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CREATIVE DRAMA AS AN INTERVENTION TO ENHANCE SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

SHIRLEY N. CERBO



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**CREATIVE DRAMA AS AN INTERVENTION TO ENHANCE SOCIAL AND
COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM**

SHIRLEY N. CERBO

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(SPECIAL EDUCATION)**



**FACULTY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

2019





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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the use of creative drama as intervention to enhance social and communication skills of learners with autism. Objectives of the study were to identify the social and communication skills of learners with autism, develop a creative drama module, determine the effectiveness of the activities in the module and identify the changes in the skills of learners with Autism spectrum Disorder (ASD) as they undergo the activities. The case study was conducted at Jose Fabella Memorial School (JFMS), Mandaluyong City, Philippines. Purposive sampling was used involving six learners with ASD whose age ranged from 8 to 11 years old. Samples also involved six parents and six teachers. Data were collected through interviews, observations, checklists and field notes. Inter-rater checklist results were taken from the six teachers' and the researcher's responses. Data were analyzed using thematic and narrative analysis. The themes that emerged from the interviews were interaction with others, showing appropriate behavior and giving appropriate verbal response. Findings showed learners' social skills difficulties such as disinterest in people, a choice of solitary activity over contact with others, doing socially inappropriate things, and the inability to readily exchange social smile. Communication skills difficulties were lack of initiative to talk with others, inability to ask questions and take turns in conversations, lack of clarity in speaking and lack of eye contact and facial expression. Most activities in the drama module were useful in enhancing, in varying degrees, the social and communication skills of the learners. In conclusion, creative drama could be used as intervention to enhance social and communication skills of children with ASD. Implication of the study provides significant input and information on the use of drama activities as an alternative intervention to help improve social and communication skills of learners with ASD.





DRAMA KREATIF SEBAGAI INTERVENSI UNTUK MENINGKATKAN KEMAHIRAN SOSIAL DAN KOMUNIKASI KANAK-KANAK AUTISME

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penggunaan drama kreatif sebagai intervensi untuk meningkatkan kemahiran sosial dan komunikasi pelajar autisme. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti kemahiran sosial dan komunikasi pelajar dengan autisme,, membangunkan modul drama kreatif, menentukan keberkesanan aktiviti modul dan mengenal pasti perubahan kemahiran pelajar *Autism Spectrum Disorder* (ASD) ketika mereka menjalani aktiviti tersebut. Kajian kes dilakukan di Jose Fabella Memorial School (JFMS), Kota Mandaluyong, Filipina. Persampelan bertujuan yang digunakan melibatkan enam pelajar ASD yang berumur di antara 8 hingga 11 tahun. Sampel juga melibatkan enam ibu bapa dan enam guru. Data dikumpulkan melalui temu bual, pemerhatian, senarai semak dan nota lapangan. Keputusan senarai semak *inter-rater* diambil daripada enam guru dan jawapan penyelidik. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dan naratif. Tema-tema yang muncul daripada temu bual adalah interaksi dengan orang lain, menunjukkan tingkah laku yang sesuai dan memberi tindak balas lisan yang sesuai. Penemuan menunjukkan masalah kemahiran sosial pelajar seperti tidak menunjukkan minat terhadap orang, memilih aktiviti bersendirian yang tidak berhubung dengan orang lain, melakukan perkara-perkara sosial yang tidak sesuai, dan ketidakupayaan untuk bertukar senyuman sosial dengan mudah. Kesukaran kemahiran komunikasi adalah tidak mempunyai inisiatif untuk bercakap dengan orang lain, ketidakupayaan untuk bertanya dan mengambil giliran dalam perbualan, percakapan yang tidak lancar, hubungan mata (*eye contact*) yang tidak banyak dan ekspresi wajah. Kebanyakan aktiviti dalam modul drama sangat berguna bagi penambahbaikan pelbagai peringkat, kemahiran sosial dan komunikasi pelajar. Sebagai kesimpulan, drama kreatif boleh digunakan sebagai intervensi untuk meningkatkan kemahiran sosial dan komunikasi anak-anak ASD. Implikasi kajian memberikan input dan maklumat penting mengenai penggunaan aktiviti drama sebagai campur tangan alternatif untuk membantu meningkatkan kemahiran sosial dan komunikasi pelajar ASD. Implikasi kajian memberikan input yang signifikan dan maklumat mengenai penggunaan aktiviti drama sebagai intervensi alternatif untuk membantu meningkatkan kemahiran sosial dan komunikasi pelajar ASD.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABA	Applied Behavior Analysis
ADDIE	Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASP	Autism Society of the Philippines
CARS	Childhood Autism Rating Scale
CBT	Cognitive-Behavioral Training
CDD	Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
CSN	Children with Special Needs
CWA	Children with Autism
DepEd	Department of Education
DSS MMD	Diagnostics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
DTT	Discrete Trial Training
EAHCA	Education of All Handicapped Children Act
FAPE	Free and Appropriate Public Education
HFA	High Functioning Autism
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
JFMS	Jose Fabella Memorial School
LA	Learner with Autism
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
LSEN	Learners with Special Educational Needs





NCDA	National Council for Disabilities Affair
PDD-NOS	Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified
PECS	Picture Exchange Communication System
PLA	Parent of Learner with Autism
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLT	Social Learning Theory
SPED	Special Education
SSTP	Social Skills Training Program
STR	Student-teacher Relationships
ZPD	Zone of proximal development
SULP	Social Use of Language Program
TEACCH	Discrete-Trial Training, Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication related handicapped Children
TLA	Teacher of Learner with Autism





APPENDIX LIST

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The implementation of Republic Act 7277, also known as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, an Act providing for the rehabilitation, self-development and self-reliance of disabled persons and their integration into the mainstream of society has been beneficial in the development of programs and services for children with special needs (CSN). In response to its legislation, the Department of Education (DepEd) has directed all school divisions in the country to establish Special Education Centers for the effective delivery of special education services nationwide. The Department of Education is has focused on new perspectives and directions in special education that are geared towards meeting the needs of the disadvantaged children against the persistent challenges and demands of the 21st century and the K to 12 Curriculum.





A number of government elementary schools in the Philippines have Special Education Programs that cater to the needs of the exceptional learners, through the DepEd Concept of “school within a school” or “Silahis Center”, This is a response to the Inclusive Education thrust agreed upon by 92 countries in the World Conference on Special Needs in Education in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. Samples of the population were identified from one of the public schools that adhered to the aim of inclusive education. The study was conducted at the Jose Fabella Memorial School (JFMS), one of the oldest schools in the Philippines which catered to the needs of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Special education programs have implemented certain behavior modification strategies that have been proven to be useful in teaching children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. These are Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Discrete-Trial Training, Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication related handicapped Children (TEACCH), and Social Stories. These strategies have its own merits as manifested by its popular use among public and private institutions all over the country. However, in the Philippines, the special education teachers notably in the public school system have problems in the use of the given behavior modification strategies. The problems range from a lack of clear knowledge that lead to incorrect implementation, to the reality that no two children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are the same; hence one modification could work for one, but not for the other. There are times when a particular behavior modification strategy might work for some, but not for all the learners with ASD. This necessitates considering other strategies that could be helpful in developing social and communication skills of learners with ASD. One area which has been proven to develop self-confidence, social and





communication skills among typically developing individuals is the area of creative drama. According to Watanabe (2011) drama as a method refers to a process of learning wherein the teacher consciously incorporates activities to carry the learners. He likens dramatic activities to a vehicle for traveling in different worlds, through the realm of the imagination. Play and drama activities reduce fear, increase fun, and make interaction accessible; thus increasing the potential of having positive outcomes among children with autism, in the form of developing their social and communication skills (Seach, 2007).

Having good social and communication skills is essential in developing success in life. Children learn to communicate by watching and listening to their parents and sibling, and then mimicking their words and actions. the more parents communicate with their children, the earlier and quicker they will develop these skills. Children, likewise, develop social and interpersonal skills through interaction and play with siblings and friends. Good communication and social skills make learners feel at ease in social situations, where they will find it easier to strike up conversations with peers, and make new friends. Through these relationships, they will also develop their ability to empathize and interpret non-verbal communication cues. Mastering these two essential skills in life will make learners navigate and understand this world better (Campbell, Hansen & Nangle, 2010).

Not all children develop their social and communication skills to the optimum. Children with special needs (CSN) develop in an atypical manner. Some of them have difficulty in developing communication and social skills; thus negatively affecting their ability to successfully relate to the current environment they are in. Failure to develop





essential skills impacts their holistic development. Many professionals are consulted to address the varied needs of the CSN. Most of the time, interventions are conducted in the clinics of the professionals. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is the requirement in federal law that states that students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA Federal Law, 2004). Children with exceptionalities have as much right as their typically developing peers to achieve their potential and to live a life that is beneficial to their development.

Among the various groups of children with exceptionality categorized by



05 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), children with Autism Spectrum

Disorder have been identified as having difficulty in developing social and communication skills. Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is a set of neurodevelopmental disorders, which includes autistic disorder, Asperger syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). Learners under this category are characterized by abnormalities in any or all of the following domains: language use, reciprocal social interactions, and/or a pattern of restricted interests or stereotyped behaviors. Over the past few decades, prevalence estimates for ASD have been increasing at ~5/10,000 in the 1960s, and with the current estimates of as high as 1/88 (Newschaffer et al., 2007).

Common understanding of autism is that it is a developmental disability that is greatly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction. It generally





manifests before age three, and subsequently adversely affects a child's educational performance. Additional characteristics that are often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. (Sec. 300.8 Child with a disability, IDEA 2004).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSSMMD) (2013) recognized four main sub-types of autism. These are 1) Autistic Disorder, which is also known as autism, childhood autism, early infantile autism, Kanner's syndrome or infantile psychosis; 2) Asperger Syndrome, which is also known as Asperger's disorder or simply Asperger's; 3) Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, which is also known as CDD, dementia infantilis, disintegrative psychosis, or Heller's syndrome; and 4) Pervasive Developmental Disorder (Not Otherwise Specified), also known as PDD (NOS) or atypical autism. Rett syndrome, which manifests autistic-like symptoms, used to be another category but is now no longer considered to be a sub-type of autism. The four main sub-types of autism were further dissolved into one diagnosis, which is the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as stated in the fifth edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5 (2013).

As an educator who trains future teachers, and as an advocate of the rights of learners with special needs, the researcher finds inspiration in doing a research that focuses on the empowerment of this specific group of CSN, the children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Of the different categories of exceptionalities identified by the Individuals with





Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), individuals in the Autism Spectrum Disorder have difficulty in socialization and communication. Some of the learners under the ASD category have average to above-average mental functioning, as in the case of those with Asperger. This enables them to be mainstreamed in regular schools and learn side by side with the typically developing children. However, they still show behaviors that manifest the same deficits in communication skills and social functioning as those in the other types of ASD. Notable deficits are on the area of pragmatic language. This involves the social use or function of language in conversation and turn-taking. It also involves nonverbal communication that is used in social interaction like gestures, facial expression, eye contact, and/or body posture (DSM -5, American Psychiatric Association, (2013). Research tells us that social and communication skills are important for functioning in a variety of settings (Campbell et al.,2010). Failure to develop these two essential skills could lead to problems in the future environment of the child.

Various behavior modification strategies have been conducted to develop the social skills of learners with ASD, notable are the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), the Social Skills Training (SST) and the use of Social Stories. However, it was noted that the programs established to develop social skills of AS/HFA are still in the infancy level (Rao, Beidel & Murray, 2008). Each of the programs and approaches offers interesting and effective ways for social skills development. Although these approaches have been widely used, these do not totally address the need for better social involvement among children with ASD; thus, there is still a need to develop more approaches to address this specific concern.





Research in special education has provided startling advances that have led to improved practices that have tremendously improved the lives, learning, and competencies of persons with and without disabilities. However, common to research in all disciplines is the gap between initial discoveries and their becoming a part of routine practices (Lee, Chou & Feng 2017). They stated some primary reasons that led to this gap. These are the disconnectedness of the research and practice communities; the limited relevance of educational research; the inability to articulate manageable research-validated interventions; and the lack of opportunities for professional development. It is high time for educators and practitioners to do something to propose a solution to bridge the current gap between research and practice in special education. Additional research-based intervention practices are in order to provide new strategies to address this concern.



Since new studies on relevant intervention strategies are encouraged, the research would undertake a study on such topic for ASD learners. Through this study, the researcher would seek to identify the social and communication skills profile of the ASD children. From the result of the profiling the researcher would come up with activities to develop the social and communication skills of children with ASD. The creative drama activities will make use of the Building Blocks Model of Creative Dramatics. The model was developed by Brian Way in 1999. His model involves a hierarchical series of stepping stones of techniques in Creative Drama for the use of educators in facilitating dramatic expression with learners. The output of the study is a Creative Drama Module that can be used by teachers in addressing social and communication problems of learners.





1.2 Background of the Study

1.2.1 Education Plan for ASD in the Philippines

In the Philippines, children with autism (CWA) are accepted based on chronological age, in an inclusive setting with the neurotypical students, without consideration to their limitations and type of disabilities (Dizon et al 2011). However, not all schools adhere to inclusive setting. Other schools either mainstream CWA in the regular classes, with provision for shadow teachers or pullout sessions to address the need for socialization and behavior modification. Another placement option is integration, where CWA are in special classes, and at some time of the day will join the neurotypical learners. Different non-governmental organizations help in supporting the cause of CWA; notable of which is the Autism Society of the Philippines (ASP), a national, non-profit organization dedicated to the well-being of persons with ASD, work with the government and private individuals in spearheading activities for the benefit of the learners with autism. The ASP has been in the forefront of providing services and training to families living with autism. Seminar-workshops and lecture fora for teachers, parents, and the public, are conducted to provide awareness on Autism. An aim of Special Education (SPED) in the Philippines is to maximize the potential of every child with disability to enable him/her to have opportunities for a full and happy life (SPED Division, Department of Education (DepEd) Philippines Memorandum). New approaches in developing capabilities of CSN are in the fore as regards the goals of the DepEd.





1.2.2 Education Plan for ASD According to IDEA

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was legislated in 1975 and was reauthorized in 1990 as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law gives guarantee for the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students with disabilities. It also mandates the placement of children with special needs (CSN) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), to enable them to make progress toward achieving their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals. This means that as much as possible, learners with disabilities should be educated with the typically developing children. IDEA likewise mandates that students with disabilities must have an IEP, which describes the student's current level of functioning, his or her goals for the year, and how these goals will be supported through special services. The challenges connected with the effect of ASD in many key aspects of development immensely impact education and learning. Thus, learners with ASD are considered to have disability as specified in the IDEA guidelines and are legally entitled to an IEP plan and appropriate professional services and accommodations from the school to help them achieve their developmental and academic goals.

Before the advent of the many specialized professionals that deal with the different concerns of CSN in their respective clinics, interventions were done in the schools. One of the first schools that advocated the model of educational therapy is the Dubnoff School in North Hollywood, California. The school which opened in 1948, caters to the needs of learners who were found to be unfit to be admitted in the public schools. Most of the





learners suffer from emotional problems, perceptual problems, specific learning disabilities, minimal brain dysfunction, hyperactivity, or autism. The Dubnoff School was one of the early institutions for learning that supported the cause of persons with disabilities.

1.2.3 Creative Drama as an intervention for ASD

Creative drama is the use of creative and expressive process of art to enhance physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being of individuals through art, music, dance movement and drama (Orkibi, 2014). Through the process of creation, imagination, playfulness, movement and dramatic structure, verbal barriers are connected. Drama, particularly, makes use of movements, of using the voice and the body to create and to express. According to Wheeler (2013), drama is a type of creative arts therapy that enables a person to explore emotional difficulties through a variety of activities that involve games, writing and learning scripts, improvisation exercises, or activities using puppets and masks. Drama can involve group or individual activities. Drama aims to enable a person to understand himself/herself better; to solve a problem; to explore and overcome unhealthy behavior; and to develop social skills (Corbett et al., 2010; Loper (2010). Using the art of pretend, drama activities can almost act like a practice ground for persons who have low self-confidence. By providing a safe and secure environment, drama therapy enables individuals to act out the way they would like to be (in this case more confident) helping them to learn skills they can put into practice in real life (Counseling Directory, 2016).





Drama therapy is predominantly a group-based therapy which requires teamwork and communication. Thus; this enables one who has difficulty communicating with or trusting others to develop such skills in a safe and therapeutic environment.

Drama for children generally uses Creative Dramatics where improvisational activities and theater games enable the learners to express themselves and to socialize. It encourages interaction and collaboration which are essential in the development of social skills. According to Ulubey (2018), one notable importance of drama, especially for children, is the development of empathy. Through the study of the lives of different characters in plays, children get to learn about them, and learn to empathize to them. Being empathetic with someone is incredibly valuable for developing our communications skills.



As Mc Caslin (2006) in her book *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond* shared, drama is different from other art forms because drama fully involves all aspects of a person's being: intellectual, emotional, physical, verbal, and social. As a communal art, drama teaches individuals to be a team and to cooperate with each other. Likewise, children learn to become more sensitive to the concerns and standards of other people through role playing activity.

Creative Drama, although a relatively new phenomenon, is an attempt to use drama for functional purposes as an educational tool (Okorokwo, 2011). Furthermore, Onder (2012) reiterated that creative drama is concerned with helping children to gain mastery over their intellectual and linguistic powers, to have discovery of their own selves, to develop awareness of other people and situations around them, and to develop sensitivity



towards them. Van Volkenburg (2015) in her research, mentioned that in the study on two high school students with AS mainstreamed in a regular class conducted by Kempe and Tissot (2012), it was found out that the drama process created a “safe space” for the students to have the opportunity to practice social skills that might not have been present in a more traditional learning environment. The study also unexpectedly found imagination skills in the students that had previously not been identified.

Creative Dramatics, although not yet a well-researched field as regards its use for intervention of children with ASD (Van Volkenburg, 2015), has been through many researches to have helped in the remediation of different conditions. It is the purpose of this study to find out its effect on the socialization and communication skills enhancement of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), manifest deficits in communication and social skills (Bauminger-Zviely, 2013). This makes fitting in and living harmoniously with the neurotypical learners difficult. The deficits make it hard for them to fit in because even if they are mainstreamed, the typically developing classmates find them aloof and disinterested. Unnatural demeanor and awkward movements make learners with ASD easy targets for bullying. Likewise, deficits in social and communication skills negatively affect learning in school. Because of this, there is a need to provide for intervention to enable them to cope with and live in harmony with their typically developing peers (Bailey, 2012)

and to maximize their learning experiences in school. As a response to this need, the researcher chose to undertake a study on using creative drama as an intervention for learners with ASD.

Learners with ASD have as much right as their typically developing peers to achieve their potential and to live a life that is beneficial to their development. They will not be able to do this if they lack the social and communication skills needed in interacting with the society. Not having the skills to relate with others, learners with ASD are easily isolated because of the difficulty to be accepted by peers (Muller, Schuler & Yates, 2008). Given appropriate intervention, their ability to fit in and have social interaction with others will be helpful in achieving success both in their present and in their future environments (Bailey, 2012). As the call for equity and equality become prevalent, it is but fitting to give focus to this group of learners who, like the typically developing individuals have as much right to the full fruition of their skills and talents. Inclusivity is considering how to make each one, regardless of differences and exceptionality, could live in an accepting environment.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the use of Creative Drama in enhancing the social skills of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Specifically, this study aimed to achieve the following objectives:



1. Identify the social skills of learners with ASD;
2. Identify the communication skills of learners with ASD;
3. Identify the social skills difficulties of the learners with ASD;
4. Identify the communication skills difficulties of the learners with ASD;
5. Develop a creative drama module for the learners with ASD based on their profile;
6. Identify the changes in the social skills of children with ASD as they undergo the activities;
7. Identify the changes in the communication skills of the children with ASD as they undergo the activities; and
8. Determine why the activities in the module are effective in enhancing the social and communication skills of children with ASD.



1.5 Research Questions

This research study would like to answer the following questions:

1. What are the social skills of the learners with ASD?
2. What are the communication skills of the learners with ASD?
3. How do the learners manifest difficulties in social skills?
4. How do the learners manifest difficulties in communication skills?
5. What are the important elements that a module must have?



6. What social skills did the learners with ASD acquire after undergoing the module activities?
7. What communication skills did the learners with ASD acquire after undergoing the module activities?
8. Why are the activities in the module helpful in enhancing the social and communication skills of learners with ASD?

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study shown in Figure 1.6 uses the ADDIE model. It indicates the steps and the important concepts that comprise the whole research process. The Analysis focuses on identifying the social and communication skills difficulty experienced by learners with ASD. Baseline data were gathered through document analysis, interview protocols and observations. An autism checklist was used to identify the characteristics of the learners. Interviews were conducted to gather information from parents and teachers. Observations were conducted in the respective classes to observe the behaviors of the learners with ASD. Data collected from the three sources were analyzed through thematic and content analysis. Findings became the basis in developing activities in the module. The Design of the module has strong underpinning of the Sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978) and the Social Learning theory of Bandura (1971). The concept on the use of drama as intervention to address the social and communication skills deficits of the learners likewise provide the foundation for the module design. The Development

of activities using the drama approach were created based on the Building Blocks Model in Creative drama designed by Van Volkenburg was used. The model organized the activities into seven hierarchical blocks. The creative drama module was evaluated by five experts in the field of Special Education and Drama. Implementation of the creative drama module as intervention was for 21 days. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the module within the duration of the implementation focused on the activities that enabled the learners to manifest focus skills. The learners' performance in the creative drama activities to gauge which social and communication skills were enhanced by the creative drama activities were likewise assessed.

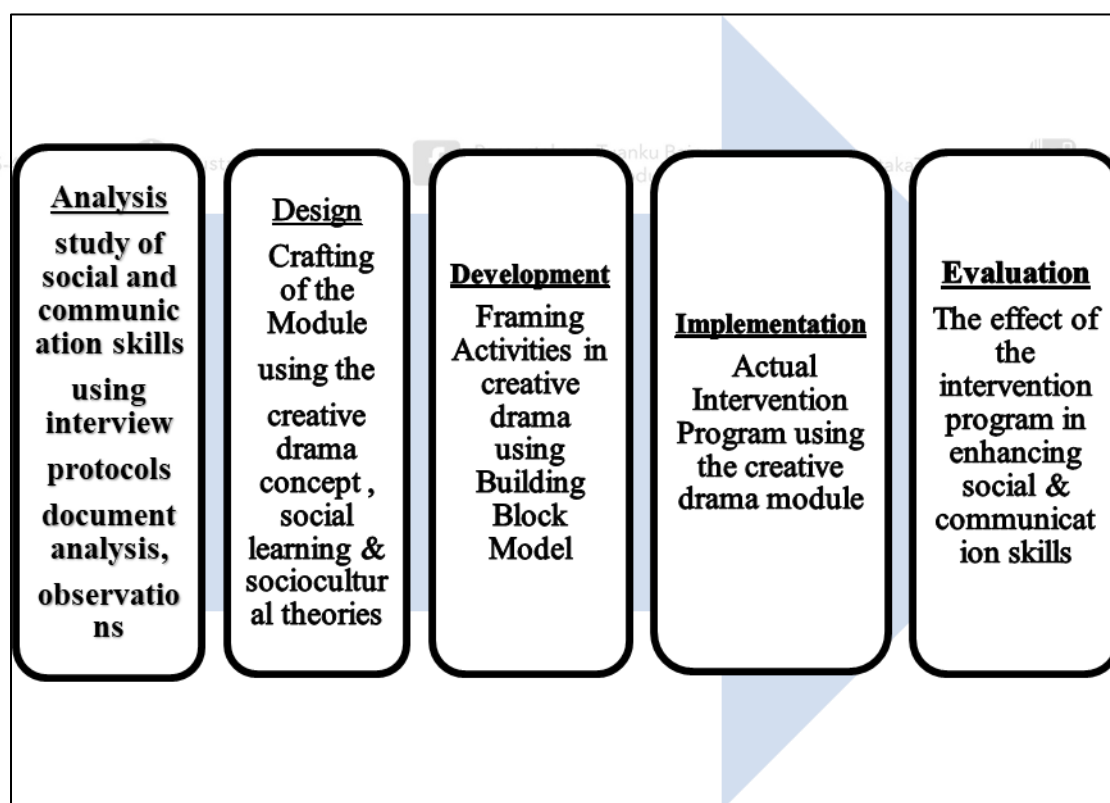


Figure 1.6. The Conceptual Framework



1.7 Significance of the Study

This research study is highly relevant to the university's research priorities. As reflected in the University's Research Agenda for 2013-2015, this study may be classified under the research theme: Product Development. The document on the university's research agenda describes product development as a study that focuses on the production of valuable material and human resources that could provide an answer to national and global educational concerns. This includes are materials for teacher instruction and development of instruments, resources for the development of education, skill and capabilities of teachers and learners, and product on technological knowledge.



This study has both national and international significance. As a member state of the United Nations, our country agreed on achieving what was dubbed as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals address 17 internationally significant issues with Goal Number 4 focusing on ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning. It is projected that countries which will pursue to attain this goal, will have by 2030, eradicated gender inequalities as regards education and guarantee that everyone has equal access to all education levels and vocational preparations including those at risk, as well as the indigenous peoples, the persons with disabilities (PWDs), and children in susceptible circumstances. Likewise, it guarantees that all learners attain the knowledge and skills necessary for the promotion of sustainable development; and this includes, among others, education for viable development and justifiable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, the spreading of a culture that seeks peace and non-violence, global citizenship and respect for diversity of cultures and on the contribution of culture to



sustainable development, construct and promote learner, disability and gender responsive education facilities and give provision for safe, peaceful, inclusive and functional learning environments for all. Our country has positively responded on achieving this goal through several programs of the administration including the No Child Left Behind Policy of the Department of Education and the National Council for Disabilities Affairs (NCDA) efforts, through its Sub-committee on Education, to ensure that laws pertaining to the rights of persons with disabilities are implemented to benefit the PWDs.

This study is of significance in effecting change in the social and communication skills of learners with ASD. Through the various Creative Dramatics activities, the learners will be able to communicate better and show improved social functioning. Through the activities, the identified group of learners with special needs will gain the acceptance of their neurotypical classmates. Likewise, the module will be helpful to teachers in providing activities for intervention for social skills development.

Finally, this study will be helpful to teachers of learners with special needs in the public schools, SPED Centers' administrators and teachers. The creative drama module could be used by teachers in helping learners with ASD develop social and communication skills. The module could also be used for learners with other developmental disabilities who have the same deficits that need to be addressed.



1.8 Operational Definition

The following terms used in the study are defined operationally for clarity and ease of understanding.

1.8.1 Autism Spectrum Disorder

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) (2013), ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that involves current or historical deficit in social communication and interaction through multiple contexts. It is a spectrum of disorders that includes autistic disorder, Asperger syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).

According to Plimley (2006), autism is a condition which manifests the “triad of impairments”. These are the three main areas of development wherein persons on the autistic spectrum show differences. These are social interaction, communication and rigidity of thought and behavior.

The Autism Encyclopedia (2005) defines autism as a developmental disorder that is defined by striking difficulty in communication and social relations; it is marked by the presence of atypical behaviors including unusual responses to sensation, repetitive movements, and insistence on routine or sameness. In this study, ASD or autism is used to refer to the condition manifested by verbal learners who have been assessed and are



manifesting characteristics of classic autism and/or Asperger syndrome notable of which are deficits in social and communication skills.

1.8.2 Creative Drama

Van Volkenburg (2015) defines creative drama as a process-oriented drama that involves different activities and exercises. It is a group experience where each child is managed and guided to develop self-expression and interaction with others. The goal of creative drama is not to develop performers in front of an audience, but to develop the social and communication skills of the whole child through fun activities that begin with play, the natural way by which a child learns (Way, 1998).

Creative Drama according to Tombak (2014) are action status, improvisations and animations created by the learners based on their own original ideas, creative discoveries and understanding about a particular subject. The child is at the center of the learning process, guided by the teacher in the creation of new knowledge. It is the creation of dramatic moments in the game processes and life situations during group interaction processes. It is done under the guidance of an expert, through the use of improvisation and role playing techniques (Salcedo, 2017).

In this study, creative drama is an integrative process that develops creative expression in children through the use of movement, pantomime, improvisation, story



dramatization and group discussion to facilitate the acquisition and development of language and communication skills, and social interaction.

1.8.3 Communication Skills

Communication skills refer to the effective way by which a message is conveyed either verbally, by means of a common language, or non-verbally, though gestures, body language, facial expression and posture in a way that the message is clearly understood (Kabir, 2017).



Communication skills as the ability to convey information by means of exchanging ideas, intentions, attitudes, emotions, expectations, perceptions, or commands through speaking, using gestures, body language or by writing. He further noted that effective communication takes place when its desired purpose which could include eliciting action, creating understanding or giving information has been achieved Majid (2015). This also means an aptness in giving or receiving information. It involves communicating needs, desires, perceptions or knowledge. It involves ease in initiating and maintaining a conversation in the process of social reciprocity (Fox, 2015).


In this study, communication skills refer to the ability to share or convey to another thought, ideas and feelings through verbal means, or using oral communication, or non-verbal means that could include using facial expression, gestures, body language.



Furthermore, it is also the act of giving or receiving information from one person to another, whether using the oral, written, visual, or non-verbal language like using body language, gestures and changes in the tone and pitch of voice.

1.8.4 Module

A module is a short unit of instruction which deals with a single conceptual component of a subject matter. It is a self-contained and independent unit of instruction with the main focus on a few well defined objectives (Padmapriya, 2015).

 05-4506832 Module is a form of individualized instruction that enables learners to use a self-contained package of learning activities. These activities guide learners to gain understanding or to be able to do something. Further, a learning module covers activities intended to help learners gain knowledge on certain lessons (Cruickshank, 2003). It is also defined as a self-contained, independent unit of a planned series of learning activities developed to help the student realize certain well-defined objectives (Guido, 2014).

In this study, a module is defined as a tool that provides activities with teacher prompted directions to guide the learners, in order for them to manifest and acquire the skills as specified by the set goals. Each activity in the module targets the improvement of the identified communication and social skills deficits.



1.8.5 Social Skills

Social skills are behaviors that are learned and are socially acceptable to enable a person to positively interact with others. (Gresham, Elliot, Vance, & Cook 2011). These are the definite behaviors that students perform in particular social situations (Gresham, Elliot, & Kettler, 2010).

These are further defined as socially acceptable behaviors that are learned and will enable communication with others. These are behaviors used to realize the goals of their interaction with others. These include interpersonal behaviors like reconciliation, introducing self, asking for help, being aware of others, respecting, being friends with others and keeping it; these are likewise behaviors that ensure peer content as asking for permission, sharing, thanking, helping, emotional awareness and interaction; these also increase school success as decisiveness and following instructions; also increase communication skills like listening, taking turns, and having empathy (Korukcu, Ersan & Aral, 2015).

As defined by Gresham, Van, and Cook (2006), social skills are a set of abilities that are essential in promoting positive social relationships; likewise, these skills contribute to development of friendship and peer acceptance; and are essential in enabling learners to cope with and adapt to the demands of the social environment.





Cook, Gresham, Barreras, Thornton, and Crews (2008) defined social skills as such that concern learned behaviors including interactions with others which facilitate people to work efficiently at social tasks. Social skills are the skills people use to communicate and interact with one another, whether verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language and personal appearance. The common denominator about different definitions people give to social skills is that it involves interaction with others.

Social skills involve the ability to communicate, relate, and form emotional connections with one another (Bailey & Montgomery, 2012). In this study, social skills is defined as the skills used to relate to, communicate and interact with others, both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language and personal appearance.



1.8.6 Intervention

Intervention is any interference that is designed to modify a process or a situation (Sundell & Olsson, 2017). It also refers to the systematic process of assessment and planning employed to provide remediation or prevention of a social, educational, or developmental problem (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition, 2011).





Intervention is the education to increase knowledge and convey new skills to induce behavior change (Smith, Morrow & Ross, 2015). In this study, intervention is referred to as the arrangement of modular activities using creative drama approach which are intended to bring about changes in the social and communication behaviors of learners with autism.

1.9 Limitation of the Study

The study is limited only to the six learners assessed to have ASD who are enrolled at the Jose Fabella Memorial School (JFMS). One limitation of the study is that the participants come from different grade levels and chronological age. Three of the participants are from Grade Two; one is from grade Three; and two are from Grade Four. Their ages range from eight to eleven. Another limitation of the study is that one of the six learners does not have a written assessment from a Developmental Pediatrician to show that he was diagnosed to have ASD. However, his father, during the interview attested that he has been assessed to have ASD, yet due to the floods, they lost a copy of the assessment. The SPED Coordinator evaluated the child upon application for transfer from another school, and she concurred with the father's statement that the child has ASD. The learners were all assessed to have ASD, however, the type of ASD that each child has and the severity of their condition is not included in the criteria for selection.





Another limitation of the study is the need to change the schedule three times, within the duration of the creative drama workshop. The workshop sessions covered 21 meetings. The researcher met the learners three times a week, every other day. The sessions took place as scheduled for five weeks. However, due to the dismissal of classes arising from transport strike, declared National Holidays, or national events that necessitate classes suspension, during the last two weeks of sessions, the researcher met the learners every day. This was done because classes were suspended the whole week after November 10, 2017 due to an important national event. Knowing that a whole week of not meeting the learners, then meeting them again after that week, could have a tremendous negative effect on the learners considering their strict adherence to routine as brought about by their condition. So the researcher asked the SPED Coordinator if it would be possible to meet the learners for the last two weeks. She responded affirmatively on this. The researcher likewise talked with the parents if it would be alright with them if their children would have creative drama sessions every day for two weeks. The parents were so supportive and readily agreed to the change in schedule.

1.10 Summary

This chapter presented the context of the problem in the study. It identified the concerns of individuals with ASD and the repercussion of their condition in their way of living and in dealing with others. Specific research questions and research objectives were identified. The important concepts that were used in the study were introduced and defined operationally. The limitations of the study were likewise presented.

