



Evaluation of Drama in Education (DiE) Studies Conducted in Independent Pre-schools: A Case Study in Aydın-Turkey

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Abstract

The present study investigates and evaluates how pre-school teachers take drama as an educational method, what drama activities they use in their classrooms, how they plan these activities in accordance with student needs and purposes, and whether they have efficient knowledge and experience about educational use of drama. Work group of the study consists of three independent pre-schools in the provincial centre of Aydın. The schools were selected in accordance with purposive sampling method among low, medium and high level schools in terms of socio-economic status. Sampling way can be defined as “criteria based sample selection” technique. Data of the study were collected with qualitative research techniques; observation, interview and documentary analysis, and method triangulation method was adopted for a detailed data collection. Collected data were evaluated in terms of pre-school teachers’ use of drama as an educational method and their processes of developing drama lesson plans. According to the evaluations, it was observed that pre-school teachers considered drama as an educational method, however they lacked some qualities required for planning and implementing and they had difficulty in developing authentic working areas for children to interact, express themselves, and discover new situations. It was also observed that drama studies were not used as a method, they were not associated with other lessons efficiently and teachers didn’t make evaluations in this context.

Keywords :Pre-school education, independent pre-schools, drama, drama in education.

Introduction

Pre-school developmental period covers the period from birth to sixth age. In this period children are motivated to thinking oriented to discover their environment they live in. Pre-school education plays an important role in encouraging and developing these characteristics of children.

There are various institutions that give education intended for pre-school children. These are institutions varying by nursery school, kindergarten, pre-school and day-care names, which are founded by governmental and private institutions in accordance with various laws and regulations. It was stated in these that pre-school education institutions can be founded as independent pre-schools in public schools of Ministry of Education, or in places of need kindergarten classes under the primary levels of basic educational institutions or practice classrooms under other educational institutions can be founded (Ministry of National Education, 1975). As of 2015-2016 school year, in Turkey there 72.228 teachers and 1.209.106 students in pre-school educational institutions (Ministry of National Education, 2016).

The education given in pre-school institutions are planned and conducted in accordance with pre-school education program regulated by Ministry of National Education. This program is defined as a multilateral program with supportive and preventive dimensions, developed in order to provide children attending pre-schools with learning experiences, development in motor, social, affective, language, and cognitive development domains, self-care skills, and readiness for primary schools (Ministry of National Education, 2013).

Drama in pre-school education is very important is it gives children the opportunities for self-knowledge and contribute to their learning physical and social environment (Slade, 1995). McCaslin (1984) states that creative powers of all children can be revealed and developed through drama. Edwards and Springate (1995) point out that drama activities provide children with vast opportunities to reveal their creativity. Additionally, especially in

pre-school period, drama provides with various opportunities for the education of children of different characteristics. Drama is considered as a very effective method for the education of children who need special education (Conroy, 1996).

Educational drama is a method used by teachers to identify their students, support their development, provide them with appropriate learning environment and develop appropriate materials. Because the purpose of this method is development and education of the children in all domains, the most appropriate drama conductor is the teacher. Teachers are the ones who best know the children's needs, and the purpose and planning of their education. According to McCaslin (1984) if the teacher is a sympathetic leader, respects to others' ideas, and sensitive to imagination and people, then they have the basic qualities required for drama.

For the drama to have positive effects on the children, teachers' proficiency in this area is important. Researchers report that for the effective use of drama as an educational method, teachers need to have the necessary qualities (Johnson and O'Neill 1984); and it is important that pre-school teachers get education on the use of drama in order to establish relations between learning and drama, and to effectively plan and manage the dramatic games in the classroom (O'Toole, 2011). Heatchcote (1969) highlights the importance of teacher qualities in meaningful learning and states that teachers need to have certain qualities in learning-teaching through drama processes (Akar-Vural, 2012).

The present study investigates and evaluates how pre-school teachers take drama as an educational method, what drama activities they use in their classrooms, how they plan these activities in accordance with student needs and purposes, and whether they have efficient knowledge and experience about educational use of drama. The main purpose of the present study is evaluating the drama activities conducted at independent pre-schools. In accordance with this main purpose, the answers to the following questions are sought:

1. By who are the drama lessons conducted in independent pre-schools from low, medium and upper level socio-economic levels?
2. How are the drama lessons structured in independent pre-schools from low, medium and upper level socio-economic levels in terms of planning, strategies and techniques used?
3. Do the drama activities differ from each other in independent pre-schools from low, medium and upper level socio-economic levels?

Methods

Research Model

The present study conducted in order to evaluate the educational drama studies conducted in independent pre-schools is designed in descriptive survey model in accordance with qualitative research design.

Work Group

The work-group of the present study consists of three independent pre-schools in the provincial centre of Aydın. The schools were selected in accordance with purposive sampling method among low, medium and high level schools in terms of socio-economic status. Sampling way can be defined as "criteria based sample selection" technique. The criteria based are that each school represents a different socio-economic status, the schools are independent pre-schools, and the teachers are graduated from pre-school teaching departments of faculties of education.

Data Collection Tools

Data of the study were collected with qualitative research techniques; observation, interview and documentary analysis, and method triangulation method was adopted for a detailed data collection. Accordingly, in the scope of the present study, teachers were interviewed individually, lessons were observed, and lessons plans of the observed lessons were analysed as a document.

Semi-Structured Interview Forms: In the present study, interview forms were used in order to identify teachers, define the drama education they took at the faculties, or in in-service training programs, how they use drama as a method professionally, how they plan and conduct lessons, and how they perceive themselves in terms of their efficacy in drama.

Interview forms prepared for teachers consist of 17 questions. First 8 questions are intended for identifying teachers and drama education they got, the next 7 questions are intended to evaluate how they plan, conduct and evaluate drama activities. Last 2 questions are intended to get their ideas about their efficacy in drama, whether they need in-service training and drama activities.

Observation: Observation studies are classified in two main groups as natural environment (structures and unstructured) and artificial environment (structures and unstructured). Necessary permissions were taken from the teachers before the observation, then the drama activities were observed. In the present study, unstructured natural environment observation method was adopted and attended classroom observations were conducted. For each teacher, 6 drama lessons were observed, and in total 18 lessons were observed.

Document Analysis: Document analysis refers to the analysis of written materials including information about the phenomenon/phenomena targeted for research. In the present study, 18 drama lesson plans from three different schools were analysed with content analysis. Content analysis was based on the drama lesson plan format developed by Akar-Vural and Somers (2012).

Data Collection / Analysis

More than one data collection methods were used in the present study to collect data. The data were collected in a 6-week period in 2015-2016 school year. First three independent pre-schools from low, medium and upper socio-economic backgrounds in provincial centre of Aydın were selected as the work group. Meetings were conducted with school managers and classroom teachers in order to inform them about the purpose, data collection tools and duration of the study. One teacher was selected in each school, and these teachers were interviewed. Each school was studied on one day of the week for six weeks, on different days of the week these schools were observed while taking notes, and activity plans were obtained from teachers. Data obtained from interviews and observations were analysed, and the findings were discussed in accordance with the related literature.

Results

Findings obtained through interviews, observations and document analysis in the present research are presented below.

Opinions Related to Drama Education Taken in Pre-Service Education Period.

All three pre-school teachers who participated in the present research stated that they took drama courses during their pre-service education. These courses were structured as two

class hours a week, in two academic semesters. Apart from one of the teachers, the other two teachers stated that they thought the education they got in the pre-service period was not adequate, and these courses were not practice based. All teachers agreed that a learning-teaching processes based on role-play, pantomime, and dramatization was conducted.

Pre-School Teachers' Using Drama as an Educational Method

All of the teachers reported that they used drama frequently. They stated that they used role-play and pantomime techniques, and they used costumes in impersonation activities. None of the participating teachers has awareness of drama approaches in education (Expert Role Approach, Procedural Drama) and therefore they can't use these approaches.

Process of Developing Drama Lesson Plans

Teachers who participated in the present research stated that they used ready-made lessons they obtained from the Internet, and they chose the activities from books. None of these teachers plan their learning-teaching processes related to drama activities on their own.

Opinions Related to the Tangible Attainments Drama Develops Among Students

All of the teachers stated that drama especially developed students' self-expressing, creativity, and socialization skills, and in addition to these skills, students' empathy, self-confidence, and expressing emotions skills also developed.

Establishing School Shows and Drama Studies Relations Styles

All of the teachers stated that they organized theatrical shows at schools. However, these shows were the carrying of the drama activities to the stage, and they put theatrical activities on the stage after some rehearsal.

Evaluation and Assessment Methods and Techniques Used in Drama Lessons

It was observed that teachers didn't evaluate or assess dramatic skills after drama activities (creative fiction, impersonation, mimes and gestures etc.), and they only shared feelings and opinions after the activities.

Pre-School Teachers' Requirement for In-service Training on Drama

All three of the teacher who participated in the present study stated that they didn't get any in-service training or course about drama, and two of these teachers stated that they needed practical in-service training.

Findings Related to Lesson Plans and In-class Observations

Defining and Practicability of Objectives and Attainments in Drama Activities

The objectives, attainments and indicators specified in lesson plans of the teachers in the work group were in agreement with the activity contents. Because all three of the teachers used ready-made lesson plans they obtained from the Internet, needs of the student in their classes were not taken into consideration while objectives and attainments were determined. However, lesson plans are coherent with pre-school education program.

Selecting the Tools, Materials, Lights, Stage etc. to be used in drama activities and Preparations

It was observed that teachers didn't use light or stage in the activities. One of the teachers conducted their drama studies in the drama room of the school, one in the classroom, and one conducted in the game room. One of the teachers didn't make any material or tool preparations and didn't use these, one of the teachers arranged the place with children during

the studies, and one of the teachers made some preparations, such as puppets and pictures before the studies. It can be reported that the physical environment was appropriate for drama. During the observations, it was seen that teachers gave instructions to the children during the activities about the use of materials and organization of the fictional area, and they used some tools and materials in the classroom. The furniture in the classroom were replaced, made ready for use during the activities, and materials were distributed with the instructions of the teachers.

Methods and techniques used in drama studies

It was observed that teachers considered warm-up exercises and games as drama studies, they mostly used impersonation, role-play, visualization techniques, one of the teachers organized puppet show, and one of the teachers participated in the activities by playing a role. It was also observed that other drama techniques in the literature weren't used.

It was seen that teachers informed their students that they were going to the drama studies, and the children were aware of these activities. Another observation was that teachers in the work-group paid importance to children's willingness, and they didn't force the children who didn't want to participate in the activities. It was seen that during drama lessons, students conducted their studies in accordance with the students' instructions, and the children, who acted according to these instructions, were approved by the teacher. It was observed that activities could get flexible, through children's discussions and brainstorming. It was attention-grabbing that the instructions given during the studies were didactic and guiding, and they weren't encouraging for creative ideas.

Discussion and Interpretation

Findings obtained through observations, lesson plan analyses and teacher interviews conducted in three schools from different socio-economic levels are discussed here in the light of the related literature.

In this context, it was observed that pre-school teachers considered drama as an educational method, however they lacked some qualities required for planning and implementing. That lesson plans are obtained from the Internet, and not planned in accordance with the terminal behaviours and objectives defined specifically for the children in these schools are the indicators of this finding. It can be claimed that authentic thinking and acting areas weren't created for children in the roles assigned to them, they were asked to conduct pre-prepared expressions and tasks, and children are limited in terms of gaining real experiences.

Drama method is an important instructional tool that can provide children with the experiences of discovering their social environment, because in order to realize that, they need to interact with that environment (Önder, 2006). In the present study it was observed that and teachers had difficulty in developing authentic working areas for children to interact, express themselves, and discover new situations.

Akar Vural and Somers (2012) stated in their study that teachers should start planning their lessons based on drama method by first defining what they want to do, what the objectives and attainments are, with what techniques, materials, role persons, and sources they

will do what they what they want to do, and in what order they will set these to work. Taking these steps of planning the instruction, they prepared a plan for a lesson based on drama method. The evaluation of the lesson plans of the teachers who participated in the present study showed that they used lesson plans formatted with objectives, attainments, activity content and evaluation parts. It was observed that there were some deficiencies in the definition of student and teacher roles, the introduction part of the plan didn't include information about how attracting attention, motivation, and transition studies to be conducted, sometimes only warm-up studies were included and warm-up studies were just consisted of warm-up exercises or games. Akar Vural and Somers (2012) stated in their study that warm-up activities could include talks about what was done in the previous drama session, what is going to be done in the present session, besides exercises or games. Definition of problem or pre-text techniques and instructions takes place in the body part of the lesson plan format. It was seen in the lesson plans used by the teachers who participated in the present study that these were included in the implementation part of the activity but not detailed. Akar Vural and Somers (2012) stated that conclusion and evaluation part of the plan should include final summary, re-motivation, establishing inter-disciplinary connections, closing and evaluations and informing about the next lesson or drama session. It was observed in the analysed lesson plans that these took place in the evaluation part but the evaluations were limited to the evaluation of the activities through question-answer method.

Observations and lesson plan analyses conducted in the present study showed that drama studies weren't used as a method, they weren't associated with other lessons efficiently, and evaluations in this context weren't done. For instance, an electric drama activity was conducted as an electricity current game. A drama activity supported with science activities on the subject of electricity, various experimental or observational studies on how the electricity is formed and transferred can be an indicator of the use of drama as an educational method. Similarly, in "half-whole exhibition" drama, children match two halves of paintings exhibited in a museum. When this activity is supported with mathematical concepts of half and whole, and various mathematics activities, we can mention the use of drama as an educational method. The evaluation of the observation and lesson plan analyses in accordance with the related literature shows that the teachers in the work group of the present study used drama as an independent discipline and a lesson. Evaluations made accordingly show that there aren't any findings about how the assessment of children's individual follow-up and their development of dramatic skills within the process are conducted and it was observed that the teachers didn't use portfolios in accordance with this purpose.

The evaluation of lesson plans and implementation of the activities presents that evaluation and assessment criteria aren't defined clearly and no assessment of the attainment of the objectives is done apart from a general experience sharing. Assessment is considered as the evaluation of the conducted study as a group. Assessment of the students' participation in the activities, and development of technical and dramatic skills can be possible by keeping a development portfolio of teachers' notes of observations, video-recordings, photos, the pictures and drawings students produced during the drama activities.

Drama has important functions in developing students' creativity and aesthetic development, social development and working skills, development of communicative skills, knowing themselves, self-confidence, decision-making skills, development of linguistic and communicative skills through extended vocabulary, development of feelings and ideas, and developing empathy (Ömeroğlu et al., 2010).

Heathcote highlights that teachers should have certain qualities for a successful design of learning-teaching through drama processes. Some of these qualities are listed as; a strong imagination and creativity, the ability to observe student needs, and to transfer these needs to lesson plans, the ability to observe general emotional status of the group and to transfer these needs to lesson plans, the ability to observe general emotional status of the group and empathize, the ability to listen effectively, provide efficient feedback, and use dramatic elements correctly (Akar Vural and Somers, 2012). It was observed in the present study that teachers used ready-made lesson plans, which shows that they lacked the required qualities to observe student needs and transfer these to lesson plans, to observe in measurement and assessment processes, and to follow students' dramatic development. Teachers' lacking these qualities required for the use of drama as a method is also an indicator of the inefficacy of the education they got in this area.

Implications/ Suggestions

In accordance with the findings obtained in the present study, following suggestions can be made;

- Taking the effect of drama in education on children, pre-school teachers should adopt drama as a teaching method.
- Because the best drama conductor is the teacher, lesson plans should be prepared by the teachers considering the development and needs of children. They shouldn't use ready-made plans.
- There should be more practical courses related to the educational use of drama in undergraduate programs of pre-school teaching.
- Pre-school teachers should be provided with in-service training about drama practices and planning.

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