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Necessity or Emancipatory Action: Drama in the Classroom

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Necessity or Emancipatory Action: Drama in the Classroom

Nevin Gümüş¹, Özge Metinnam²

Abstract

Drama is an art form and a teaching method. In this respect, it is possible to say that drama is a way for people to express themselves more freely through the use of their senses and feelings. At that point, drama as an art form and as a teaching method should exist in the education system.

This research was conducted in order to determine whether using drama in the classroom gives teachers a sense of freedom. Aspects of drama practice were evaluated by obtaining the opinions of 14 classroom teachers working in both private and state schools in different parts of Turkey. This research is modeled as a basic interpretive qualitative research. A semi-structured interview form consisting of open-ended questions was created as a data collection tool. The findings of the study show that the teachers believe creative drama supports them to express themselves freely, find their potential, improve their creativity and participate effectively. At the same time, teachers believe that the curriculum, the classroom environment, the other teachers and the principals at the schools where they work might pose obstacles to the implementation of creative drama in the classroom.

Key words: *primary school teachers' view, drama, private and state schools*

1. Introduction: Theoretical background

Drama is a powerful tool. Drama is influential because of its unique balance of thought and feeling, which makes learning exciting, challenging, enjoyable and relevant to real-life situations. Drama allows students to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Using drama in the classroom as a means of teaching helps students learn academically, socially and developmentally. Using drama to teach in the elementary classroom gets students involved and gives them the power to have a key role in their learning.

Freedom in education refers to the liberty of a person to carry out a research in a scholarly manner within the structure of the learning community. It is defined as:

The freedom of professionally qualified persons to inquire, discover, publish and teach the truth as they see it in the field of their competence, without any control of any authority except the control of the authority of the rational methods by which truth is established. (Worgul, 1992, p. 10)

About freedom, Madison (1998) states that:

It is through imagination, the realm of pure possibility, that we freely make ourselves to be who or what we are, that we creatively and imaginatively become who we are, while in the process of preserving freedom and possibility to be yet other than what we have become and merely are. (as cited in Greene, 1995, p. 38)

This means that when we imagine, we accept who we are and what we want to become. Then, we can think of the starting point of our next move among many possibilities. This can happen only in the classroom by freely engaging students in dialogue (Osman, 2013).

Everyone needs to be part of education. Students need to be responsible for their learning. Hooks (1994) thinks that the classroom can be made a democratic setting where everyone feels responsible for contributing to a central goal of transformative learning. The community views the function of the educational institutions as that of handing on cultural and social order; however, it is not ready to allow teachers to act freely. One expects the school to select, criticise, evaluate and innovate the classroom experiences.

As Kean (1994) states, teachers must be free to choose, recommend and assign learning material that is important for the students and appropriate to their maturity level. The selection of the material and the reconsideration of this material should include critical selection objectives and procedures for complaint handling.

The teacher should involve students in critical thinking and attentively engage them in drama activities. Dewey (1916) viewed the school as a miniature democratic society where students could learn and practice the skills and tools necessary for democratic living. The students should be allowed to identify alternative possibilities and choose what they think is possible. This might help them learn autonomously and explore the world.

The school should take the role of shaping society to advocate not only the freedom of the learning environment, but also the teachers' freedom to explore and carry out the research that is required in order to make their teaching successful. Teachers have to create an environment that would allow creative thinking on the part of students. They should see that this is possible in the classroom. It is their responsibility to inculcate students with the value of freedom and the worth of other individuals. They should make the school a place where communities can gather with the purpose of creating a common life and opening up new paths for growth. They must also learn that a democratic attitude towards minority groups will often involve unpopular decisions, such as giving them a voice to express their point of view (Osman, 2013).

In drama lessons, teachers and learners find themselves conducting a kind of collaborative research. This is why a classroom situation where the students are critically aware is vital. Furthermore, in drama lessons, students build up confidence. Students who don't feel comfortable and at ease during lessons will often experience difficulty, which in turn affects the class as a whole as they find it difficult to work with others. Therefore an environment is important in making an individual feel that they belong to a group and are in a social environment. Thus, during the primary school period when self-confidence develops, students increase their sense of belonging and social communication (İşyar & Akar, 2017).

When drama is used as a teaching method, it allows students to explore the curriculum. There are many ways in which drama can be integrated into elementary school classrooms. Drama can be a way to teach all subject areas: language, arts, mathematics, social studies, science, etc. Teachers who use drama in the classroom adopt the "whole brain" approach to learning. When teachers use drama as a teaching method, these lessons help students have great academic achievements.

In the method of drama in education, a person will be deficient in the sense of the self and in understanding their own wishes, unless emotional intelligence is used effectively. In an education system that attaches importance only to academic achievement and does not care about the emotional intelligence of the individual, there will be individuals who are successful in the academic field but unhappy (İşyar & Akay, 2017).

Drama as an art form is the approach to the support of personal development and self-actualisation. This approach focuses on the development of a person through drama. It promotes children's physical, intellectual, social and emotional welfare. Drama is "a social, interactive art process, and also it creates experiences which enable the development of cognitive, emotional, social and creative understanding and skills" (Bolton, 1979, p. 21).

Drama is an effective and indispensable tool for education, as well as a great chance to support personal development. Drama can be used to create a learning environment, to discover new things and to create meanings about the world. In many places, efforts are made to produce drama by arranging many variables. Sometimes, there are factors that affect the liberating areas of drama. There may be different reasons for this.

2. Aim

The aim of this study is to determine the freedom of the classroom teachers trained in drama to use drama in terms of the students, the school, the teacher, the principal, the curriculum, the objectives, and the physical environment.

3. Methodology

This research is modeled as a basic interpretive qualitative research. It explores which subjects are taught with the use of creative drama and the views of classroom teachers on using creative drama in education in general. As a data collection tool, a semi-structured interview form consisting of open-ended questions was created. The open-ended questions were designed by the researchers to determine the views of classroom teachers on the concept of drama in education.

3.1. Study group

In this research, a criterion sampling strategy is used. The participant teachers of the research had to have successfully completed the drama training, and to have been entitled to receive the certificate and work with this certificate as classroom teachers for at least three years. 14 teachers participated in the interview. The participants' teaching experience ranges from 3 to 29 years and their experience in teaching drama ranges from 3 to 18 years. In this way, it is assumed that the teachers have sufficient experience of drama in practice, therefore they can express different groups' perspectives on drama.

The teachers' opinions were received and the final interview form was sent to the participants who created the study group. The study group is composed of drama-trained teachers working in private and state schools.

3.2. Data

As a data collection tool, a semi-structured interview form consisting of open-ended questions was created. The open-ended questions were designed by the researchers to determine the views of classroom teachers on the concept of drama in education. While developing the form, the researchers sought the opinion of 3 experts in the field of the curriculum and instruction and 2 experts in the field of classroom teaching, with the purpose of content validation. The following three open-ended questions were asked in the form.

1. Does creative drama have a liberating effect? If yes, how do you describe this effect?
2. Is a liberating effect experienced when you use creative drama as a method? If so, in what circumstances do you think it is experienced? What do you think about the emancipation of children?
3. Does the school you are in, whether a private or a state school, change the liberating potential of creative drama?

Qualitative research data are analysed in four stages: (1) coding of data, (2) finding the themes, (3) finding codes and themes, (4) identifying and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 260).

The analysis of the qualitative data that were obtained through questions was carried out in stages. The collected data were analysed in four stages:

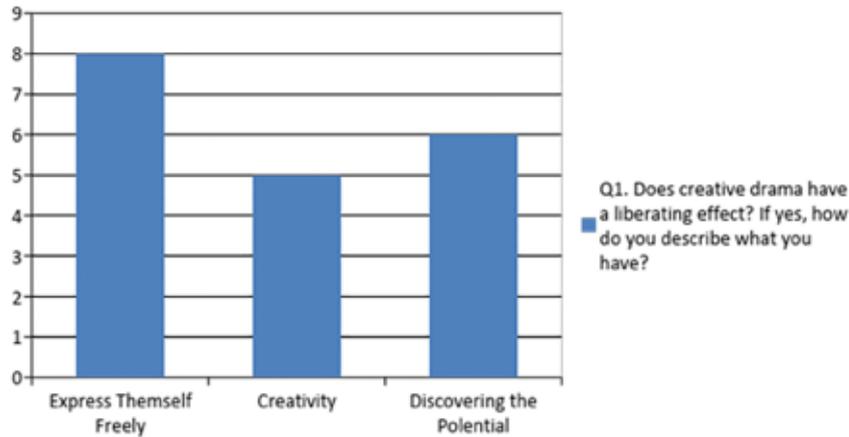
1. The answers were read and the data were coded as follows: "different perspectives", "thinking", "freedom", "emotion/thought", "improvisation", "role-playing", "experiencing", "questioning", "limitation", "process", "individual trait", "play", "time", "art", "production", "flexibility", "interest", "instructor", "comfort", "objectives", "principal", "team spirit", "rolling", "run", "cushion", "training programme", "performances", "possibilities", "knowledge" and "concrete".
2. The following themes were created, based on the coded data: "Express Oneself Freely", "Discovering One's Potential", "Creativity", "Active Participation", "Physical Environment", "Curriculum", "Principal-Instructor" and "Facilities".
3. The codes were classified according to the related themes by considering their common features.

3.3. Data analysis

Table 1. Analysis of qualitative research data obtained by questions

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	
Express oneself freely	P2, P3, P5, P8, P9, P10, P12, P13		
Creativity	P1, P2, P8, P10, P11		
Discovering one's potential	P1, P4, P5, P7, P8, P10		
Active participation		P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14	
Physical environment		P2, P5, P6, P8, P9, P12, P14	
Curriculum			P9
Teacher - principal			P3, P6, P8, P10
Facilities			P9, P10, P11

Graph 1. Q1. Does creative drama have a liberating effect? If yes, how do you describe this effect?



As shown in graph 1, all participants believe that creative drama has a liberating effect. They describe it in different ways. According to this question, the participants' answers are grouped into three categories. These categories and the corresponding direct quotations are presented below.

Express oneself freely / self-expression

Some participants emphasise that they can express themselves freely due to (students') creative drama. Creative drama gives us freedom to run around, to express our wishes. The participants' prominent views on this theme are as follows:

"Children get lots of experience in the process, as much as they can get in real life. While they are expressing themselves I can see the difference. They can look at things from different perspectives. It's more meaningful for them to gain experience and get their ideas themselves. When we teach them directly, we skip their ideas and choices." P9

"I see the biggest proof that drama is liberating when I look in the mirror. Finding myself led me to a revolution of liberating myself. It helped me look at the whole, and the circle we established made me a more hopeful person. I have experienced a change that even attracts the attention of my environment. Now I see this change in students, and my eyes shine. I think that the only factor that prevents drama from being liberating is the didactics, a leader who fears to renew himself/herself, not the drama itself." P5

Creativity

Within the scope of this theme, the participants contribute to the students' creativity in accordance with the aims of drama, and they also help students take a critical look at the events and situations as they become aware of their thoughts. Moreover, creative drama reveals our creativity. In this way, children get lots of experience in the process, as much as they can get in real life. The participants' prominent views on this theme are as follows:

"Yes, the education process makes students more free and they use their creativity." P12

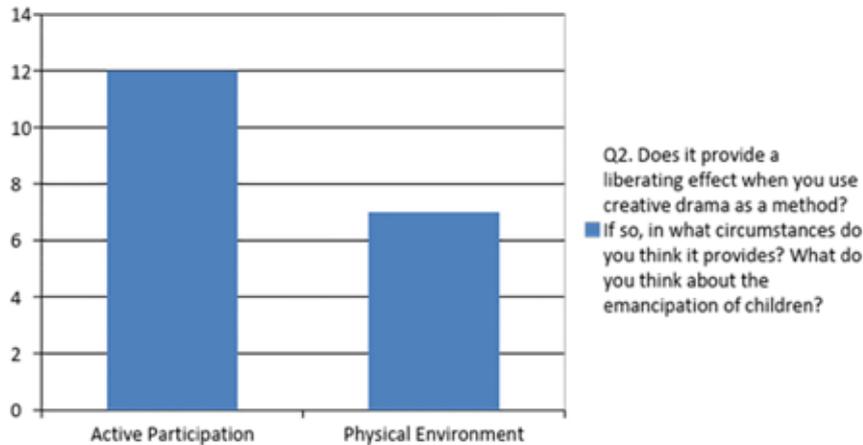
"Yes, it helps the system acquire the ability to think about and question the imposed knowledge from a different perspective." P4

Discovering one's potential

Some teachers expressed that as creative drama has a liberating effect, they were often able to discover the students' potential. Other participants said that creative drama helps a person discover his/her potential. According to this theme, there is a mutual interaction between teachers and drama participants and they stated that they bring their continuous development in line with this interaction. One participant's view of this theme is as follows:

"Yes, it helps a person discover their potential. You see that your own universe can be wider, you move away from being a consumer." P1

Graph 2. Q2. Is a liberating effect experienced when you use creative drama as a method? If so, in what circumstances do you think it is experienced? What do you think about the emancipation of children?



As shown in graph 2, most participants stated that creative drama allows for freedom in the classroom if it is used as a teaching method. In this question, all but two participants accept that creative drama has a liberating effect. On the other hand, one participant says that creative drama sometimes gives them freedom. He/she thinks that the curriculum restricts freedom. In this context, the participants' opinions were examined under the following sub-themes.

Active participation

In drama, students make decisions as a group, listen to each other and value each other's suggestions. As learners, they participate in a series of activities based on specific objectives.

It is the teacher working with the students within the drama, who will build on the students' ideas and bridge the gap between their own experience of the world and the meaning of drama, so that both insights and understanding arise from the activity (O'Neill & Lambert, 1989). Drama provides ways of experiencing curiosity, questioning, reaching the source of knowledge and experiencing skills. In drama lessons students do improvisations and take different roles. They are in charge of organising improvisations, so they actively take part in the lesson. Also, drama is an art form, thus it gives students lots of opportunities to be active and free.

"Yes, knowledge provides ways of experiencing curiosity, questioning, reaching the source of knowledge and experiencing a skill by providing guidance instead of presenting skills." P5

"During the process, children are free to express their ideas, they are free to choose their role. This makes them feel more comfortable and free." P7

Physical environment

Teachers emphasise that creative drama gives them freedom and creates more a natural and accepted space for students. In Turkey, most classrooms are very crowded, so they do not provide enough space even for walking around. Sometimes, the classroom environment limits students' movement and this might affect their freedom.

When students have a drama class, they have the opportunity to move around easily. In a drama class they don't need to sit on a chair, they can sit on a cushion or lie down. They have more freedom than in the classroom.

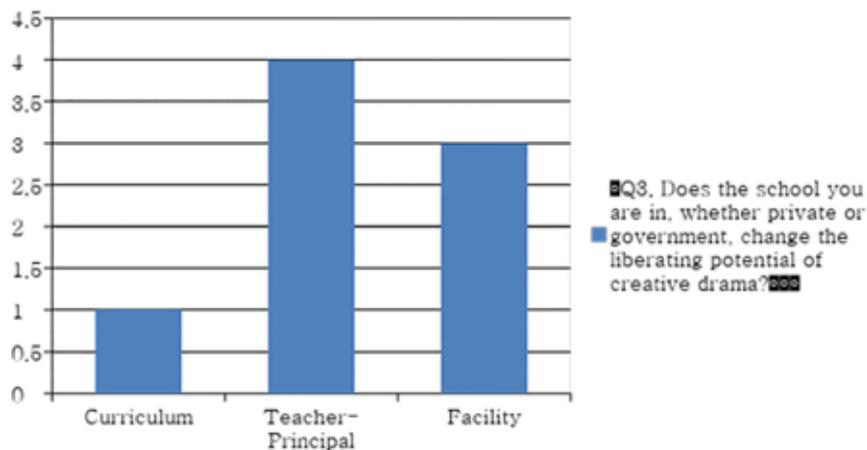
"It creates a more natural, more accepted space for students." P3

"It's usually positive because the children in the drama class sit on the mat, run around, express their wishes and add a lot to this process." P12

Contrary to the above opinions, a participant stated that they were concerned about not being able to meet the objectives and therefore they could not fully reflect the emancipatory effect of drama as a teaching method. For this reason, it can be stated that there are some limitations to the use of creative drama as a teaching method.

“... the limits are too many. I feel that, sometimes, the curriculum reduces the freedom. And it isn't really liberating when the students get too involved in the game.” P4

Graph 3.Q3. Does the school you are in, whether a private or a state school, change the liberating potential of creative drama?



In graph 3, six participants said that the liberating potential of creative drama doesn't change in private or state schools; however, eight people think that this factor does have a certain effect. Four participants have the same opinion; they say that private schools are more liberating because they believe that their potential would be higher. One participant says that state schools are more free. On the other hand, three participants think that being in a different school can change the liberating potential of creative drama, but the others haven't got the same opinion.

One participant said that the liberating potential of creative drama doesn't change whether you are in a private or a state school. They emphasise that drama equals performance. They also state that this situation depends on their expectations about the school principals and the instructor. In this context, the participants' opinions were examined under the following sub-themes.

Curriculum

A curriculum is a sequence of learning experiences, which gives students opportunities to learn specific content.

“I work in a private school. In private schools we have to develop curricula that connect the units together. However, private schools also support teachers' creativity.” P10

Classroom teachers teach different subjects, such as social studies, science, mathematics, etc. In the curriculum, there are lots of objectives to be reached in a year. Classroom teachers stated that the objectives they have to reach in a week are too many, that the drama method courses take more time than the courses in which they did not use drama methods, and that they cannot meet the corresponding objectives. Therefore, they generally stated that they had to use the lecture method.

Teacher - Principal

Those who mention that the state school is more emancipatory, think that the principals' expectations in private schools are demonstrative-oriented and that drama is more results-oriented rather than process-

oriented.

“No. I work in both institutions at the same time. It makes no difference whether it is a private or a state school. This is completely about the expectations of the school principal and the instructor.” P9

“Private schools have better potential in this regard. State schools depend on principals. If the principal is not very involved in a private school, the drama teacher has more freedom.” P11

Facilities

Generally, due to the lack of facilities, state school teachers mentioned that they are not able to use the drama method.

“If I was in a private school, my possibilities would be better; even in a state school, creative drama would provide an unlimited number of tools.” P12

4. Results and conclusions

It has been found that free space can change according to the conditions and that it has a liberating effect when necessary facilities are provided. The teachers' opinions on whether creative drama is an area of emancipation and how this effect occurs, if any, are grouped into the following three categories: active participation, creativity and express oneself freely.

The participants' views on whether or not creative drama is used as a teaching method are discussed on the basis of two themes. As Adıgüzel (2013) stated, the use of creative drama as a method in a class setting for different lessons, is based on students to make the studied topic more permanent and experiential, to make the learners (whether they are children, adolescents or adults) think differently and critically, to have them express their emotions in a good way, and to provide an opportunity for the development of free thoughts and expression. Similarly, the participants stated that they actively participated in the lesson when drama was used as a teaching method, and thus permanent learning took place.

The participants' opinions on whether creative drama in private or state schools affects the state of the creation of an emancipatory space, are grouped into three themes. Accordingly, participants state that there are various obstacles to the use of creative drama as a teaching method. The most prominent of these obstacles is the teaching of the curriculum. Metinnam, Keleşoğlu and Özen (2014) also stated that some of the social studies teachers who participated in their studies were unable to teach the curriculum when creative drama was used as a teaching method, and therefore they had to use creative drama less.

The philosophical orientation of promoting creativity in education originates from a humanistic belief in education which values learner autonomy in a flexible and democratic environment (Esquivel, 1995). A drama-enhanced curriculum is an effective strategy to foster creativity in both students and teachers. Morgan and Saxton (2001) explained that the approach of learning and teaching through drama would enhance students' reflective and adaptive skills and enable them to look into a problem from multiple perspectives. Drama in education adopts an innovative approach to learning from a child-centered perspective (Bolton, 2001), and classroom teachers state that it improves communication, creativity, self-expression and problem-solving skills.

According to their responses, it certainly reflected the role the education system is playing as a blueprint in affecting individual's educational orientation and decisions on resource allocation, which in turn impacts the students' learning experiences. Metinnam, Keleşoğlu and Özen (2014) stated that causes like the hurry to cover the areas of the curriculum, the planning skills and the long preparation process can be seen as major reasons why the creative drama method is not used.

From the participants' opinions regarding active participation, it is seen that creative drama exposes students to different perspectives, increases the existing closeness and sincerity between teacher and student, and makes students participate in a more active way. Drama is an effective way to encourage students to elaborate, make eye contact, listen carefully and give supportive non-verbal responses. It is a good way to engage students in active participation and identification with the characters, and to gain pleasure from this engagement. Also, it requires students to accept limitations and responsibilities and to empathise with the roles (Cheng, 2015).

The teachers included in the study group mentioned that, most times, the physical environment imposes a limitation. In Turkey, classrooms are very crowded and this fact limits students, the teacher and drama. Teachers need to organise the classroom or need to find different places to teach by use of drama. In most

schools, facilities are not enough. Also, this makes the principal a part of the process. Some principals do not support the use of drama by teachers, or they focus only on the performances. This is another limitation for teachers and students. Most of the times, teachers need to overcome these obstacles. Also, they stated that the fact that the drama environments differed from the traditional classroom environment, affected the students' and teachers' freedom space. Drama environments have various positive effects, such as being close to natural environment, participation, creativity, self-expression and problem-solving.

It has been found that the liberating space can change according to the conditions and that it has a liberating effect when the required facilities are provided. Based on the findings, it is necessary to improve the classroom conditions with the support of the state and the principals. Drama training can be provided to principals on this subject and a better understanding of drama can be provided. Thus, principals may further support drama training.

Therefore, by decreasing the issues surrounding drama in the classroom as stated above, drama can fulfil its true potential both in the classroom and to the students. Thus, the increase in drama practices and pressure on the teacher can be reduced. In addition, the Ministry of National Education in collaboration with the Contemporary Drama Association can address more people by continuing projects.

Notes

1 Drama / Classroom Teacher

2 Drama / Classroom Teacher

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