Θέατρο & παραστατικές τέχνες στην εκπαίδευση: ουτοπία ή αναγκαιότητα;

Theatre/Drama & Performing Arts in Education: Utopia or Necessity?

Πανελλήνιο Δίκτυο για το **Θέατρο στην Εκπαίδευση**
μέλος του Διεθνούς Οργανισμού για το Θέατρο στην Εκπαίδευση (IDEA)

Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network
member of International Drama/Theatre and Education Association (IDEA)

Using Dorothy Heathcote's Commission Model Approach to Promote the Teacher Candidates' School-Real Life Relationship Skills[1]

Zeki Özen, Ömer Adıgüzel

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Abstract

The effort to create a natural environment in educational studies has been one of the most controversial topics. The contact with the individual's social environment is seen as an important tool in many educational approaches or methods. One of the ways that people care about their social environment and their learning in this environment is drama.

This study was carried out in order to define Dorothy Heathcote's Commission Model approach, which is one of Dorothy Heathcote's most recent drama approaches and which is not well known in the field of drama. Based on this definition, the aim of the present research is to develop an application example of the Commission Model and to analyse the experiences of the students included in the application example, in line with the purpose of the Commission Model. The research is structured according to a pattern of action research. The research group was composed of teacher candidates from different departments of the Ankara University Faculty of Educational Sciences in the period 2015-2016. In the first phase of the research, the Commission Model, which has very few examples, is described. In the second phase, the Commission Model application was implemented using the initial stages of the Mantle of the Expert approach. In the third phase, the research group members' experiences in the process were examined. During the implementation process, data were collected by way of observation, interviews, visual presentations, reflective summaries, voice recordings and video recordings. The data collected during the research process were analysed by inductive analysis and content analysis techniques. The findings obtained from this survey are based on the Commission Model approach; this is an approach that solves problematic situations in real life, develops responsibility and presents a collaborative learning environment through social interaction. Moving on from these findings, it is proposed that the Commission Model applications should occupy more space in the drama discipline and that school-real life relations should be structured in light of this understanding.

Key words: *Commission Model, Dorothy Heathcote, Mantle of the Expert, responsibility, awareness*

1. Introduction

The effort to create a natural environment in educational studies has been one of the most controversial topics. In the traditions of educational sciences, philosophers such as Rousseau and Dewey emphasised this concept and examined the relationship between education and naturalness together with the concept of nature.

In order to obtain more quality in learning processes, it is necessary to equip the environment with specific objectives. The social environment, which is part of nature and the environment, can be considered as a valuable part of this equipment. According to Dewey (1996), the social environment shapes the individual's emotional and intellectual attitudes and behaviours by channeling them to actions that will lead to certain motives, goals and results.

Drama studies involve processes that are based on group interaction and nourished by the life experiences of group members. The group members who participate in the drama studies demonstrate their

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thoughts by acting aimed at certain dramatic situations. Participants involved in the process take on some roles in order to maintain their social interactions in a healthy manner.

Prior to the role studies undertaken in drama practices, mental and physical preparatory work are carried out. The fact that the individuals who have numerous different experiences can express their views about the theme being treated and witness the degree of different levels of experience existing in other participants through social interaction, supports the fact that the work is fictional.

Individuals, who share a great number of experiences in a fictional setting, have problems believing in their enactments with a short preliminary preparation. Participants who do not believe in the process of make-believe play do not fulfill the role requirements, such as linguistic, physical, spatial, spiritual, emotional requirements, etc. For this reason, it can be said that participants are further away from believing in the role.

Aesthetic anxieties, monitoring, cultural-intellectual distress of the role played, lack of revitalising experience, the inability of self-excitement, excitement, space, time, etc. could be the reasons for reduced belief in the roles undertaken in enactments.

The concept of role belief is considered by many drama pioneers. The pioneers working in the field of drama have experimented or used different techniques to increase the belief in the role assumed in their original approach. In this respect, the pioneers are often focused on psychology studies. They have also reviewed approaches in theatre studies and have tried to find links to support the role belief in both areas.

According to Bolton, one of the pioneers in the field of drama, Brian Way, was influenced by Stanislavsky (Metinnam & Adıgüzel, 2016). In order to help the students develop, especially in terms of sensitivity, concentration and intuition, he designed drama processes in which he unified three such processes together. Beside this, Dorothy Heathcote, another pioneer in the drama field, referred to Bruner as an example of the people who influenced her when designing the session planning. According to Heathcote, drama is a social art - it involves goal-oriented interaction. A teacher needs to assist in various ways to achieve consensus in classes (Heathcote, 2010). Bruner describes three steps for these assisting ways:

- Iconic (pictorial, images);
- Symbolic (speaking, describing, writing); and
- Enactive (to act in a real way by expressing the make-believe play behaviour of the statement).

Dorothy Heathcote, who cares about Bruner's work in the planning of the drama class, doesn't plan the drama processes with Stanislavski's understanding such as transferring one's own feelings and resources to the process of game creation, like Brian Way and Peter Slade do. Heathcote constructs the drama processes with a Brechtian understanding that conveys the discovery of individuals and their subsequent manifestations to the learning process (Fiala, 1977; Hesten, 1993; Eriksson, 2009).

Figure 1. Heathcote/Fiala: Drama as Context
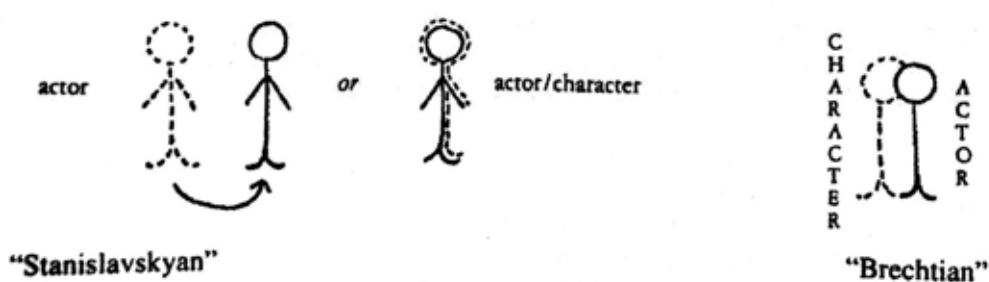
In many (traditional?) drama classrooms the main concern of the drama/theatre pedagogue is the creation of reality illusion, like a simulation of real-life situations. The pedagogical ideal in such a tradition is that the player either takes a conscious psychological step "into" the soul of his character (left figure above) – or attempts a "fusion" of his identity with that of his character (middle figure). In Heathcote's approach the ideal is not pretending or believing to be "another", but to retain consciousness of self whilst taking on a believable, characteristic attitude of "another" (right figure) (Eriksson, 2009).

Dorothy Heathcote treats the concepts of fiction and reality carefully in her original approach. Heathcote cares about the social interaction of participants with different life experiences; she starts her works

with tasks that are considered easy to be performed by the participants. Heathcote tries to create self-confidence by creating situations in which the participants will not feel unsuccessful.

Heathcote borrowed theatre metaphors from the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman and said that terms such as "role" and "performance" were transferred to many different social contexts.

Heathcote takes a decisive break in her 'living-through-drama', from Man-in-a-Mess to Mantle of the Expert. Mantle of the Expert combines theoretical and scientific investigations with performance. This is a type of role play where the entire class has a collective role, such as architects, archaeologists or monks. The pupils are not characters in a psychological sense but create their roles collectively with common values and the responsibility that goes with the role of the expert (Tor, 2008).

The social function of Heathcote's methodology appeared to be the examination and modification of attitudes and the enhancement of child self-expectation. At an early stage, the child was encouraged to think symbolically. Consequently, the child's creativity was channeled into symbolic group activity, in which an awareness of whole group responsibility was fostered. The lesson was designed to develop an in-built decision-making mechanism in the child to ensure responsibility taking within the context of the drama (Hesten, 1993).

Commission Model practices, which is the last one of Heathcote's original approaches, have moved away from fictional environments to the real-life environments. This step, which can be deemed too brave for the drama world, seeks to create opportunities for the participants to assume more realistic responsibilities.

In the Mantle of the Expert approach, natural and realistic responsibilities are produced, but known as fiction. When we look into the Commission Model practices, we see that they are trying to create an environment that is all real without fiction.

2. Aim

The aim of this study is to develop an application that focuses on the Commission Model approach, which is one of the approaches of the drama field pioneer Dorothy Heathcote, and to analyse the experiences of the students included in the application example according to the Commission Model objectives.

3. Theoretical framework
3.1. Meeting areas of drama and education

The concepts of education and drama come into being as two concepts which have a unified coexistence in many different cultures and systems. The fields of education and drama are often discussed together with the field of fine arts education. In this context, the discipline of drama that tries to gain an independent place in different countries and cultures, is referred together with the use of theatre in education.

In education, the field of drama exhibits ups and downs like a roller coaster (Bowell & Heap, 2001). In addition to being a discipline in its own right, the drama field is used as a tool to create organic bonds with other courses in educational systems.

3.2. Make-believe play, fiction and real life

The relationship between life and playing begins from an early age. Philosophy, psychology, education and arts have examined the relationship between humans and playing in particular. The dramatic plays performed in early childhood include the processes in which children imitate their interactions with their social environment.

According to Adıgüzel (2016), dramatic plays began in the form of the expansion of all the dramatic plays in our lives; in a sense, playing real-life roles powerfully enables players to express their needs and visualise their experiences by use of their imagination. Thus, they find a new solution to a problem.

In general, children are asked to look at their drama situation as adults, and this is manifested as the power of the "make-believe play" feature (Toye & Prendiville, 2000). Drama pioneers have placed make-believe play, fiction and real-life situations in their own approaches, in different ways.

For instance, Dorothy Heathcote used the approach of the teacher-in-role. After using this approach, it was revealed to her that there was also a twilight role, a grey area (that region between consciousness and unconsciousness) where she was neither in role nor completely out of role (Hesten, 1993).

Heathcote, who wants the participants to touch the real life carefully, has benefited from the approaches of theatre writers and sociologists such as Bertolt Brecht and Erving Goffman on the subject of belief, production of responsibility and real life.

3.3. Social learning, Bruner and Dorothy Heathcote

Jerome Bruner (1966) mentions that for the internalisation and personalisation of knowledge, the learner must be actively involved in the learning process and that the learner's emotions, values and imagination must be conveyed in accordance with the lessons.

Developments in the behaviour and attitudes of learners who are part of the society do not take place directly with the transfer of emotions, knowledge and beliefs. In all these learning processes, the "environment" is a dominant tool.

Dorothy Heathcote, who studied the Commission Model approach on the basis of this research, benefited from Bruner's social learning theory. In describing social learning styles, Jerome Bruner benefited from the life experience cone of Edgar Dale. The cone, which provides data about our life experiences in our learning, classifies the areas of social interaction as follows:

Table 1. Edgar Dale's life experience cone
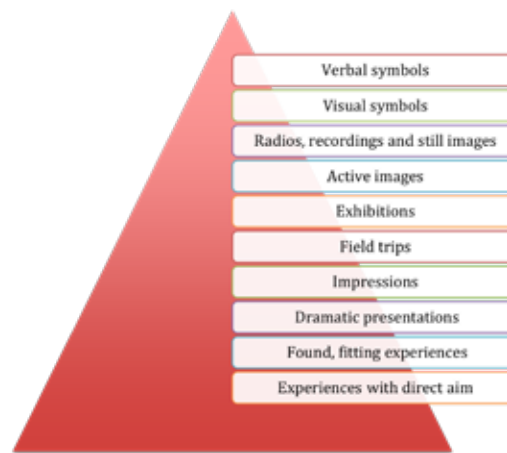
3.4. Role, frame, frame distance

The performances performed by the participants in the drama works are affected by the roles in real life; and these roles are performed in safe classroom environments.

While these active actions performed by the participants in a "fictional" area try to create a sense of reality, the fact that the actions are happening in the classroom environment can move the participants away from this sense of reality.

Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman approaches the reality of life in a dramaturgical way. According to Goffman, every time we go into social interaction, in every place and in every situation, we play a role that is required by social relations and after a while this role play is accepted by us as our own reality. Everyone we encounter in our life is effective in determining our feelings and behaviours. We also interact with people who interact with us to determine their emotions and behaviours. The ideas put forward in social interaction are a reflection of our role playing and experiences in real life.

In our real-life roles, there are some roles we play to gain knowledge or to make sense of any situation. Erving Goffman says that this is a framework. Dorothy Heathcote, based on this framework structure, has created a chart entitled "general role functions", which is associated with frame distance.

Heathcote's learning framework in drama practices was developed from Erving Goffman's frame analysis and was adapted for use in drama classes. A frame or perspective is a window in which participants view the action and identify their attitude to events (Sayers, 2011).

4. Methodology

This study is structured with an action research pattern taken from qualitative research designs. Action research is a process of problem solving and continuity. This is similar to "reflective thinking" that is described by Schön (1983). Similarly, the action research process consists of the stages of problem determination, data collection, data analysis, action plan determination, action taking and decision to take alternative or new action.

4.1. Participation group of the research

The study group of the research consists of teacher candidates who studied at different departments of the Ankara University Faculty of Educational Sciences in 2015-2016.

In order to create the study population, appropriate status sampling was preferred. Appropriate status sampling is related to easy access of the experimental group (Ekiz, 2009).

Graph 1. Gender, Division and Drama Experience Distribution
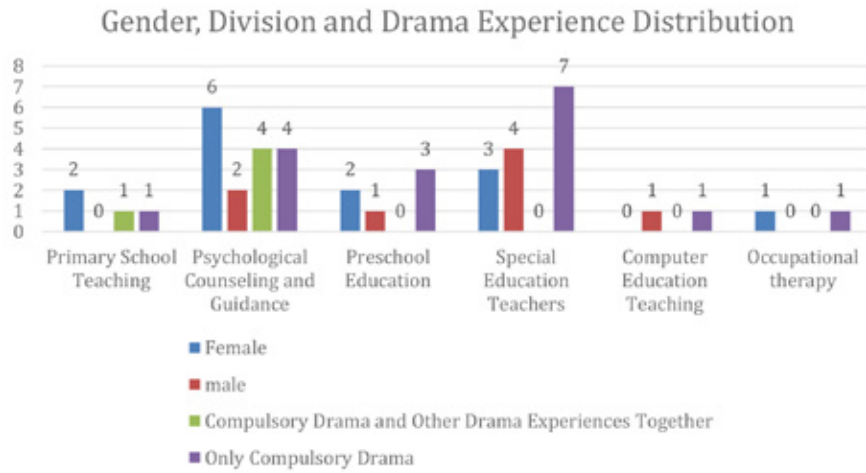
4.2. Data collection resources, tools and methods

In the systematic data collection process carried out in action research, it is decided what kind of data, how and how often to collect before starting the research (Kuzu, 2005). In addition to the main study group of the research, the data was collected from the other stakeholders that the student group contacted. In this respect, the research group students prepared reports reflecting the process that they experienced. At the end of the process, the data was diversified by conducting a focus group interview with the research group.

4.3. Data collection

An effort was made to examine the working group's experiences in the research process, the ownership of a structure within real life, the points and reasons for this ownership, the subjective situations in which the participants live in their groups, and the participants' feelings, motivation and motivating factors in the group. In addition to these topics, the student community was asked to define the Commission Model approach based on their own experiences in the research process. After all the studies were completed, the research group prepared a general report that addressed the real client - Ankara University Department of Health, Culture and Sports.

4.4. Data analysis

For the analysis of the qualitative data obtained, the coding was done based on the texts. The coding process involves collecting text or visual data into small categories of information, searching for evidence for the code from different databases used in the study and then providing a label to the code (Creswell, 2013). The reminder notes taken next to the codes given by the researcher helped to identify the categories. The categories were formed, intersecting common points were determined and themes were created and interpreted.

5. Findings and conclusions

This text is a part of a PhD thesis (Using The Commission Model From The Drama Approaches To Bring The Teacher Candidates' School-Real Life Relationship Skills) that was completed by Zeki Özen under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Omer Adıguzel at Ankara University in April, 2018. You will find only a part of the research steps in the Findings. These steps were chosen by the researcher as the participants' views. Further information can be found in the Turkish language in the Ankara University archive.

5.1. We are creating a "Cultural Art Centre" with the Mantle of the Expert approach

At this stage of the study, first of all, the opinions and experiences of the research group members on the Mantle of the Expert applications were evaluated through their own statements. A map has been formed which shows the relationship between the data obtained from the experiences expressed by the members of the group.

It has been observed that the Mantle of the Expert studies performed before starting the Commission Model field studies had a positive effect on the members of the research group.
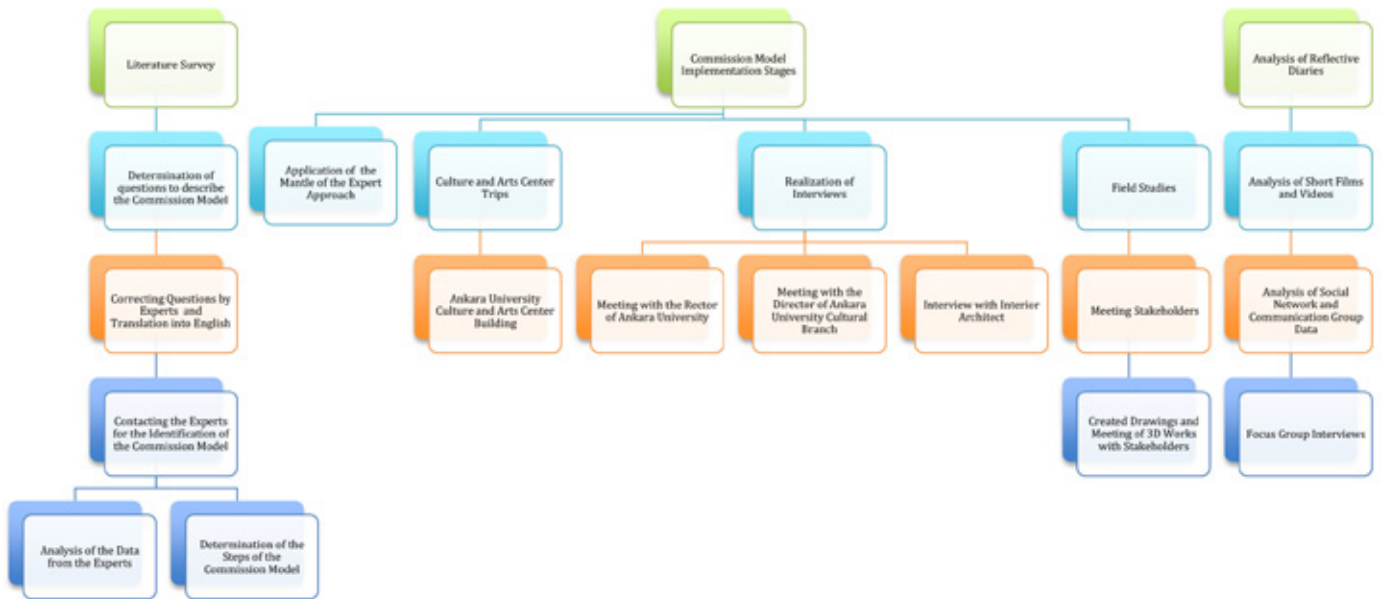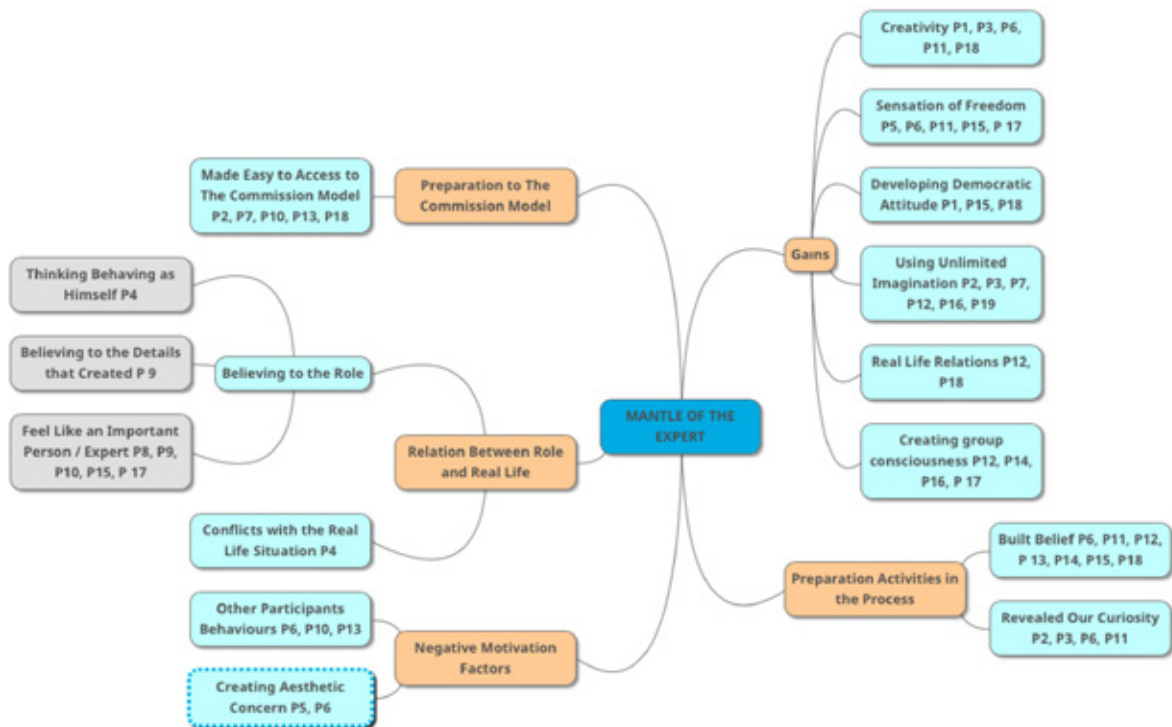
Table 2. Application Steps of the Research

Table 3. Research Group Members' Thoughts on the Application of Mantle of The Expert

5.2. Opinions about the Commission Model implementation

In the basic understanding of the Commission Model applications, contact with real people and coping with real dramatic situations made the group members think in detail. The details expressed by the experts, and the expectations of the people contacted in the field have created new learning titles. Thus, the details that the research group members did not think about previously were transferred to the next implementation step through life experience and sharing. Some of the statements made by the group members regarding the interactions taking place in the field are as follows:

P1: We were making our plan by determining our next step at each meeting. We divided the groups and visited the cultural centres in Ankara. We presented videos and photos to our friends. We shared our information. We talked about the positive-negative aspects.

P11: As the first step in the construction, we planned to develop our ideas in line with this information; we collected information about the Culture Art Centres in Ankara.

These experience expressions of the research group members for different field studies show that their existing thoughts are positively influenced by other experiences:

P1: We also learned something different from the places where we went. We learned how to name the halls or how they set the time of the courses. I wasn't very knowledgeable about cultural art centres. I've learned a lot with these studies. My interest has increased. I gained awareness.

P14: We had an interview with the person in charge, which was very useful. When we returned to the drama class, other friends also shared the information they gathered about different cultural art houses. This sharing was very useful because we had an idea about many cultural centres.

It can be seen that these studies, which are realised by direct field studies, determine the quality of the activities carried out at other stages of the research. For example, meeting with the head of a cultural arts centre gave to the members of the group an understanding of the details that they had not thought of before.

P9: One of the best things about the field work was contacting people. Sometimes, even if we didn't get feedback, it was taking us to another point of view.

P11: I can say that we were at a somewhat beginner level on our way to the first field. We realised later that our questions were limited and that we wanted to get approval. I think it's worthwhile to go out and collect data, because it allows us to see and improve our different experiences, ideas and perspectives.

It has been observed that the contact and experience sharing with real people, who are the focus of the model approach, has a positive effect on the learning process of the group members. On the other hand, some conflicts occurred in the group. In this context, the main ideas for group conflicts are as follows:

P13: Trying to find the middle way sometimes made me tired in such situations.

P6: The point where I experienced the most problems was the fact that I had to do something with the group. It was struggling.

The members of the research group mentioned that the Commission Model practices are an approach that develops the awareness of responsibility, creates environments providing cooperative learning, gives self-confidence, makes participants feel valuable, develops speaking skills, teaches disciplined-planned work and allows detailed thinking:

P1: Commission work required discipline, responsibility and time. We had to do everything on time, in cooperation. I did as much as I could.

P12: The good aspects that it added to us: to make common decisions and apply them, to orient ourselves towards the plan, to take responsibility…

P19: I think the work of the Commission Model has brought a lot to me in this process. I learned a lot about teamwork. I realised it was important to be a responsible person and I made some corrections about myself.
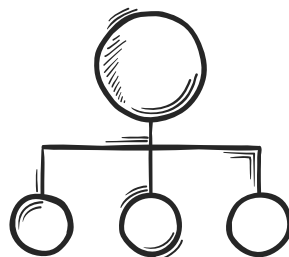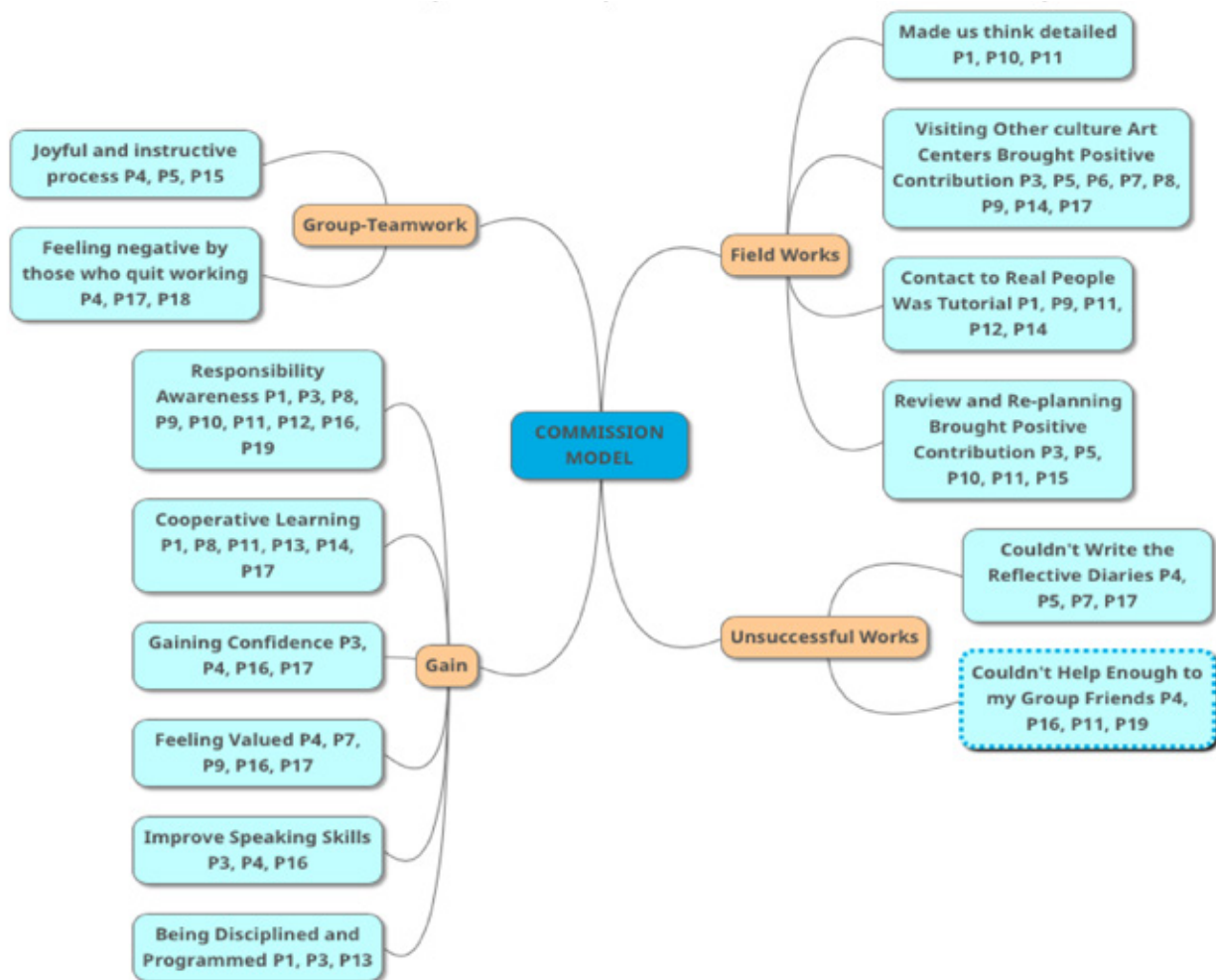
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Table 4. Research Group Members' Opinion on the Commission Model Implementation

6. Conclusions and suggestions

The Commission Model implementation is considered as a staging process; each group member was a certain small performative player of a whole performance. In a natural environment, the members of the group who direct their own choices, reactions and Commission Model implementation activities have experienced emotions and gains that can be considered as variable because of their social interactions. The Commission Model involves an implementation process involving concepts of role and reality.

Erving Goffmann (2009), who says that the world is a stage with a dramaturgical approach, has the following views about the interactive creations that he calls the "team" and the reactions of the individuals in these creations:

> It is clear that these individuals, who are members of the same team, will have an important relationship with each other, just because of teamwork. We can talk about two basic components of this relationship. Firstly, it seems that while team performance continues on the one hand, any member of the team has the power to unleash the foyer of the show or to reduce performance by inappropriate behaviour. All teammates must rely on each other's actions and behaviours.

It can be said that the Commission Model practices are also related to community development. The implementations, which are taken into the focus of the model, are tried to be finalised with common tasks, while the ideas of the other stakeholders in the society are becoming more important for the implementation.

Based on the findings of the research, it is concluded that the Commission Model approach is an approach that produces responsibility, produces social action, realises certain roles in real life, does not create teaching pressure, uses art forms and makes group work systematic.

6.1. Suggestions for Drama field professionals and researchers

Based on the research findings it is suggested to:

- Conduct studies on introducing and discussing the Commission Model as an approach, because the Commission Model practices are not sufficiently involved in the literature;
- Hold an in-depth discussion of the relationship between fiction and reality due to the acceptance of the Commission Model approach in the field of drama. Also, organise activities that can bring together sociologists, psychologists, artists and educators under this approach;
- Construct drama studies in a way that cares more about social interaction and social change;
- Increase the dimensions of the drama works in contact with real life.

Notes

1   This text is a part of a PhD thesis (Using The Commission Model From The Drama Approaches To Bring The Teacher Candidates' School Real-Life Relationship Skills) that was completed by Zeki Özen under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Omer Adıguzel at Ankara University in Aprıl, 2018.

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