-up – Preparation

Fruit Basket (color basket)

The teacher dresses the students with colored bags and explains the color basket game. Students stand in a circle and the place of each student is marked with a chalk. Teacher chooses an 'it' and he/she stands in the middle of the circle. Teacher says the color of a bag. Students wearing that color begin to switch places. As they do so, 'it' tries to occupy a place that becomes vacant during switching. The game continues with the teacher calling other colors.

b) Interpretation

Simultaneous Improvisation

Teacher chats with students about what things are made up of colors.

He/she talks with students about how the rainbow is formed, and what is seen, what is felt as it happens.

Role Playing

Roles are given to students based on the colored bags they are wearing (yellow-sun, black-cloud, blue-sky, other colors-rainbow) and are asked to simulate the creation of the rainbow.

c) Evaluation – Discussion

Big-Small Group Work

Teacher asks the students to take off their bags and hold them from each end with their parents. Purple-navy blue-blue-green-yellow-orange-red stand in sequence to form the rainbow. The student and parents holding the red bag walk under the rainbow and talk about their feelings and thoughts related to the activity.

Interview Technique

When the activity is finished, the teacher asks each student 'How was your day?', and after talking about why the day was good or bad, he/she then asks 'Would you like our other activities to be like this? Why?'.

**7. Implementation**

Name of Activity: What are these?

Theme: Things that come to us from nature

Location: School yard

Aim:

- Learning to express feelings and thoughts
- Becoming aware of the feelings of others
- Creating the form needed with one's body
- Distinguishing between sounds

Equipment: Cardboard, glue

Preparation

Students bring an object from nature.

a) Warm-up - Preparation

Teacher asks students to sit in a circle; places the object he/she brought in the middle, and asks 'What do you think this is? What is it used for?' He/she asks each student to walk to the object and show using just their bodies, what they think it is. The other students guess what it is. The activity continues until all participants use the object.

b) Simulation

Inner voice

Teacher asks students to take their objects in their hands. All students are asked to use the objects that they found with a different aim than the usual, using vocalization.

Frozen Image

Each participant takes the shape of his/her object and freezes.

Role Play with Small Group

Teacher divides the class into 5 groups. He/she draws squares of 100x100 cm in five different places. Each group goes into a square and start talking, imagining what the sound of the chosen object could be, if it had a sound. The activity continues until all groups carry out vocalization. At the end of the activity, they talk about what the sounds they made were like and if they had similarities or differences with the sounds of other objects.

Evaluation – Discussion

Creating a Map, Sketch

Teacher asks the students to stay in groups. A large cardboard is placed in the middle and each group is called in turn to glue their objects to the sides of the cardboard. Teacher glues the first object. Objects from nature are glued to the cardboard one by one; as if the object is a whole, and each student is asked to glue his/her object so that it completes the other, creating one single form.

Interview Technique

*What is the difference of these activity processes from other processes? What else can we do; what are your suggestions?

**4. Conclusion and recommendations**

Through literature review and the data obtained as a result of applications, the conclusion was reached that the project improved the skills of students in using body and language as tools of communication. During the activities of the students, it was observed that their use of body and language increased, they could express themselves more comfortably, and that they could

support what they said with bodily movements besides using various tones of voice in their speech. During interviews, responses like 'I liked this lesson a lot; I would like all our lessons to be like this', 'I can do it too since no one laughed at me', and 'I wish this game never ended'.

Students became aware of their own development. Before the activities started, they were asked 'Can we talk if we closed our mouths?'. Their responses were 'Impossible, no one would understand us'. After the completion of activities, the same question was asked again. This time they responded saying, 'My hands talk too', 'My hands, feet, belly can explain everything', 'Sound comes even from my feet'.

As it was observed that creative drama method in pre-school education supports the use of language and body as tools of communication, it is recommended that,

*In-service training should be implemented to create awareness of creative drama method among pre-school teachers,

*Activities, in which communication skills are developed using creative drama method, should be implemented to higher classes and to adult groups,

*Creative drama activities should be implemented, supporting other fields of development in pre-school education.

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