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“Can we Play again with Picasso Miss?” The Effects of the Arts in Children’s Involvement during Literacy Activities in the Early Years Settings: A Case Study in the Greek Context.

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Abstract

Involvement is the cornerstone of the educational process, especially in the early years settings. It is a fundamental factor in people’s actions particularly when they are deeply concentrated in an activity. However, little research has been conducted in the early years settings, with focus on teaching and learning. This piece of research investigates the effects of the arts as a means to promote children’s involvement during literacy activities. This was based on the hypothesis that the arts provide opportunities to children to participate actively. The participants were from a case study of an early years setting in Greece, with 18 children and their average age was 5,2 years old. The research procedure was based on the “Play and Learn through the Arts” programme, which was an interdisciplinary programme that was designed for a PhD project. Children’s involvement was measured with Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children (LIS-YC) and it was further examined with a semi structured interview to the head teacher of the class. The findings show that the data collected from both measures verifies the research’s hypothesis about the beneficial effect of the arts on children’s involvement during literacy activities. These findings should be treated carefully in terms of generalising them, as they derived from a case study. This research could be useful to early years educators as a pioneering approach in early literacy.

especially in the early years settings. It is a basic element of people’s activity by which we can understand the level of concentration during a certain task and their correspondence. When a child is deeply involved in an activity, it is highly unlikely to be distracted by external factors and the child will persist to fulfill it. According to Laevers [14], involvement is a quality of people’s activity that is described by motivation, insistence and pleasure. It can be recognised in tasks or activities that are within children’s abilities and intrinsic interests which means that the activities are not too easy or too difficult.

Researching the existing theoretical and empirical literature, it is obvious that there is a difference between the terms involvement and engagement. According to Ferlazzo [7], the term involvement presumes an action in something whereas the term engagement implies an action with someone. However, the term engagement is mostly used in pieces of research that examine the role of parent in children’s learning and performance whereas the term involvement is mainly used when examining the action itself. For this purpose, this paper will use the term involvement as its main purpose is to measure children’s actions in literacy activities and not children’s action with someone else.

Effective teaching and learning process is highly linked with the level of children’s involvement to the activity and of course to teacher’s engagement. A teacher-lead approach can result in very limited creativity and children do not learn to be pioneering and independent thinkers and to use their abilities to solve problems [20]. Effective learning can only be achieved when children are motivated and deeply involved in a task or an activity [1; 27]. These arguments have their roots to Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s theory as they both

1. Introduction

Involvement is a very important parameter during the teaching and learning procedure

put great emphasis on experience [see 21; 31]. Although this concept is very important in the early years settings, there are certain constraints that early childhood teachers may confront in their attempt to involve children actively during teaching and learning such as children's personality, culture, socio-economic background, parents' attitude, large number of cohorts in the classroom, the demanding and challenging environment of the early years classroom etc. In addition, most of the researchers are examining the effects of parents' engagement in teaching and learning and not children's involvement by itself [see 9; 10; 13; 15; 17; 18]. Parents' engagement is another important aspect of effective learning but as Siraj-Blatchford et al. [28] stress, one major aspect of research is to further examine the levels of children's involvement during school hours.

For these reasons, this paper examines children's involvement during teaching and learning process and stresses the value of involving young children in their own learning. The focus of this study is the early years settings and its purpose is to examine the effects of the arts as a means to promote children's involvement during literacy activities.

2. Why the early years settings? The importance of this context

The early years settings have a very strong influence on children's future academic and social performance. The interactions and the activities in this area hold an important role in education in general, as they can influence children's approach to learning. A lot of researchers have verified this argument by conducting relevant pieces of research towards this direction.

Tymms et al. [30] were some of the researchers who conclude that early years activities influence significantly students' performance in primary school. Exploring the progress of students in the first grade of primary school, they identify that children who attended early years centers had better performance from those who did not attend early years centers. Thus, Tymms et al. [30, p.106] suggest that the early years activities were "a good predictor of later performance which provided a very satisfactory basis". A couple of years later, Siraj-Blatchford et al. [28] and Yan and Yuejuan [33], agreed with this, stating that this context has significant

effects on learning, enhancing young students to begin school with better academic perspectives. Tymms et al. [29] also agree with this argument, endorsing the advantages of 4-year-old students' activities in their future academic progress. They propose that an early intervention can have positive impacts on young children's long-term development.

This leads us to suggest that the early years settings are an important area for children's future academic performance, as children create a good foundation for their knowledge. What we need to discuss now before we analyse the paper's methodology is how the relevant pieces of research had examined the aspect of children's involvement.

3. Research regarding children's involvement

Children's involvement is highly related to academic performance. Based on this argument a lot of researchers examine this aspect from different points of view and they all agree and conclude about the importance of children's involvement in their learning and academic and social performance.

A basic aspect of this matter is what strategies teachers use in order to engage actively children in the learning process. The way that teachers present school activities is fundamental on how children will react and participate. If a school activity is not attractive, then children will show low participation and interest and this will have a serious impact on their learning. Phelps et al. [20] shed light on this and identify that teachers in Vietnamese schools should enable children to become more active in their own learning. They are concerned about the improvement of teaching techniques and for this reason they interviewed 9-10 year-old children in order to understand the way of their learning. Their ultimate goal was to inform the quality of improvement of a motivating school environment. Through their study they conclude that the Vietnamese educational society should consider a more child-centered curriculum that helps children to become independent learners.

Similar to this matter is the type of school activities, as they have their roots in teachers' strategies. The way that teachers will set or organise the school setting will result eventually in the type of activities that children will participate. For example, if the educational resources like papers, crayons or puzzles are placed in very high shelf that children cannot

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reach, this will not empower them to take responsibility of their own learning as they will always depend on the teacher to give them the resources they want in order to play. The type of activity is an important parameter in children's involvement. An activity has to be motivating and intriguing for children to participate fully in it and this will result in high or poor involvement. Robson & Rowe [23] shed light on this as they researched preschool children's involvement and creative thinking during activities. Through observations of child-initiated, adult-led and adult-directed activities the researchers concluded that the highest levels of children's involvement and persistence were shown in child-initiated activities which were also associated with creative thinking skills. This can be justified because this kind of activity may result from the true children's interests and goals. Therefore, this leads us to suggest that children's involvement has a great impact in children's learning and thinking skills.

Children's active involvement is also a vital indicator of the quality of the school setting, which eventually results in its effectiveness. From this aspect it can be identified that when children spent meaningful time in school activities they have the opportunity to deeply explore and construct the new knowledge. Ridley et al. [22] investigate this aspect with group observations in child care settings of North Carolina. They focus their arguments in the concept of engagement as they were interested on children's interactions and not in the concept of involvement as it is the focus of this paper. However, it is worthwhile analysing this piece of research as it gives valuable information that can be used in the concept of involvement too. The researchers conclude that high quality settings are closely related to high levels of children's engagement. However, in school settings the quality of the interactions is more important rather than the traditional standards that characterise quality e.g. group size, ratio adult-children. The researchers point out that the immediate response of the teachers has higher influence on children's engagement rather than the traditional measures of quality. This can be related with the focus of this paper because the content of teachers' interactions is very important, and as argued previously, teachers' strategies affect children's active involvement.

Proceeding in the last argument, children's involvement can also have great effects in the development of self-regulation. Self-regulation

is an important parameter in the development of student's independent learning skills [25] and therefore should be highly considered. During meaningful interactions, children have the opportunity to establish the appropriate emotional foundation in order to regulate their learning and behaviour. Williford et al. [32] agreed with these arguments and contributed by researching this aspect in the early years settings. This paper is also focused on engagement but as stated earlier it gives interesting insights to children's involvement too. Through children observation, teacher report and direct assessment, the researchers concluded that children who were actively engaged in school activities had greater gains in emotion regulation skills than children who were not engaged actively. This can be linked with the focus of this paper because as argued previously the quality of interactions can result in the active involvement of children in their learning.

To summarise, reviewing the empirical research literature regarding children's involvement it is obvious that this aspect has a vital role on children's social and cognitive achievement. All the analysed pieces of research show that when children have the opportunity to involve deeply in an activity, they have greater school and social performance. Children's involvement has been conceptualised as an important indicator of the quality of school settings and children's self-regulation. In addition, teachers' strategies and the type of school activities are fundamental to empower children to involve actively in school activities. Although, most of these pieces of research focus in the early years settings there are no evidence of a particular focus in a specific subject area of the early years curriculum (like math or literacy) in conjunction with another subject area, as it is the purpose of this study (like arts or physical exercise). Therefore, it can be argued that there is a need to explore further children's involvement examining in more detail each subject area of the early years curriculum with the ultimate goal to find meaningful ways to promote children's involvement.

4. Why the arts? The importance of this subject area

Art activities in the early years settings is a mainstream type of activity of children's free play as they spent most of their time in drawing, playing with musical instruments,

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clay sculptures and drama play. One of the basic characteristics of the arts is that they offer freedom and the opportunity to express feelings, thoughts and attitudes that are difficult to verbalise. According to Dewey [4, p.254], “art breaks through barriers that divide human beings, which are impermeable in ordinary association”. Early childhood educators can intervene indirectly to embed educational outcomes in art activities without over-structuring children and damaging their enjoyment.

Children’s free art activities can be utilised by teachers without spoiling children’s creativity as they can intervene and guide children to the pedagogical aspects of these activities. According to Eisner [5], art educators have a fundamental role on children’s progress as they have the opportunity to stimulate children to continue their learning explorations. The arts enable students to justify and express clearly their experience [6]. They create a playful environment in which students find meaningful activities. Moyles [19, p.37] stresses that learning is more meaningful when it is achieved through play and identifies that

“the concept of drama and dramatic play is worth exploring further as it is a play medium and process which can encompass most if not all other areas of curriculum and at the same time investigative, language based and creative”.

In other words, Moyles [19] suggests that a specific kind of the arts, drama and drama play, is a great tool that teachers can use in teaching and learning process as it links free play to educational outcomes.

Another important characteristic of the arts is that they offer interesting and motivating activities for young children that result in deep and meaningful learning. This is based on the argument that amusement has a vital role in the teaching and learning procedure. People and especially young children should find the educational activities attractive in order to participate fully. Hall and Robinson [12, p.124] support this, highlighting that

“people- all people, not just five-year-old people- learn more efficiently, with greater intensity and with more purpose when the learning is fun”.

However, it should be noted that amusement is often divided from serious learning activities where seriousness and austerity is dominant in

the context of these activities. Looking more carefully to the initial meaning of the term amusement, it is obvious that it is very important on people’s live and learning. According to Shusterman [26, p.293],

“the English term ‘amusement’ derives from the verb ‘to muse’ whose early meaning is to be absorbed in thought, to wonder, to be astonished or puzzled”.

Consequently, amusement is a very important aspect of the learning procedure instead of a trivial and unimportant aspect.

Investigating the arts a little further, they also correlate with significant learning goals in literacy. Vygotsky [31, p.112-113] perceives a child’s drawing as an early form of writing and as describing the process of children’s drawing, he notes that

“the schemes that distinguish children’s first drawings are reminiscent in this sense of verbal concepts that communicate only the essential features objects. This gives us grounds for regarding children’s drawing as a preliminary stage in the development of written language”.

A lot of researchers have examined the impact of the arts on children learning and especially on children’s literacy and they all concluded in the beneficial outcome of the arts. Gromko [11] focuses her research in the early years context and confirms that music activities have a beneficial role on young children’s phonological awareness. Some years later, Bolduc [2] agreed with Gromko [11] about the advantages of music on children’s phonological awareness in the same level of education. Another form of the arts was investigated by McMahan et al. [16] while examining the effects of a dance programme on reading skills of students in the first grade of primary school. They concluded that learning to read through dancing can improve students’ achievement in reading. Lastly, a related kind of the arts was also investigated by Fleming et al. [8], who confirmed the positive outcomes of drama on students’ reading, mathematics, self-concept and attitude in primary school.

To summarise, the arts are a very important aspect in children’s learning especially in the early years settings as they derive from children innate desire and maintain a basic type of activity in their free play. Early childhood teachers can utilise arts activities to

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promote children's learning and direct them in the educational aspects of these activities. Having established the reason for choosing this subject area, the importance of the arts and the need of this study, following there will be a presentation of the paper's methodology.

5. Research aim, hypothesis and method

Having discussed thoroughly the importance of children's involvement and art activities, the aim of this research is to examine the effects of the arts as a means to promote children's involvement during literacy activities. This aim was built on the hypothesis that the arts have the opportunity to enable young children to participate actively during early literacy activities following an interdisciplinary programme that was designed for the researcher's PhD project.

5.1 Participants

In order to examine research's hypothesis, this piece of research uses a case study from an early years setting located in a Greek island in Saronikos bay near Attica. This setting was chosen randomly because the head teacher of the school was eager to participate in this study. This teacher had also some artistic experience as she was a volunteer actor in the local theatrical team of the island for some years. Letters of consent was distributed to all children's parents of this setting, informing them in detail about the aim of the research and the procedure. In total 25 parents agreed for their children to participate in the study but one of the children changed school in the middle of the school year. From the final cohort two children haven't been included in the measurements as one had a diagnosis of ASD and in the other one there was a suspicion of severe learning difficulties. However, both of these children participated fully in the research procedure and activities. The final number of children participated and measured was 23 of which the 43% (n=10) was male and the 52% (n=12) was female but on the days of the measurements there were 18 children present of which the 39% (n=7) was male and the 61% (n=11) was female, which maintains a slightly equal number among gender with girls to have a higher percentage from boys. The mean age of all children was 5,2 years old, with the minimum age 4,3 years old and the

maximum age 6,2 years old and standard deviation was 0,5 (see table 1 & 2).

Table 1. Gender

Gender	
Frequency	Percent
boy	7 38,9
girl	11 61,1
Total	18 100,0

Table 2. Age

Age				
	Mini	Maxi	Mean	Std.
	N	num	num	Deviation
Age	18	4,3	6,2	5,217 ,5448

5.2 Procedure

The current research procedure is an experimental one, which has some elements of action research as in each stage it uses reflection and feedback. The programme that was implemented was the "Play and Learn through the Arts" (PLA) which utilises reflection and feedback in every stage and was based on the fact that learning follows a cycle process (see diagram 1). Its goal is to supplement and enrich teachers' strategies and not to replace them. The programme duration was a full school year. Each setting or class chose a specific kind of the arts (e.g. music, painting, drama play) and through this the team of the setting (the children and the teacher) with the instructor, designed and applied literacy activities based on children's ideas and interests. There were no ready-made activities or specific guidelines from the teachers as this technique was opposite to the general pedagogical approach of the programme. The main purpose is to find ways to involve children and teachers actively as a team in teaching and learning procedure.

PLA has four stages and in each stage there is a continuing reflection and feedback from the teacher and the children. In stage 1, children were observed and participated in a discussion with the teacher in order for their interests to be identified. In stage 2, based on the collected data, teachers and students designed the educational activities around a specific theme that was evolved from children's interests. As a motive to approach this specific theme they utilised the selected form of the arts and they embedded literacy aspects. In stage 3, teachers and children implemented the organised activities and in

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stage 4, they assessed the whole procedure and plan the next educational activities (see diagram 2). Arts and literacy activities took place three days per week for 20 minutes approximately per day.

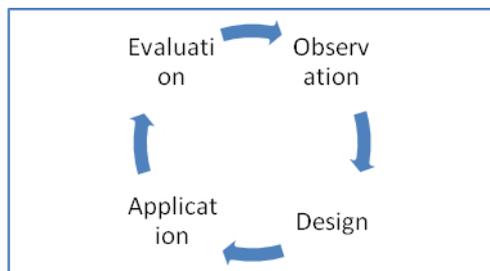


Diagram 1. PLA's Cycle Process of Learning

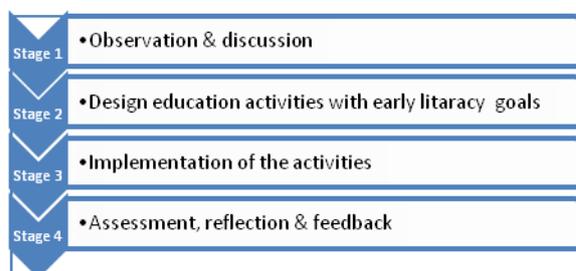


Diagram 2. PLA's Stages

The selected setting chose to use paintings, as a preferred form of the arts and through specific paintings and artists, children with the teacher were organising and applying literacy activities. Implementing the stage 1 of the PLA, children were interested in topics such as the human body, the universe and weird shapes and creatures. For this purpose, the artists Pablo Picasso, Wassily Kadinsky, Joan Miro and Frida Kahlo were chosen as their work has some aspects of these topics and the teacher felt more comfortable with their work. The teacher selected some paintings of these artists and presented them to the children, who chose the one they preferred most and based on this they discussed and designed the educational activities. For example, children with the teacher, while discussing the selected painting, suggested activities that were inspired by the painting and the teacher embedded indirectly literacy goals in these activities. These ideas were written by the children on a paperboard which they used as a diary of the procedure.

5.3 Measures

Children's involvement was measured during literacy activities which were emerged from their interaction through the arts. For this

purpose, the Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children (LIS-YC) was used. LIS-YC was developed by Laevers [14] and it measures involvement using 9 signals and more specifically: concentration, energy, complexity and creativity, facial expression and posture, persistence, precision, reaction time, language and satisfaction. It further describes the levels of involvement as: low activity, frequently interrupted activity, mainly continuous activity, continuous activity with intense moments and sustained intense activity. The observer should make an overall judgement of each child's involvement using the levels of involvement in conjunction with the signals.

In order to collect data for LIS-YC, children were observed during two different literacy activities that emerged through their interaction with the selected paintings. Each child was observed for 10 minutes in total. These observations were carried out by the researcher. They were semi-structured observations and were based on guidelines of LIS-YC.

Before conducting the final observations, there was a pilot observation in a smaller sample of the setting in order to testify the appropriate use of the test and to correct the upcoming mistakes that will affect the outcomes. The purpose of the pilot observation was twofold, as it was also a good opportunity for the researcher to be familiarised with this technique. At the end of the PLA there was also a semi-structured interview with the head teacher in order to investigate her view of the programme's procedure and correlate it with the outcomes.

6. Data analysis and discussion

The aim of this research was to examine the effects of the arts as a means to promote children's involvement during literacy activities. Eighteen records were coded and analysed in order to define the levels of involvement of each child in the sample and a semi-structured interview with the head teacher of the setting was conducted in order to compare it with the outcomes. It should be noted that the data of this piece of research came from a case study of an early years setting in a Greek context and because of the small number of the sample it should be dealt carefully, especially for generalise the outcomes.

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6.1 Data from Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children (LIS-YC) to measure children's involvement

Reliability of the measure and more specifically internal consistency of the 9 signals of LIS-YC were measured using Cronbach's alpha, which showed ($\alpha=0,941$) that all items are correlated strongly with the scale (see table 3 & 4).

Table 3. Reliability

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	
Alpha	N of Items
,941	9

Table 4. Reliability Analysis

Item-Total Statistics		
	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Concentration	,929	,924
Energy	,929	,924
Complexity and Creativity	,784	,934
Facial expression and posture	,914	,925
Persistence	,893	,926
Precision	,848	,931
Reaction time	,947	,926
Language	,282	,953
Satisfaction	,527	,949

Data analysis showed that children had high levels of involvement during the literacy activities within the PLA programme. Overall, the 72% (n=13) showed sustained intense activity (Level 5), of which the 69% (n=9) were girls and the 31% (n=4) were boys. The 6% (n=1) showed continuous activity with intense moments (Level 4), which was one girl and 22% (n=4) showed mainly continuous activity (Level 3), of which the 25% (n=1) was a girl and the rest 75% (n=3) were boys. There was no input from Level 1 and Level 2 which are the lowest levels of involvement within the LIS-YC which shows that the research procedure was well received (see table 5).

Table 5. Involvement Analysis

Involvement	
Sustained intense activity (Level 5)	
Frequency	Percent
13	72%
9	69%
4	31%

Total	13	72%
Girls	9	69%
Boys	4	31%
Continuous activity with intense moments (Level 4)		
Total	1	6%
Girls	1	100%
Boys	0	0
Mainly continuous activity (Level 3)		
Total	4	22%
Girls	1	25%
Boys	3	75%

Despite the small size of the sample, as it was derived from a case study, two further tests were conducted in order to examine the levels of significance among age, gender and involvement. Data analysis from Fisher Exact Test ($\text{sig.}=0,245 > 0,05$) shows that there is no statistical significant relationship between gender and involvement. Also, data analysis from One Way ANOVA ($\text{sig.}=0,722 > 0,05$) shows that there is no statistical significant relationship between age and involvement (see table 6).

Table 6. Inferential Analysis

Inferential analysis of the variables	
Gender & Involvement	
Fisher's Exact Test	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
	,245
a. 4 cells (66,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,39.	
b. The standardized statistic is 1,410.	
Age & Involvement	
ANOVA	Sig.
Between Groups	,722

Analysing the data with a qualitative approach and debriefing the comments that were written in the LIS-YC in order to make an overall judgement of the level of involvement of each child, we can further verify the positive outcomes of the programme towards children's involvement especially when the arts are used as a means to promote literacy.

According to Laevers [14], involvement can be identified by people's concentration and persistence towards a certain activity. However, activities should be derived from their internal desires and interests and people should be able to accomplish them without being too simple or unachievable. Some years later, Siraj-Blatchford et al. [27] agreed with this argument and supplemented that when people are involved in an activity they are

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focused and absorbed totally on the task and they insist on fulfilling it. They also mentioned that involved adults and children show signs of excitement and internal motivation.

The data from the present study is highly linked with these arguments and evidence of this attributes can be detected. It shows that the majority of the children involved in the literacy activities, which were derived through their interactions with the arts, were totally concentrated, showing signs of sustained intense activity and nothing could distract their attention.

Child 3: "He is very concentrated in the activity and he looks absorbed in his writings. He is not interested in the noise around him. The child next to him is often speaks loudly but he is not turning his head to him. Nothing can distract his attention. Sometimes he raises his head and look to the ceiling, as he is thinking of his next step."

Child 7: "She sets goals and tries to fulfill them. She seems to be in an advanced level regarding literacy and tries to write a full sentence. She is not disturbed by external factors and when other children asked for her help, she first finishes her work and then helps the others."

Child 9: "The teacher asked her 'What are you writing?' but she seems so absorbed that she does not reply. She repeats the word she wants to write many times in order to find the next phoneme. She will first fulfill her goal e.g. write the word she wants and afterwards she will notice the external stimuli."

Observed children also showed signs of determination towards the goals of the literacy activities that were initiated from the selected paintings. They did not leave the tasks effortlessly and they showed eagerness to continue until they met a satisfactory outcome. Sometimes, they also found ways to extend the activity by setting new goals.

Child 17: "She insists to write in a good handwriting with no mistakes. When she writes

something that she thinks it is wrong she erases it and tries to think of the correct way of doing it."

Child 15: "He tries to fulfill his goals and continues to the next one. He observes his drawing and he writes underneath what he has drawn. When he finishes his writing he enriches each of his drawing and writes underneath what he added."

The existing data is further linked with these arguments as there are signs of satisfaction and internal desire during the literacy activities of the PLA programme. Children showed that they enjoyed the procedure as they demonstrated feelings of excitement with their achievements and they took pride in their outcomes

Child 1: "He looks very happy with the words he managed to write and shows them to his friends."

Child 4: "When she finishes her writings, she looks at them and smiles."

Child 3: "He looks very proud about his writing and he is seeking the teacher to show it stating 'Look miss what I managed to write about Picasso!'"

Researching the literature a little further, it is obvious that another attribute of involvement is the effort that children make in order to meet the goals of the activity. Ridley et al. [22], state in their research that involvement can be defined as an activity that children show concentration or active contribution. Active participation is one of the most important aspects of involvement as it shows that children are truly interested in the specific activity and they are stimulated. In addition to these attributes, involved children are conceptualised as independent thinkers that take responsibility of their own learning. From the following data, it is evident that the arts can trigger children to participate deeply in order to write.

The evidence from the data is associated with this argument as children were not passive followers in literacy activities but they had an active role in the procedure and outcome. Children were devoting much effort

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in the activity and they showed responsibility to find ways to solve the upcoming problems. It has to be mentioned that these literacy activities were derived from their interaction with the arts.

Child 11: "She is very quiet during the literacy activity but she shows signs of mental energy in her face as she is trying to find the next phoneme of the word she wants to write."

Child 13: "She shows a lot of energy when participating in the activity. She often speaks very loud about what she is going to write next and she presses the crayon very hard to the paper."

Another fundamental characteristic of involved children is the expression of their ideas and emotions during the activity. This can be located in verbal or non-verbal signs that show if they are truly interested in the content of the activity or if they are just participating for external factors and reasons. Robson & Rowe [23] define and further categorise involvement as an effort that children make during an activity while they analyse and speculate ideas and solutions.

During observations, there was evidence of children's verbal and non-verbal signs that justifies the levels of their involvement. Data from these observations can be further linked with these arguments as children were constantly stating their positive emotions regarding the procedure and nonverbal signs and posture were apparent during the whole activity.

Child 7: "She shows constant non verbal signs of deeply involvement in her writing. She is not participating in any other conversation until she finishes her letter."

Child 8: "Non-verbal signs of hard thinking are apparent during the activity. She stops to think about the next phoneme putting the crayon in her mouth. Her eyes show hard, mental activity to find a solution to the upcoming difficulties."

Child 1: "In his effort to write a letter, he stated that he wants to do his best and trying to think

what the receiver of this letter would like."

Child 5: "When he finishes his writing, he shows it to the teacher with enthusiasm and asks 'Miss could we play again this game?'"

To summarise, evidence from the data collected with LIS-YC is highly linked with the attributes of involvement as they are described through empirical literature. On a 5-point scale, which measures levels of involvement, data showed that the majority of children were highly involved and exhibited sustained intense activity. There were no data from the lowest levels of the scale. Through the additional qualitative analysis of the comments that were noted for LIS-YC, it is obvious that the research procedure was well received towards children's involvement. As the arts were the stimuli for literacy activities in which the measurement was made, it can be argued that data analysis verified the research hypothesis. The arts, a central mean to PLA programme, facilitate young children to involve deeply in early literacy activities in all involvement signals.

6.2 Data from teacher's interview

Semi-structured interviews provide a good opportunity to investigate further the views and opinions of the participants and through the flexibility that they offer, the interviewer can investigate thoroughly the interviewees' opinions [3]. Data from the interview with the head teacher of the setting also verifies the positive outcomes of PLA programme towards children's involvement. Overall, the teacher stated that the PLA is a good opportunity to promote levels of involvement during literacy activities in the early years as it combines learning and pleasure through the constant interaction with the arts

The head teacher holds a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education and a Master's degree in Human's Rights with a focus in Special Education. Her work experience involves approximately 8 years of teaching in both private and public early years settings and 1 year as a mentor in Higher Education. She has also some experience in the arts as she is a volunteer actor in the local theatrical team of the island.

As it is mentioned previously, the type of school activities is very important to children's

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involvement. Children are mostly involved actively in activities that are initiated by themselves [23]. This is verified by the teacher as the basic factor of the PLA's success. She justifies her opinion by highlighting that the programme offered children and herself a unique kind of freedom and self-direction in which everyone could make their contribution with no right or wrong answers.

Q: What do you think as the most motivating factor of the procedure?

T: I must say that there was a part of team work but there was also a part of spontaneity. There was also a part of observation but there was also a part of freedom that everyone could see what they wanted to see and commented on what made them the biggest impression. This does not exist with other teaching methods in which sometimes we pressure children to meet a specific outcome that was decided from the beginning.

Another important aspect of involvement is the teaching methods that shape the learning process. As Phelps et al. [20] stressed, teachers should use teaching methods that enable children to involve actively in the school activities and take responsibility of their own learning. This argument is also linked with the data from the interview as the interviewee clearly stated that the research procedure is based on unique teaching methods that combine different roots of learning. She also thinks that the programmes's success was the interdisciplinary teaching methods used.

Q: What do you think of the programme in general?

T: In the beginning I could not understand how this procedure will work toward early literacy and involvement. I thought I could give it a try to see how it will go. In the meantime, I realised that learning is not a straightforward process although I work for approximately 8 years in this area. Now, I know that we can use a number of different paths towards learning but this was the most amusing. I was

extremely happy when I saw that the arts can promote literacy activities and children involved so deeply in the learning procedure.

The existing literature also supports that quick reaction time is a fundamental aspect of involvement. Roskos et al. [24] note that the concept of involvement includes a combination of awareness, interest and satisfaction. In addition, Laevers [14] states that involved children are ready to act and respond immediately to the stimuli that are produced during the activity. Data collected from the interview supports this as children's response is another characteristic of involvement that was picked up and commented by the teacher.

Q: Could you think of a reason of children's development? What do you think that helped the children more?

T: Children were responding directly to the procedure and activities with the paintings by suggesting their ideas in order to design educational activities. I think that this was attributed mainly because they were interested and involved in the learning process. I don't think that a more guided and strict approach would have the same outcome.

To summarise, data collected from the semi-structured interview further verified the research's hypothesis as the head teacher of the early years setting agreed that the programme, which uses the arts as a medium, promotes children's involvement during early literacy activities. This is very important as the findings from LIS-YC are correlated with the teacher's opinion which shows that the programme was well received as a research process and towards children's involvement.

7. Limitations and contribution

This piece of research has some limitations that should be highly considered for generalising the findings to the wider population. A basic limitation was the small number of the sample (18 children and 1 teacher) as this research was a case study that took place in the Greek context. A basic

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purpose of the case studies in the social research is to testify a theory or a hypothesis in order to gain a better understanding of the upcoming circumstances [3]. On this account, the purpose of this research design was not to generalise the outcomes but to recognise the benefits of the programme towards children's involvement and suggest further research with this focus. This research is also useful to early childhood teachers as a pioneering approach in early literacy with the ultimate goal to promote involvement.

8. Conclusions

This paper investigated the effects of using the arts as a means to involve children in early literacy activities. This aim was built on the hypothesis that the arts have attributes that can involve actively children during early literacy activities. To testify this hypothesis a case study from a Greek island was used that implemented PLA, an interdisciplinary programme which was designed for the researcher's PhD project. Data collected using LIS-YC and via an interview of the head teacher of the setting. The findings showed that the research procedure and the PLA programme in general had positive outcomes regarding children's involvement. This was also verified with the findings from the teacher's interview as she was very positive regarding the programme. These findings should be considered carefully for generalising them in the wider population because of the small sample size. Further research should be conducted towards this direction. However, this piece of research can be beneficial for everyday educational practice as it suggests a pioneering way of teaching early literacy that involves children deeply. It can also be considered as a useful tool to early childhood teachers who seek different ways of applying early years curriculum.

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