HOW EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS CAN INFLUENCE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVITY THROUGH PLAY IN YOUNG CHILDREN

D.M.W.Munasinghe
Dept. of Early Childhood and Primary Education
Faculty of education
Open University of Sri Lanka
malinimunasinghe@yahoo.com, dmmun@ou.ac.lk

ABSTRACT
This study focuses on how teachers view and use play to influence creativity in preschool children. Play is strongly featured in most of the discussions about creativity in young children. Hence, it was noted through direct observation that most preschool teachers are not concerned with promoting play to develop the child’s creativity. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate how the teachers use play, for the development of creativity in the preschool environment. The survey method was used as the research design and interviews, observations and document perusal were used as data collection methods. The sample consisted of 20 preschools from selected administrative divisions in the Colombo district. It was revealed that a majority of preschool teachers used folk games as a means of involving children in play. Teachers assume that this type of guided play will motivate the child learn new words, memorization and provide enjoyment. Eighty per cent of the preschool teachers used the play equipment installed in the preschool premises to encourage children to get involved in activities calculated at promoting the physical development of the child. In 40% of the preschools visited it was noticed that when children were given their break they created their own forms of free play and enjoyed themselves thoroughly in the little time available to them. Also, about 20% of preschool teachers promoted imaginative play with their preschoolers. There was also the situation where the role of play was interpreted negatively by the teachers who assigned the children to copy letters and numerals during the time assigned for play. This has a negative impact on the child’s creativity. In conclusion, it was felt that the teachers do not make the best use of the opportunity available to use the child’s enthusiasm to stimulate creative actions in him/her and that there is no suitable environment to develop creativity through play.

Keywords— Creativity, Preschool children, Preschool environment, Play method.

1. Introduction

Play is an enjoyable activity used by everyone. Play is essential to achieve the total development of the individual. Play in relation to aims of pre-school education is to ensure physical social, emotional, intellectual and aesthetic/creative development. New Jersey State Department of Education’s Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards (2013) has stated that play is an important vehicle for, as well as a reflection of, the social, emotional, and cognitive development of all preschool children including children with disabilities. Early childhood education is underpinned by an ideological and theoretical tradition which regards play as essential to learning and development.

Play helps to develop creativity and it directly affects development of the personality of a creative person. Creativity is closely bound with an individual’s personality and emotional life: there is more involved than just ‘thinking skills’. Mellou (1996) suggested that young children’s
creativity can be nurtured through educational settings in three respects: the creative environment, creative programs and creative teachers and their ways of teaching. Fundamental to the creative environment is the encouragement of children’s play.

Eugster, (2008) has mentioned that children play imaginatively and creatively in various ways based on many factors such as age, play environment, toys provided, etc. Children can engage in imaginative and creative play by themselves or with others.

Learning and Developing through play –( Aistear )stated that

“Children’s play develops over time and is enhanced when given the right kinds of supports. While all children have the potential to play some may require extra support from the adult in order to benefit from playing. For example, children who are impulsive or get into many conflicts, children who are withdrawn or isolated, children whose first language is neither English nor Irish, children who have speech delays, and children with sensory or physical impairments often need specialized and focused support from the adult.”( P. 59)

Theoretically, Vygotsky and Piaget have emphasized the importance of play for young children. Based on Russ’s (1998) literature review on creativity and play, she proposed a model that involves the cognitive and affective processes in creativity and also identified several fruitful connections between the four variables: divergent thinking, transformation abilities, expression of emotion, and expression of affect-laden fantasy Journal of Education and Learning (2012) A number of studies have demonstrated the mechanism that pretend play facilitates creativity through cognitive and affective processes in children.

Thinking skills can be developed through play that provides the child with a variety of problems to solve. Whether it’s two children wanting to play the same role or searching for the just right material to make a roof for the playhouse, the child calls upon important cognitive thinking skills that the child will use in every aspect of his/her life, now and forever.

Christopher D. Cerf (2013) pointed out that while the adults in the preschool environment provide the conditions and materials that influence how children play and scaffold learning so that more sophisticated levels of interaction and expression are realized, it is the child who determines the roles and the rules shaping the play. The learning environment must, therefore, accommodate planned and unplanned, as well as structured and unstructured experiences. Therefore, the broad aim of this study is to investigate the interface between play and creativity.

2. Objectives

1. To identify the current status of developing creativity using play method through language in the preschool teaching-learning process

2. To identify how the play method is used as a strategy to enhance creativity in preschool children.
3. Research Methodology

The main aim of the study was to identify how educational settings can influence development of creativity through play in young children. The survey method (Qualitative and Quantitative) was used as the research method.

3.1 Population

The target population for the study comprised preschool children and preschool teachers in Colombo district in Sri Lanka.

3.1.1 Sample

A representative sample was selected from the Colombo District, Western Province, in Sri Lanka.

The sample consisted of 10 preschools selected randomly from the 20 selected preschools in Sri Jayawardenapura, Maharagama, Kaduwela, Moratuwa, and Maradana Education Divisions.

Interviews were used to collect data from 20 preschool teachers from the selected preschools.

Table 1: Sample of preschools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Preschool</th>
<th>Government Preschools</th>
<th>Non-Government Preschools</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational Private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>05 03</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05 03</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>10 06</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.2 Data collection instruments

Interviews and observations of preschool teachers were the methods used to collect data and it was prepared according the research objectives.

3.1.3 Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis of responses was done on the basis of the frequencies of the responses. Frequencies were analyzed as percentages. Furthermore, qualitative data, gained from the responses received from the interviews and observations.
4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are given below.

- According to my investigation it was found that preschools run by the private sector did not conform to the curriculum for preschools developed by the government in that, most private sector preschools teach the syllabus taught in government grade 1, grade 2 in the primary schools. Private preschools introduce activities on the suggestions of parents.
- The government preschools teach a syllabus that include activities involving socializations pre writing, pre reading activities, preparatory activities for formal writing (both letters and numerous)
- Investigations have shown that there are no significance differences in government preschools whether rural or urban, but private preschools have differences in both rural and urban areas.

Table 2: Age distribution of pre-school teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of the sample (09) of the preschool teachers are in the age range of 30-39 years with one teacher being in the age range of 50-59. In the case of the teachers (50-59 years) it needs to be pointed out that this teacher not only teaches but also runs the preschool. This is the situation especially with respect to private preschool whereas the teachers in government preschools are employees.

Table 3: Educational qualifications and professional qualifications of teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Qualifications</th>
<th>No of Teachers</th>
<th>Professional qualifications (Followed a course in preschool education)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/L</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/L</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

07 out of 20 of the sample of preschool teachers identified for the study have A/L with government Preschool certificate or Diploma in Early Childhood and Primary Education
Certificate and 05 teachers have A/L qualifications with non-government preschool certificates. And also 08 out of 20 preschool teachers have O/L qualifications along with government and non-government preschool certificates.

Table 4: Professional qualifications of Preschool teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Years</th>
<th>&gt;1</th>
<th>1-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>15&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of Teachers</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the above table one of the preschool teachers had over 15 years of experience. A majority of the sample (07 preschool teachers in the survey) ranged from 6-10 years’ of experience. Based on the information each preschool teacher has professional qualifications to work in a preschool.

Types of Play

- According to the above pie chart teachers in preschools are concerned about providing the opportunity for children to get involved in some play activities such as role play, energetic play, (climbing, running) imaginative play, free play and social play. Most of the preschools are interested in energetic play for preschool children.

- 100% of the preschool teachers agreed that play activities support development of concepts related to the integrated approach with preschool children. According to the teachers’ views they assume that this type of play will motivate the child learn new words, and at the same time have fun.

- Eight percent of preschool teachers used the play equipment installed in the preschool premises to encourage children to get involved in activities calculated at promoting the physical development (Energetic play) of the child.
Forty per cent of the children, when they were given their break created their own forms of free play such as getting into small groups and playing with some objects, running, jumping, drawing on the blackboard and imitating.

Also, about twenty percent of preschool teachers promoted imaginative play with their preschoolers. Fifteen percent of preschool teachers used (social play) play that had a domestic orientation.

There was also the situation where role of play was interpreted negatively by the teachers who interpreted play time for children as a waste of school time and tried during that time to get the children to do what the teachers felt was of educational significance like assigning extra time to copy letters and numerals.

Forty per cent of the sample used simple text books to introduce letters and words. Some teachers failed to provide the children with the opportunity for self-expression when they involved themselves in play activities.

It was noted that the classroom setup posed restraints to children as evidenced by the amount of free expressions they were involved in during their free time.

5. Conclusions and Future Recommendations

- The government preschools are more concern with providing the child with social skills than subject content. Most private preschools teach subject content taught in grade one of the government primary schools.

- The teacher needs to promote the role of play with respect to the situation of the child. It is best that the teacher comes prepared so that she can create the scenario to facilitate children’s play. The children express their ideas when they are released from the constraints of the classroom setup.

- The teacher can use the situation of the children’s free play to introduce key vocabulary terms e.g. quantification, comparison, emotion etc.

- The teacher does not make the best use of the opportunity available to use the child’s enthusiasm to stimulate creativity in his/her actions. The teacher does not make a concerted effort to provide material, calculated at stimulating creative thinking/actions in the children. Most of the teachers in the sample were not concerned with the ability level of the child.

- Provide teacher training for the teachers as well as opportunity for training and updating of their know-how according to the latest developments in the field.

- Government should also make it part of the state responsibility to monitor what is being doing regarding the total development of their country’s preschool age child.

- Awareness programs for parents should be planed and implement them.

Acknowledgment

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by Prof. G.I.C Gunawardena former Dean, Faculty of Education, Open University of Sri Lanka. I also wish to thank all academics and non academics staff of the Faculty of Education, Open University of Sri Lanka.
References

Australian Journal of Teacher Education (2011). Volume 36 | Issue 8 Article 5 Play in the School Context? The Perspectives of Finnish Teachers Pirkko T. Hyvonen University of Oulu, pirkko.hyvonen@oulu.fi,


Journal of Education and Learning, (2012). Vol. 1, No. 2; 2012 ISSN 1927-5250 E-ISSN 1927-5269 Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education

Play, Imagination, and Creativity: A Brief Literature Review,

“Learning and developing through play” - Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.56,59 www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/Guidelines_ENG/Play_ENG.pdf

New Jersey State Department of Education, (2013). Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards Christopher D. Cerf, Commissioner Secretary, State Board of Education Christopher D. Cerf, Commissioner Secretary, State Board of Education Vol. 1, No. 2; 2012 ISSN 1927-5250 E-ISSN 1927-5269 Canadian Center of Science and Education

Imagination, and Creativity,

Mellou, E. (1996). “Can creativity be nurtured in young children?” Early Child Development and Care,

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in Society, The development of higher psychological Mifflin. 7. All rights reserved, City, Encyclopedia Britannica