



Enhancing Social Emotional Learning: Drama with Host and Refugee Children in Turkey

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Abstract

Close combat in other words the war, which causes migration is a main problem in some Muslim countries. This study is about facilitating social emotional learning and enhancing intimate relation between host and refugee children in Sinop. Drama sessions were occurred in the most north part of Turkey in Sinop. Sinop is one of the small cities in Turkey in Black Sea shore which situated in a peninsula. There were ten drama sessions held with 50 students. The students are studying in third and fourth classes in primary school. 25 students were Turkish and 25 students were refugee children. Those refugee children are from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. The study conducted as a qualitative. 50 students were interviewed after ten drama sessions. Social emotional learning's five core competences are main themes of this study. These are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making and problem solving. They are the main themes retrieving from interviews.

Keywords: Social emotional learning, drama, refugee children

1. Introduction

11 September 2001 was the turning point of Afghanistan and later other Muslim countries such as Iraq, Libya, and Syria. A great deal of people becomes refugee due to the United States of America attack and later civil war. War, terror, climate conditions, finding better working conditions, making the world more and more multicultural force people to emigrate. These multicultural world situations reflect themselves to the classrooms. Different ethnicity children from all over the world share the same classrooms. Turkey, which is a bridge between three continents Asia, Europe and Africa, is a tampon country between Middle East, Caucasus and the Balkans. Because of civil wars in Muslim countries especially in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, Turkey became a preference country to emigrate.

This paper is about drama with refugee children. Drama sessions were occurred in the most north part of Turkey in Sinop. Sinop, which is situated in a peninsula, is one of the small cities in Turkey in Black Sea shore. Sinop's population is 109.787 (Tuik, 2014). As the population rate in Sinop isn't high, refugee families can easily be recognized by host people. Refugee families' children who are in school age went to the schools without any discrimination. In other words, they started to their education with host families' children with in the same schools, same classroom even same desks. It is inevitable that there were some problems. Low sociometric status, aggressive and submissive behaviors were observed in two groups.

1.1. Social Emotional Learning

Social emotional learning (SEL) is a process that helps mainly children to help people social emotional capability or competence. There are five core skills pointed out by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning).

- 1) Self-awareness – recognizing one’s emotions and values, and being able to assess one’s strengths and limitations realistically.
- 2) Self-management – being able to set and achieve goals, and handle one’s own emotions so that they facilitate rather than interfere with relevant tasks.
- 3) Social awareness – showing understanding and empathy for the perspective and feelings of others.
- 4) Relationship skills – establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, working effectively in groups as both leader and team member, and dealing constructively with conflict.
- 5) Responsible decision-making and problem solving – making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior (Elias & Moceris, 2012).

Extensive developmental research indicates that effective mastery of social-emotional competencies is associated with greater well-being and better school performance whereas the failure to achieve competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic difficulties (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

1.2. Drama

Drama consists of all communication process. Definition of drama accepted by the Children’s Theatre Association of America in 1977 is “drama is an improvisational non exhibition, process centered form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experiences (Heining, 1993: 5). Although drama traditionally has been thought of in relation to children and young people, the process is appropriate to all ages.

It has been stated that dramatic play helps the child development from a purely egocentric being into a person capable of sharing and of giving and taking. In dramatic play, children create a world of their own in which to master reality. They try in this imaginative world to solve real life problems that they have until now, been unable to solve. They repeat, reenact, and relive these experiences (McCaslin, 2000: 5).

Drama is grounded in experiential, in-context learning and emphasizes the importance of observing the give and take of interpersonal, nonverbal cues (O’Neill, 1995). The essence of drama is social interaction, which involves contact, communication, and the negotiation of meaning within a group context. Creative drama can provide the opportunity to develop imagination, encourage independent thinking and cooperation, build social awareness, take others’ perspectives, promote a healthy release of emotion, and improve habits of speech.

It is always an improvised performance: lines are not written and not memorized. Each member of the group gets an opportunity to play various parts. Participants are guided by a teacher and not by a director. No decorations, costumes, or special equipment is needed, just time, space, and an enthusiastic (Arieli, 2007).

The beauty of improvisational drama in education is that participants can make ill-advised choices and see what happens without real life consequences. There is safety in drama. Drama allows students to hide behind a symbolic mask and so venture into situations that could be dangerous in another class setting. Improvisational drama can be a heady experience for students who are denied a wide range of social experience. The aim of drama teaching is to help students understand

themselves and the world in which they live. Drama provides pressure for physical, emotional, and intellectual identification with a factious situation. (Smagorinsky, 1999).

1.3. Interaction between Drama and CASEL's Five Core Skills

Self-Awareness: In drama children's positive self-concept and self-expression are fostered by the leader who believes in each child's personal worth and creative potential. The leader's attitude produces a climate of psychological security in the classroom, so that the children are not afraid of being themselves, growing and searching for new awareness (Heining, 1993).

Self-Management: Regardless of whether SEL addresses emotional intelligence competencies, it is acknowledged that SEL programs endorse values of self-development, care and respect, and may have positive outcomes with regard to the promotion of awareness, understanding and management of one's emotions and the acquisition of skills that play an important role in the maintenance of good social relationships (e.g. taking the perspective of others, responsible decision making) (Mayer & Cobb 2000; Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews 2002).

Drama provides excellent opportunity for facilitating self-esteem/self-responsibility and self-management. Creating an environment that is not only suitable but encouraging of drama is a major responsibility of the drama leader. The drama climate requires that there should be mutual trust, respect, and an absence of duress. Whether a student chooses not to participate out of shyness, apprehension about what might happen, or a need to be contrary or disagreeable, quality experiences in drama are not possible when you force a student to participate. You better serve the creative process by patiently encouraging such students and giving them opportunities to "sit this one out." You can also assure them that when they can take part in ways that do not spoil the play for others, they are welcome to re-enter the drama, but not until they can be comfortable in the work and self-responsible. Your behavior as drama leader, as well as your words, must clearly communicate the importance of courtesy, trust, and mutual respect (Cottrell, 1987).

Social Awareness: It has often been said that drama is a rehearsal for living. Through drama, children can pretend to be the people or things they find interesting and significant. They can relive the experiences of others, of the various people that inhabit their storybooks, their history and social studies books and their everyday life and fantasy world. They can have experiment with societal roles and, in the process, identify and empathize with others' learning or their concerns, confront their problems, and experience their successes as well as failures. Through drama, children can begin to establish a tangible relationship with the human condition. What is it like to experience discrimination? What is it like to hold a particular political or religious view? What is it like to be a member of another culture or nation? Through drama, children can discover the common bond of humanness that transcends time, age, and geographical boundaries.

Creative drama also provides learning experiences in social and group interaction. In many ways, drama is a group art. Plays focus on social group interaction; the theatre requires the talents and skills of numerous artists. As children engage in drama, they must plan together, enact ideas together, organize their playing space, and experience a variety of human interactions in their dramatizations. Effective socialization becomes a high priority, and the rewards of cooperative group behaviors are often clearly demonstrated to even the youngest children.

Relationship skills: Empathy is the ability to see life from another's perspective and to feel with that person. This "as if" feeling is similar to the one the Russian theatre director Konstantin Stanislavsky attempted to encourage through what he called "emotional memory." Actors were urged to sense and understand the character they were playing by recalling similar situations in their own lives. Children begin to develop empathy as their thinking matures and they move away from egocentricity. Two studies have specifically demonstrated the effectiveness of using creative drama as an aid to children empathic or role-taking abilities. Through drama, children have the

opportunity to see the world from another point of view and to respond as that person would respond. If the inner attitudes of another can be identified and understood through creative drama, if children can experience “walking in another’s shoes,” more tolerant understanding of others and more effective communication will result.

Responsible decision-making and problem solving: Drama can stimulate the development of problem-solving skills. When children are presented with problems to solve, with open-endedness that requires a filling in of gaps, with information and ideas to synthesize into new relationships, they are learning creatively, according to Torrance (1970). Although the degree of creativity may vary with each situation, in problem solving, children are encouraged to guess, hypothesize, test alternatives, and perhaps even redefine the problem (Heing, 1993:7)

1.4. Relevant Literature

Schools are thus faced with the challenge of developing prevention and intervention programs to help new arrivals deal with their past experiences and adjust to new realities (Tolfree, 1996; Hodes, 2000). Artistic activities, as a mean of expression, have come to be considered a good way of helping immigrant children elaborate identity issues and construct meaning around the experience (Barudy, 1988; Golub, 1989; Lykes & Farina, 1992).

Classroom activities addressing the overall adjustment of refugee children to the host society and their well-being have an important role. They support the children in assimilating past and present experiences by presenting these as learning opportunities, facilitating emotional expression with respect to the experiences, and promoting the development of relationships among refugee children and with children and adults of the host society (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008).

Rousseau and his colleagues (2007) in their evaluative study assesses the effects of a school drama therapy program for immigrant and refugee adolescents designed to prevent emotional and behavioral problems and to enhance school performance. The 9-weeks program involved 136 newcomers, aged 12 to 18, attending integration classes in a multiethnic school. At the end of the program, although there was no reported improvement in self-esteem or emotional and behavioral symptoms, the adolescents in the experimental group reported lower mean levels of impairment by symptoms than those in the control group, when baseline data were controlled for. Their performance in mathematics also increased significantly compared to that of their control peers. The findings suggest that the workshops may have an impact on social adjustment of recently arrived immigrants and refugees. This drama therapy program appears to be a promising way of working preventively and in a nonstigmatizing manner with adolescents who have been exposed to diverse forms of adversity, among which are war and violence. Rousseau and Guzder (2008) summarize related literature on school based prevention programs for refugee children:

- Ecologic models of intervention that address the whole-school environment are useful because they provide a systemic understanding of the interactions among the different players. They propose supporting and training teachers so that they can help their refugee students without becoming too distressed. These models also insist on parent-school interactions, which should be understood in terms of cultural differences and also as reflecting power imbalances between refugee families and host country institutions.
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- Some prevention programs that use specific treatment modalities such as artistic expression also seem to be protective at different moments of children's development. They can be implemented in kindergarten, elementary school, or high school. They support the transformation of past and present adversity through creativity and metaphorical representations and foster the development of solidarity among children.
- Secondary prevention, which includes group intervention for children presenting with PTSD (post traumatic symptom disorder) symptoms and school-based clinical services for individual children presenting with emotional and behavioral problems, seems to have some efficiency and to be well accepted by refugee parents. There is, however, a need to document more thoroughly the group or personal reluctances to participate in these services to understand their cultural appropriateness well.

Drama is an inexpensive and enjoyable method to strengthen students' SEL, and to increase their understanding of socio-emotionally relevant issues, such as bullying and child neglect. DIE (drama in education) also seems to create empowerment and greater democracy in classroom. We recommend the use of DIE as a method in SEL. This requires a stable school environment so that teachers, school nurses and other school professionals are able to concentrate on developing their personal approach to using drama as a didactic method (Joronen, Hakamies, & Astedt-Kurki, 2011: 677). Also, Rousseau and his colleagues (2005) indicates that Refugee and immigrant children's needs should be addressed through intersectoral programs that target exclusion and support a sense of agency.

This study is very important because this is the first time Sinop has met such a kind of different group of people. In 1950-1990, United States of American soldiers worked in the city. American soldiers highly affected Sinop's people especially in economic and cultural way (Usakli, 2013). Results of this study will help how to cope with diverse populations in school settings.

2. Method

The research group comprises fifty (50) elementary students from two different schools in Sinop; the most part of Black Sea in Turkey. 25 of them are host students 25 of them are refugee children. Table Ia and Table Ib illustrates demographic characteristics of the students who participated in drama sessions.

Table Ia: Demographic Characteristics of the Students who Participated in Drama Sessions According to Gender

Refugee Children		Host Children	
Female	Male	Female	Male
14	11	15	10

Table Ib: Demographic Characteristics of the Students who Participated in Drama Sessions According to Class

Refugee Children		Host Children	
Female	Male	Female	Male
3	4	3	4
16	9	15	10

2.1. Procedure

Drama was main intervention method overall in the study. There were ten drama sessions. Warm up activities, roll playing, improvising, forum theater, hot seat, station technique, rituals, flash back, playing back theater, split screen, internal speech were the techniques of drama sessions. Four aspects seem to play a key role in all the workshops: the construction of a safe space, the acknowledgement and appreciation of diversity, the establishment of continuity, and the transformation of adversity (Rousseau et. al., 2004).

Drama Sessions

1. Session “who I am.” (Self introduction, warm up activities and name games)
2. Session “what I like most” (thinks that participant like and dislike)
3. Session” who the people around me are” (how can I establish friendship, introducing self to new people) (Usakli, 2011:54).
4. Session “getting in touch with new friends.”
5. Session “things that I have to do.”
6. Session “how I can organize play.”
7. Session “importance of friendship.”
8. Session “being a new; values of knowing other people” (Wetton & Cansell, 2012).
9. Session “how I can organize my responsibilities.”
10. Session “problem solving station.”

There were two groups for this research. Each group consists of 25 mixed ethnic roots students. Each drama sessions were occurred in six stages. These are warm-up, play, giving information, re-play, evaluation and giving homework. Each drama sessions were occurred in 90 minutes.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

The data was collected via general evaluation stage after ten sessions. At the end of ten sessions, participant students were questioned “How do you feel now? Is there any change in your emotions and ideas? How was your relation with others in drama sessions?”

2.3. Collection of Data

Each drama sessions were managed by drama leaders. Four leaders who are graduated from education faculty and experienced in drama managed this study’s applications (drama sessions) with supervisor of the author of this paper.

2.4. Analysis of Data

A qualitative research has been carried out. After interviews (the students were asked about their feelings and thoughts) with 50 students, 32 transcript pages were gathered after ten sessions of drama. Qualitative research recognizes a complex and dynamic social word. It involves researchers’ active engagement with participants and acknowledges that understanding is construed and multiple realities exist (Tindall, 2002). Thematic analyze was used in this study.

3. Findings

Table 2 illustrates the finding of this study. Overall drama sessions positively affected participant students. Drama sessions are less effective in “responsible decision-making and problem solving” with home students (n= 30; 60%). Drama sessions is the most effective in social-awareness (n= 48; 96%).

Table 2: Student's ideas on social emotional learning in drama sessions

Themes	n	%	Example	Who
Self-awareness	35	70	I feel good about myself. This is first time I meet such	F3rAN*
	45	90	different lesson. Before drama I easily get bored. But now I can suffer people.	M4hHA
Self-management	32	64	With the help of drama I can manage my feelings	M3rBU
	38	76	With the help of drama I can easily achieve my goals.	F3hBS
Social-awareness	36	72	Before I think that only I am and my family suffering	F4rAF
	48	96	difficulties. But now I don't think so. Being friendship with others is very good.	M4hCE
Relationship skills	48	96	I made many friends. I love people in this group.	M3rNT
	37	74	Before I didn't know how should I act to others (refugee), but now we are friends.	M3hMK
Responsible decision-making	32	64	Homework was nightmare for me. But I can easily go to my friend (home) house and ask.	F4rRY F4hPS
Problem solving	30	60	When I have a problem such as conflict days and days I offended. Now I easily overcome my problem.	

* F3rAN this code is F (Female) 3 r (refugee) (Third Class) A (Name) N (Surname)

4. Discussion

The finding of this study is relevant to literature. Participation in drama, a group art form, involves students in special experiences that require social interaction and cooperation in order to succeed. The ensemble nature of drama involves interaction in which competitiveness is seldom desired and winning is rarely a goal (Cottrell, 1987: 14). Drama is an inexpensive and enjoyable method to strengthen students' social emotional learning, and to increase their understanding of socio-emotionally relevant issues, such as bullying and child neglect. (Joronen, Hakamies, & Astedt-Kurki, 2011). Forum theater and playback theater were the techniques of this study. Rousseau and his colleagues (2005) also used those two techniques in their study with refugee children.

The social emotional learning (SEL) requires five core skills. These are self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making problem solving. Drama which is different from those of extra-curricular activities emphasizes goals of social skills; originality and inventiveness are generally valued.

4. Recommendations

Drama sessions should be arranged both refugee and home children. There should be sharing between cultures. Collective values and stories should be investigated. The guideline should be short and understood. This study was conducted only in third and fourth classes. New studies should be done with younger and older students. Education policy makers should be aware of importance of drama and social emotional learning for refugee children.

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