

PLAY AND CREATIVITY AT EARLY AGE

Article One

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ABSTRACT

Creativity development at early ages is considered very important, as it allows better adjustment to environment in later life. The current study has used a survey among 60 kindergarten teachers and observation on kindergarten behavior to check the linkage between play and creativity development at early ages. In accordance with literature, the findings suggest that although creativity is partly inherited, the teacher has a major role in giving the child the chance to develop his creative abilities, and what if" and make believe games are a prominent way to develop creative abilities in early ages.

INTRODUCTION

Importance of creativity to child's development

Creativity is considered in the last few decades a very important ability a child has to learn starting in early education and continuing over the next years in the education system. The term 'creativity' is derived from the word 'create' in Latin languages, and indeed – a person who is creative takes the elements of his environment, and finds novel way to manipulate them in order to solve a problem. Creativity has the ability to make new connections to change the environment for the better, making it easier for a person to adapt to changing circumstance successfully (Porat, 2000).

Tsai (2012) claims that "It is believed that creativity is an important capacity for students to possess in order to face this fast-changing world". Thus, in the modern society, which is rapid to change and ever evolving, creativity is a ability that is

considered essential to success in life, by finding and making use of them (Porat, 2000).

Heritability vs. nurture debate

The effort to make children more creative is the cause of an ongoing discussion among scholars about heritability against education in achieving creative traits: Scholars have a good knowledge of the characteristics of a creative person, mainly originality and openness toward the environment, but also sensitivity, curiosity and playfulness. However, they are not sure as to creativity being a fixed trait that is genetically inherited or a learned ability that can be achieved through learning and experimenting (Porat, 2000).

Recent studies seem to view creativity as learned behavior that is emulated from the environment, and that although not every person is affected identically from the stimulus he gets from the environment, and hereditary base line for the ability to be creative does exist, creativity can be developed, and the teacher has a major role in giving the child the chance to exhaust his abilities in that field (Chien & Hui, 2010).

Supporting that creativity can be learned, Armstrong (1993) maintained that all children, both genius children and ordinary children, are born with an identical starting point in all that pertains to the element of creativity. He claims that the development of creativity depends on the involvement of the adult, who works to improve the abilities of creativity through play and different activities.

Play and creativity

Education systems around the world don't wait to the final conclusion of that debate, and taking after Armstrong's claim that the teacher is the most important agent to develop child's creativity, they encourage teachers of young children to help them be more creative, and give them the tools to think creatively (Porat, 2000). Thus, creativity has becoming a topic of ever-increasing interest to educational settings (Tsai, 2012). The emphasis on teaching creative abilities is embedded in these school systems as early as preschool and kindergarten systems, reflecting the importance

these educational systems see in giving children tools to think creatively from the beginning of their lives (Chien & Hui, 2010 ;Porat, 2000).

Play might be a technique allowing to children to develop their creative abilities. playing games is a way in which a child can contemplate on 'what if' scenarios involving the objects of concepts he is thinking of. The child can experiment in finding different solutions to a problem and their effect on him, and learns the connection between cause and effect. Essentially, play provides an arena for creative activities and processes (Tsai, 2012), and pretend play domain through which creative expression is encouraged by allowing children practice transformational skills like interpreting their developing world. That is the reason why it is thought that play develops creativity (Mullineaux & Dilalla, 2009)

According to Winnicott (2009):" In play, and only in play, the child or the adult can be creative and use the entire personality, and only by being creative does the individual discover himself". Winnicott claims that the ability to focus on the play is an indication of the ability to focus on thoughts and cultural and scientific creativity. The child who plays here also investigates the world around him and concurrently acts as inventor and is excited by his discoveries and by himself. He claims that creativity is displayed vis play not only on young ages but also in adulthood, when people get creative in enjoying culture – drawing and painting, poetry and song

Winnicott (2009) sees ages four to eight as important to the development of creativity, as this is the time that the child has evolved to gain opportunities for creativity and self-discovery supported by adults, who will lead to independence of thought and action.

Although the theoretical discussion on the issue of the connection between play and creativity in childhood is vast, not many empirical studies had focused in that issue. One of a few studies focusing on that subject was made by Mullineaux & Dilalla (2009) in Illinois, USA. They assessed the amount of realistic role play of 127 five old children, and returned to question them when they were 10-15 years of age. A significant positive correlation was found between role-play in childhood and

creativity suggesting the play is represents early creativity, and facilitates later-on creativity. The researchers found that girls engage in more realistic role play in childhood, and are more creative on later years.

Another study is by Mottweiler & Taylor (2014), who tested 75 children aged 4-5, and found that not every role play predicts better creativity: they found that only those children who engaged in a elaborated role play, involving imagining other's persons thoughts and behaviors and imitating him, developed their creativity. Children who role played without using their imagination didn't benefit in creativity.

To sum up, there seem to be much theoretical consideration supporting the notion that there are positive relationships between play and creativity in young ages, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support these theories (Mullineaux & Dilalla, 2009). Therefore, the present research is aimed to contribute to the empirical literature on the subject, with the proposition that education of children through socio-dramatic play creates a learning environment that is free of fears and that promotes creativity

RESEARCH METHOD

Research population

A total of sixty kindergarten teachers with undergraduate degrees who work in the Southern, Central, and Sharon regions of the country participated in the research study. The participants were 3 men and 57 women, aged 30-55 (mean age of 35.10). The participants had in their kindergartens different play corners and at least twelve hours a week were dedicated to socio-dramatic play. Only six kindergarten teachers (10%) were trained to instruct the children during the socio-dramatic play. The participants participated in the research study on a voluntary basis.

The participants were divided into two groups according to the variable of "professional involvement" (play together with a professional character / play with members of the peer group) according to 'survey for the kindergarten teacher', which they filled out before the experiment. In addition, in every group of 'professional involvement' the participants were allotted randomly so as to avoid self-selection.

Research instruments

a survey was distributed to the kindergarten teachers, which included ten open ended questions, among them two questions that constitute a precondition for participation in the survey, four questions that differentiate between teachers who had professional training in the socio-dramatic field and those who didn't, and seven diversionary questions.

In addition, six non-participative observations during the play time of children aged three to five in the kindergartens. After the documentation of the different interactions, reflection was performed, which emphasized the cognitive status of the children relative to the peer group.

RESULTS

Survey results among kindergarten teachers has yield that they strongly support the notion that that socio-dramatic play contributes to creativity among children. They saw playing as a contributor to the child's ability to experience new fields of knowledge and emotions, and to try "what if" scenarios, thus developing creativity.

Having said that, observations on children behaviors had showed that creativity is influenced by genetics, so it can be acquired up to a certain point. The observations put the children with the highest intelligence quotients among their age group at a higher threshold than that of their classmates in the ability to participate in socio-dramatic play. Their communication, ways of action, use of objects, and speech were of higher level and more complex, all which has an impact of their creativity abilities and development horizons.

CONCLUSION

Literature puts much emphasis on creativity development as contributing to better adjust to life in our ever changing society, and find solutions to problems the child may encounter in his life. That is the reason that the education system takes high

priority in giving children tools to enhance and develop their creativity (Porat, 2000; Tsai, 2012).

One question that is in the base of the ability to develop creativity is if the ability to be creative is inherited or can be learned. Literature has expressed different views on the subject, some claim that the ability to be creative is heavily influenced by genetics (Porat, 2000), others claim that creativity can be thought to everyone (Armstrong, 1993), and still others take a hybrid point of view, claiming that there is an inherited baseline for the ability to be creative, still – creativity can be developed (Chien & Hui, 2010). The current study supports the hybrid point of view: observations of children play proved that some children are gifted that others in expressing and experiencing creativity, still – it was found that a teacher that is sensitive to child's needs and abilities can teach him the needed tools to think creatively.

The second question that is of importance with accordance to creativity development is what the way to make children more creative. Theory strongly suggests that play is a technique allowing to children to develop their creative abilities (Tsai, 2012; Mullineaux & Dilalla, 2009; Winnicott, 2009), and this notion is also supported by the few empirical studies that measured the correlations between play behavior and creativity development (Mullineaux & Dilalla, 2009; Mottweiler & Taylor, 2014). Results of the current study strongly support the notion that play behavior is a prominent way to encourage children to express creativity, and develop it.

The study has partly closed the knowledge gap in literature between theory that strongly supports play as a method to develop creativity in young ages, and the insufficient empirical data to support that theory. The study shows that with accordance with previous literature, play is a way to enhance the child's creativity. Although not all children have the same ability to be creative, results strongly support the idea that encouragement to play "what if" and make believe games in early education can give the child an opportunity to maximize his creative abilities, thus making him more successful in further life.

Results support the emphasis given by different education systems around the world on development of child's creativity. As teachers the teacher has a major role in creativity development (Chien & Hui, 2010), it is recommended that education system would create curriculums dedicated for the enhancement and development in early ages, as early as age four (as suggested by Winnicott, 2009), and train kindergarten teachers on methods to develop creativity at early age.

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