

ORIGINAL

## The performing arts on the development of creativity in children

### Las artes escénicas en el desarrollo de la creatividad en el nivel inicial

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#### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** performing arts are a form of artistic expression encompassing dance and theater, where creativity plays an integral role in exploring new ideas and developing communication skills. This study aimed to analyze the importance of performing arts in fostering creativity among early childhood education students in Puyo, Ecuador.

**Method:** as a qualitative research endeavor, field data were collected through interviews with teachers and experts, and a field journal was employed to observe 98 preschool-aged children.

**Results:** the results revealed that students have acquired fundamental elements of creativity through the performing arts, such as originality, fluency, flexibility, curiosity, as well as production, generation, imagination, and ideation. It was established that early childhood educators place significant value on the performing arts, recognizing them as a fundamental component of their training and aligning them with strategies implemented in educational contexts.

**Conclusions:** the study concludes that creativity is an essential human trait that helps children develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, broadening their knowledge, enhancing artistic strengths, and improving their ability to navigate complex situations.

**Keywords:** Performing Arts; Art in Education; Creativity Development; Creative Education; Early Childhood Education.

#### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** las artes escénicas son una forma de expresión artística que abarca la danza y el teatro, la creatividad es una parte integral de las artes que permite explorar nuevas ideas desarrollando habilidades comunicativas. El estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la importancia de las artes escénicas en el desarrollo de la creatividad de los infantes de Educación Inicial en Puyo, Ecuador.

**Método:** las artes escénicas son una forma de expresión artística que abarca la danza y el teatro, la creatividad es una parte integral de las artes que permite explorar nuevas ideas desarrollando habilidades comunicativas. El estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la importancia de las artes escénicas en el desarrollo de la creatividad de los infantes de Educación Inicial en Puyo, Ecuador.

**Resultados:** los resultados determinaron que los estudiantes han adquirido elementos básicos de la creatividad a través de las artes escénicas como son: originalidad, fluidez, flexibilidad, curiosidad, además de la producción, generación, imaginación e ideación. Se estableció que las docentes del nivel inicial brindan un valor esencial a las artes escénicas debido a que son parte fundamental de su formación, relacionándose con las estrategias que son puestas en práctica dentro del contexto educativo.

**Conclusiones:** se concluye que la creatividad es una característica humana esencial que ayuda a los niños a desarrollar habilidades de pensamiento crítico y resolución de problemas, ampliando su conocimiento,

desarrollando fortalezas artísticas y la capacidad para lidiar con situaciones complejas.

**Palabras clave:** Artes Escénicas; Arte en la Educación; Desarrollo de la Creatividad; Educación Creativa; Educación Inicial.

## INTRODUCTION

The performing arts refer to various artistic disciplines that incorporate acting, singing, and dancing, among other forms of stage expression. These have the potential to develop creativity, as they challenge artists to create new ideas, be creative with how they tell a story, or explore new forms of expression. The arts have been present in all cultures and societies throughout history, being used to entertain, communicate ideas, and convey social messages.<sup>(1)</sup>

Creativity is a fundamental skill for success in life, especially in the initial stage. This is because the development of creativity develops critical thinking skills, such as solving complex problems while developing a deep understanding of concepts. If the capacity to create is reconsidered, it can be observed that creativity is frequently linked to the ability to generate new and original ideas or realizations.<sup>(2)</sup>

Creativity also contributes to the development of an open mind toward the world around us, self-esteem, and social skills. Recreational activities, games, expression exercises, and participation in artistic activities such as theater, dance, singing, and painting can be excellent ways to develop creativity in early childhood children.

Despite all the benefits of the performing arts, teachers tend not to use them in children's educational processes at the initial level, devaluing the arts as enhancers of creativity. It is important for children to develop creativity as it will allow them to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences in a unique and personal way.

It also allows them to develop an open mind toward the world around them, self-esteem, and fundamental social skills, which are essential for children's success throughout their lives. Art is not only an integral component in the education of human beings but also acts as a tool to shape them, allowing them to expand their understanding of both the world and their own identity, all from the perspective of aesthetic values.<sup>(3)</sup>

The performing arts facilitate the development of creativity by stimulating curiosity, imagination, expression, and communication. These artistic activities allow children to develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills essential for their future success. Creativity is a form of thought that is activated when a person faces a problem whose resolution requires specific qualities such as fluidity, flexibility, originality, and capacity for elaboration.<sup>(4)</sup>

The purpose of this study was to analyze the importance of the performing arts in the development of creativity in early childhood education in Puyo, Ecuador, based on an in-depth analysis of the characteristics in which creativity manifests itself in young children and to assess the perception that teachers have of the performing arts in the formative process. The results will allow us to explore the benefits of the performing arts in developing creativity; this research considers that the performing arts are excellent allies in early childhood education when applied appropriately.

## Background to the study

The Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Ecuador establishes that the core areas of early childhood education are cognitive development, social and emotional development, physical development, and general skills development. These core areas focus on stimulating and developing children's skills, such as language, reasoning, social and emotional skills, and creativity, to create a learning environment that promotes cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

López<sup>(5)</sup> explains that "(...) the arts constitute a paradigmatic case of the link between intelligence, will and affectivity from the point of view of pedagogy (...)" (p.319). In this way, the performing arts are fundamental in early childhood education, as these activities stimulate the development of creativity, improving self-esteem through collaboration and encouraging free expression. In this way, children can understand the world around them, developing social skills and a sense of self-awareness.

According to Silvera,<sup>(6)</sup> there is a link between early childhood education and the performing arts. The performing arts are seen as a "resource" that makes the individual "closer to himself" because it allows people to be aware of the development of their personality, showing the meditation that each individual does on his human body, his space, and the movements he is capable of. In the article, the creators emphasize the true purpose of teaching and how it relates to art because it is understood that the teacher seeks to discover the skills that make the learning process possible—demonstrating the value of using the performing arts as a tactic that results in the child's integral development.

However, dance and theater are often absent from the curriculum in education, especially in early education, where the value of the arts and their potential to develop students' skills are frequently underestimated. To "comply" with state requirements, teachers have often reduced art education to its most basic expression, limiting it to students playing a ballad on the flute.<sup>(7)</sup>

Gil et al.<sup>(8)</sup> highlight the relationship between the performing arts and physical activity, pointing out that physical education plays a fundamental role in promoting corporal self-expression. They explored the interactions between the performing arts environment and the development of creativity, concluding that the latter manifests itself as the ability to generate solutions and solve problems through artistic expression.

The performing arts can be used in any profession to develop social, emotional, disciplinary, creative, and communicative skills. Incorporating them into the educational environment can help students understand their emotions, eliminate negative emotional baggage, and regulate their behavior.

## **METHOD**

The research had a qualitative, descriptive-narrative approach, using phrases, content, and speeches to build and discern the situation of creativity and performing arts within the educational establishment. The study was conducted at the "Magic School" Basic Education School, which belongs to district 16D01 Pastaza-Mera-Santa Clara, circuit C02 of Puyo, Ecuador. The institution is privately run, with an initial level from 2 to 6 years of age. The population consisted of all the teachers and pupils of the institution, 98 children and six teachers, and the contribution of 4 professionals with experience in the performing arts. The sample was non-probabilistic at the researcher's discretion, as it was considered the only private center with an initial level in the sector under investigation.

Individual interviews were used to compile and analyze the information, which allowed data to be collected from the dialog. This technique was used to obtain information that would allow the collected data to be contrasted with the information present in the study.

In addition, for the data compendium, participant observation was used, which is defined as the process of data collection that requires the observer. The field diary was used as an instrument, allowing a record to be kept like a "notebook" where the information was detailed.

For the analysis of results, data triangulation was used, which made it possible to detect coincidences from different perspectives, with in-depth analysis based on studies in the sciences of education, the performing arts, and creativity.

## **RESULTS**

Regarding the interview with professionals with experience in the performing arts, criteria such as the following stand out: teachers can enhance their students' skills through art, skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and teamwork, which are necessary guidelines for the student's academic success.

It was also appreciated that teachers identify the limitations and possibilities of performing arts in children's creative development at the initial level in their pedagogical practice.

Teaching plays a vital role in promoting students' interest in the performing arts from an early age. This means that they must have a broad understanding of its benefits and a deep respect for creativity and the pace of learning that comes with acquiring new skills. Next, students must be provided with a safe environment where they can freely explore and express their ideas, demonstrating a commitment to the teaching process and involving students in the planning and executing their own performing arts projects. As Buchanan<sup>(9)</sup> puts it, "The performing arts offer a unique opportunity for students to develop their cognitive, social and emotional skills in a fun, safe and stimulating environment" (p.3).

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## Originality

Originality in children's creativity is the ability to create something unique and innovative that has not existed before. This is reflected in how children use their imagination to make drawings, write, play music, construct toys, and do other projects. Originality is also reflected in the way children see and represent the world. This can include how they see nature, people, and objects and how they relate to them. Children can see the world differently and uniquely, allowing them to create games and situations.

As part of the different activities in the "My Magical Christmas" festival, the children performed a musical theater about the birth of the baby Jesus. To put on this festival, the children expressed their ideas and opinions in a free environment provided by the teachers, especially regarding how they would like to create the dances, select the ideas, and implement them.

After the activities for the infants, it was much easier for them to present their ideas fluently and originally, so each teacher, with their group of students, performed a selection of the Christmas carols that would be used in the program. In the same way, dance activities were carried out, where each child presented a dance step that would be implemented in the choreographies.

The information obtained in the field diaries showed that, in the observation of the children in November and December, the infants were able to acquire, present, and develop imagination, fluency, and originality, as evidenced in all stages of the creation and realization of the institution's Christmas festival, where children and teachers created the process for its creation, imagined, they came up with what they wanted to do and, in consensus with the educational staff, they managed to produce and present these ideas on stage.

## DISCUSSION

By the research objective, which is to determine the characteristics of the creativity acquired by children at the initial level, the present work highlights the main findings observed in the infants at the initial level of the chosen educational center during the participatory process of the staging of the Festival "Mi mágica navidad" (My magical Christmas), a space conducive to the identification of the elements of creativity based on the theoretical contributions of Guilford.<sup>(10)</sup> In reference, Mazur<sup>(11)</sup> emphasizes: Children are naturally creative and have a great capacity to develop original skills. Children's creativity is a powerful force that can inspire adults to innovate and have greater self-confidence. Allowing children to explore and develop their talents opens new doors of opportunity for them. (p. 8)

The findings of this work stand out in the demonstration of the children at the initial level of being able to create and be original in their ideas, thoughts, and actions. The children from the performing arts in the classroom that the teachers encouraged evidenced originality, fluidity, generation, production, imagination, and ideation. According to Interviewee 1:

It has a lot of influence because they are going to feel free and safe, and they are going to create new movements, art, and many other things with their imagination. They are going to make them feel that they can achieve many different things, keep developing in a better way, and be sure of what they are doing.

Fluency in creativity is acquired through practice and experience. This means that children need time to experiment and to do many different things. The author reaffirms the need to use activities to develop creative fluency, including experimenting with materials, interacting with others, reading books, telling stories, watching tapes, listening to music and playing, doing creative projects, using their imagination to create stories, drawing, writing, making art, singing, dancing, and other creative activities helps develop creativity and curiosity, which allows for more innovative and fluid thinking.<sup>(12)</sup>

Fluency in creativity is an essential skill that children need to develop to succeed in life. It is the ability to think flexibly and creatively, to find creative solutions to problems, and to have an open mind to new ideas and perspectives. This skill is acquired with practice and experience, as well as with external stimulation through a variety of fun and educational activities. These activities include experimenting with materials, playing freely, telling stories, singing, painting, and dancing. Fluency in creativity is an essential skill that helps children develop critical thinking and an open mind.

On the other hand, developing children's flexibility helps them develop their imagination and sense of curiosity. Coinciding with Amabile,<sup>(13)</sup> who states:

Flexibility of thought and the ability to adapt are fundamental skills that children acquire through practice and experience. Children need time to experiment and to do many different things. The more time they spend exploring and playing with materials, the more flexible their thoughts and creative abilities become. External stimuli, such as educational experiences that challenge children to think and act in new ways, are also essential to foster this flexibility. (p. 56)

According to Vásquez,<sup>(14)</sup> "Contemporary musical theater is a genre of theatrical art that includes disciplines such as music and dance" (p. 111).

About the objective of assessing the perception that teachers have of the performing arts in the educational process of children at the initial level, there is a unanimous opinion among the teachers participating in the study that professionals in initial education highly value the performing arts and understand their benefits for

the development of their pupils' skills, as Granizo (2023) puts it, "we early childhood teachers place a very high value on the performing arts because they help children to learn effectively and meaningfully, helping them to develop their imagination and creativity, achieving good learning in children," an expression that coincides with the study by Kearney<sup>(15)</sup> who attributes:

Education must include the performing arts because theater is one of the oldest and richest forms of artistic expression. Theater is a unique tool for inspiring the imagination, developing creativity, and promoting personal expression. Theater teaches life skills such as effective communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Theater also helps students better understand the world around them, develop an individual identity, and connect with the community through history, culture, and art. (p. 5)

The aspects observed are related to what the experts consulted said, who consider that there is a close relationship between the performing arts, the development of creativity, and education. They mention that these complement each other despite not being explicit in an educational curriculum. As stated by Interviewee 2, there is no education without creativity, and creativity does not develop if it is not through art. There is no better way to relate them to each other than through performing arts.

The authors recommend that future research be carried out on the relationship between the performing arts and their application in elementary and high school education. From a comparative analysis between educational levels, identify perceptions and opportunities for their effective development, since, as demonstrated in this study, at the initial level, teachers make great use of the performing arts as strategies to develop the teaching-learning process and the creative skills necessary for the integral development.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research show that the students at the initial level have managed to acquire characteristics of creativity through the application of the performing arts, by Guilford's theoretical approach mentioned in the theoretical foundation; it is determined that the main characteristics that the children showed through the performing arts were originality, fluidity, flexibility manifested in freely and spontaneously provided activities such as experimenting with materials, interacting with others, listening to music and playing by inventing rhythmic sequences and sounds, using their imagination to create stories, drawing, singing, dancing and other creative activities.

Early childhood teachers value the performing arts because they are part of their profile and academic training and are used as strategies for developing children's skills and abilities. According to the experts interviewed, the performing arts are more relevant in early childhood education, and their use needs to be encouraged in higher levels of education, such as primary, elementary, and secondary.

It is therefore concluded that there is a relationship between the performing arts, the development of creativity, and early education since they complement each other, enhancing the development of skills and abilities in students, especially at the early levels, where educational processes are developed through the performing arts such as theater, singing, dramatization, dance, rounds, among others.

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