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Does Creative Drama Promote Language Development in Early Childhood?
A Review of the Methods and Measures Employed in the Empirical Literature

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This systematic review of the literature synthesizes research from a number of disciplines and provides a succinct distillation of the methods and measures used to study the impact of creative drama on the language development of young children. An analysis of the merits and limitations of the reviewed studies reveals a number of methodological problems that threaten the validity, reliability, and credibility of drama research. Recommendations on how to limit these threats are offered. These recommendations can potentially help researchers design more rigorous studies that are better able to guide educators’ and administrators’ decisions about the inclusion of creative drama in early childhood curricula.

KEYWORDS: drama, early childhood education, language development.

There is a wide variety of classroom activities that can elicit good responses from the child who has low verbal skills. He can erect cities out of blocks and paint big murals. He can pour and measure. He can work on a puzzle, sing a song, and classify materials into sets. But to get the child to use more words in longer sentences, he must use the words within the context of action. The action should be so strongly motivated that the child is impelled to speak in order to be part of the action.

—Paley (1978, p. 320)

The desire to enter into a pretend prehistoric world and become a dinosaur or to journey to the magical land of a fairy tale and become a knight in shining armor, a princess, or even a villain has been known to entice even the shyest child to take a role in a classroom drama. The chance to wriggle like caterpillars and then flutter like butterflies, to soar through space, or to swim in the deepest parts of the ocean piques children’s interest as it beckons them to join their peers and discover places yet unknown. It is clear from children’s enthusiasm for dramatizing imaginary
creative and situations that children enjoy exploring fantasy worlds and using their imaginations in the context of a drama.

Vygotsky (1966) theorized about the importance of these sorts of imaginative experiences for preschoolers. He asserted,

Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives—all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development. (p. 16)

Like play, drama inherently possesses these characteristics. This would suggest that preschool participation in creative-drama activities can foster a child’s development.

Drama practitioners contend that drama promotes development and note that drama is particularly beneficial for fostering language development (Fox, 1987; Heathcote, 1984; McCaslin, 1996; O’Neill & Lambert, 1982; Paley, 1978, 1981, 1990; Sik, 1983; Way, 1967). Although these claims of drama’s merits are based on classroom experiences and observations, educators and administrators in today’s high-stakes academic environment are wary of this type of evidence. They look to researchers to confirm practitioners’ claims. As Vitz (1983) noted more than 20 years ago, “Educational systems concerned with accountability need research to validate the claims of the beneficial effects of creative drama” (p. 17).

Research does, in fact, suggest that early childhood participation in drama promotes language development (Conard, 1992; Kardash & Wright, 1987; Podlozny, 2000; Vitz, 1983; Wagner, 1998). This is particularly noteworthy because poor language development in early childhood is associated with reading difficulties throughout the primary grades, which, in turn, are associated with long-term academic failure (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Therefore, participation in drama may potentially benefit students’ academic performance. Yet, financial concerns continue to prompt schools to eliminate the arts. For example, funding cuts in Evanston, Illinois, forced the award-winning District 65 Drama Department to reduce drama participation for students in kindergarten through third grade (District 65, 2002). Moreover, the U.S. Congress has found that arts and cultural programs available for children, especially at the elementary school level, are inadequate (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

If existing drama research illuminates drama’s benefits for early childhood language development, why do educators and administrators remain unconvinced of the relevance of drama in early childhood education? Scholars have noted that much drama research is marred by methodological flaws (Conard, 1992, 1998; Kardash & Wright, 1987; Miller & Mason, 1983; Podlozny, 2000; Vitz, 1983; Wagner, 1998). Perhaps these methodological flaws limit the interpretability of the research and prevent educators and administrators from using this research as the basis for curricular programming. As Hetland (1999) notes in a methodological review of the Mozart effect, it would be imprudent to base decisions about educational programming on the findings of studies that fail to eliminate alternative hypotheses or fail to “clearly define the nature, measurement, and scope of the interventions and outcomes.” (p. 2). In addition, the interdisciplinary nature of this research may make it difficult for educators and administrators to synthesize the findings and implications of studies from diverse fields with diverse research methodologies.

This analysis of the literature therefore investigates the methods and measures employed in the empirical studies of the effect of creative drama on language development.
acquisition as well as the merits and limitations of these studies. It also identifies a number of problems that threaten the validity, reliability, and credibility of this research and suggests ways to limit these threats. These recommendations are critical to creative-drama research because small but consequential changes in a study’s design or in the way a study is reported can affect how educators and administrators view that study in particular and creative drama in general. Rigorous, well-reported studies garner more respect from those who have the power to make consequential decisions about the place of creative drama in early childhood classrooms. This review of the literature may help researchers design more rigorous studies that can guide educators and administrators making decisions about the inclusion of creative drama in early childhood curricula. In addition, this review synthesizes the relevant research from a number of different disciplines, providing educators and administrators with a succinct distillation of the methods and measures used to study the impact of creative drama (for a theoretical discussion of drama’s effect on narrative comprehension and production, see Mages, 2006a).

Method

Inclusion Criteria

The empirical studies reviewed in the following analysis investigate the effect of creative-drama participation in early childhood on the language development of young children. Inclusion criteria for this study were determined before the relevant literature was collected and analyzed. The inclusion criteria, detailed below, focus on four critical elements: a study’s publication status, creative-drama intervention, oral language outcome, and participants. Any study that met the inclusion criteria for all of the four elements was included in the analysis (see Appendix A for a table of the inclusion criteria).

Publication Status

All of the studies included in this analysis were available in English and were published after 1960 in books or peer-reviewed journals. Kardash and Wright (1987) note that research investigating drama’s effect on academic outcomes, such as language development, did not begin until the middle of the 1960s. Thus, the publication year 1960 was selected as a strategy to ensure the inclusion of the most comprehensive set of relevant studies published within a span of more than four decades.

This review is restricted to published research because such studies are more readily accessible to educators and administrators and are thus more likely to influence policy decisions regarding the inclusion of creative drama in early childhood education. The impact of published research on educational practice is so profound that publication status was adopted as a criterion even though a review of only published studies can be biased due to the tendency for journals to reject studies with no statistically significant findings (Fink, 1998; Light & Pillemer, 1984; Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990).

Creative-Drama Intervention

All of the studies in this review employed an intervention that met the construct definition of a creative-drama intervention. In this study the terms creative drama and

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drama are used synonymously and are defined as improvised guided enactment (Davis & Behm, 1978, 1987; McCaslin, 1996; Ward, 1981). Way (1967) distinguishes drama from theater, noting that “‘theatre’ is largely concerned with communication between actors and an audience; ‘drama’ is largely concerned with experience by the participants, irrespective of any function of communication to an audience” (pp. 2–3). Some drama theorists view creative drama on a continuum, with “drama in its natural state” on one end and theater on the other. Davis and Behm (1987) explain that the spectrum of activities involving children and the drama/theatre is established on the classic definitions of drama (a thing done) and theatre (to gaze on). The natural dramatic propensities of children, located at the far left on the continuum, are seen to be the bases of, and to infuse, all the forms of drama and theatre. (p. 261)

When a facilitator guides what Davis and Behm (1987) term “drama in its natural state” (p. 261), the result is called creative drama. Davis and Behm explicate this more fully, defining creative drama as “an improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centered form of drama in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experience” (p. 262). It is important to note that this definition was considered sufficiently broad to include a wide variety of drama styles including, for example, process dramas (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999; O’Neill & Lambert, 1982).

This literature review focuses only on creative drama and not on children watching or playing roles in theater productions. This study is designed to investigate practices that can be translated into effective classroom curricula. Thus, studies that focus on parent–child dyads or family-focused interventions were excluded.

Oral Language Outcome
All of the studies included in this review investigated the effect of creative drama on an oral language outcome. These studies assessed a variety of outcomes associated with oral language development. Studies that assessed oral language skills such as vocabulary development, narrative development, story comprehension, story sequencing, and story recall were included.

Participants
The participants in all of the reviewed studies were typically developing children between 2 and 7 years old. Studies that focused on children in this age group but also included slightly older children were not excluded from this analysis. Studies that focused primarily on participants with learning disabilities or other special needs were considered ineligible for inclusion in this literature review.

In sum, the scope of this literature review is limited to studies published in English after 1960 that investigate the correlation between participation in creative drama and language development in typically developing children between 2 and 7 years old.

Culling the Relevant Literature
A systematic search of five databases—PsycINFO, ERIC, MLA Bibliography, Medline, and LLBA—was conducted to identify the literature that investigates the
effect of creative-drama participation in early childhood on the language development of typically developing children (see Appendix B for the list of search terms employed). Additional studies were located by culling the reference lists of identified articles, reviews of the literature, meta-analyses, and theoretical papers. Any research study that met all of the above criteria was coded and entered into a database for further analysis. The codes assigned to a study indicated, for example, the study’s design (including whether it was a qualitative or quantitative study), the type of drama intervention that was implemented, the outcome or outcomes assessed, and any measures that were employed. Thirty-four unique studies were included in the analysis.3

Results

The results of this analysis are organized into four major sections. First, the historical foundations of creative-drama research are described. Next, the three distinct strands of research investigating language development through creative drama that were revealed in this analysis of the literature are explicated. Then, the measures that have been used to assess oral language outcomes in drama research are enumerated. Finally, concerns related to the facilitators of the intervention are discussed.

Historical Foundations of Creative-Drama Research

Interdisciplinary Nature of Creative-Drama Research

It is important to note that although all of the literature analyzed for this review conforms to the stated definition of creative drama, only two of these studies were published in journals that regularly feature articles about educational drama or theater (Brown, 1992; Vitz, 1983). Most of the other studies were not designed to investigate the effects of creative drama per se but were designed as “play training” studies or literacy development studies.

Interestingly, the earliest study that met the selection criteria was reported in a book focusing on classroom practices (Cullum, 1967). In this study, drama was used to foster the vocabulary development of 22 kindergarten children. This study focused on the acquisition of sophisticated vocabulary words, such as appariation, pachyderm, and chanticleer, that are not ordinarily associated with kindergarten curricula. At the end of the school year, the children were tested on these sophisticated words. Although the vocabulary words were not reviewed before the test was administered, 90% of the children remembered all of the words that had been dramatized.

In contrast to the Cullum (1967) study, most of the early studies of drama’s effect on young children’s language development were conceived as play training studies. The tradition of play training studies began in the late 1960s with Smilansky’s (1968) seminal work with disadvantaged preschoolers. Before that time, it was thought inappropriate if not detrimental for a teacher to intervene in children’s play (Christie, 1985). Smilansky rejected this view. She believed that certain forms of play facilitate cognitive development and school readiness. She also believed that children with well-educated parents learn the foundational forms of play before coming to school. However, children with less educated parents, who are not enculturated into this form of play at home, may start school without the foundational skills necessary for high-quality play. Smilansky developed a scale to identify children’s play deficiencies and created a program to train children in the skills they lacked. She found that her
intervention was able to remediate the children’s play skills and foster cognitive development.

Smilansky (1968) came to this work as a psychologist, not as a creative-drama specialist. Yet, many of the techniques she employed are the same as, or similar to, ones used by creative-drama instructors. However, some of Smilansky’s perspectives are quite distinct from those of creative-drama practitioners. For example, Smilansky notes that in her study as soon as a child demonstrated an ability to use the play skills identified in the Smilansky Play Scale the “intervention was no longer needed and the child could be depended on to develop his ability further through involvement with other children and through imitation” (p. 116). This was the case even if the child was only able to use these skills “in a limited way” (p. 116). The creative-drama literature, on the other hand, does not describe a level of development at which creative-drama exercises and techniques are no longer beneficial and at which the development of the skills creative drama fosters will progress on their own. Thus, creative drama is viewed as a way of enhancing skills in participants at all developmental levels, not just as a tool for remediation of those with serious skill deficits.

Christie (1985), who, like Smilansky, was not trained as a drama specialist, advises that facilitators should try the “less obtrusive” method of guiding a drama verbally before trying the more overt technique in which facilitators take a role in the drama (pp. 46–47). In contrast, drama practitioners often advocate that facilitators take a role in a drama right away (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999; O’Neill & Lambert, 1982). Both Christie and Smilansky seem to view creative drama almost as if it were a powerful drug: They advocate using only the minimum dose necessary, and they advise discontinuing treatment as soon as the most severe symptoms have subsided. Although drama specialists would agree that drama is a powerful medium, they do not promote rationing its use or prescribing it only for the most needy children.

A question that seems particularly salient in play training research, which is less relevant to creative-drama researchers, is whether children who are directed to play are truly engaged in play. This question is founded on a definition of play as a voluntary activity (Williamson & Silvern, 1991). Williamson and Silvern note that some researchers have argued that if play is mandated by an adult it loses its “voluntary nature” and thus is no longer truly play (p. 72). Earlier, this argument had led Silvern (1980) to redefine the intervention used in one of his studies. In a footnote, Silvern concedes, “Since the child was directed to pretend, it is probably safer to say that the child is engaged in activity under external locus of control. The activity, then, is not play, but rather play like” (p. 135). A decade later, Williamson and Silvern (1991) seem to question the degree to which children’s playful activities must be voluntary in order to be classified as play. They write, “If telling children that they can or must play removes the voluntary nature of play, then children who are playing because their parents told them to are not really playing” (p. 72). Defining the construct under investigation is critical to sound research. However, this level of specificity about the construct play is not as salient to the study of creative drama, as the construct under investigation is defined as improvised guided enactment.

Another fairly prominent issue in the play training literature is whether it is actually the act of play itself or the interaction between the adult facilitator and the children that leads to the children’s improved performance on outcome measures (Smith
Hypotheses about the effects of peer interaction have also been posed (Nicolopoulou, 2002; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982). Although it is important to determine the mechanism of change, this type of research seems to assume that a number of different activities can be designed to provide equally good contexts for interpersonal interaction. However, research suggests that the arts provide an environment uniquely suited to language development (Heath, 1999). Thus, from a creative-drama perspective it may be less important to determine if activities from other disciplines can be manipulated or modified so that they provide contexts that can be equated with creative drama than it is to determine which drama activities, or methods of drama instruction, are best able to nurture development in specific domains with particular populations.

Importantly, Podlozny (2000), in a meta-analysis titled “Strengthening Verbal Skills Through the Use of Classroom Drama: A Clear Link,” found that the research evidence as a whole does, in fact, support theorists’ assertions that drama facilitates story understanding, story recall, and oral language development in young children. It is worth noting, however, that Podlozny did not specifically address whether the language gains were due to drama, to tutoring, to peer interactions, or to a combination of these factors. Nonetheless, Podlozny’s meta-analysis corroborates the findings from two earlier meta-analyses (Conard, 1992; Kardash & Wright, 1987) that also found that drama had a positive effect on oral language development. However, the methodological issues associated with the individual studies included in a meta-analysis can affect the results of the meta-analysis. Hence, it is important to examine these methodological issues more closely.

**Terminology Used in the Literature**

One of the inherent challenges of interdisciplinary research is integrating the vocabularies and concepts of disparate academic fields. This is particularly difficult in creative-drama research, which is the nexus of a number of academic disciplines: cognitive psychology, language acquisition, reading achievement, early childhood education, and educational drama. Researchers and theorists have employed a large vocabulary of terms to refer to the same, similar, or related constructs as the one defined here as creative drama (see Appendix C for a list of some of the terminology that has been employed). This multiplicity of terms can be problematic because it is often difficult for scholars to determine whether studies that use identical terms are, in fact, investigating identical constructs. Similarly, it is often difficult to discern whether studies that use different terms are, in fact, investigating different constructs.

Although scholars select particular terms to refer to very distinct concepts or practices, other scholars use those same terms to denote different ideological constructs. For example, Galda (1984) distinguishes thematic-fantasy play from sociodramatic play, noting that “thematic-fantasy play is concerned with roles, events, and themes that players have not experienced in real life” (p. 106). She goes on to say that characters from literature and film can inspire this particular type of play. Wolf (1985), on the other hand, does not seem to make this distinction. Wolf describes sociodramatic play as playing “‘store,’ ‘school,’ ‘Batman,’ ‘mothers,’ or more mysterious scenes” (p. 325). It seems, however, that Galda would define “Batman” and “more mysterious scenes” as thematic-fantasy play not as sociodramatic play. The lack of consensus about the meaning of the terminology used...
in drama research makes it is difficult to synthesize the research or to draw conclusions across studies.

This confusion about terminology, constructs, and definitions has been documented in the literature (Podlozny, 2000; Silvern, Taylor, Williamson, Surbeck, & Kelley, 1986; Wagner, 1998). As noted, most early research in the field referred to in this report as creative drama attempted to investigate the cognitive effects of play. In 1986, Silvern and his associates noted that a major concern in the field was the “lack of a consistent definition” of the construct (p. 73). They recommended “consistent use of operational definitions” as a solution to this problem (pp. 73–74). This advice seems to have gone unheeded. In 2000, Podlozny wrote “the labels used for ‘drama’ (e.g., sociodrama, creative dramatics, thematic fantasy play) have no set definitions, especially in the research with young children” (p. 239). This plethora of terms is also problematic because it complicates researchers’ and scholars’ endeavors to use bibliographic databases to locate literature that is relevant or related to their work. This complication may thwart even the most diligent researchers’ attempts to design their current research based on previous findings in the field.

As it is unlikely that creative-drama researchers, who are trained in a variety of disciplines, will come to a consensus about the meaning and appropriate use of every term, it is essential for authors to explicitly define the construct they are intending to investigate. It is also important that authors distinguish the terms they are using synonymously from the terms that they are using to convey disparate concepts. The explicit articulation of a study’s construct along with the consistent use of terminology will greatly assist researchers, as well as educators and administrators, in drawing inferences across studies. Although it may be unrealistic to expect researchers in disparate disciplines to develop a common set of terms to describe creative-drama constructs, researchers within a single discipline should strive to develop a common vocabulary with established definitions.

Three Strands of Research Investigating Language Development Through Creative Drama

The reviewed studies fall into three major categories: thematic improvisation, story-based improvisation, and Paley-style improvisation. Both thematic improvisation and story-based improvisation are subordinate categories of creative drama. Thematic improvisation is defined as the enactment of themes such as a visit to the doctor or a trip to the circus. In contrast, story-based improvisation is defined as the enactment of set stories. It is important to note that in story-based improvisation the set stories that are dramatized can be either adult authored or child authored. In this review, all of the studies that specifically mentioned dramatizing child-authored stories employed a drama intervention strategy based on curricula described by Paley (1981, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001). Hence, in this review, an intervention that focuses on the dramatization of child-authored stories is said to employ Paley-style improvisation.

All three of these research traditions continued through the 1990s. It seems, however, that only the Paley-style tradition has persisted into the new millennium (Fein, Ardila-Rey, & Groth, 2000; Nicolopoulou, 2002; Richner & Nicolopoulou, 2001). It is rare that studies focus on the distinctions between these traditions. However, one study that simultaneously investigated the effects of thematic
improvisations and story-based improvisations found that the effects of these two interventions did not differ (Shmukler & Naveh, 1984). This study is important because it begins to investigate the possibility that different types of drama interventions can differently affect children’s language development.

**Thematic Improvisation**

The first research tradition uses thematic improvisation as the intervention. This form of drama intervention is less structured than story-based improvisation because thematic dramas do not have predetermined characters or predetermined plots. In this type of intervention, children spontaneously create the characters and the plot of the dramas they enact. In Smilansky’s (1968) seminal study, children dramatized themes such as a visit to the doctor or a trip to the grocery store. Smilansky did attempt to use story-based improvisation as well, but she found that children reacted to this more structured drama differently than they did to the thematic improvisations. Therefore, she did not include the story-dramatization intervention in her description of the study results. Researchers have followed in this thematic tradition, dramatizing such themes as a visit to the zoo (Lovinger, 1974), a family picnic (Dansky, 1980), a trip to a fast-food restaurant (Levy, Wolfgang, & Koorland, 1992), cooking a meal (Christie, 1983), deep-sea diving (Smith, Dalgleish, & Herzmark, 1981), a trip to a farm (Smith & Syddall, 1978), and sandpipers on the beach (Cullum, 1967).

Of all the articles, chapters, and books that met the inclusion criteria for this review of the literature, only 20% used solely thematic dramas as their creative-drama intervention. Among these studies, there was a great deal of variation in the length of the intervention. For example, one study held nine drama sessions over a 3-week period (Dansky, 1980). Another study held 40 drama sessions over an 8-week period (Smith et al., 1981). Yet another study indicated that drama sessions ran throughout the school year (Cullum, 1967).

In addition to the differences in the number of drama sessions these studies offered, they also differed in how the themes were selected and how many times each theme was enacted. It seems that Christie (1983) and Dansky (1980) selected themes prior to the start of their studies. Christie notes that a total of four themes—a picnic in the country, a trip to a grocery store, surgery at a hospital, and cooking a meal—were dramatized and that each theme was enacted between two and three times. Similarly, Dansky reports that a total of three themes—a family picnic, a trip to the grocery store, and a visit to the doctor—were dramatized and that each theme was enacted three times. Others, however, allowed the children to contribute to the selection of the thematic content of the dramas (Lovinger, 1974; Smith et al., 1981). In these studies, no specific themes were reported. It is also unclear how many times each theme was dramatized. The distinctions between the interventions make it difficult to compare the results across studies. It is also difficult to know if, or how, the thematic content or the number of times each theme was enacted may have influenced the study’s findings.

**Story-Based Improvisation**

The second research tradition uses story-based improvisation as part of the intervention (Cullinan, Jaggar, & Strickland, 1974; Niedermeyer & Oliver, 1972; Saltz, Dixon, & Johnson, 1977; Saltz & Johnson, 1974; Strickland, 1973). In this
form of drama research, stories are read or told to the participants. Then the participants are invited to enact dramas based on the stories that they have heard.

Seventy-nine percent of the articles, chapters, and books that were analyzed explicitly state that the children in the intervention dramatized stories. Within this subsample, 48% report using traditional tales, folktales, or fairy tales; 44% report using modern children’s literature; and 26% report using child-authored stories. Seven percent of the studies that report using adult-authored literature do not specify whether the stories used were traditional stories or modern stories. In addition, some studies combined the use of both modern tales and folktales.

There are a number of methodological issues associated with this group of studies. First, some of the authors do not give full references for the literature they used. Second, some authors do not provide information about whether the illustrations, which often accompany children’s literature, were shown to the participants. Third, the results of the studies are difficult to compare because the studies differed in a number of substantive ways, including the number of times the children were exposed to each story and the kind of literature the children dramatized. Finally, a few studies reported age effects that may actually be attributable to an artifact of the study’s design.

Citing the literature. Many authors fail to provide full references for the stories used as a stimulus for the drama intervention (see Mages, 2006b, for a more in-depth analysis of this topic). This is particularly true when folktales are employed. Of all the authors that note that folktales were used, only Galda (1982) includes the full citation information for the folktales in her report. Although providing only story titles may seem adequate for well-known folktales, it is not sufficient because there are often a number of disparate versions of familiar folktales. These versions may vary in the difficulty of the vocabulary used, the sophistication of the syntax employed, and the total length of the text. Even the plot and outcome may differ from one version to the next. These differences may have an effect on the participants’ understanding of the story and thus on the outcome of the study. The use of full references is critically important both for future replication studies and for classroom implementation of successful interventions. Although it may be impractical for longitudinal studies to cite all of the literature that was dramatized throughout an intervention, it would be beneficial if these studies cited a few examples of the type of literature that was dramatized. This would help both researchers and educators to better comprehend the sophistication and style of the stories that were enacted, which may then influence the design of future studies and curricula.

Use of pictures. It is common practice, when reading books to young children, to show them the pictures that accompany the text. Accordingly, some studies that employ adult-authored children’s literature—literature that may have had professional illustrations accompanying the text—note that illustrations were shared with the participants (Montgomerie & Ferguson, 1999; Saltz et al., 1977; Silvern, 1980). Other studies note that pictures were not shown to the participants. For example, Silvern and his colleagues (1986) explicitly state that the stories used in their interventions “were typed onto 8½ in. × 11 in. pages, with no illustrations” (pp. 77, 82).

Importantly, Pressley (1977) indicates that the use of pictures can enhance children’s comprehension of an accompanying narrative. However, only 24% of the
story-based studies that employed adult-authored literature mention whether or not
the participants had the opportunity to view illustrations of the text. It is important
to know whether illustrations were used; furthermore, when illustrations were used,
it is important to be able to identify the specific illustrations that were employed.
Omitting this information makes it difficult to replicate a study and thwarts attempts
to identify the mechanism of change. Thus, it would be beneficial for the interpre-
tation and replication of drama research if authors explicitly note whether they used
illustrations as part of their interventions and when illustrations were used that they
cite the books in which the illustrations can be found (see Mages, 2006b, for a more
detailed discussion of this issue).

Number of story exposures. Another important variable in the story dramatization
studies, besides the type of literature the children enacted and whether the children
had an opportunity to view story illustrations, is the number of times the children
were exposed to any given story. Some studies had the children enact each story mul-
tiple times, trading roles every time it was dramatized (e.g., Saltz et al., 1977; Saltz &
Johnson, 1974). In these studies, the children were exposed to the same story on more
than one occasion. Other studies had the children dramatize each story only once
(e.g., Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Silvern et al., 1986; Yawkey, 1979). Typically, these
studies afforded the children only one exposure to each story and allowed them to
enact only one character per story (e.g., Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Yawkey, 1979).
However, in a study Silvern conducted with his research team, the children only
enacted the story on one occasion, but they had the opportunity to listen to the story
a second time (Silvern et al., 1986). The children in this study also had the chance to
watch their classmates dramatize the same story.

Differences in the number of times a child is exposed to each story and the nature
of this exposure—listening, watching, enacting—may affect studies’ outcomes.
There may also be an effect for the total number of stories experienced. Thus, even
if two studies allow the children the identical number of exposures to any given
story, and the nature of those exposures is also the same, the results may differ
depending on the total number of different stories each study employs.

Type of literature dramatized. Comparing studies that used story-based impro-
visation is difficult because the studies differ in the type of literature they drama-
tized. As noted earlier, some of the studies used adult-authored stories, some used
child-authored stories, and some used a combination of the two. The differences
in the sophistication of the child-authored narratives and the adult-authored narra-
tives may affect a study’s outcome. This comparison is further complicated
because the children in the studies that used child-authored materials also produced
those narratives. In other words, in the studies that used child-authored narratives
it is often unclear if it is the dramatization of the stories, the production of the sto-
ries, or an interaction between the production and the dramatization of the stories
that produced the reported outcomes.

Even comparisons limited to studies that used only adult-authored stories are prob-
lematic. As noted earlier, some of the studies used traditional tales and some used
modern tales. This distinction alone may affect a study’s outcome. Silvern and his
colleagues (1986) found that children’s ability to recall a story differed depending
on whether the stories enacted were familiar or unfamiliar. In their study, all of the
familiar stories were fairy tales and all of the unfamiliar stories were modern children’s literature. Although the differences in the children’s recall may be due to the familiarity of the texts, as the authors suggest, these differences may also be attributable to distinctions that are characteristic of the two genres. For example, folktales often conform to a canonical narrative structure and begin with a traditional opening such as “Once upon a time” (Mandler & Johnson, 1977). These features are often less evident in modern works. It is also possible that a child’s familiarity with both the story and the genre of the story may affect the child’s performance on outcome measures.

Among studies that used only a single genre, differences in the texts (e.g., story content, narrative structure, vocabulary, syntax, and total story length) may affect outcomes such as children’s story comprehension, story recall, and narrative development. In the future, it would be helpful if a line of research could be established in which key elements of individual studies, such as story genre, story complexity, the use of illustrations, and the number of story exposures, were systematically varied across studies. This would enable researchers to test hypotheses about the mechanisms of change associated with children’s language development. Without this type of approach, it may not be possible to determine which aspects of story-based improvisation can explain the variation in language outcomes.

Age-related results of story-based improvisation. Often, researchers included children of different ages or grades in the same study. In these cases, when all of the children were exposed to the same intervention, some studies found that the drama intervention was more valuable for the younger children in the study (Galda, 1982; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Silvern et al., 1986). Galda and Pellegrini (Galda, 1982; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982) found a positive effect of the drama intervention for kindergarteners and first graders but no significant effect for second graders in their study. Galda noted, however, that there were positive qualitative differences in the narrative abilities of the second graders who were in the drama intervention group. When asked to retell the story, these children “used a more dramatic tone, included more details, and recreated the conversation between characters” (Galda, 1982, p. 54). Although these qualitative differences did not affect the number of story events a child recalled, which was the measured outcome, it did affect the level of story elaboration.

Silvern and his associates (1986) also found that the younger children in the drama intervention did significantly better than the children in the control group, but for the older children (children older than 6.7 years) there were no significant differences between the drama group and the control group. In a follow-up study, Williamson and Silvern (1990) reanalyzed the data for the older children who scored at least 1 standard deviation below the mean on the pretest. They discovered that for these children, like their younger peers, drama had a positive effect on story comprehension. Thus, older children who started the study with below-average scores significantly improved their performance. Similarly, Nielsen (1993) found that dramatization was more beneficial for low-achieving kindergarten children than it was for their higher achieving peers.

Williamson and Silvern (1990) wondered if drama is only advantageous for less able older children or if this finding was an effect of the study’s design. They
Mages suggested that in the future studies should use more difficult stories or tests to investigate whether story-based improvisation may be beneficial for older children in general. This cogent suggestion implies that interactions between drama interventions and age that sometimes have been attributed to the onset of operational thought in older children may be attributable to ceiling effects. A story that is difficult for a kindergartner to comprehend may be quite easy for a second or third grader to understand. A story that is readily understood does not need to be dramatized to facilitate comprehension. In other words, dramatizing a story may indeed facilitate comprehension in older children, but this may not be detectable unless suitably complex stories are employed. This hypothesis has not yet been fully investigated.

The effect of age in drama intervention research has only been reported in association with studies that employed story-based improvisation. Hence, some of the age-related issues, such as the complexity and sophistication of the stories that are dramatized, may have little relevance for researchers designing studies that employ only thematic improvisation techniques. However, all researchers investigating the effect of drama on language development need to consider the possibility of age effects, interaction effects, and ceiling effects when designing their studies.

Paley-Style Improvisation

A little more than a decade after the earliest drama studies were published, Paley (1981) wrote a book describing a new type of drama curriculum. Paley’s (1981, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001) work is well known in the field of early childhood education, yet her work is not often cited in educational drama texts. The unique feature of this third type of drama intervention is that, in addition to dramatizing adult-authored stories, children are encouraged to dramatize stories that they themselves have created. In a number of ways, this practice is distinct from other drama practices, such as those that incorporate children’s ideas into a story to dramatize (Way, 1967). First, in a Paley-style drama curriculum, dramatizing child-authored stories is the primary focus of the drama program. Second, children participating in a Paley-style drama program are given regular opportunities to dictate stories to an adult scribe. Third, child authors are regularly offered the chance to have their stories dramatized by their classmates.

McNamee and her colleagues (McNamee, 1987; McNamee, McLane, Cooper, & Kerwin, 1985, 1986) were the first to conduct a quasi-experimental investigation of a Paley-style drama intervention. Thus, Paley’s innovative curriculum became the basis of a third branch of drama research. Research on Paley-style curricula is important particularly because it has immediate implications for classroom praxis. Curricula based on Paley’s (1981, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001) work have already been successfully adopted in schools across the country. If it can be demonstrated that this type of educational programming fosters language acquisition in early childhood, then it should not be difficult for other preschools and kindergartens to institute this type of curriculum.

Control groups. Although all of the research on the Paley-style curricula used a storytelling/story-dramatization intervention, three different types of control paradigms were employed. Each of these different controls has the potential to answer a different research question. Nicolopoulou (2002) utilized a no-treatment control group. This type of control addresses the fundamental question, Is the intervention
more effective than no intervention at all? McNamee and her colleagues (McNamee, 1987; McNamee et al., 1985, 1986) used a storytelling-only control group. This allowed them to address the question, Does enacting child-authored stories enhance children’s language development above and beyond the effect of storytelling alone? Finally, Fein and her associates (2000) employed a control that combined storytelling with a story-sharing component: The teacher read the child-authored stories aloud to the whole class. This type of arrangement can control for the possibility that attending and responding to peers’ stories may promote narrative development. It also controls for the possibility that sharing stories with peers and having the classroom community honor one’s work motivates children’s interest in narrative and thus influences the quality and quantity of the narratives they produce.

There is a fourth type of control that has not yet been explored in this research genre. No one has attempted to hold story-based improvisation constant while varying the storytelling component. The control group in this type of study would be asked to dramatize stories identical to those dramatized in the intervention group. In other words, the children in the drama-only control group would dramatize stories written by the children in the storytelling/story-dramatization treatment group. This would allow researchers to investigate whether storytelling explains some of the variation in language development once dramatization is controlled.

It would be particularly informative if a single study could investigate a number of these different controls. If this were possible, cross-group comparisons could illuminate both the effect of the story-based improvisation and the effect of storytelling. Most important, analyses from this type of multitreatment study could determine whether there is an interaction between the story-based improvisation treatment and the storytelling treatment. Moreover, it would allow the researchers to determine how much of the variation in the children’s language development can be explained by the storytelling intervention and how much of the variation can be attributed to the creative-drama intervention.

Child-authored stories as evidence. When a child dictates a story to an adult, the written product, or story, may be more a reflection of the interaction between two collaborators than a true indication of the solo narrative ability of the child. In addition, Paley (1990) has reported that classmates sometimes make contributions to a child’s story. Hence, a child-authored story may be an indication of the child’s maximum narrative abilities within the scaffolded “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978). When applied to children’s storytelling abilities Vygotsky’s definition of the zone of proximal development—“the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86)—suggests that there may be a substantial difference between the sophistication of a story a child can create alone and the sophistication of a story a child can craft when working with collaborators.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine the role of the scribe, or the child’s peers, from the written documentation alone. Thus, to explore the contributions of each of the participants, the child, the scribe, and possibly the child’s peers, as well as the collaborative process, recordings of the dictation session need to be transcribed and analyzed. McNamee and her colleagues (McNamee, 1987; McNamee
et al., 1985, 1986) did include analyses of teacher–student interactions; however, analyses of this type of data are rare. Reviving the use of this form of data will allow researchers to control for different forms of teacher–student interaction and for the contributions of other children. It will also help scholars to better understand the process of children’s narrative development in the context of Paley-style curricula.

Measures Used in Assessing Language Outcomes

Early childhood participation in verbal interaction is particularly important for language development (Snow et al., 1998). Thus, the reviewed research literature investigates the effect of creative drama on five main categories of oral language development: oral language proficiency, productive narrative development, story comprehension, story recall, and story retelling. A wide variety of measures has been employed to assess development in these areas. The diversity of measurement instruments and coding schemes, however, limits the validity of cross-study comparisons.

Measures of Language Proficiency

To assess language proficiency, a number of the reviewed studies used measures of receptive language, such as a version of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Christie, 1983; Marbach & Yawkey, 1980; Saltz et al., 1977). Other standardized measures of language proficiency or verbal intelligence were also employed, such as the Verbal Expression scale of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (Lovingier, 1974), the verbal subtests of the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (Saltz & Johnson, 1974; Shmukler & Naveh, 1984; Smith et al., 1981), sections of the Reynell Language Development Scale (Smith & Syddall, 1978), the Head Start Measures Battery, Language Scale (Brown, 1992), and the Expressive Vocabulary Test (Nicolopoulou, 2002). In lieu of a standardized vocabulary measure, one study used a researcher-devised vocabulary measure to assess the particular set of words targeted in the dramas (Cullum, 1967). Another study assessed children’s language proficiency by having children narrate wordless picture books; the elicited narratives were coded for total number of words and number of communicative utterances the child used and the mean length of the child’s communicative utterances (Vitz, 1984). Another study had trained observers rate the child’s speaking ability for clarity, volume, and verbal fluency, as well as the child’s ability to speak in complete sentences (Niedermeyer & Oliver, 1972).

The multiplicity of measures used to assess oral language proficiency can be problematic. It is often difficult to determine if two measures of the same construct are comparable. Thus, it is difficult to make comparisons across studies.

Measures of Narrative Development

Some studies assessed children’s narrative proficiencies by presenting them with oral narrative tasks and then coding their verbal responses (Nicolopoulou, 2002; Saltz et al., 1977). These studies used a variety of techniques to elicit narratives. For example, as a pretest and posttest, Nicolopoulou used a “Figurine-Based Narrative Task” in which children were presented with a number of small figurines and asked to tell a story about them. The children’s stories were then coded for their level of narrative sophistication. Saltz and his colleagues used a slightly different approach. They showed children a set of pictures that depicted a simple story and asked the children to tell the story they saw illustrated in the pictures. The researchers then
used a rating scale to score the narratives for a child’s ability “to relate events to one another and to interpret causal relations between these events” (p. 371).

Researchers also analyzed the child-authored stories that were the product of a storytelling narrative curriculum. McNamee and her associates (McNamee, 1987; McNamee et al., 1985, 1986) analyzed children’s stories for their narrative structure by using a coding system based on Applebee’s theory of narrative development. Applebee’s (1978) theory, inspired by Vygotsky’s stages of concept development, delineates six distinct stages of narrative development. Applebee terms the first and most primitive stage “heaps” (p. 57). Heaps is followed by “sequences” (p. 59), “primitive narratives” (p. 62), “unfocused chains” (p. 63), “focused chains” (p. 64), and finally “narratives” (p. 65). As Applebee notes, these “modes of organization emerge clearly, but many stories use more than one method of organization” (p. 59).

Other researchers coded child-authored narratives for children’s ability to use story elements such as beginnings, settings, characters, sequence, feelings, descriptions, conversations, and endings (Warash & Workman, 1993). In addition, Nicolopoulou and Richner (Nicolopoulou, 1997; Richner & Nicolopoulou, 2001) analyzed children’s narratives in an attempt to explore the possibility that boys and girls have distinct, gender-related patterns of narrative development.

It is worth noting the distinction between the two types of narratives that researchers have assessed: oral narratives that are elicited under testing protocols and child-authored stories that are a product of a narrative curriculum. Generally, when a child produces a narrative under rigorous testing procedures the adult scaffolding is limited and defined. In contrast, in a narrative curriculum the child-authored stories are often produced with the help of adult scaffolding (McNamee, 1987; McNamee et al., 1985, 1986). In some instances, the child-authored stories may also reflect the “help” or “input” of peers (Paley, 1990). It is important to take these distinctions into consideration when interpreting the results of analyses of narrative development.

**Measures of Story Comprehension, Story Recall, and Story Retelling**

Researchers are often interested in investigating whether a drama intervention affected a child’s ability to comprehend, recall, or retell a story. This seems to be particularly true for researchers who use story-based improvisation as a part of their studies. Thus, a variety of outcome measures designed to assess whether a drama intervention affected children’s ability to comprehend, recall, or retell a story have been used. Comprehension measures such as criterion-referenced tests (Galda, 1982; Pellegrini, 1984; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982), as well as sets of more open-ended questions (Silverm, 1980), have been employed. Story recall has been assessed in a number of ways, including picture-sequencing tasks (Dansky, 1980; Pellegrini, 1984; Saltz et al., 1977; Saltz & Johnson, 1974) and Cloze tests (Marbach & Yawkey, 1980; Yawkey, 1979). To evaluate a child’s ability to retell a story, researchers read the child a story and then simply ask the child to retell the story (Galda, 1982; Pellegrini, 1984; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982). Sometimes pictures are provided to aid the child’s ability to recall the sequence of events (Dansky, 1980). The child’s response is then coded for its similarity to the original story.
Validity and Reliability of Measures

Studies investigating the relationship between drama and language development often fail to report the validity or reliability of the measures that were used. This may be due, in part, to the lack of standardized measures available for assessing some of the constructs creative-drama researchers want to explore. Yet, information about the validity and reliability of the instrument, or instruments, used to measure the outcome of a study is essential to the interpretability of that study. Thus, Christie and Johnsen (1983), noting the importance of rigorous measures, emphasize,

In future experimental studies, care should be exercised in the selection of dependent variable measures. Reporting validity data for standardized procedures seems minimal. While many of the variables under study do not lend themselves to standardized techniques, a careful description of the rationale and development of assessment techniques would encourage replication. (p. 111)

This sagacious advice seems equally apt for quasi-experimental designs. Similarly, qualitative and ethnographic studies can use methods such as triangulation to reduce threats to validity due to the inherent biases of a singular method of data collection (Maxwell, 1996). As the Committee on Scientific Principles for Education Research notes, “If a research conjecture or hypothesis can withstand scrutiny by multiple methods its credibility is enhanced greatly” (Shavelson & Towne, 2002, p. 64). Another way to enhance a study’s credibility is through the use of multiple raters. Drama researchers that code occurrences of particular behaviors or linguistic features should consider using multiple raters so that interrater reliability statistics can be calculated and reported (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997).

Replication is another way for creative-drama researchers to ensure that a study’s findings are valid. The Committee on Scientific Principles for Education Research (Shavelson & Towne, 2002) avers,

Scientific inquiry emphasizes checking and validating individual findings and results. Since all studies rely on a limited set of observations, a key question is how individual findings generalize to broader populations and settings. Ultimately, scientific knowledge advances when findings are reproduced in a range of times and places and when findings are integrated and synthesized. (p. 4)

Christie and Johnsen (1983) concur. They explicitly advocate for the use of replication as a means of establishing creative drama’s effect on specific areas of language development and the ability to generalize that relationship to the population. Unfortunately, as Podlozny (2000) notes, there has been a dearth of replication studies conducted within the field of creative-drama research.

Drama Facilitators

An often overlooked factor in all three strands of research investigating language development through creative drama is the importance of the drama facilitator. Just as qualified teachers are critical to the successful implementation of academic curricula, qualified drama facilitators are essential to the successful implementation of drama interventions. Thus, facilitator training is critically important to successful interventions because untrained, undertrained, or mistrained facilitators can lead to poor-quality, impoverished dramas. If the quality of the participants’ creative-drama
experience is sub par, it is less likely that the drama intervention will positively affect the study’s outcome measures. Thus, the ability of an adult facilitator to successfully guide a high-quality drama can affect how the participants respond to the intervention and can influence the results of the entire study.

**Facilitator Training and Expertise**

Although some authors clearly indicate who was responsible for facilitating a creative-drama intervention—the author, a fellow researcher, a graduate student, a classroom teacher—other authors fail to report who administered the drama treatment. Similarly, only some authors appropriately record the drama facilitator’s expertise. For example, Lovinger (1974) states that the person implementing the intervention “had been trained and [had] worked professionally in speech and theater” (p. 314). It is more common, however, that, when reported, the facilitator’s expertise is in psychology (Saltz et al., 1977) or in early childhood education (Brown, 1992; Cullinan et al., 1974; Fein et al., 2000; Saltz et al., 1977; Silvern et al., 1986; Smilansky, 1968; Strickland, 1973; Williamson, 1993) rather than in theater or drama.

Few authors mention that their creative-drama facilitators had previous drama experience. However, some note that a facilitator-training program was part of the intervention (Brown, 1992; Cullinan et al., 1974; Silvern et al., 1986; Smilansky, 1968; Strickland, 1973). Brown, for example, gives a fairly detailed description of how the facilitators were trained. This is important not only because it informs the reader about the training procedures but also because it can let the reader know which drama techniques the facilitator used in the course of the intervention. For example, it may be helpful to know if the facilitator was trained to take a role in the drama, a technique known as “teacher-in-role” (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999; O’Neill & Lambert, 1982) or “modeling” (Smilansky, 1968) or, if the facilitator was trained to guide the children from outside the drama, a technique known as “side coaching” (Spolin, 1963) or “verbal guidance” (Christie, 1985). However, as Kardash and Wright (1987) indicate, descriptions of facilitator-training procedures are not prevalent in the drama research literature.

Perhaps the importance of facilitator training is not a particularly salient consideration for researchers because they do not view guiding children to enact stories or themes as a complicated task. Vitz (1983) refers to this as “the ‘anyone can do it’ syndrome” (p. 24). Yet, some researchers have documented the challenges drama facilitators have encountered. Saltz and Johnson (1974) not only describe the difficulties that the drama facilitators experienced but enumerate some of the basic creative-drama tenets and techniques that the facilitators acquired during the course of the study. Saltz and Johnson comment that “with practice, both the children and the intervention teachers became more skilled” (p. 627). Thus, training programs that provide sufficient opportunities for drama facilitators to practice the skills and techniques that they are acquiring would be beneficial. Brown (1990) avers,

Clearly, creating high-quality drama experiences is the ultimate goal, and there is little doubt that a classroom teacher would find it difficult to duplicate the expertise of a skilled drama specialist. Substantial benefits, however, can be achieved when drama is used by a teacher with adequate training and motivation. (p. 29)
Importantly, Silvern and his colleagues (1986) not only report that they trained their drama facilitators but also detail the process evaluations they conducted to ensure the uniformity of their drama intervention. They write, “Videotapes, audio tapes, and on-site visitations were used to monitor the implementation of the treatment condition” (pp. 82–83). Accounts that describe how rigorous drama standards were maintained are quite rare. They are, however, critically important. For example, when Niedermeyer and Oliver (1972) assessed the quality of their drama intervention they discovered that there were “considerable differences in the teachers’ skills” (p. 99). They concluded that “teacher training may be required” (p. 99). Thus, not only is it important to properly train drama facilitators, but it is equally important to evaluate the fidelity with which the facilitators implement the drama intervention.

Facilitator–Participant Ratio

The ratio of facilitators to participants is another factor that should be taken into account. Some studies assigned the drama facilitator to guide groups of three to five children in the drama techniques (Galda, 1982; Pellegrini, 1984; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Saltz et al., 1977; Saltz & Johnson, 1974), whereas other studies required that the drama facilitator work with the whole class at once (Brown, 1992; Cullinan et al., 1974; Smilansky, 1968; Strickland, 1973). The difference in the number of students assigned to a single drama facilitator not only can influence a study’s outcome but also may affect how a successful intervention can be translated into classroom praxis. An intervention that requires a teacher to work with only a small group of children at a time may be less practical in today’s classrooms than an intervention that allows the facilitator to work with the whole class at once. These differences in facilitator–participant ratio make it essential for researchers to report the number of facilitators, as well as the number of participants, who were involved in the creative-drama intervention.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although individual studies are important, it would be beneficial if, in the future, creative-drama researchers worked to establish lines of research. Wagner (1998) has noted that in the past creative-drama research has not always been able to build on previous studies. Establishing a line of research affords investigators the opportunity to develop paradigms based directly on the findings from previous studies. Once a strong research paradigm is created, then scholars working within that paradigm can systematically manipulate variables across studies in an attempt to identify the mechanisms within creative drama that contribute to the change in language development. In addition, it would be useful to investigate whether creative drama has differential effects for particular groups of participants, such as children who are learning English as a second language and bilingual children who are fluent in both English and another language, as well as children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Although this recommendation may appear to apply only to experimental and quasi-experimental designs, it is equally applicable to qualitative and ethnographic studies. Strong ethnographic paradigms can be applied to different communities of creative-drama participants or to the same community of participants over time.
Unlike a single ethnography, a series of ethnographies can begin to elucidate similarities and differences in creative-drama practices between communities or can describe how a particular community’s creative-drama practices develop and change. Paley’s (1981, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001) work in early childhood education provides a particularly good example of how a series of ethnographic studies can document successful drama practices and details how these practices have evolved and developed over two decades. Rich description (Maxwell, 1996), the hallmark of ethnographic studies, is often able to illuminate processes or practices that may influence creative-drama outcomes, such as language development. This type of work may also be able to identify new areas of inquiry that might not be detectible or salient in experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

An additional benefit of establishing lines of drama research would be that scholars working within the same research paradigm over time can begin to establish a consistent vocabulary to describe the constructs under investigation. Although it will still be important for researchers to carefully articulate the constructs they study and to explicitly define any terminology they use, working within a line of research may help to establish a common vocabulary. This will also make it easier for researchers to understand, interpret, and build on previous findings.

Perhaps even more important than the establishment of particular lines of drama research is the development of rigorous standards for reporting a study’s methods, measures, and findings. Descriptions of interventions need to be sufficiently comprehensive so that readers can understand both what was done and how it was done. This includes detailing which creative-drama practices were introduced, who facilitated the creative-drama intervention, the expertise and training of the facilitator, and the number of students assigned to a single facilitator. It also includes describing the measures that were used and the validity and reliability of those measures.

In addition, it is essential for researchers who use literature as part of the intervention to fully cite the works that were used and to explicitly note whether any illustrations were shared with the participants. It would also be helpful if researchers noted the level of difficulty of the texts that were used. Finally, researchers should report how they assessed this level of difficulty and whether factors such as the total length of the narrative, the sophistication of the vocabulary, or the complexity of the syntax were considered when selecting a particular set of stories.

In the future, the quality and rigor of creative-drama research may determine whether drama is included in early childhood classrooms. In this era of accountability and high-stakes testing, educators and administrators need tangible proof of drama’s benefits, and only the highest quality research can provide this type of evidence. Although drama purists may balk at the idea of promoting drama solely for its potential to foster language development, this may be a particularly effective way to ensure that today’s children have the opportunity to experience the joy of dramatizing a story or enacting a scenario. In 1987 Booth wrote,

The next few years will be important ones for those of us interested in working with drama, language and children. Our mandate will be to develop sound language processes without diminishing the inherent worth of the art form called drama, as well as to create drama strategies that will help us promote language growth in children. (p. vii)
Two decades later, Booth’s mandate is still relevant. Moreover, it is up to researchers to demonstrate that drama is accomplishing this mandate. Thus, it is critical for research in this field to maintain the highest standards possible. It is also important to the future of creative drama that research in this field is not limited to only one or two methods of investigation. Both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms have the potential to shed light on the relationship between creative drama and language development. Different methods are differently able to answer particular types of questions. Thus, Christie (1992) has advocated combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Although sometimes this cannot be done successfully in a single study, Christie’s suggestion highlights

**APPENDIX A**

*Empirical literature inclusion criteria*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Study element</th>
<th>Inclusion criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Published after 1960 in books or peer-reviewed journals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available in English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative-drama</td>
<td>Study intervention met the construct definition of <em>creative drama</em> defined following Davis and Behm (1987) and Way (1967)</td>
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<tr>
<td>intervention</td>
<td>Excluded: Studies focused on parent–child dyads or family interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Study outcome must be associated with oral language development</td>
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<tr>
<td>outcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>2- to 7-year-old typically developing children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No severe mental, emotional, or physical impairments</td>
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APPENDIX B
List of databases and search terms used to identify relevant studies

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<tr>
<th>Databases</th>
<th>Drama terms</th>
<th>Language terms</th>
<th>Participant parameter terms</th>
<th>Excluding terms</th>
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<td>comprehension</td>
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<td>Narrative</td>
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<td>Oral language</td>
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<td>achievement</td>
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<td>Reenact$</td>
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<td>Thematic fantasy play</td>
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Note. $ is a database search convention that indicates a search for the preceding word stem with all possible endings.
## APPENDIX C

*Terms for creative drama and similar or related constructs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Examples of some authors who use the term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acting-out stories</td>
<td>Paley, 1978</td>
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<td>Child drama</td>
<td>Davis and Behm, 1978, 1987</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative drama</td>
<td>Cooper and Collins, 1992; Davis and Behm, 1978, 1987; Kardash and Wright, 1987; McCaslin, 1996; Vitz, 1984; Wagner, 1998</td>
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<td>Creative dramatics</td>
<td>Cullinan, Jaggar, and Strickland, 1974; Strickland, 1973</td>
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<td>Drama</td>
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<td>Drama in education</td>
<td>Brown, 1992</td>
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<td>Dramatic play</td>
<td>Galda, 1984; Smilansky, 1968</td>
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<td>Niedermeyer and Oliver, 1972; Paley, 1978</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Fein, Ardila-Rey, and Groth, 2000; Kirk, 1998; McNamee, 1987; McNamee, McLane, Cooper, and Kerwin, 1985; Warash and Workman, 1993</td>
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<td>Educational drama</td>
<td>Wagner, 1998</td>
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<td>Fantasy play</td>
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<td>Fantasy reenactment</td>
<td>Pellegrini, 1984</td>
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<td>Group-dramatic play</td>
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<td>Guided drama</td>
<td>Davis and Behm, 1978, 1987</td>
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<td>Imaginative drama</td>
<td>Paley, 1978</td>
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<td>Imaginative play</td>
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<td>Improvisation</td>
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<td>Informal classroom drama</td>
<td>Wagner, 1998</td>
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<td>Let’s pretend play</td>
<td>Yawkey, 1979</td>
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<td>Make-believe</td>
<td>Christie, 1983; Singer, 1973; Smilansky, 1968; Yawkey, 1979</td>
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<td>Fein, 1981; Galda, 1982; Silvern, 1980; Yawkey, 1979</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play enactment</td>
<td>Saltz et al., 1977</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play tutoring</td>
<td>Christie, 1983; Smith et al., 1981</td>
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<td>Pretend play</td>
<td>Fein, 1981; Harris, 2000; Nicolopoulou, 2002</td>
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<td>Pretense</td>
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<td>Process drama</td>
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<td>Role enactment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role play or role playing</td>
<td>Brown, 1992; Cullinan et al., 1974; Fein, 1981; Strickland, 1973</td>
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<td>Role-taking</td>
<td>Levy, Wolfgang, and Koorland, 1992</td>
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</table>

(continued)
the importance each method has for developing an understanding of the phenomena associated with drama and language development. It is clear that many forms of creative-drama research are warranted and necessary to fully explore the field and to make different kinds of inferences. Hopefully, in the future the fecundity of high-quality rigorous creative-drama research will provide educators and administrators with the information they need to make well-founded decisions about whether and how to include drama in early childhood curricula.

Notes

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1Davis and Behm (1987) note that this definition is “based on the definition developed by Ann M. Shaw, Frank Harland, and Anne Thurman” (p. 263; see also Davis & Behm, 1978).

2This review is limited to studies that focus on children without any severe mental, emotional, or physical impairments.

3The results from a few of the 34 unique studies were described in more than one report. However, duplicate reports of the same study were not considered when calculating the reported percentages. In addition, the works of Vivian Gussin Paley (1981, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001) were taken into consideration. Although Paley’s books are sometimes viewed as ethnographic research or action research, they were excluded from the percentages reported in this review of the literature because they are framed not as research but as stories about classroom practices. In addition, the inclusion of the Paley corpus would skew the results toward Paley’s methods and mask the variation in the rest of the field.
Mages

See McNamee, McLane, Cooper, and Kerwin (1985, p. 244; 1986, p. 224) for a concise explication of their operational definition of each of Applebee’s six stages.

References


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