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# The evaluation of the art activities applied in preschool education programmes in terms of self-expression opportunity given to child

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## Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the art activities applied in preschool education programmes in terms of self-expression opportunity given to child, and a qualitative research pattern is used. Research group consists of 10 female preschool teachers whose work experience ranges 5 to 27 years. A semi-structured interview form is used to obtain research data. Data is collected through individual, face to face interviews with the teachers. Records are analyzed by using descriptive analysis method. It can be said that teachers in research group aim to strengthen fine motor skills and there aren't opportunities for children to express themselves effectively.

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## 1. Introduction

In the early years, 'self-expression' is one of the basic needs of a child. Child creates knowledge related to the world and emotions related to the knowledge. Child wants to express knowledge and emotions related to this knowledge. Eric Fromm says "If man [sic] expresses his grasp of the world by his senses, he creates art and ritual, he creates song, dance, drama, painting, sculpture." According to Fromm, this expression is basic human need, and if this need is not met, people feel insecure and nervous (Krenksy and Stetten, 2009).

On the other hand, the knowledge and emotions created by the child are, in a sense, results of the effects of physical and social environment. In the same way, child has a right to affect his/her environment by reflecting the knowledge and emotions that s/he creates as a result of these effects. Children use art to transfer their thoughts and feelings earlier and more effectively than spoken language (Bae, 2009).

The goals of each educational institution should be to give children development opportunity, and to bring them the characteristics that can affect this world.

Education programmes in which there are not any elements related to 'art' which is described as a way of "expression" (Ozsoy, 2003; Bae, 2009) cannot achieve these goals.

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It is stated that application form of art education in formal educational institutions can differ depending on the meaning attributed to it (Cakir Ilhan, 2003). Generally, there are two basic views in art education. One of these views is **education through art** in which education is dominant; the other one is **education for art's sake** which is applied to express art and to make it clear (San, 1982; Cakir Ilhan, 2003).

In education through art view, the important element is that artistic activities are placed in education system as processes that educate people. In this view, it is aimed to balance the over-nationalization in education systems by giving place to emotions and senses more than mind and supervision of mind (San, 1982; Cakir Ilhan, 2003). In a sense, artistic activities serve as a tool for achieving the goals of education that is appropriate for human nature.

In education for art's sake view, it is aimed to art for the sake of art. In this view, child and teenager are asked to conceptualize the actions verbally and to predicate their evaluation on a mental base (San, 1982; Cakir Illahn, 2003).

Although they are seen as conflicting ideas, it is stated that these views can create a mixed view by taking place in education system. San (1987) states that education through art is appropriate for preschool and primary school while education for art's sake is appropriate for secondary school and high school.

In MEB (Ministry of National Education) 2006 Preschool Education Programmes, which are still applied in Turkey, giving place to art activities is suggested in order to support children's development in each and every area.

In this study, it is aimed to evaluate the art activities applied in preschool education programmes in terms of self-expression opportunity given to child. It is thought that the results of the study contribute to the studies related to meeting child's self-expression need through art education and the regulations done to provide gain in preschool education programmes.

The art activities in this study are only "visual art activities" because all art activity examples expressed by teachers are visual art activities.

## 2. Method

In this research qualitative research pattern is used.

### 2.1. Research Group

Research group consists of 10 female preschool teachers. 5 of these teachers work in an independent kindergarten bound to Ministry of National Education in Antalya, 5 of them work in kindergarten in a formal primary school bound to Ministry of National Education in Antalya. Easy sampling method is used in determining research group; the teachers are told that the study is conducted to "evaluate the ways of using art activities in preschool education programmes", the study can contribute to both preschool education programmes and teacher training programmes; the study is conducted with the teachers willing to participate in the study. All the teachers in the research group are female and their work experience is between 5 and 27 years. Teachers' names' codes, school type and work experience are presented in Tablo 1.

Table 1. The information about the teachers in the working group

Code	Professional Experience(Year)	School Type
Feride	12	Independent Kindergarten
Zeynep	14	
Neşe	15	
Aysel	5	

Güneş	8	
Funda	27	Nursery Class bound to Elementary School
Bahar	5	
Canan	5	
Defne	22	
Banu	27	

## 2.2. Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form, designed by the researcher, is used to obtain research data. In the interview form, there are questions about mostly used activities and self-expression opportunities given to child. Since teachers talk about other teachers' applications, some questions are added; these questions are about teachers' opinions related to the applications, generally applied in education programmes.

## 2.3. Data Collection Method

In the research, data is collected through individual, face to face interviews with the teachers in working group. At the beginning of the interviews, the researcher asks for approval of written record during the interview. Each interview lasts for 30-40 minutes.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

The records, kept during the interviews, are analyzed by using descriptive analysis method. The data obtained by descriptive analysis method, is interpreted in line with the previously determined topics (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2000). The data obtained by the interviews is categorized depending on the questions appropriate for the aim of the research and interpreted by the researcher.

## 3. Findings

The findings related to teachers' goals for using art activities in education programmes:

Almost all the teachers, in working group, mention developing children's hand skill (psychomotor development) as a goal of giving place to art activities in education programmes.

Canan states that "through art activities she can find an opportunity of developing psychomotor skills, eye-hand coordination and an artistic value". Banu says that "children learn how to hold a pencil, color and use glue through art activities". Güneş expresses that "art activities develop eye-hand coordination and thus they develop children's ability of doing what they are asked to do". Neşe illustrates art activities she uses to develop children's hand skill: "Children do not like tear and stick activities. If we apply this activity, we do it in small areas. When I give a big duck, I ask the children to do the small parts. I make preparations in the fields that the children have difficulty by getting their opinions.

As well as developing hand skill, the most common answer for the aims of art activities is developing children's imagination and creativity. Feride gives this example to explain art activities that she uses to develop creativity: "for example, if we are creating a rabbit, everyone should create its ears or eyes as they like. I give the materials (such as scissors) to children. They create the rabbit however they want." Neşe emphasizes that when the aim of the activity is to develop creativity, teachers should be patient and she says that "at the beginning there may not be good results. Materials can be thrown away. It is not important, it will develop in time."

Although the goal in using art activities is stated as promoting creativity, it is understood from teachers' statements that there are limitations even in the activities applied to develop creativity. Also, it is understood that teachers lead and decide the activities children are supposed to do. Canan expresses that "All art activities do not promote creativity, mainly working with surplus material promotes it. When children are set free to decorate the works, when there is no teacher intervention, creativity emerges." Although she says there is a contradiction between intervention and creativity in her statement, it is perceived that there is intervention and construction with the aim of creating a product in the process until the decoration step.

Güneş is another teacher that expresses she gives importance to creativity. She is asked to explain which activities she uses for creativity. Güneş answers: "I give triangle and square paper. They create something using the paper. I like it. I do not make them do classic activities." When the researcher asks which activities the children like, she says children love sponge press (*sünger baskı*) with water colour.

Although teachers do not clearly talk about aims related to creating a production, it is seen that they focus on producing something on a topic. Only Defne and Banu express that their goal of using art activities in education programmes is not only to develop children's psychomotor skills but also to promote their social emotional development. When Defne explains the goals of the art activities she includes in programme, she emphasizes that art activities are important for children's muscular development, self-expression, creativity, and having a hobby, thus children find themselves and put their emotions and thoughts on paper. Banu, also, states a similar view; it is aimed to promote their social development as children learn to share during these activities.

Mostly used activities in education programmes and self-expression opportunities given to child in these activities:

The teachers in working group state that they generally apply these activities in education programmes: working with surplus materials/collage, modelling clay, water colour, crayon, paper work. Teachers state that other teachers generally apply paper work and tear-stick activities.

Most of the teachers say that children are given opportunity to express themselves by talking about the product that is presented at the end of the work. Güneş says: "I want them to talk about their products. To provide self-expression, I ask some questions such as 'Who is there near the duck?' 'Where is s/he going?'" Güneş thinks: "Thus it is possible to get some information about child and to behave him/her in a different way by using this information." Neşe emphasizes that children's talking about what they create in art activities promotes language development as well as expressing emotions.

Only one of the teachers in working group (Aysel) expresses that children express themselves through their choices and performances during the activities. Aysel expresses her opinion in the following way: "They make a scarecrow unhappily. They reflect their environment even in its clothes."

Although one of the teachers (Zeynep) is aware of the fact that children cannot express themselves when they are guided, she believes children should be guided. "Willing children express themselves. However, when they are guided they do not express themselves. Children need guidance because they do not have a lot of knowledge. For example, child does not know what a body consists of. There are some children who still draw stickman. First s/he draws the tree in his/her mind. However, there are lots of trees in the nature. When you show those trees, child draws a tree in a different way."

Some of the teachers in working group, state that children find an opportunity to express themselves in free time activities through experiences such as games, chatting with the teacher etc. in education programmes. In addition to this, they express that children express themselves through verbal and auditory activities such as songs, poems, tongue twisters etc.

Teachers' opinions about the application of art activities in preschool education programmes:

When teachers answer the questions about what their goal is in art activities, they state that although they are against this kind of applications, the activities in educational institutions are product-oriented and this product-oriented works cause aesthetic concern and rivalry among teachers because of presentations such as exhibitions.

Funda states product-oriented activities are conducted “to strengthen the meaning and importance of special days” while Banu thinks they are conducted “to use surplus materials as appropriate activities for unit and topic”.

Defne says “teachers compare activities to compete with each other and this cause the efforts to create good works rather than giving importance to children’s products.” Bahar says “I think there is a comparison among teachers about who does it better”. She supports the view that the works in art activities are product-oriented and these product-oriented works convert into a product-oriented and aesthetic concerned rivalry among teachers.

Funda thinks “Parents compares the classes and have an expectation. Parents’ attitude such as the other class did this, why our class is in this level, affects this rivalry.”

Almost all teachers point that exhibiting the activities increase the level of rivalry among teachers.

#### **4. Discussion and Interpretation**

Almost all teachers in the research group state that developing children’s hand skills is a goal of art activities in education programmes. Some of these teachers express that they aim to promote children’s creativity as well. However, it is understood from teachers’ statements that since teachers choose the activities whose aim is to promote creativity, and there are interventions and limitations during the activity, these activities are applied in a teacher-centered manner.

It takes attention that teachers’ use the expression “make children do something” while talking about application of the activities. As understood from these statements, children make their own choice within the scope of creating a product limited to the material they are given. It can be clearly stated that children will express themselves better in the activities they choose. However, it is thought that children’s choices are ways of self-expression.

Only two of the teachers in the research group include child’s self-expression in the goals of applying these activities. Teachers give children an opportunity to express themselves through children’s talking about their product.

Moran (1997) emphasizes that creativity is a personal and interpersonal process. Certainly, child’s showing creativity can be seen as a sign of self-expression. In education programmes, children should be given opportunity to show their creativity, use their potential of creativity develop their skills. However, the expectation that children express themselves only through creativity gives children limited opportunities. Children should have a chance to apply imitation and common styles as well as unique and uncommon ways while expressing themselves. There should be interventions neither on common and acceptable works nor on unique or incongruous works to provide self-expression.

It is seen that teachers in research group ask some questions to the children to make children express themselves while applying the activities. The questions that the teachers use by talking to children about the art activities are under the “inquiry approach” category of Schirmacher’s (1986) traditional approach classifications. In this approach, the children who cannot express everything verbally can be unwilling to express themselves. Also, it is stated that preschool children’s art is special, egoist and they do not try to imitate something (Ulutaş and Ersoy, 2004, p.7). on the other hand, children whose verbal language skills haven’t developed, cannot find an opportunity to express themselves through other art forms.

The findings of the research show that art activities are generally conducted in a product oriented way in relation to unit and topic, and neat and good products are important. Bresler (1993) expresses that there are three types of visual arts education orientations in preschool education programmes, depending on education philosophy and

goals. The first orientation is the little-intervention orientation in which children perform open-ended tasks. The second orientation is the production orientation in which teachers plan almost everything beforehand and children follow the instructions or imitate their teacher. The third orientation is the guided-exploration orientation which gives children an opportunity to observe objects more carefully while producing an art work and to use their sensitivity, and to express their own ideas ( Bae, 2004, p.248).

According to the statements of the teachers in research group, art activities in preschool education programmes are in production orientation category. In Rozario and Collazo's study (1981) (Bae, 2009, p.248), it was found that teachers try to shape children's expressions by controlling children's art works and guiding them to make their products similar to the determined models by the teachers.

Although 30 years have passed since the study of Rozario and Collazo (1981) (Bae, 2009, p.248) the similar studies are being done in Turkey. Therefore, the teachers in Turkey can allow children to make art activities to express themselves. In Bae's qualitative study (2009), conducted with teachers who show guided-exploration orientation, it is seen that teachers plan in-class activities with a balance between freedom and structure.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestions

In the research which is conducted in order to evaluate art activities in preschool education programmes in terms of the self-expression opportunity given to child;

It can be said that preschool teachers in research group aim to strengthen fine motor skills while applying art activities in education programmes and there aren't opportunities for children to express themselves effectively.

In this research data is collected through interviews with teachers. In addition to this, it is thought that doing a research in educational settings, based on the observations of a researcher, will be useful in evaluating the art activities in education programmes in terms of the opportunity given to children.

The findings of this research show the importance of organizing the programmes related to art education in teacher training. In art education programmes for teachers, there should be some regulations in term of providing teachers with "education through art" perspective as well as "education for art's sake" perspective.

It is thought that in teacher training programmes, conducting courses related to art education through interdisciplinary collaboration with early childhood trainers and art trainers will be useful.

It is thought that including an educational approach in in-service training programmes can contribute to create activities appropriate for the developmental education goals in education programmes.

In the world, there are some applications which show that early childhood education programmes, alternative to traditional education, can promote children's self-expression and development in every field. In these approaches, preschool teachers and art teachers work collaboratively. Considering this fact, it is thought that while preparing preschool education programmes and applying them, a collaborative work among preschool teachers and art teachers will be useful.

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