School-based Drama Program to Enhance Social and Emotional Wellbeing at Elementary School

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The drama program was designed by the experienced drama expert and educator Annukka Häkämies and Katja Joronen with the teachers in Southern Finland. The program premised upon the drama theories of e.g. Owens and Barber (1998) and social cognitive theory of Bandura (1986). Program focused on improving social competence and social and emotional wellbeing in the classroom which may also reduce bullying. Participants were elementary school children in grades 4–5 (mean age of 10.4 years). The aim was to improve the following functions of the students: empathy, social competence, student–teacher interaction, child–parent interaction, recognition on of values and emotions. Pretexts of the drama sessions were related to friendship, loss of a friend, bullying, support to the bullied classmate, tolerance and child abuse (Owens & Barber, 1998; Owens, Airaksinen, & Korhonen, 2002). No exact manual was used but the teachers implemented the drama sessions based on two distributed drama handbooks. Home activities included interactional tasks between parent(s) and child. For instance, the child interviewed his or her parent about the school life and bullying when the parent was a school child. Parents’ evenings were based on themes which emerged from parents’ and teachers’ written suggestions. Themes were bullying, family–school cooperation, parental monitoring and common rules at school. Parents’ evenings were tutored by a drama teacher (Annukka Häkämies) who used drama methods to enhance interaction between parents and teachers.

The study was a controlled before-after intervention design and the data were collected by structured questionnaires. Students (n = 190) were recruited from two
primary schools with similar demographics and socio-economics in the Southern Finland and purposively allocated either to an intervention group (drama) or a control group. The response rate was 71 percent. Measures used in the study were e.g. Multisource Assessment of Social Competence scale (MASK) by Junttila, Voeten, & Vauras, (2006) and two scales of School, Wellbeing Profile by Konu (Konu & Lintonen, 2006). Additionally, data were gathered through semi-structured focus group interviews after the program in the drama classes. The main interview questions were:

- What kinds of issues do you recall from the drama program?
- Did you learn something in the drama program?
- If yes, what kinds of things did you learn?

Four focus group interviews were performed with four students (two girls and two boys) per group per class. The research data were analyzed statistically and by using inductive content analysis.

The results showed that empathy skills of the students involved in the drama program were improved whereas those of the control group deteriorated. Anti-social behavior stayed at the low level in the drama group whereas it increased in the control group. The social relationships in the drama group improved more than in the control group. Bullying victimization decreased 20.7 percentage units from pre-test (58.8%) to post-test (38.1%) in the drama group. Qualitative data showed examples of enhanced social and emotional learning, increased understanding of diversity of people, and consequences of bullying. Additionally, drama transformed pro-social behavior.

The results suggest that drama has the potential of learning social and emotional skills at school.
References


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摘要

本文主要敘述一所在芬蘭的小學在二零零七至二零零八年如何實行校本戲劇課程研究計劃及其結果。研究結果反映戲劇富有促進在學兒童在社交及情緒管理能力發展上的潛力。