

# **Enhancing School-aged Children's Social Competence through Educational Drama**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, the role of educational drama was examined as a means of promoting primary school students' social competence. A research study was conducted in 90 public primary school classrooms in Greece. The research data came from 1826 children aged 9 through 11 years (904 boys, 922 girls) in an experimental process of pre-testing and post-testing, using the sociometric nomination procedure of Coie and Dodge (1983). Statistical analysis of research data revealed that: (1) Drama activities have positive effects on students' social competence and (2) the positive effect that educational drama has on students' social competence is not related to the age of the children since the research expectations were finally confirmed in all experimental classrooms. Thus, more attention should be paid to a drama-based curriculum in primary school if the development of students' social competence is to be facilitated.

*Keywords:* educational drama, students, social competence, sociometry, elementary school

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## Theoretical background

### Educational Drama

Educational drama first appeared in the United Kingdom at the end of the nineteenth century and continues to grow all over the world today (Bolton, 1998; Bresler, 2007). It is a way of engaging closely and intimately with the world that allows students of any age to act out imagined roles to explore events, issues, and relationships. Children are involved in situations in which they need to make informed decisions and face the consequences of their actions (Neelands, 2004; Schonmann, 2011).

Educational drama makes use of a fictional situation and characters. This initial make-believe context actively mediates to transcend the ready suspension of disbelief. It is important as a learning tool in which students construct personal, cultural, linguistic, musical, gestural, and other meaning systems to look more deeply into the relationship between real and fictional reality (Berry, 2000; Schneider, Crumpler, & Rogers, 2006). In educational drama, students test their hypotheses and explore their own personal values in an interesting and challenging way, while they are acting out roles and projecting into doubtful “as if” situations (Entwistle, 2013; Niemi, Toom, & Kallioniemi, 2012). Pupils keep two central realities clearly in their minds and place their imaginary worlds inside the real world of their classrooms, constructing common place locations where imagination and reality form two distinct yet interrelated worlds (Davis, 2005; Leonard & Willis, 2008).

Drama education is increasingly popular as a discrete subject although its use in the primary school curriculum is less evident in various countries around the world. Many scholars feel that drama is marginalized and, therefore, leads to a precarious existence on the fringes of the elementary school curriculum (Bresler, 2007; Sherratt & Peter, 2012). Drama in its first feature can be seen primarily as a service tool to support teaching across a wide range of primary curriculum areas and as a medium for personal, social, health and cross-cultural education at the risk of being relegated to

the position of a service subject or teaching methodology (Baldwin, 2008; Clipson-Boyles, 2012). Nowadays, educational drama is not only considered as a methodology, but also as an artistic activity which is situated in an arts curriculum with its own identity and set of aims (O'Toole, Stinson, & Moore, 2009; Taylor, 2012).

Educational drama is chiefly social, because it is developed and implemented collaboratively and it requires unending negotiation and renegotiation of the meaning as pupils continuously interpret and reinterpret their own views compared to the other participants in the drama process (Schneider, Crumpler, & Rogers, 2006). Drama activities have the transformational ability to help pupils to develop skills which will assist them in the social contexts in which they find themselves. The structure of drama enables behavioural, developmental, and other components of social learning to occur simultaneously (Anderson, 2012; Chasen, 2014). Educational drama unifies a multi-layered and interactive approach to social skills in which specific skills are taught, empowering a deeper level of social learning (Dickinson & Neelands, 2012). Drama process naturally accommodates operations which guide self-understanding, other-understanding, and all forms of human growth while recreates naturalistic settings in which concrete skills, displayed through dramatic plot, can be meaningfully enacted, rehearsed and scripted (Chasen & Landy, 2011; Schonmann, 2011).

## **Social competence in children**

Social work, psychiatry, clinical psychology, and education show great interest in social competence, from both developmental and remedial viewpoints, supporting specific programs for diverse populations at risk or socially unskilled. Although the concept of social competence is understood by the scholars, the definitions for social competence are problematic. One possible definition of social competence would be the child's ability to respond flexibly and skilfully to various interpersonal demands in peer interactions (Newman & Newman, 2011; Thomas & Hersen, 2010). Social competence is the basis on which children's expectations about future

cooperation with others are built and on which they unfold perceptions of their own behaviour. Children must develop the ability to interact with others in a more efficient way, in which they appropriately match both self and others' needs and goals with the demands of the social context (Carroll & McCulloch, 2014; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). Emotional experiences are closely related to emotional competence. One of the most important aspects of social competence is the capacity to precisely send and receive emotional messages. Recognizing the other person's emotional state in a social situation demands encoding nonverbal cues including facial expressions, prosody, and gestures (Anderson & Beauchamp, 2012; Weiner, 2013).

The notion of social competence often encloses some extra constructs such as social skills and social interaction. Social skills are behaviours that are repeatable and end-directed. Social interaction presumes that a social goal can be fulfilled through interpersonal interaction using language and nonverbal communication (Jones, 2010; Spitzberg, 2003). Social competence involves accurate perception of the social interaction. Perception during interaction encloses motivation and knowledge on how to perform the skill (Nangle, Hansen, Erdley, & Norton, 2009). Without suitable perception the motivation and capacity to perform the skill will not end up in socially appropriate actions. Additional variables such as empathy, perspective taking, temperament and maturation are included in the elements of social competence (Johnson & Shiffrar, 2013; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007).

During the past several years, a substantial body of empirical evidence has been accumulated suggesting that unless children achieve minimal social competence by the age of six, they have a high probability of being at risk of isolation throughout life (Ladd, 2000; Mayesky, 2014). Moreover, recent research suggests that a child's long-term social and emotional adaptation, academic and cognitive development, and citizenship skills can be enhanced by frequent opportunities of developing and strengthening social competence during childhood (Dowd & Tierney, 2005; Kinsey, 2000). Some studies suggest that a population proportion between 7% and 10% faces problems with social interaction skills and may be considered socially incompetent. There

is also adequate empirical evidence that links social competence to mental and physical health (Davis, Broitman, & Semrud-Clikeman, 2011; Ogden & Hagen, 2014). There are children who find it difficult to decode social cues, facial expressions, and body gestures. There are also children with aggressive and unfriendly behaviour whose acting out behaviours negatively affect their ability to form relationships, and support interpersonal interactions. These children can be rejected socially by their peers frequently and suitable programs should be helping them to develop social competence skills (Eisenberg, Damon, & Lerner, 2006; Gorman, 2001). The following section describes one such intervention program based on educational drama.

## **Method**

### **The present study**

The main aim of this study was to find out if educational drama can be used as a means of developing primary school students' social competence. The research questions formulated for the present study are as follows:

Question 1: Do dramatic activities have positive effect on the development of primary students' social competence?

Question 2: Is the possible positive influence of educational drama related to the age of students?

The study was carried out in 30 Greek primary schools in order to identify the effect of educational drama on primary school students' peer relations. This study used an experimental pre-post comparison group design in 90 public primary school classrooms, which included 45 experimental groups and 45 control groups. Totally, 1826 children, ranging from 9 to 11 years of age, were asked to fill in a questionnaire based on the nomination procedure of Coie and Dodge (1983) in an experimental process of pre and post testing.

## Participants

To ensure that all the potential subjects have an equal chance of being included in either the experimental or the control group, random sampling is done as the first level of sampling, before random assignment to groups. 30 public primary schools in Athens were randomly selected for the first level of sampling. In the second level of sampling, 45 classes in grades 4-6 were randomly selected as experimental teams and 45 classes as control teams. In order to eliminate the potential influence of confounding factors, a control group from each school was randomly selected and was comparable to the experimental group. Randomized assignment of students into the treatment and control groups were used to assure comparability in these groups. The above schools were sharing the same premises and the children of these classes were all middle to upper socio-economic status. The data collected were from 1826 children aged 9 through 11 years (904 boys, 922 girls). The total research sample was divided into two groups. The experimental groups included 913 children and the control groups included 913 children. The number of children in the classrooms varied from 18 to 22 ( $M = 25$ ). Parental consent was obtained for all the children to participate. For further details, Table 1 provides an analytical presentation of the total number of students in both the experimental and the control groups.

Table 1

*Research Sample Composition*

	Experimental Groups (N=15)			Control Groups (N=15)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	152	154	306	151	157	308
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	148	156	304	154	149	303
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	150	153	303	149	153	302
Total	450	463	913	454	459	913

The research treatment was designed to last approximately 16 weeks. Students of the experimental group participated in weekly one-hour drama sessions that were designed to build sequentially on personal development of skills about knowing one's self and understanding relationships. The selection of this schedule was in accordance with the Greek primary school curriculum.

The concretization of the whole experimental plan was made by the teachers of the experimental classes (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000; Smithenry & Gallager-Bolos, 2009). A large part of the dramatic activities, which were included in the intervention program, was connected with social situations, motivating students to express themselves orally and through their full-body movement (Sternberg & Garcia, 2000). These types of drama activities have been indicated as appropriate for students' sensitization, self-growth, interpersonal interaction and the creation of a climate of confidence among them (Swale, 2009). The forms of drama activities were clearly located in the real world, since the ability of such activities is believed to be one of the major contributing factors for providing opportunities for interaction, negotiation and collaboration among students (McMahon, 2002). For example, a drama activity which was included in the intervention program comprised students' effort to narrate a story accompanied by freeze frames dramatic technique. Three characters arranged themselves around the acting space and created three very different freeze frames. A narrator sauntered around them explaining their present situations. Two of the key students then departed the acting area, leaving one behind. That student would now act out how he came to be in the initial freeze frame using a series of freeze frames depicting his past. The narrator would explain what was going on in each frame. The freeze frames were held throughout the whole narration. The same procedure was next repeated by each of the two above-mentioned departing students. At the end, the key characters adopted their original positions but because the audience now knew more about them, their presence aroused more dramatic interest (Young, 2007).

## **Means of data collection**

The research hypothesis consisted of evaluating whether a concrete program, which included goal-oriented drama activities, can positively affect elementary school children's social competence. The basic aim of our study was to use a reliable means of measuring students' social competence. Vaughn and Haager (1994) conceptualized social competence as a higher-order construct that is difficult to measure. As a result, they further divided

social competence into four components: (a) peer relations, (b) social skills, (c) behaviour problems, and (d) social cognition. The research considered above indicates that peer relations constitute one of the basic elements of social competence in young children since they contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007; Wong, 2004).

Sociometry is a technique for describing social relationships which exist between individuals in a group. Among the alternative methods of sociometric assessment, the standard score model of Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982) as it is modified by Coie and Dodge (1983), was adopted in this study due to its widespread use in measuring children's social competence and to its high validity (Maassen & Verschuere, 2005). In effect, the above model is a sociometric nomination procedure in which peers can be informants about a child's social competence. The most common use of the nomination procedure is to assess peer rejection, which is an indication of how disliked a child is in his or her peer group. For this purpose, peers nominate the children whom they most and least like. Each student has a social preference score that is derived by taking the proportion of most liked nominations he received from classmates, minus the proportion of least liked nominations received, controlling for the number of peers who made nominations (Matson, 2011). Coie and Dodge (1983) developed a procedure by which a classification into five sociometric status groups (popular, rejected, neglected, controversial, and average) can be derived from the positive nomination totals (or "liked most" score, LM) and the negative nomination totals (or "liked least" score, LL) received by the group members (Maassen, van der Linden, Goossens, & Bokhorst, 2000). This classification is considered to be two-dimensional; popular, average, and rejected largely correspond to the first dimension (social preference), whereas neglected, average, and controversial correspond to the second dimension (social impact). To examine the reliability of the nomination procedure in this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated. The obtained reliability coefficient for Cronbach's Alpha was .79 for Pre-test and .81 for Post-test.

The nomination procedure of Coie and Dodge (1983) is a method for



chartering relationships within a group based upon the stated preferences of the members. It is a self-report technique in which each group member responds to the same questions posed by the teacher in writing. Like all self-report techniques, it is based on the willingness and honesty of the respondents (Sherman & Fredman, 2013).

The research participants were first tested with the nomination procedure in September. The retest was conducted after an interval of six months, between March and April of the same school year, immediately after the end of the intervention program.

## **Procedures**

At both assessments, testing took place in a classroom setting during normal school hours. Particular emphasis was laid on the questionnaire completion process. Efforts were focused primarily on methodological rigor and meticulous concern for conducting research under nearly identical conditions in all experimental and control classes. The researcher specified a suitable scenario to achieve this goal. According to it, the students were told that the questionnaire was not a test, there were no right answers and their answers would be kept private in order to create a confidential atmosphere. After an introductory explanation, the children were presented with several questionnaires, including the sociometric assessments. The participants were asked to write down from memory positive and negative nominations. The completion of the questionnaire was done by the students in silence after having the questions first read by the researcher. The children were encouraged to ask for help if they encountered difficulties in completing the assessments. Questionnaire completion time was not predetermined; thus, the whole process lasted as long as the last student was able to answer the questions. Through the nomination procedure, each student was asked to nominate the classmates with whom they most liked and least liked to play. More specifically, students were asked to nominate three classroom peers they most liked to play (positive nominations) and three with whom they least liked to play (negative nominations).

## Data analysis

In our study the independent variables were the content of drama activities, the students' physical activities, the frequency of social interaction among school team members through verbal and non-verbal means of communication, the age of children and the lack of control group students' engagement in similar drama activities. In order to better test the impact of the independent variable, which was related to the specific content of drama activities, the teachers applied the same drama themes in all experimental classes.

We used a measure of sociometric status as a method of assessing social competence in children. This technique allows each child to express their personal feelings for others in the form of choices so that they could function with each other. Through the use of this technique, a standard score procedure was invented to establish cut-off values. This standard score model leads to a two-dimensional classification into five status groups: popular, rejected, neglected, controversial, and average (Coie & Dodge, 1983). The popular, average, and rejected categories are positioned along the first dimension, usually referred to as social preference, while the neglected, average, and controversial categories are positioned along the second dimension, usually labeled social impact or visibility. Children who are rejected are those who are low on the social preference scale, and children who are not noticed are those who are low on the social impact scale (Maassen & Verschueren, 2005).

One distinct advantage of the standard score model is the transformation of children's raw positive or negative nomination scores into "z-scores", so that it becomes possible to make normative comparisons of each child in different group size. Coie and Dodge (1983) proposed a classification scheme for nomination-based data where positive and negative nominations are summed to "liked most" (LM) and "liked least" (LL) scores. LM and LL are standardized within the group, converting the children's raw frequency scores to standardized z-scores by computing the means and standard deviations for each of the two general questions "liked most" (LM)

and “liked least” (LL) (Frick, Barry, & Kamphaus, 2010). Next, these standard scores are transformed into two new variables: SP (social preference) and SI (social impact) calculated as their difference and sum, respectively, hence  $SP = z_{LM} - z_{LL}$  and  $SI = z_{LM} + z_{LL}$ . The resulting scores are also standardized. Finally, the subjects are assigned to five sociometric status categories by applying Boolean Logic as follows: (a) popular, persons with standardized Social Preference scores  $> 1$ ,  $z_{LM} > 0$  and  $z_{LL} < 0$ ; (b) rejected, persons with standardized Social Preference scores  $< -1$ ,  $z_{LM} < 0$  and  $z_{LL} > 0$ ; (c) neglected, persons with standardized Social Impact scores  $< -1$ ,  $z_{LM} < 0$  and  $z_{LL} < 0$ ; (d) controversial, persons with standardized Social Impact scores  $> 1$ ,  $z_{LM} > 0$  and  $z_{LL} > 0$ ; and (e) average, all remaining group members. It should be noted here that we chose one standard deviation from the mean as cutoff limits on both dimensions for the formation of all sociometric categories (Maassen & Landsheer, 1998).

The liked-most and liked-least nomination scores received by each student were standardized by using Walsh’s Sociometrics Program and transformed into social preference and social impact scores within each nominating group. These scores were standardized within each class by conversion to z-scores which were in turn used to identify five sociometric groups – popular, average, neglected, rejected, and controversial children.

As mentioned above, the five status groups are the dependent variables of measuring students’ social competence. These are defined and described as follows:

- 1) The first variable is the popular - children, who receive many positive nominations and few negative nominations (high on preference, high on liked most and low on liked least nominations).
- 2) The second variable is the rejected - children who receive few positive nominations and many negative nominations (low on preference, low on liked most and high on liked least nominations).
- 3) The third variable is the neglected - children who receive few positive and negative nominations (low on impact, low on liked most and low on liked least nominations).

- 4) The fourth variable is the controversial - children, who receive many positive and many negative nominations (high on impact, high on liked most and high on liked least nominations).
- 5) The fifth variable is the average-children, who receive an average number of positive and negative nominations (all remaining children).

In order to check the multiple influences of other factors on the dependent variable in our research study, comparable treatment and control groups were created by random assignment that were statistically equivalent to one another. Essentially, this facilitated reliability of the conclusions drawn through the application of the experimental program.

Statistical analysis used in the present investigation was performed with a commercially available statistical package (SPSS, version 22.0 for Windows). Data were subjected to statistical analysis, using Student's *t*-test, comparing a specific difference between the average values of each research variable that has been measured on the same scale, at two different points of times (Kolaczyk, 2009; Landau & Everitt, 2004; Tarling, 2008).

## Results

Statistical analysis of the survey data revealed that our research assumptions were partly confirmed. In all experimental classes the positive effect of the exploratory program is statistically confirmed in three of the five dependent variables reported.

As shown in Tables 2 to 4, the Student's *t*-test revealed a significant difference in favour of the experimental groups. More specifically, in Table 2 the experimental classes in grade 4, as measured by a two-tailed Student *t*-test, showed significant gains to composite scores for three dependent variables: popular ( $M_{Control} = 2.94$ ,  $M_{Expt} = 3.4$ ,  $MD = -.46$ ,  $t = -3.500$ ,  $p < .01$ ); rejected ( $M_{Control} = 3.00$ ,  $M_{Expt} = 2.27$ ,  $MD = .73$ ,  $t = 3.556$ ,  $p < .01$ ); neglected ( $M_{Control} = 3.20$ ,  $M_{Expt} = 2.67$ ,  $MD = .53$ ,  $t = 3.228$ ,  $p < .01$ ). On the contrary, no significant gains were observed in scores for two dependent variables: controversial ( $M_{Control} =$

1.40,  $M_{Expt} = 1.53$ ,  $MD = -.13$ ,  $t = -.807$ ,  $p = .433$ ); average ( $M_{Control} = 9.87$ ,  $M_{Expt} = 10.20$ ,  $MD = -.33$ ,  $t = -1.581$ ,  $p = .136$ ).

Table 2

*T-test for the Control & Experimental Groups' Pre-Test & Post-Test Scores of the Grade 4 Students*

Experimental Group (N=15)	Pre-test		Post-test		MD	SD	t-value	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD				
Popular	2.94	.45	3.40	.63	-.46	.51	-3.500	.004**
Rejected	3.00	.65	2.27	.45	.73	.79	3.556	.003**
Neglected	3.20	.67	2.67	.72	.53	.63	3.228	.006**
Controversial	1.40	.50	1.53	.74	-.13	.63	-.807	.433
Average	9.87	.74	10.20	1.08	-.33	.89	-1.581	.136
Control Group (N=15)	M	SD	M	SD	MD	SD	t-value	p-value
Popular	2.80	.41	2.86	.91	-.06	.79	-.323	.751
Rejected	2.87	.51	2.93	.70	-.06	.70	-.367	.719
Neglected	3.40	.50	3.34	.89	.06	.70	.367	.719
Controversial	1.40	.50	1.53	.51	-.13	.35	-1.367	.164
Average	10.06	.79	9.93	1.38	.13	1.06	.487	.634

Note: \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$

As presented in Table 3, the experimental classes in grade 5, as measured by a two-tailed Student *t*-test, showed significant gains in scores for three dependent variables: popular ( $M_{Control} = 3.00$ ,  $M_{Expt} = 3.40$ ,  $MD = -.40$ ,  $t = -3.055$ ,  $p < .01$ ); rejected ( $M_{Control} = 2.73$ ,  $M_{Expt} = 2.33$ ,  $MD = .40$ ,  $t = 3.055$ ,  $p < .01$ ); neglected ( $M_{Control} = 3.20$ ,  $M_{Expt} = 2.74$ ,  $MD = .46$ ,  $t = 3.500$ ,  $p < .01$ ). On the contrary, no significant gains were observed in scores for two dependent variables: controversial ( $M_{Control} = 1.47$ ,  $M_{Expt} = 1.73$ ,  $MD = -.26$ ,  $t = -1.468$ ,  $p = .164$ ); average ( $M_{Control} = 9.86$ ,  $M_{Expt} = 10.06$ ,  $MD = .20$ ,  $t = -1.871$ ,  $p = .082$ ).

Table 3

*T-test for the Control & Experimental Groups' Pre-Test & Post-Test Scores of the Grade 5 Students*

Experimental Group (N=15)	Pre-test		Post-test		MD	SD	t-value	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD				
Popular	3.00	.53	3.40	.50	-.40	.50	-3.055	.009**
Rejected	2.73	.59	2.33	.48	.40	.50	3.055	.009**
Neglected	3.20	.41	2.74	.45	.46	.51	3.500	.004**
Controversial	1.47	.51	1.73	.59	-.26	.70	-1.468	.164
Average	9.86	.91	10.06	.88	-.20	.41	-1.871	.082
Control Group (N=15)	M	SD	M	SD	MD	SD	t-value	p-value
Popular	3.06	.59	2.80	.67	.26	.70	1.468	.164
Rejected	2.93	.59	3.13	.51	-.20	.56	-1.382	.189
Neglected	3.00	.65	3.06	.70	-.06	.45	-.564	.582
Controversial	1.33	.48	1.53	.59	-.20	.56	-1.382	.189
Average	9.80	.94	9.34	.89	.46	.91	1.974	.068

Note: \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$

As shown in Table 4, the experimental classes in grade 6 as measured by a two-tailed Student *t*-test, showed significant gains in scores for three dependent variables: popular ( $M_{Control} = 2.80, M_{Expt} = 3.33, MD = -.53, t = -3.228, p < .01$ ); rejected ( $M_{Control} = 2.93, M_{Expt} = 2.40, MD = .53, t = 4.000, p < .001$ ); neglected ( $M_{Control} = 3.33, M_{Expt} = 2.93, MD = .40, t = 3.055, p < .01$ ). On the contrary, no significant gains were observed in scores for two dependent variables: controversial ( $M_{Control} = 1.47, M_{Expt} = 1.60, MD = -.13, t = -1.000, p = .334$ ); average ( $M_{Control} = 9.60, M_{Expt} = 9.73, MD = -.13, t = -1.468, p = .164$ ).

Table 4

*T-test for the Control & Experimental Groups' Pre-Test & Post-Test Scores of the Grade 6 Students*

Experimental Group (N=15)	Pre-test		Post-test		MD	SD	t-value	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD				
Popular	2.80	.67	3.33	.48	-.53	.63	-3.228	.006**
Rejected	2.93	.45	2.40	.50	.53	.51	4.000	.001***
Neglected	3.33	.48	2.93	.59	.40	.50	3.055	.009**
Controversial	1.47	.51	1.60	.50	-.13	.51	-1.000	.334
Average	9.60	.82	9.73	.88	-.13	.35	-1.468	.164
Control Group (N=15)	M	SD	M	SD	MD	SD	t-value	p-value
Popular	3.00	.65	3.13	.83	-.13	.74	-.695	.499
Rejected	2.94	.59	3.00	.84	-.06	.59	-.435	.670
Neglected	3.00	.53	2.87	.74	.13	.35	1.468	.164
Controversial	1.46	.51	1.66	.72	-.20	.41	-1.871	.082
Average	9.74	.88	9.80	1.14	-.06	.45	-.564	.582

Note: \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$

As shown in Tables 2 to 4, no significant gain was observed in scores of any dependent variables, at the 1% level of significance, in any of these control classes.

The main research findings show that the answer to the first research question is affirmative. Educational drama is one of the most important contexts for the development of primary school students' social competence. Furthermore, the positive effect that drama can have in children's social competence is not related to the age of students, since the research outcome expectations were finally confirmed in all research samples. Consequently, the independent variable "age of students" does not seem to suspend the positive effect of the independent variable "drama activities" on the development of children's social competence.

## Conclusions

Several studies have shown that it is more difficult to improve children's sociometric status than it is to improve their social behaviours and skills (Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996; Cillessen, Bukowski, & Haselager, 2000). However, the results of our research study confirmed the main research hypothesis. In order to be more concrete, the application of specific intervention strategies in the experimental classes, based on drama activities, facilitated the development of students' social competence. The affirmation of the main research questions is attributed to the drama activities' positive influence on each student individually but also on the school team as a whole; a fact that mediated the students' experience of effective peer relationships. The products of our research investigations raise one additional consideration. The rejected and neglected children, who have participated in dramatic play, received further external assistance to improve their social skills. It is likely, however, that these children can continue to develop specific patterns of behaviour which are suitable for improving their social status in the classroom setting.

Children in educational drama have an opportunity to re-enact their own life experiences and to acquire a different perception of themselves. They also communicate through a different code; they blunt their comprehension of the world; they learn through doing in a productive way; and they are provided with suitable experiences which will help them face their future life (Byron, 1986; Goldstein, 1988; Mayesky, 2012). A lot of researchers point out that the extent to which children become deliberate players, being aware of the drama rules, leads them to the knowledge of their own identity, to the growth of their self-monitoring function and self-concept in the flow of playful interaction (Bolton, 1998; Walker, 2007). In educational drama children impersonate characters and shape the perception of their own attitude as this is differentiated through their role in their play (Jackman, 2011; Stone & Farberman, 1986). Educational drama helps children enter their world imaginatively, develop their autonomy, extend their sovereignty and develop a healthy sense of their self (Bräuer, 2002; Courtney, 1989; McCaslin, 1984).

Several recent studies show that if children are encouraged to strengthen their self-image, they feel responsible for their actions and they believe in their own abilities (Marion, 2011; Rosengren, 2005). More specifically, according to research findings, children's participation in educational drama enables them to realize their abilities and to develop their potential by building their self-respect (Bridgeman, 1981; Hayes, 2012). Children with positive self-perception are encouraged to develop healthy interpersonal relations and maintain the quality of their faculty for successful professional and social incorporation (Nicotera, 1993; Rosenberg, 1986; Wigfield & Karpathian, 1991). In educational drama, it is easier for students to be led to a fertile exchange of their own opinions in order to improve their collaboration and to share common experiences and ideas, a fact that encourages the establishment and improvement of their relationships (Doctoroff, 1997; Koster, 2014). Consequently, through children's interaction with their peers in drama, each child may be more sensitised to the needs, wishes and attitudes of their classmates (Boldstein, 1993; Narey, 2008).

One of the most significant predictors of social popularity or social rejection is the way children interact together. For peers, these behaviours appear to become important sources of information on how they should interact with a particular student (Damon & Lerner, 2008; McCartney, 2011). Social competence in childhood is essential to concurrent and future psychosocial adjustment. For example, Rubin and Coplan (1998) found that early social withdrawal is a strong predictor of peer rejection, social anxiety, loneliness, depression, and negative self-esteem in later childhood and adolescence. Early peer relationship problems may have a negative psychological impact on the child's later personal, social and emotional development. Unpopular children with an especially adverse prognosis for extended periods of time may face problems as adults (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998; Kupersmidt & Coie, 1990). Some children are exceedingly shy and withdrawn and they are more likely to suffer depression and anxiety as adults (Rubin, LeMare, & Lollis, 1990). However, preventive interventions that targeted specific problems such as social rejection and isolation were found to be especially effective when they are undertaken early in a child's



life (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2014; Nevid, 2012).

Drama activities allow children to experiment with, rehearse, and recreate actions and words in a social context. Through educational drama and dramatic play, children develop key cognitive skills, social behaviors, and aesthetic appreciation (Hunt, McAvoy, & Water, 2015; Winston, 2000). Drama group activities have a much more significant influence on children's development, helping them to learn and practice new social skills and become acquainted with the social norms and processes involved in interpersonal relationships (Hughes, 2010; Mayesky, 2012). There is consensus that sociodramatic play reflects and influences children's social competence because pretense often involves negotiations with others and requires a certain level of competence. Several studies have reported relationships between social competence and sociodramatic play (Connolly & Doyle, 1984; Connolly, Doyle, & Reznick, 1988; Howes & Matheson, 1992). Other studies have indicated that pretend play versus non-pretend play context is characterized by superior social functioning on specific social behaviors (Awbrey, Longo, Lynd, & Payne, 2008; Connolly, 1980; Uren & Stagnitti, 2009). Researchers have found that creative drama and dramatic play are valuable techniques for teaching social studies in the elementary grades and they may have a positive effect on productive and cooperative behavior in the classroom (Erbaya & Dođru, 2010; McKinney & Golden, 1973; Pinciotti, 1992). Whiteman and Nielsen (1986) conducted an experiment to evaluate drama as a method for teaching social work. They found that experimental group students who were actively involved in drama activities had significantly more positive attitudes than control group students. Finally, various studies have shown that creative drama appears to have a positive effect on self-concept, empathy skills, social skills and relationships, anti-social behavior and problem behavior (Freeman, Sullivan, & Fulton, 2003; Joronen, Håkämies, & Astedt-Kurki, 2011; Joronen, Håkämies, & Astedt-Kurki, 2012).

The results of this study have suggested some important implications for the field of children's social competence. The study sample included many students of different cultures and backgrounds. It should be mentioned at this

point that systematic within-family environmental influences and cultural contexts also affect social competence. What is good or effective social behaviour is a relative term and can dramatically vary from one culture to another (Peoples & Bailey, 2012; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). A key aspect of general cross-cultural orientation is the comprehension of the culturally relative nature of beliefs, normative social behaviour and other information which is indispensable to successful adjustment and to interpersonal interaction among people in a culture (Ratner, 2008; Sommers, 2012). One of the key aspects of increasing children's social competence is the growth of cultural self-awareness, particularly of one's values, prejudices and beliefs. Educational drama incorporates the kinaesthetic expression and encourages transformational learning. The richness of the dramatic activities creates a space where students can reflect on their own cultural identity (Anderson, 2012; Neelands, 2009). Drama classroom fosters cultural understanding and supports students to bridge their differences and find ways to learn from each other and one another's company (Bauer, Liou, & Sokolik, 2012; Bornstein, 2010). It is the teachers' responsibility to create a drama classroom community where children can comprehend and estimate the various cultural values, beliefs, and behavioural modes (Day & Gu, 2014; Johnson, 2015).

The potential limitations of our study are related to the method for assessing social competence. In order to provide new directions for future research in this field, we suggest that future studies can use a different assessment method and examine gender differences in social competence. Since the children's interpersonal competence is associated with different age groups and the family environment, future research studies should probably include children from different socioeconomic status backgrounds and different age ranges.

The Greek educational system in recent years continues to focus on the cognitive rather than the interpersonal and aesthetic dimension of children's life rendering them passive recipients of received wisdom. In the light of recent scholarship in the field of educational drama, particular emphasis was placed on the importance of its educational value in promoting children's

social competence. Policies related to the teachers' education and training must be reviewed to include creative drama work. Educational drama should first exist within its own right as a separate discipline with its own timetabled lessons and not merely as an artistic learning tool. The need for a drama-based curriculum is considered to be the most urgent in the Greek educational system and all over the world.

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此為上文摘要中譯

# 以教育性戲劇提高學齡兒童的 社交能力

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## 摘要

本文討論希臘公立小學學童一項運用社會計量提名方法 (Coie and Dodge, 1983) 進行的研究, 藉此探討教育性戲劇在提高小學生社交能力的作用。該研究的對象是1826名年齡由9至11歲的學童, 當中男童佔904人, 女童佔922人, 他們來自不同希臘公立小學共90個班別。參與研究的學童在進行戲劇活動前和後分別填寫社會計量提名問卷來測試社交能力。研究數據分析顯示: (1) 戲劇活動給學童的社交能力帶來正面的影響; (2) 所有參與實驗的班別, 均顯示這正面的影響, 可見與學童年齡這因素無關。綜觀研究結果, 要提高小學生的社交能力, 實在應該要更重視以戲劇為本的小學課程。

**關鍵詞:** 教育性戲劇、學生、社交能力、社會計量學、小學

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