



Environmental Education Activities with Drama Method¹

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Abstract

The emergence of global warming, depletion of natural resources, a growing population, and industrial advancements has led to environmental challenges. In response to these issues, the significance of sustainable practices and environmental education becomes apparent. Environmental education goes beyond imparting knowledge; it involves fostering the necessary attitudes, values, and skills in individuals. The effectiveness of environmental education is best realized through a combination of in-school and out-of-school programs that mutually support each other. Particularly for preschool and primary school children, engaging in nature-oriented games and providing firsthand experiences in natural settings is crucial. Through such activities, children develop positive emotions and learn to treat nature with sensitivity. In the process of environmental education, incorporating activities and methods that enhance an individual's interaction with the environment and foster creative and critical thinking skills is essential. Utilizing creative drama, a contemporary educational approach, is believed to be an effective means of integrating these skills and values into the learning process. This research delves into the exploration of environmental education, the incorporation of the creative drama method in education, and the significance of employing the creative drama method within the context of environmental education. The relevant literature has been scrutinized to gain insights into these aspects. Furthermore, this study also showcases an illustrative environmental education activity plan that utilizes the creative drama method as a central approach. This research investigates environmental education, explores the use of the creative drama method in education, and assesses the significance of employing this method in environmental education through a review of pertinent literature. Furthermore, the study includes a practical demonstration of an environmental education activity plan that utilizes the creative drama method.

Keywords: Environment, drama, environmental education.

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Introduction

The onset of industrial and technological advancements following the 18th-century Industrial Revolution transformed societal norms, ushering in a faster production era with the shift to modern agriculture. These developments have led to increased consumption patterns and environmental challenges. Initially centered on the interactions between humans and the natural environment, specifically addressing human interference and damage, environmental pollution has evolved into a multidimensional concept. Beyond its initial scope, it is now recognized for its psychological, political, philosophical, legal, educational, sociological, technological, and cultural dimensions. The root cause of environmental issues can be traced to human behavior, and the prevailing level of awareness that drives such behavior. In this context, unless there is a shift in people's intellectual and moral consciousness, their environmental awareness will remain unchanged, perpetuating current issues in a continuous cycle (Dikicigil & Gülersoy, 2020; Gülersoy, 2019; Gümüş et al., 2017). Education is indispensable for individuals to cultivate awareness of a particular issue and develop a sense of responsibility. Effectively preventing environmental pollution requires a shift in long-standing habits, and as such this transformation is achievable primarily through education. The significance of high-quality environmental education that addresses these needs becomes evident (Erten, 2003; Küçük, 2017; Ünal & Dımişki, 1999).

The primary objective of environmental education is to instigate positive and enduring behavioral changes related to the environment, with a focus on ensuring active individual participation in addressing environmental challenges. To achieve this goal, educators play a crucial role by providing children with information about the environment, fostering a sense of environmental responsibility, supplying ample materials related to the environment, promoting proactive actions, and reinforcing their value judgments regarding the environment through tangible outcomes of applied efforts. Activities proposed within this framework include practices like the separate collection of recyclable waste, composting, demonstrating paper recycling, and utilizing dramatization techniques, as outlined by Şimşekli (2001).

According to San (1991), children have an equal stake in this world as much as adults do. The primary responsibility of teachers and educators is arguably to create opportunities for children and adolescents to engage and communicate with their surroundings, as well as themselves and others fostering a deeper understanding of the world. However, in contemporary times, such opportunities for children are often limited both at school and at home. This limitation results in a disconnect between the child's emotional, intellectual, and cognitive realms, turning learning into a purely cognitive exercise rather than an experiential one. It becomes crucial, however, to integrate emotionality and affective experiences into the learning processes. For effective participation in the learning journey, children need to activate their emotions, imagination, and even dreams. Creative drama emerges as a valuable tool in incorporating these essential skills and values into the learning processes. Creative drama provides a means for children to engage emotionally, fostering a holistic and experiential approach to learning beyond purely cognitive dimensions.

Creative drama, as a contemporary educational approach, is deemed highly effective for environmental education. The emphasis on learning through active participation, role-playing, and hands-on experiences aligns well with the goals of environmental education. By encouraging direct interaction with the environment, creative drama has the potential to foster environmental consciousness and awareness. Moreover, it plays a pivotal role in cultivating positive attitudes and values toward the environment. The significance of creative drama in environmental education highlights the need for research that contributes to the literature. A study that provides examples of environmental education activities utilizing the drama method can be instrumental in promoting effective environmental education. Such a study would not only enhance the understanding of the role of creative drama in environmental education, but also offer practical insights for educators and practitioners seeking innovative methods to instill environmental awareness and values in learners.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the concepts of environmental education and creative drama in education through an extensive review of pertinent literature. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the practical application of creative drama within the realm of environmental

education. Furthermore, a sample environmental education plan, employing creative drama as a central method, is provided as part of this investigation.

Environmental Issues

The environment, comprising soil, water, air, people, plants, and animals, serves as a shared living space where interactions between living and non-living entities occur (Karagözlü, 2020). Unfortunately, the importance of this environment for all living things has been jeopardized by rapid industrial development worldwide, leading to pollution, destruction, and degradation. The overconsumption of natural resources for raw materials, the increase in production waste, and unintentional harm inflicted by humans on nature contribute to the deterioration of the environment (Yalçınkaya, 2013).

Environmental studies categorize various issues as environmental problems, including air, water, and soil pollution, noise pollution, climate changes, irresponsible resource use, challenges in garbage disposal and recycling, extinction of animal and plant species, deforestation, and radioactive pollution (Baykal & Baykal, 2008; Gürbüz & Kışoğlu, 2011; Kaypak, 2013). Rapid population growth, industrial developments, and pollution that threaten natural resources have given rise to environmental problems, posing significant challenges towards the end of the 20th century. The future of humanity and the world is now at risk due to these environmental issues (İşçen & Yangın, 2013).

Environmental problems, as defined by Özgen and Kahyaoğlu (2012), encompass the negative consequences arising from humans attempting to impose their artificial environment on the natural environment, coupled with issues stemming from excessive and misused natural resource exploitation, leading to environmental destruction. Resource depletion, biodiversity loss, waste production, and destruction of natural habitats are identified by Mittal (2013) as critical issues demanding attention to ensure the sustainability of life on Earth in the coming century.

Rapid population growth is highlighted by Gürbüz and Kışoğlu (2011) as a crucial factor in the emergence of environmental problems. Destruction of forest areas to meet nutritional and shelter needs, unconscious hunting of land and water animals, destruction of natural areas, unplanned construction, depletion of natural resources, and problems arising from waste generated during vital activities contribute to these environmental challenges.

Karagözlü (2020) emphasizes that the key reasons for environmental problems include a lack of education, unconsciousness, and insensitivity towards the environment. Economic motivations, inadequacy of local government services, unplanned urbanization, population density, and a lack of control are identified as significant contributing factors. Industry and technology, inadequacy of laws, traffic-related issues, and global warming are additional factors causing environmental problems.

Atasoy (2010) suggests that while industrialization, urbanization, tourism, and population growth are often pinpointed as geographical and economic phenomena causing environmental problems, the underlying reason lies in negligence and inadequacy in environmental education, awareness, and consciousness. Many environmental problems are attributed to human behavior, such as improper waste disposal, littering due to the absence of trash bins, excessive use of private vehicles over public transportation, the use of pesticides for increased yield, and wasteful practices like leaving computers on continuously.

Examining these definitions, it becomes evident that the element both affecting and being affected by the environment is human. The causes of environmental problems include increasing population, industrial and technological developments, rapid urbanization, unconscious use of natural resources, and damage to nature and living things. These issues are attributed to a lack of environmental awareness and sensitivity. Therefore, the shared living space of all living and non-living creatures, the environment, requires protection and development, emphasizing the crucial role of lifelong environmental awareness and education.

Environmental Education

The significance of environmental education, a developmental process aimed at nurturing knowledge, skills, and attitudes across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains to safeguard and enhance the entire environment, is increasingly emphasized (Yılmaz et al., 2002; Aydođdu, 2006). Contemporary environmental education goes beyond merely informing individuals about the environment; it aspires to transform them into proactive participants equipped with the desire and skills for effective environmental management (Peyton et al., 1995).

The structure of environmental education should empower individuals to perceive the natural environment and positively influence their values and behaviors. The primary objective is to cultivate environmental awareness, fostering sensitivity toward the protection and sustainable use of the natural environment (Başal, 2003). It is crucial to design meaningful and enduring learning experiences within educational environments. Environmental education, grounded in process-based experiences, is envisioned as a lifelong learning journey.

The critical factor determining the success of environmental education is the teacher. It is emphasized that without the necessary knowledge, skills, and commitment on the part of the teacher to design lessons focused on the environment, the cultivation of environmentally literate students becomes challenging. Gurevitz (2000) notes that a purely information-based approach to environmental education often results in individuals avoiding active participation in solving environmental problems. In light of this, it becomes evident that environmental education should prioritize the development of affective skills in individuals. While education geared towards imparting knowledge and cognitive skills is important, it may not suffice for fostering environmental awareness. Instead, the emphasis should be on nurturing environmentally sensitive individuals capable of generating solutions to environmental challenges.

Recent discussions have highlighted the connection between education and contemporary environmental challenges, questioning the adequacy of environmental education in schools and its effectiveness in fostering environmental awareness. While education is acknowledged as fundamental for a healthy and lasting environment, there is a call to assess the sufficiency, functionality, and especially the long-term impacts of applied education (Atasoy, 2005). Given its nature, environmental education necessitates a teaching approach rooted in learning through living and experiencing. To fulfill its goals, the education process should contribute to individuals' motor skills, cognitive development, attitudes, and values toward the environment. This involves incorporating innovative learning processes intertwined with nature, such as invention and discovery. To embark on this transformative journey, a departure from traditional teaching methods toward contemporary, student-centered techniques is deemed essential (Bulut, 2015; Demir & Yalçın, 2014; Tanrıverdi, 2009).

Creative Drama in Education

The concept of creative drama in education is multifaceted and is known by various names across different regions. In the United States, it is referred to as 'Creative Drama,' while in England, it is known as 'Drama in Education.' In Germany, it goes by the names 'School Play' or 'Game and Interaction.' In Turkey, the terms 'educational drama,' 'dramatic education,' 'drama in education,' 'educational drama,' 'creative drama,' and 'creative drama in education' are all encountered. Despite the diversity in nomenclature, a review of the definitions reveals that these terms share commonalities in terms of quality, purpose, and scope (Adigüzel, 2012).

San (1991) notes that the term 'creative drama' is predominantly used in the United States, while England has extensive experience with the application of creative drama in educational processes, often using the term "drama in education." The creative drama method is considered to bring contemporary approaches to the classroom environment, offering several contributions. One significant contribution is the emphasis on individual learning through personal experiences, commonly known as learning by doing San (1991). Through techniques like improvisation in drama, students engage in 'pretending,' allowing them to experience situations not encountered in real life. These experiences contribute to mental development, imagination, and visualization. Ultimately,

students may gain the ability to access new and diverse information by analyzing and synthesizing the knowledge they acquire.

According to Adıgüzel (2012), creative drama involves participants creating action situations, improvisations, and animations based on their original thoughts, experiences, and knowledge, without relying on pre-written texts. These role-playing activities serve as a process within group work that allows students to learn and experience concepts, course topics, or themes in an educational environment.

In a broader sense, drama can be defined as the animation of an event, concept, or subject in a workshop environment led by an instructor and involving participants. Although theater techniques, including role-playing, improvisation, and pantomime, are commonly employed; the utilization of creative drama as an educational method brings about social improvement in students. It not only raises students' awareness of their role and responsibility in society but also fosters a sense of belonging to a group. Aligning with the goals of the drama method, its use in classrooms aims to liberate education from mere memorization, establishing a meaningful connection between lessons and daily life. The method is considered effective in nurturing the development of innovative, creative, self-confident, and happier individuals (Dağ, 2014).

Creative drama activities, prepared by an instructor or teacher using drama as a method, encompass various tools during the animation phase, known as 'techniques' or 'strategies.' In the realm of education, techniques such as improvisation, role-playing, dramatization, frozen image, writing-in-role technique, pantomime, and interview technique may be employed based on factors such as subject matter, theme, student levels, ages, readiness, and drama experience within the participating group (Dağ, 2014).

Structuring Creative Drama in Education - Stages

According to San (1991), the implementation of creative drama involves four key application methods, each contributing to a comprehensive learning experience. These methods are warm-up and relaxation exercises, games, improvisation, and formations.

Warm-up and Relaxation Exercises

In the initial phase of a creative drama workshop, activities focus on group integration. Participants engage in exercises that encourage mutual acquaintance, build confidence, and adapt to the environment. The process advances through activities targeting the five senses, developing observation skills, and fostering heightened awareness of one's body and brain. This stage provides individuals with the realization that their senses can be trained (San, 1991).

Games (Pantomime and Role Playing)

Games, a fundamental activity in personality development involving sharing and imitation, takes precedence in creative drama. Games, selected based on the group's characteristics, span various genres. Leaders should be cautious not to overemphasize games, ensuring participants are not unnecessarily fatigued.

Improvisation

Commonly defined as spontaneous and unscripted situations, improvisation is a key element in creative drama, showcasing individual and group creativity. Unlike written or recorded works, improvisations are experienced through visualization, emerging as a unique process rooted in the individual's own experiences. The absence of predetermined details adds to the distinctiveness of each improvisation (San, 1991).

Formation

The final stage in creative drama workshops aims for an endpoint that remains undetermined at the outset. The essence of formations lies in initiating a process without predefined outcomes. The evolution of activities and their ultimate destination cannot be predetermined (San, 1991). This last method underscores a creative drama process where participants' creativity is observed at its peak.

An integral aspect during the application of the aforementioned methods in creative drama is evaluation. Evaluation can be incorporated based on the leader's observations at an appropriate time or after each or multiple methods, depending on participants' preferences. Evaluation, in this context, involves initiating a discussion on participants' experiences, feelings, and challenges. Participants respond to these questions, and the leader guides the process, sharing observations if necessary. This evaluative stage is essential in drama studies (Üstündağ, 1998).

Creative drama finds applicability in various settings, including classrooms, museums, parks, factories, nursing homes, sports centers, galleries, historical sites, forest areas, playgrounds, amusement parks, and hospitals. Creating a conducive working environment for creative drama activities can enhance the learning experience (Adıgüzel, 2012).

Using Creative Drama Method in Environmental Education

The creative drama method serves as a valuable tool for children to explore themselves and their surroundings, fostering interaction with the environment. This method contributes to the development of positive attitudes and behaviors toward the environment, encompassing both cognitive learning and affective development. Active participation in the learning process through creative drama ensures a lasting educational impact, making the learning experience more engaging and memorable (Aydın & Aykaç, 2016). Implementing environmental education through the contemporary approach of creative drama proves effective in instilling knowledge, love, protection, and empathy for nature. Environmental education goes beyond theoretical understanding by incorporating role-playing and improvisation techniques. These methods enable students to embody nature, take on roles of beings within nature, and portray individuals contributing to environmental pollution (Özyürek, 2021). By engaging with environmental issues through improvisation and role-playing, students approach the subject creatively, fostering deep learning, retention of information, and gaining insights into themselves, others, and the environment (Levey, 2005).

Research, such as that conducted by Andrikopoulou and Koutrouba (2019), underscores the significant impact of environmental education when integrated with drama activities. Teachers' opinions indicate that drama-based activities in the classroom effectively achieve environmental education goals, promoting cognitive and socio-emotional development. Drama is noted to enhance resourcefulness, create a deeper understanding, cultivate empathy, and contribute to socialization, sensitivity, and responsibility. Effective implementation of drama-based activities requires well-trained, motivated, inspired, and supported teachers (Andrikopoulou & Koutrouba, 2019).

Reviewing relevant literature reveals positive contributions of using creative drama as a method in environmental education. Techniques like role-playing, improvisation, and animation enable individuals to connect with the environment, fostering empathy and interaction. Creative drama provides a creative perspective for examining environmental problems and generating solutions. Its learner-focused approach supports cognitive, affective, and social learning, making it an effective method in environmental education.

An environmental education study plan incorporating creative drama as a method is appended to this document. Developed by a creative drama expert, the plan received input from two additional drama experts. The plan outlines activities that can be conducted in a park or schoolyard, emphasizing hands-on, experiential learning. Materials are prepared by the drama leader in advance, ensuring a well-organized and engaging event.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Environmental education is defined as a process involving the acquisition of information about the environment, fostering positive attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors towards the environment, transforming these behaviors into a lifestyle, and ultimately creating environmentally conscious societies (Gülersoy et al., 2020). To effectively achieve the goals of environmental education, there is a need for an educational approach that enhances individuals' motor skills, cognitive abilities,

attitudes, and values related to the environment. This approach should incorporate innovative learning processes intertwined with nature, such as invention and discovery.

In order to implement such a comprehensive educational process, it is imperative to move away from traditional teaching methods and adopt contemporary, student-centered teaching methods and techniques (Bulut, 2015; Demir & Yalçın, 2014; Özbuğutlu et al., 2014). Research indicates that relying solely on traditional education within the school setting is insufficient for comprehending the environment. Instead, fostering environmental awareness is more effectively achieved when students engage in learning through exploration rather than memorization (Gülersoy et al., 2020). Creative drama, which is one of the contemporary education methods, is a suitable method for environmental education; It can be said that using drama techniques such as role-playing, dramatization and animation in environmental education activities is effective.

In this study, the concept of environmental education and creative drama in education were tried to be explained by scanning the relevant literature. In addition, a sample environmental education study plan using creative drama is presented as an example for educators.

According to the results obtained in this study, the following suggestions can be offered:

- Conduct environmental education activities that target the development of both affective and cognitive skills. These activities should involve familiarizing individuals with nature, understanding natural beings, recognizing natural resources, and comprehending environmental problems. Effective environmental education goes beyond knowledge-based tasks, encompassing initiatives that promote environmental protection, improvement, heightened environmental sensitivity and awareness, and instill a desire to engage in activities addressing environmental issues.

- Include the drama method, which involves activities such as role-playing, dramatization, and games, in environmental education.

- As a follow-up to this research, consider conducting an experimental study with students by developing an environmental education study plan using the creative drama method.

- Consideration of conducting studies to assess activities carried out with creative drama in environmental education based on student perceptions.

- Consideration of extending this study by offering environmental education workshops for teachers using the drama method. If such a study is undertaken, evaluate the activity plan by gathering feedback from the teachers who participated in the workshop.

- Consideration of developing this study with family participation to enhance the sustainability of environmental education activities using the drama method.

Appendix: Environmental Education Activity Plan with Drama Method

Topic: Sustainable Nature

Purpose: To raise awareness about recycling for sustainable nature

Method: Creative Drama in Education

Duration: 2 hours

Tools and Equipment: Pencil, paper, natural wastes such as dried leaves, small rocks, wood pieces.

Group: Primary School 2nd Term students

Working Location: Park or schoolyard

Warm-up Exercises: The group leader assembles the participants in a circle in the garden and initiates the activity with a warm greeting. Explaining that they will be adopting different roles through imitation and role-playing techniques, the leader invites participants to create a path in an imaginary forest with dense trees. As they walk along this path, participants are encouraged to greet the animals, trees, river, stones, sun, and clouds they encounter, fostering a connection with nature.

"Jump" Game: Participants form a circle, and the leader assigns them the role of forest horses that never tire. With rhythmic hand movements and verbal cues, the leader guides the group through the game. Instructions include commands like "Run, turn right, turn left, there's a crowd in the distance, slow down, greet people, there's mud ahead; jump," or "There's a tree in front of you, say hello." This engaging game allows participants to explore the imaginary forest and interact with various elements.

After this game, people go around a tree in the garden and sit in a semicircle.

Impersonation

Pantomime: The leader initiates a reflective pantomime activity, prompting participants to delve into the imagined world of a tree. Questions about the tree's type, age, and potential planter are posed, encouraging participants to consider the tree's perspective. Participants are invited to contemplate what the tree may have witnessed, experienced, and what emotions it might be feeling. The leader encourages participants to imagine the tree expressing itself and shares that those ready can approach the tree, engaging in non-verbal interactions by touching, hugging, smelling, and pretending to listen to its voice.

Identifying Objects: Participants form a circle, and the leader introduces natural objects (such as dried leaves, small rocks, and pieces of wood) collected from nature. Each participant selects an object, examining and identifying its current state. The leader prompts participants to reflect on the object's past, its origin, the person who left it, and its potential future. After individual identifications, the leader transitions to a new phase, suggesting that these objects aspire to return to nature with a renewed identity. Participants are then divided into groups of 5-6 people, with each group selecting 2-3 objects from the circle. The chosen objects serve as primary materials, and participants collaboratively give them a new 'form.' Next, the participants are tasked with creating a fresh design by combining natural waste materials. After establishing the identity and story of the new object, participants are encouraged to bring it to life through animation in their respective groups. This activity is designed to encourage creativity, environmental consciousness, and collaborative storytelling.

Let's Write a Letter: The leader invites participants to reflect on their experiences in the activities attended and implemented. Participants are asked to express their feelings by writing a letter, detailing what they enjoyed and disliked about the activities. Following the letter-writing exercise, participants are guided to lie down on the floor. They are encouraged to feel the texture of the surroundings, absorb the natural scents, close their eyes, and immerse themselves in the sounds of nature. After a period of relaxation, participants are informed that those ready can stand up, marking the conclusion of the activity.

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