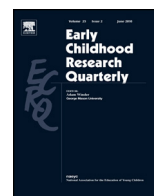




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Early Childhood Research Quarterly



# Reliability and validity of a measure of preschool children's theatre arts skills: The Preschool Theatre Arts Rubric

Amy Susman-Stillman<sup>a,\*</sup>, Michelle Englund<sup>a</sup>, Chloe Webb<sup>b</sup>, Amanda Grenell<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Center for Early Education and Development, Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota, 1954 Buford Avenue #425, St. Paul, MN, 55108, United States

<sup>b</sup> Department of Educational Psychology, University of Minnesota, 250 Education Science Building, 56 East River Road, Minneapolis, MN, 55455, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 1 February 2017

Received in revised form

23 November 2017

Accepted 9 December 2017

Available online xxx

#### Keywords:

Creative drama

Storytelling/storyacting

Observational assessment

Measurement

### ABSTRACT

The increasing attention to arts integration in early childhood education necessitates assessment of arts skills in order to measure the impact and the mechanisms by which the arts can affect early childhood development. The purpose of this study is to describe and provide initial validation of a newly developed observational measure of preschool children's theatre arts skills, the Preschool Theatre Arts Rubric (PTAR), which measures five preschool theatre arts skills: independence in role play, use of face and gesture, focus/persistence, collaboration, and theatricality. We present findings regarding internal consistency, inter-rater reliability, construct validity (convergent and divergent), and sensitivity to change of the PTAR using a sample of 158 ethnically and linguistically diverse, low-income preschoolers participating in an early childhood theatre arts program using storytelling and storyacting (ST/SA) in their preschool classrooms. Findings indicate that the PTAR demonstrates acceptable internal consistency and interrater reliability; convergent and divergent validity with a norm-referenced measure of expressive language, an authentic measure of narrative expression, a teacher-rated measure of learning related social skills, and a measure of storytelling quality; and significant sensitivity to change. While more research is needed, results suggest that the PTAR can be reliably and validly used to observe preschool children's theatre arts skills in research, classroom, and programmatic contexts. Findings suggest that theatre arts skills are valid indicators of expressive language skills and to a degree, learning-related social behaviors.

© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Theatre arts, or creative drama, traditionally part of best practices in early childhood education (Furman, 2000; Wee, 2009), is experiencing a rebirth as an integral component of early childhood education. The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards recently developed a set of core theatre arts standards to promote coherence and quality in arts education for preK to 12th grade, which focus on creating, presenting, responding, and connecting (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). State early learning standards, which describe the expected knowledge and skills of young children as they enter kindergarten, include critical skills that are fostered through theatre arts activities, such as listening, speaking, imagining, inventing, creating, and critically responding

(Colorado Preschool Drama and Theatre Arts Academic Standards, 2009; Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress, 2017). Use of dramatic techniques in preschool classrooms, such as improvised storytelling, or storytelling/storyacting (ST/SA; Paley, 1990) is being promoted around the country (Cooper, 2009; McNamee, 2015; Sachs, Mardell, & Boni, 2014). An intentional emphasis on integrating theatre arts into early childhood education provides promising opportunities to enhance early education program quality, engage early learners, improve children's school readiness skills, including those of special populations of early learners (English Language Learners; Greenfader, Brouillette, & Farkas, 2015), and reduce the achievement gap (Mardell, 2013).

Currently, however, measurement of children's skills in the context of theatre arts programming is generally of non-arts skills, such as oral narrative skills (Lee, Patall, Cawthorn, & Steingut, 2015; Mages, 2008). There is a dearth of sound measurement tools available to appraise relevant arts skills, which hampers the ability to understand the processes by which theatre arts may affect chil-

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [asusman@umn.edu](mailto:asusman@umn.edu) (A. Susman-Stillman).

dren's development, and maximize the potential benefits of arts integration. In this study, we describe and provide initial reliability and validity data for the Preschool Theatre Arts Rubric (PTAR), an observational tool developed to assess children's preschool theatre arts skills in the context of storytelling/storyacting (ST/SA; Paley, 1990). The PTAR represents a first effort to measure children's theatre arts skills in the context of early childhood classroom-based theatre arts programming.

### 1.1. The development of preschool theatre arts skills

Preschool theatre arts skills emerge in the context of play, or "drama in its natural state" (Mages, 2008, p. 127). Children's dramatic activities have been conceptualized on a spectrum with children's pretend play at one end and theatre or "communication between actors and an audience" on the other end (Way, 1967, as cited in Mages, 2008, p. 127), and theatre techniques as tools that enhance children's natural proclivity toward creative play (Youth Stages, 2016). Most researchers agree that all types of play are intrinsically motivating, enjoyable, have an element of imagination, and are flexible in that pretend actions can be different than real ones (Krasnor & Pepler, 1980). In early childhood classrooms, opportunities for dramatic experiences are actualized through play-based and drama-based activities and described with multiple terms, including creative drama (Furman, 2000; Mages, 2008), sociodramatic play (Elias & Berk, 2002), guided play (Gupta, 2009), make-believe play (Berk & Meyers, 2013), drama-based pedagogy (Lee et al., 2015), storytelling drama (Wright, Diener, & Kemp, 2013), and ST/SA (Hynes-Berry, 2012; Mardell, 2013; Paley, 1990). In this paper, our focus on dramatic play within the context of ST/SA aligns most closely with the concept of guided play. Guided play "incorporates adult-scaffolded learning objectives but remains child-directed" (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013, p. 105). The collaboration between adult and child during guided play is an important difference between spontaneous pretend play or free play and guided play. When we refer to theatre arts skills, we are referring to a set of skills that children use to participate in what is commonly referred to as creative drama or "improvised guided enactment" (Mages, 2008, p. 127) and include language, cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills.

The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards Board defined what preschool children should be able to know and do when they participate in theatre arts activities, such as engaging in dramatic play experiences, recalling an emotional response, telling a short story, and understanding that imagination is fundamental to dramatic play/guided dramatic experience (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). Demonstrating these standards requires children to use preschool cognitive, language, social, emotional, and motor competencies. The skills of a preschooler engaging in theatre arts overlap with the skills of a preschool early learner.

With the emergence of pretend play during the early toddler period, children show the beginnings of theatre arts skills. These first pretend actions involve children acting "as if" with objects such as bringing an empty spoon to the mouth to pretend to eat (Fein, 1981). Around 24 months of age, children begin to understand the symbolic relation between objects and their substitutions (e.g., using a spoon as a phone) and start to combine object substitutions while playing (Carlson & Zelazo, 2008; Sachet & Mottweiler, 2013). They also begin to engage in role-play through acting on dolls and stuffed animals (Sachet & Mottweiler, 2013) and begin to understand the pretend actions of others and the imaginary outcomes that these pretend actions can have (Harris, Kavanaugh, Wellman, & Hickling, 1993; Lillard & Witherington, 2004).

During the preschool years, children become better able to reflect on the relation between symbols and their referents and begin to understand irony and sarcasm (Carlson & Zelazo, 2008).

Their pretense becomes more decontextualized and distanced from reality and they begin to substitute objects that are different from the original object in function and appearance (Carlson & Zelazo, 2008; Fein, 1981). During the preschool period, pretend play is in "high season" (Singer & Singer, 1992) since children begin to engage in complex social pretend play, or sociodramatic play, in which they act out roles with others (Howes & Matheson, 1992). Children's executive function (EF) or self-regulation is also rapidly improving; children are able to practice their EF skills in the context of pretend play, such as being flexible enough to pretend that one object stands for another, taking turns with a play partner during role-play, and following certain rules based on the pretend context (Berk & Meyers, 2013). Similarly, their language skills become increasingly complex; pretend play provides opportunities to enhance vocabulary, tailor speech to a particular role, and practice conflict resolution skills (Ervin-Tripp, 1991). They are also developing a sense of physical presence, such as where their bodies are in space. The cognitive, social-emotional, executive function, and motor skill changes occurring during the preschool period facilitate the development of both theatre arts skills and early learning skills.

Engaging in dramatic play also promotes early childhood skills (Fleer, 2014; Lillard et al., 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) posited that dramatic or pretend play is a major source of developmental growth for preschool age children; through dramatic activity, children use imagination, learn to appreciate the function of rules, and develop self-regulation skills. Furthermore, through play children become more deeply engaged, reflective, socially skilled, and mature in terms of their interactions and personal skills. "In play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions, and the voluntary formation of real-life plans and volitional motives—all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102). More recently, cultural-historical perspectives that build on Vygotskian theory (Fleer, 2014) argue that role-play is central to understanding children and contemporary societies, and is viewed as a cultural tool promoting children's development. Children's role play actions serve as a window into their understanding of their world, a strategy for adults to cultivate particular ways of thinking and behaving, and a strategy for children to practice rules and behaviors and explore ideas.

Indeed, play and its dramatic underpinnings have been used in the early childhood classroom to promote an array of key early childhood skills ranging from literacy (Mages, 2008) to creativity (Yeh & Li, 2008) to social and self-awareness and self-regulation (Barnett et al., 2008; Blair & Raver, 2014; Bodrova & Leong, 1996, 2001, 2007; Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, & Munro, 2007). There is a nascent literature examining the impact of preschool theatre arts on young children's development. Findings are promising, with a handful of studies demonstrating the impact of guided drama training and activities (including ST/SA) on oral narrative abilities of English-speaking preschoolers (Cooper, Capo, Mathes, & Gray, 2007; Lee et al., 2015; Mages, 2008; Nicolopoulou, Cortina, Ilgaz, Cates, & de Sá, 2015; Phillips, Gorton, Pinciotti, & Sachdev, 2010; Podlozny, 2000) and non-English-speaking preschoolers (Greenfader, Brouillette, & Farkas, 2015; Krueger, Orton, & Bays, 2013a; Krueger, Orton, & Bays, 2013b). A few studies also find positive effects of theatre arts education on social competence (Menzer, 2015; Nicolopoulou, Barbosa de Sa, Ilgaz, & Brockmeyer, 2009; Nicolopoulou, Cortina, Ilgaz, Cates, & de Sá, 2015). These studies suggest that the integration of theatre arts and early childhood activities may be fruitful for supporting preschool children's development.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11002143>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11002143>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)