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Play and Creative Drawing in Preschool

A Comparative Study of Montessori
and Public Preschools in Kenya



Herbert Utz Verlag · München

Münchner Beiträge zur Bildungsforschung

herausgegeben von

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Band 22



Zugl.: Diss., München, Univ., 2013

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek: Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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ISBN 978-3-8316-4284-7

Printed in EC
Herbert Utz Verlag GmbH, München
089-277791-00 · www.utzverlag.de

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Rudolf Tippelt for his insightful guidance, continuous encouragement, and fascinating sense of kindness and assistance made the undertaking of this work not only possible but also very enjoyable. I also extend gratitude to my second and third supervisors Prof. Dr. Jan- Willem Strijbos and Prof. Dr. Hartmut Ditton

This work would not have been possible without the continuous support of my loving family, my father Abraham and my mother Hellen whose continuous moral, emotional and financial support enabled me to get through this demanding period. I thank my siblings Edwin, Angela, Anita and Aron for their encouraging talks and laughs through my lows.

More gratitude goes to my fiancé Gerard William Foley. He believed in me, pushed me on and reminded me of my capabilities. I cannot forget all his kind words to me when I needed them most.

Finally, I extend my gratitude to the staff and children in the selected pre-schools in Kenya who participated in my study, as well as the Faculty of Education and Psychology at the Ludwig Maximilians University, Munich, for all the support I received.

ABSTRACT

When children enter preschool or kindergarten, they often seem to bring a spirit of wonder, great curiosity, and a spontaneous drive to explore, experiment and manipulate playfully and originally. Learning environments have been perceived to have the dual role of promoting as well as killing creativity. This has been attributed to the fact that as a child progresses through school years, teaching and learning become more dominant as play and self-exploration are stifled. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between play and creative drawing in Kenyan preschool children. A comparative study of the Montessori and the traditional public school system was carried out 48 preschool children between the ages of 4 and 6. Half were enrolled in Montessori while the other half in public schools Kenya. Through a qualitative design by the use of the Test of Creative Thinking Drawing Production (TCT-DP) (Urban & Jellen, 1996), and Rubin's (2001) Play Observation Scale analyses were carried out. Independent sample *t* tests, Pearson product moment correlations and stepwise hierarchical multiple regressions were computed to determine whether interactions and differences in social play, cognitive play and creative drawing performance were apparent between Montessori and traditional public preschools. Statistically significant results were obtained indicating that Montessori children engaged in cognitive play more than public preschool children and had higher scores on creativity than public preschool children. In addition, age differences in social play as well as in creativity scores were found. However, no gender differences were apparent in social play, cognitive play or in creativity scores.

Keywords: Play, Creativity, Montessori, Public preschool.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between play and the creative performance of Kenyan preschool children who were enrolled in Montessori and traditional public preschools. Chapter 1 introduces play and creativity concepts and how they are related (Johnson, Christie and Wardle 2005). Furthermore, this chapter presents the aims of the study, defines the key terms and subsequently presents the hypotheses of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the current literature of the main scope of the study starting from the educational system situation in Kenya and how the colonial history, social, cultural, and demographics have shaped it. Then, the constructivism theory is introduced with the aim of showing differences between Montessori and public preschools. Play and perspectives on play are also discussed in this chapter. The concept of creativity is then discussed in-depth particularly emphasizing on the componential theories of creativity. Social psychology and components model of creativity (Amabile, 1996) componential model of creativity (Urban, 2002, 1991) and the person, process and product components of creativity are discussed. Chapter 3 describes the participants of the study, measures and the procedures followed in carrying out the study and the statistical analyses adopted. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study in the form of statistical differences and significance obtained. It also includes testing of the hypotheses of the present study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results with respect to the study's hypotheses and in relation to the theory and research presented in the literature review. Strengths and limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are presented in this chapter as well.

In recent times western nations have been delving deep into research and putting phrases like creativity in school and innovation at the workplace to use. However, much of the developing world still lags behind in grasping, let alone using this newfound perception of promoting productivity in education, training, and subsequently at the workplace.

Educational policy makers are constantly faced with the challenge of how to make their educational systems more effective and competitive. According to the World Bank (2005), the impact of education should be witnessed in national economic development and poverty reduction. Consequently, the development and success of the western world has been attributed to advanced literacy skills, which promote critical thinking, and entrepreneurial skills necessary to steer the economy into development.

Similarly, parents try to provide the best for their children by en-

rolling them in the highest achieving schools or the most highly ranked. Regardless of which institutions of higher learning any of these children will find themselves in, one thing that is common to all is the first few years of formal education commonly referred to as preschool, kindergarten and nursery.

Magnuson, Ruhm, and Woldfogel (2005) argue that a child's achievement later on in school is linked to the child's academic performance at the beginning of kindergarten.

An important aspect of education that has long been forgotten is the experience of joy during learning. This brings up the aspect of play, which has been regarded as "so important to optimal child development that the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights has recognized it as a right of every child" (Ginsberg, 2007, p. 183)

Amabile (1997) advises that in order for people to reach their maximal creative potential, they should be allowed to do what they love. This implies that shoving ideas down students' throats or using the stick approach may be beneficial for only a short while as it may not result to any behavioral change.

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

The Kenyan public education system has in recent times come under criticism as questions on its quality, curriculum and end product have been raised. Gitonga (2010) labeled it as sub-standard too overloaded stressful and lacking fun and joy. It has been accused of being inadequate and irrelevant to students (Indire, 1972) and lacking the capacity and flexibility to respond to individuals changing needs (Owino, 1997).

Moreover, Chase (2006) states that the Kenyan public education system was introduced with vocational training in mind. That is, the enrolled student would be equipped with just enough skills to enable him/her to eke a living – the individual's happiness or satisfaction was not a subject of consideration. Therefore, this education system has been deemed a failure for its inability to achieve what it set out to: creativity, excellence and advanced skills for all (Chase, 2006).

This insufficiency of the Kenyan public education system—lack of play and joy during learning and not fostering creativity in individuals has resulted in parents seeking alternative educational programs for their children, where promises of positive child development and creativity abound. One such program is the Montessori preschool. Montessori advocates for child autonomy and learning at an individual pace while using material suitable for their age and developmental stage (Ryniker & Shoho, 2001).

Despite having the same goals in mind: to instill in young children the skills they will need to be successful not only in Kindergarten, but

also later on in life, Montessori and traditional public preschool programs are fundamentally different. With the philosophy of traditional preschools being similar if not the same to that of a traditional primary school, the Montessori system dances to a different tune altogether.

In traditional public preschools, the teacher is the center of everything and takes responsibility for planning and facilitating the activities that are to take place in the classroom from lectures, discussions, group work or hands-on learning. Emphasis on student progress assessment is placed on test score and grading.

On the other hand, the Montessori system has a minimal formal structure. The teacher is in essence seen as a facilitator and therefore has minimum influence on the children's activities. Autonomy is encouraged where children chose materials, assignments and tasks that are interesting to them. Contrary to traditional preschool, Montessori emphasizes on a child's learning process as opposed to their grade or end product.

Research into Montessori and traditional public preschools comparisons has mostly been on the differences in their achievement (Lopata, Wallace, & Finn, 2005), motivation (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005), creativity and divergent thinking (Besançon, M., & Lubart, 2008), among others.

However, research in one very important area and which could immensely benefit educational stakeholders is lacking. This is research into how children from these two institutions differ in the most basic activity in childhood – play. Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2008) referred to play as the “work” of children and emphasized that the importance of play in their cognitive development has frequently been acknowledged.

Moreover understanding the implications that the nature of their play at school has on their creative ability would greatly benefit educational policy makers. Lastly, understanding these differences could ensure possible best practice adoption by one of these childhood educational programs from the other in regards to the relationship between play and creativity.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study sought to investigate the relationship between social play, cognitive play and creative drawing in Kenyan preschool children who are enrolled either in Montessori or in traditional public preschools. Amabile argues that, creativity cannot be made to happen; it can only be allowed to happen (1997).

On the same note, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has concluded that what distinguishes creative individuals from non-creative individuals is their capacity to experience ‘flow’. Csikszentmihalyi defined flow as ‘timelessness’ and ‘oneness’ with the activity in which one is engaged. In

this state, he says people feel that their abilities are equal to the challenge provided by the task.

This 'flow' notion emphasized by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) could be equated to the intense concentration or intense involvement that we see when children are trying to work on something, be it a drawing, painting, fantasy or imaginary play. Most of the time, they are so deeply immersed and absorbed in what they are doing that they are oblivious to the goings on around them: who is talking to them and what they are saying. In this state, the outside world is blocked, at least for sometime.

Therefore, this study aims to show that preschool environments that provide for and nurture play in children ultimately promote creativity in young children.

In addition, it also aims to show teachers, parents and educational system policy makers that promoting play during learning fosters creativity in children. Giving children autonomy and responsibility for their work boosts their understanding of concepts by not only raising their motivation to engage in tasks and day-to-day problem solving, but also their curiosity, and eventually the end product; be it grades or something more tangible.

Finally, it is intended to help teachers conceive that when learning is student centered, it empowers students to a greater level of understanding and promotes trust.

1.3 Significance of the Study

It is imperative for parents to realize that supporting play and other learning dispositions is only the first step in a long quest to promote creativity in children. Choosing the right schooling environment for their child could determine how well the child copes with problem solving in future. According to Johnson, Christie and Wardle (2005), both cross sectional and longitudinal research show a positive and significant correlation between imaginative play and divergent thinking. It is therefore logical to presume that there indeed exists a relationship between play and creativity.

Furthermore, children's tendency towards play or playfulness has often been linked to their creativity skills (Lieberman, 1965, 1977). Consequently, play has been thought to be a predictor of creativity later on in life (Clark, Griffing & Johnson, 1989; Russ, Robins & Christiano, 1999). Teachers must realize the important role they are endowed with. These include making learning fun while at the same time providing social and developmental advancement to the children. In addition, they are tasked with providing children with favorable circumstances for their talent, aptitude and motivation to grow and advance.

The sole aim of education should not be to enable students to pass

exams. To the contrary, it is purposed with the production of wholesome individuals who are knowledgeable, curious, creative, entrepreneurial, and most importantly, satisfied with their work and enjoy what they do.

Academic excellence should not be considered to be the sole aspect in success. Other factors like personal, social, cultural, physical and emotional excellence should also be held in high regard if we are to bring up generations of smart, efficient, creative and satisfied individuals in pedagogy and at work.

Funds should be poured into education for alterations to curriculum, policies governing education, training and motivating educators and instructors, and provision of necessary materials in schools to cultivate curiosity and a think-out-of-the-box attitude.

The responsibility of raising a literate as well as a creative society should be everyone's business. The task should not be left to the government and educational institutions, parents and caretakers also need to understand that apart from school, the other place where children spend their time is at home, with them. Therefore, the home plays a key role in children's attitudes to learning.

1.4 Research objectives

1. To investigate whether Montessori children play more socially, more cognitively and have higher creativity scores than public preschool children.
2. To investigate whether gender differences in social play, cognitive play, and creative drawing performance exist between Montessori and public preschool children in Kenya.
3. To investigate whether age differences in social play, cognitive play, and creative drawing performance between Montessori and public preschool children in Kenya.

1.4.1 Research Questions

Based on the above mentioned research objectives, the following research questions were put forward:

1. Do Montessori children play more socially than public preschool children?
2. Do Montessori children play more cognitively than public preschool children?
3. Do Montessori children perform better in creative drawing than public preschool children?
4. Are there gender differences in social play, cognitive play and creative drawing performance?
5. Are there age differences in social play, cognitive play and creative performance?

The variables in this study are gender, age social play, cognitive play and creative performance in drawing production. The independent variables are social play, cognitive play, gender and age. School type is also an independent variable although in this study, it has not been manipulated, as would be the case in an experiment. The dependent variable is creativity.

Below is a general conceptual framework that has been used as a basis for the research objectives, questions and hypotheses raised in this study.

1.4.2 Conceptual Framework

It is the assumption of the researcher that the children's play behavior will determine their performance on the creative drawing task.

Play has been looked at in social and cognitive components according to Rubin's (2001) Play Observation Scale. Social play has been defined as parallel play and group play, while non-social play is onlooker behavior and solitary play. On the other hand, cognitive play refers to constructive play, dramatic play and games with while non-cognitive play refers to occupied, functional and exploratory play. Both social and cognitive play behaviors have been discussed further in the Play Observation Scale in chapter two.

The researcher therefore argues that the educational institution will determine play characteristics, which will then determine the level of creativity expressed by the preschool children on their drawing production task.

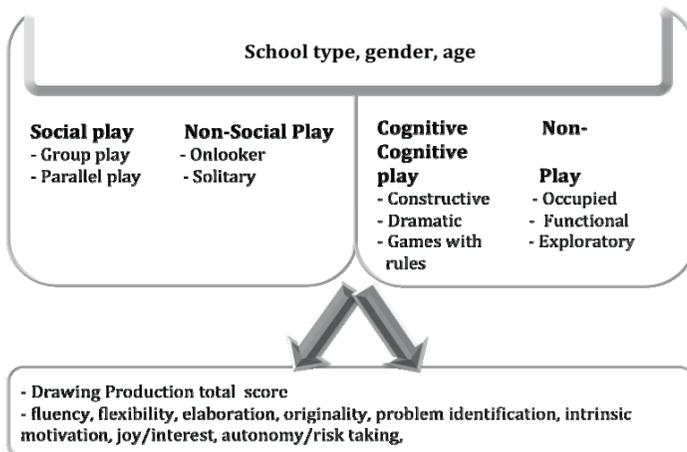


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

1.4.3 Hypotheses

H1: Montessori children will play more socially and more cognitively when compared to public preschool children, and they will also have higher creativity scores than public preschool children.

H_{1a}: Montessori children will display more social play than their public pre-school counterparts.

H_{1b}: Montessori children will display more cognitive play than public preschool children.

H_{1c}: Montessori children will perform better at creative drawing than public preschool children.

H2: There are gender differences in social play, cognitive play, and in creative drawing performance.

H_{2a}: There are gender differences in social play.

H_{2b}: There are gender differences in cognitive play.

H_{2c}: There are gender differences in creative drawing performance.

H3: There are age differences in social play cognitive play, and in creative drawing performance.

H_{3a}: There are age differences in social play.

H_{3b}: There are age differences in cognitive play.

H_{3c}: There are age differences in creative drawing performance.

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