Teacher's Belief in Enhancing Children Imagination Through Children Malay Traditional Song

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the teacher's beliefs on imagination construction of preschool children in class, explore and understand the beliefs of preschool teachers on the concept of imagination and understand the beliefs of teachers on using children traditional Malay songs to improve preschool children's imagination. This exploratory study adopted the use of qualitative method of inquiry to provide an in-depth understanding of the area being investigated. Interview and observation of four preschool teachers were purposively selected from two government schools were used to collected data. Findings revealed that all the teachers in this study expressed their views that All the teachers involved in this study expressed their views that imagination is related to creativity and it is regarded as fundamental to the child's ability to be creative. All the teachers also believe that children traditional Malay songs can boost the child's imagination because such songs have the characteristics that suit well with children. Hence the songs are easy to be appreciated and understood by the children and indirectly it can simplify the process of building child's imagination.

Keywords: Imaginations, creativity, beliefs

Introduction

Our daily lives are constantly surrounded with various problems that demand us to think for the best solution. Whether we realize it or not, amid our struggle to think for problem solving, creativity plays an important role in helping us to find ways that are innovative and effective. Since creativity can be defined as creating new idea or concept (Guilford, 1950; Mindham, 2005), divergent thoughts (Butcher & Nice, 2005), innovative (Butcher & Nice, 2005), and seeing things in a new light (Mindham, 2005), the definition given clearly demonstrates that creativity is the key to many things related to daily life.

In the process of building creativity among children, there are two elements that need to be addressed, namely imagination and expression. According to Susan (2010), imagination of a young child is at a very high level. The child must be given opportunity and enough space for their imagination in order for them to think creatively. Egan (1999) confirms that imagination is a need to ensure that we think and be creative constantly in our modern society.

Imagination is a mental picture of a phenomenon that goes beyond human logic. Imaginative activities are involved in the creative process because creative ideas are generated through imaginative ability. The ability to imagine is an essential prerequisite to publish and translate creative ideas (Azhar, 2004). The ability to imagine are within every individual and it

can be performed any time and in any situation regardless of age and background level. Nevertheless, to be a creative person, the ability to imagine is one of the most important factors of being a human.

Imagination can be triggered using words to describe or illustrate certain abstract, view the conflict events or occurrences, reverse a hypothetical events, and using alternative thinking to something that has been considered (Schirrmacher, 2002). Critical thinking can permeate all aspects and beyond these aspects critical thinking is the real imagination activator. Imagination is usually associated with the allegation that fantasy practices as something that do not exist. But imagination in actual is the basis for any creative activity and it is an important component in every aspect of human life. This implies that every product around us have been created by human on the basis of imagination. According to Ribot:

> "Every invention, whether large or small, before being implemented, embodied in reality, was held together by the imagination alone. It was a structure erected in the mind through the agency of new combinations and relationships. . . . The overwhelming majority of inventions were created by unknown inventors; only a few names of great inventors are extant. The imagination forever remains true to its nature, whether it manifests itself individually or collectively. No one knows how many acts of imagination it took to transform the plow, which started out as a simple piece of wood with a fire-sharpened end, from this simple manual tool, into what it became after a long series of alterations that are described in the works devoted to this subject. In the same way, the dim flame from a branch of resinous wood, which was the first crude primitive torch, led us, through a long series of inventions, to gas and electric lighting. All the objects used in everyday life, including the simplest and most ordinary ones, are, so to speak, crystallized imagination."

> (Ribot, 1906)

Built imaginations are often based on material obtained from reality through one's environment and experience. Moreover this factor is very important that influence one's imaginative ability. In addition, imagination also plays an important role on human action and development. Every human experience is translated through imagination because it is through imagination that human can conceive something that cannot be seen, describing information obtained through stories of others and describing something that are experienced by other people. The relationship between imagination and experience are closely intertwined and constantly influence each other. Apart from experience, imagination can also be influenced by one's emotions. Each feelings and emotions require different forms of imagination. This is because each feelings and emotions that are seen and experienced will produce different imagination (Ribot, 1906). In one particular situation, emotions may affect imagination; nevertheless, imagination may also affect emotions. Schirrmacher (2002) explains that creativity is dependent on one's environment. Each creator includes those brilliant inventors who are product of their time and environment.

Studies show that a decrease in the level of a child's imagination is caused by environment and culture of the child rather than caused by natural process (Torrance, 1974). Children should be exposed to different forms of experience so that they have the opportunity to play with fantasy in order to encourage them to imagine.

Music is seen as one of the tools that contribute to the children holistic development which includes the intellectual, emotional, physical, social and aesthetic developments. This is because musical activity is an integral part of their daily activities such as singing, moving, dancing, and playing musical instruments and the sounds that they produced on their own. Gadsden (2008) affirms that the arts allow us to imagine and allows individuals to put themselves in the experience, situation and environment that transcend different time, ages and contexts in viewing the world through different perspectives.

According to the philosophy of contemporary music pedagogy, music concepts such as melody and rhythm are good teaching materials using traditional music of local culture. Zoltan Kodaly who is an educator of Hungary suggested that the use of folk music when teaching kids in school because music is considered to be the children's "musical mother tongue" (Choksy, 1988). Folk music can evoke a sense of belonging to the singer and the listener to something bigger than themselves, such as the family and society (Davis, 2005; Kvideland, 1989). Due to most of folk music are based on environmental themes such as animal sounds that surrounds them, thus it could help the overall children development more easily. Folk music also allows the child to remember, absorb and react faster in a manner that is distinctive and creative in style. According to Kodaly, before one is able to understand the music of other countries, it is necessary to first understand the music of his country (Choksy, 1981).

Kupari (2003) stated that teacher's beliefs are critical element in determining teaching and learning processes in the classroom. According to Cooney and Lin (2001), every action carried out by the teacher in the classroom is resulted by the teacher's beliefs. With particular emphasis on aspects of teachers' beliefs, hopefully it will help the teachers to be able to transform their way of teaching in educating the children, especially on the creativity aspect. This is because the study on teachers' beliefs and practices in class will contribute as basic knowledge that can be used for us to understand and develop a more effective teaching practices in the future (Kang & Wallace, 2005; Levit, 2001 ; Luft, 1999; Tsai, 2002). Stipek et al. (2001) mentioned that teachers uphold something that is reliable. This fact will shape teaching practices in the classroom. Pajares (1992) and Hofer et al. (1997) stated that teacher's beliefs can influence the perception and evaluation on the results of teaching, in addition to the choice of methods and activities.

Previous studies found that teacher's characters can influence (Pianta et al., 2005; Saracho & Spodek, 2007; Mashburn et al., 2008), trust (Cassidy et al., 1995; Chang, 2003), and quality of early childhood programs (Burchinal et al., 2000, Bryant et al., 1994; Pianta et al., 2005; Howard-Jones, Taylor, & Suton 2002; Peisner-Burchinal et al., 2001) on the social, emotional and cognitive developments. However, there are very few studies that examine its influence on imagination and creativity, especially in the early ages of children.

Therefore, effort that can stimulate the ability to express idea of their minds need to be given further attention. Freedom in imagining and expressing ideas should be seen as necessary actions so that they will have the opportunity to play with fantasy and encourage them to imagine things. This can generate children who are able to cope with rapid changes that will constantly occur in their lives in the future and generate the world that puts high value on individual with innovative and creative character.

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of teacher's beliefs on imagination construction of preschool children in class to enhance creativity of young children. The main objective is to:

1. Explore and understand the beliefs of preschool teachers on the concept of imagination in creativity development.
2. Explore and understand the beliefs of teachers on using children traditional Malay songs to improve preschool children's imagination.

This study provides room for discussions among preschool teachers on implications for teachers who are educating and continuing professional development and may indicate cultural differences in the creativity concept. Furthermore, this study will also provide basis for judging whether current practice meets the requirement to promote children's imagination. The findings from this study will also be able to determine how teachers conceptualize imagination and what impact that their concepts have on their interpretation and objectives both in curriculum requirements and in professional preparation and training.

Method

Research design

In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' conceptions of imagination in creativity development and their beliefs about the best way in promoting imagination in the classroom, this exploratory study adopted the use of qualitative method to provide further understanding of the area being investigated. The use of qualitative method is appropriate for this study because it is an attempt to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participant's perspective, not the researcher's. A qualitative researcher is interested in understanding the meaning that people have constructed; that is how they make sense of their world and the experiences that they have in the world (Sherman & Webb, 1988). Moreover, Burn (1997) asserts that the task of qualitative methodologist is to capture what people say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world, to understand events from the viewpoints of the participants.

Sampling

The subjects of this study consisted of four preschool teachers who were purposively selected from two government schools. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) put it, many qualitative researchers employ purposive, and not random, sampling

methods. In the context of this study, the said teachers have been purposely selected for the fact that they might show differences in ideas, beliefs and practices because of the different characteristic of their personalities and physical settings.

Data Collection Methods

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions and classroom observations. The use of two instruments act as data triangulation to increase authenticity and trustworthiness of the data collected. The data gathered from the interviews and observations were shared with the teachers and discussions were held with them to find out why they acted in certain behaviors during their actual teaching.

Findings

In this study, the analyses provide broad conceptual themes to address the research questions. The themes are:

36. Teachers' conceptions about imagination.
37. Teachers' belief on using children traditional Malay songs.

Teachers' conceptions about imagination

All the teachers involved in this study expressed their views that imagination is related to creativity. Imagination is regarded as fundamental to the child's ability to be creative.

"To be creative, children need to be imaginative."

"Imagination is important to children because imagination can improve their creativity."

Teachers also explained that through imaginative skills, development of children's creativity will grow faster. This can be seen through the results of their creative artistic creations that are more unique and interesting.

"Children's creative outputs are resulted from description of their imagination."

"Imagination can make children more creative because they would imply something else, such as car that can fly with wings"

Teachers' belief on using children traditional Malay songs.

All the teachers interviewed believe that children traditional Malay songs can boost the child's imagination. This is because such songs have the characteristics that suit well with children. Hence the songs are easy to be appreciated and understood by the children and indirectly it can simplify the process of building child's imagination.

"Children are likely to be more inclined on something that interest them and fit well with them."

"The children songs are usually short and easy with simple melodies."

The ability to attract children interest is very important in the learning process. If the kids are interested they will then be able to give full attention to something that they do. Children's songs are sung by the children at all time and these songs are easy to sing and remembered by them.

"Children's songs fit well with their souls."

Apart from the children's song that fit well with their self and souls, the teachers who were interviewed also emphasized that the songs are using lyrics according to their surroundings.

"The lyrics of children's songs are based on their surroundings. For example the song entitled 'Cak Kekok Kaki Ayam'. The song deals with cock fighting that child often see in the village. "

In addition, it is also explained that there are lyrics without meaning in children's songs. Meaningless words can be used to improve children's imagination.

"The sound of 'chok' on the song entitled 'Cok Cok Kendung' is a word without meaning in this song. Thus teachers can exchange with other sounds to boost children's imagination."

There are also children's songs created accompanied with game. For example, a song entitled 'Enjit-enjit Semut'. The song is sung while making movements or activities related to the song being sung. With activities or movements that are accompanied with singing, therefore the singing of these children will be more effective because it involves cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains simultaneously.

"Kids love to sing with movement involved. Sometimes the movements are changed by the teachers and the children."

Summary

The development and improvement of children's creativity level have always been the main goals set by the Ministry of Education for preschool education. Since the preschool curriculum were drafted and introduced in 2001, up to the drafting of KSPK in 2011, the emphasis on creativity in teaching and learning processes in order to produce creative and innovative students has never been pushed aside. In fact it has to be emphasized even more seriously in the development of preschool children. In an attempt to increase knowledge level of students in various disciplines, they should also be taught on thinking skills and how it can help them to solve everyday problems. Skills in creative and critical thinking are the main skills that must be practiced in the process of teaching and learning in the classroom (Ananda, 2005). Mello (1996) explains that teachers can foster creativity in teaching and nourish children's creativity in addition to environmental and creative programs.

Music has been seen as one of the tools that contribute to holistic children development, which include intellectual, emotional, physical, social and aesthetic developments. This is because musical activity is an integral part of their daily activities such as singing, moving, dancing, playing musical instruments and producing sounds on their own. Despite the importance of creativity and the role of music in the development of children education has long been recognized in Malaysian preschool education, but their appreciation, understanding and implementation are often put into question (Ministry of Education, 2009). In reality the present preschool education curriculum are more focused on formal education that emphasizes academic achievement of preschoolers (Rohaty, 1984). The emphasis contradicts with the specialists' view on child development (Fortson & Reiff, 1995) who often emphasized that comprehensive children development through creativity and aesthetic construction should be raised in the process of teaching and learning in preschool education.

The use of children traditional Malay songs should be considered in the construction and improvement of children's imagination because such songs have the characteristics that suit well with children self-development. This characteristic in turn will create a learning process that could capture interest and attention of the children based on the songs characteristics which are simple, short, and easy to sing and remember.

Therefore, in order to create an innovative society that could survive in a challenging environment that further lead to well-being of society and country, effort should be carried out in a prudent and systematic manner as well as going through appropriate process. This is because, in order to produce individuals who are able to innovate, characters of a creative innovator must exist within individuals and to create a creative individual, there should be ability to imagine.

It is reasonable to say that imagination development is indeed valuable for our education system and that abundance of benefits for the children can be gained if it is implemented effectively. Teachers are in position to either enhance or inhibit children's imagination development, thus they should make an effort to promote imagination in the classroom. Other relevant authorities like the Ministry of Education, the Curriculum department and teacher training institutions also play an important role to ensure that the aim of promoting children's creativity through the power of imagination could be realized. The development of children's imagination need to be given higher priority in the education agenda to achieve a holistic and more meaningful growth for our children.

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