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# The effectiveness of creative drama education on the teaching of social communication skills in mainstreamed students

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## Abstract

The present study was conducted in order to evaluate the effectiveness of creative drama education on teaching the social communication skills of greeting, joining the group and initiating a conversation in preschool level disabled students integrated into mainstream education. A six-year-old hearing impaired female student attending the nursery class of a primary school administered by the Provincial Directorate of National Education in the Province of Konya was included in the study. The “Social Communication Skills Evaluation Observation Form”, which was developed by the researchers, was used as the data collection tool. As the result of the study, it was found that creative drama education had a significant positive effect on the social communication skills of the subject.

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*Keywords:* Social Communication; creative drama; mainstreamed.

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## 1. Introduction

A person should have social skills in order to accommodate to society. Social skills include a child's behaviors to others around him/her and his/her adaptability to environment. A child learns how to behave in different places, different times and cases, and the skills that today we named as life skills by observing himself/herself and others within the socialization process. Children with social skills are successful in establishing relations, sharing, obeying rules, being sensitive to others and, if needed, controlling negative feelings. And when these children came of age, they may establish sound relations with others, work in cooperation, be happy and successful in their lives, respect to the rights and feeling of others, refuse improper demands for themselves and, when needed, appeal for aid from others. Development of social skills in children is influenced by many factors such as inheritance, environment, culture, attitudes and behaviors of parents, relations with siblings and peers, behaviors of teachers and training programs (Ceylan, 2009; Önalın Akfırat, 2006).

Development of social skills has the same importance in the lives of the children with and without disabilities. Children with disabilities are more deprived of the social competence and development of social skills. It is required to prepare and apply proper training programs in order to develop social skills of the people with disabilities whose social competences are determined. Maybe the most important point that must be discussed in these programs is to gain social communication skills (Önalın Akfırat, 2004; Ömerođlu, 2002; Mc Caslin, 1990).

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One of the methods that could be used in developing and applying these programs is the creative drama. Creative drama defines and topic as imagination at any predetermined place in accordance with the structure of group and in compliance with the purpose of study by utilizing from some techniques such as improvisation, playing a role and by starting from a group and the knowledge and lives of this group members (Adıgüzel, 2006). Creative drama is an effective training method in the classes attended by normal children, in integration classes and also in the special education classes. In drama, it's supposed that the leader leads persons to learning experience. But however, at the same time there exist a society of learners in the class who willingly helps each other and helps each other to be successful. Many aims are reached as a single-body and by providing a support system. Acquisitions related to social development are the most important among the common purposes of the creative drama activities. For example, a child speaking in a different language may get help from bilingual child. Academically superior child may accompany with other who need a special help when pursuing his/her interests. All these experiences gain the importance of the sense of responsibility and ability to provide service to the class society for children. Confidence, harmony and common action are quite important. Thus, the child gains ability to do and complete a work with sharing as well as trusting in his/her environment (Ömeroğlu et al, 2004; Bayhan, 2006; McCaslin, 1990).

Drama is much more useful in learning and expressing themselves for the children with disabilities than the normal children. Children with disabilities have a discipline problem, because they are bored. With the drama, children with disabilities obtain an opportunity to perceive, solve and explain any problem in their own levels. In these children, use of drama will harmlessly provide experiencing and learning anything related to life, their confidence in themselves and their group inclusion and having the satisfaction of inclusion. Also the imagination of children will develop with the stories, they can be able to learn being ready to the new experiences and can constitute a substructure for verbal communication. Their listening and observation will develop and collect their attendances for a longer period of time (Gönen and Dalkılıç, 2002; Bayhan and Yükselen, 2007; Önder, 2009). One of the groups with disabilities where the creative drama is applied as a training method is the children with learning disability. Drama is an effective activity used to gain verbal and nonverbal communication skills and to constitute self-confidence feeling for the children with learning disabilities (Toye and Prendiville, 2000).

This study was performed in order to examine creative drama training's influence on the social skills of the children with learning disabilities who receive integration training in pre-school educational institutes and their ability to greet each other, their group inclusion and starting communication. Findings of research have importance, because it will reveal supporting the skills of greeting, group inclusion and starting communication that are the social communication skills of children.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research model

Research is studied with experimental design.

#### 2.1.1. Working group

Working group of this study consisted of six-seven years old children with learning disabilities who attend to four nursery classes of an elementary school of the Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education. Children included in working group consist of three girls and two boys with learning disabilities that was five in total who were attending to private rehabilitation center, receiving pre-school level integration education and having incompetency in social communication skills. Children with learning disabilities were selected by sample selection model.

Because of these reasons, research group consist of children with learning disability who were willing to

- follow verbal directives
- establish eye contact
- look face-to-face
- obey simple orders (ability to follow instructions)
- repeat (repeating the behaviors shown)
- participate in group activity

Children with these criterions were determined by considering classroom observation and teacher opinions.

2.1.2. *Data collection tools and data collection*

In research, “Observation Form in Assessing Social Communication Skills” consisting of 20 items prepared by the researchers was used as data collection tool. Observation form covers the behaviors of children from social communications skills such as greeting, group inclusion and starting communication. Form was prepared with 3 point linkert as following: “always does,” sometimes does and never does”.

In this study, data were collected in two stages. In the first stage of study, personal information form is used in order to obtain personal information related to children and also observation, teacher and parents opinions were had in order to determine social skill levels of children.

In the second stage,; training was provided with drama for 10 weeks related to social communication skills. As a result of 10 weeks of training, position of children has been assessed through the posttest.

When preparing the creative drama training program, first of all, a literature review is performed, and the aims and behaviors related to many social communication skills of children are determined such as greeting each other, listening, starting/maintaining a talk, asking questions, introducing themselves, thanking, helping, appealing for help, sharing, apologizing, taking responsibility in a group, cooperation, expressing the feelings and opinions. Then, creative drama program for 10 weeks in total was prepared which consisted of some activities such as motion studies, pantomime, playing a role, improvisation and creating plays from stories. Prepared program was applied into two sessions a week which was 20 sessions in total. Each session was completed approximately between 30 and 45 minutes. After sessions, children were asked the open-ended questions related to activity and the topics treated in the assessment stage, and they were provided to share their feelings and opinions and strengthen their acquisitions. Practices were performed in two different nursery classes of the same elementary school that were giving education in the afternoon.

Significance of the difference between pretest and posttest mean points which the children received from the assessment form of the social communication skills was evaluated by using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

**3. Findings and Commentary**

Significance of the difference between pretest and posttest mean points of the children’s assessment form of the social communication skills is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the Wilcoxon Signed –Rank Test for pretest-posttest points of children who constituted the experiment.

| Pretest –Posttest | n | Total | Mean | Total | Rank | z      | p                |
|-------------------|---|-------|------|-------|------|--------|------------------|
| Negative Rank     | 0 |       | ,00  |       | ,00  |        |                  |
| Negative Rank     | 0 | 3,00  |      | 15,00 |      | -2,032 | <b>,042*</b>     |
| Equal             | 0 | ,00   |      | ,00   |      |        |                  |
|                   |   |       |      |       |      |        | <b>p&lt;0.05</b> |

On the basis of negative orders

As seen in Table 1, a significant difference was found between pretest-posttest points of the children’s social communication skills ( $z=2,032$   $p<05$ ). When the mean rank and mean of different points are considered, it is seen the creative drama training supported the skills of children with learning disabilities who are attending integration classroom in greeting each other, group inclusion and starting communication.

Conroy emphasized that creative drama is effective for preschool children which disabilities, especially in gaining social behaviors (Cited in. Önder, 2002). There is a group interaction on the basis of creative drama. It is not possible to mention creative drama without any group. Therefore, children either with or without disabilities spontaneously obtain many social acquisitions in drama processes such as sharing, cooperation, ceremonies, communication skills, awaiting the turn, knowing and using their own feelings, complying with the social environment where they are. Because the drama is a training based on the lives, on contrary to teaching methods, children reach their acquisitions in this process by living them. This establishes the ground for learning to be more significant and permanent. In this research, it’s thought that development of the social communication skills of children with learning disabilities is influenced by these reasons.

In the field literature, there are studies where similar results are obtained with the research finding. De La Cruz (1995) specified that creative drama training which we gave for 35 children with learning difficulties positively influence the social skills and verbal language skills of children. Results obtained by De La Cruz support the result obtained in this study.

When other studies about this topic are explained; it's seen that drama provides different opportunities in training children with different features.

Guli (2004) stated that training is effective on social skills of children as a result of creative drama studies which he made with the children with social misperception. Jackson and Bynum (1997) revealed that drama training provides positive contributions to the social interactions of children with emotional disorders and behavioral disorders. And Colston (1985) determined that creative drama training caused positive changes on verbal and social communication skills of different aged persons who have got structural developmental disorder (Cited in. Özdemir, 2003). Önalın Akfırat (2004) searched the influence of creative drama training on the development of social skills of the 10 hearing-impaired children between 10 and 12 years old. He used pretest-posttest control group experimental group in his research. In conclusion, creative drama training emphasized that following skills are effective in their learning; "Introduces himself/herself to the people when s/he met the first time" and "Thanks when s/he is helped". Barnes (1998) emphasized that hearing-impaired children receiving the creative drama training are more successful in social, emotional and cognitive development than those not receiving it, Wagner (1983) stressed that creative drama develops social skills, playing skills of autistics adolescents and Roth emphasized that a show study he performed with the drama method for those with mental disabilities increased language, motor, social and cognitive skills. (Cited in. Önalın Akfırat, 2004).

#### 4. Result and Recommendations

As a result of this study, it was seen that children with learning disabilities gained social communication skills with drama activities. In this direction,, following recommendations can be made;

- Course regarding creative drama can be held for preschool and special training teachers and they can be provided to know creative drama more closely and to make new applications by combining it with their own fields.
- Books, materials and practice CD's including drama activities for teachers in integration classes can be prepared and teachers can be provided to use them.
- This research studied only the social communication skills of children with learning disabilities. In future researches, other development studies can be considered.
- Creative drama studies can be performed in the other groups with disabilities and efficiency of this training can be tested.

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