Children play more vigorously and more productively when their teachers have formal education or training in the importance of play. Children with challenging play behavior in the play create a difficult situation for pre-service preschool teachers, affecting their achievement in the program objectives. Issues of challenging behavior in preschool classroom settings are, in part, related to teachers’ self competencies of addressing these behaviors. The purpose of this study was to examine pre-service preschool teachers’ self competencies of children’s challenging play behaviors. It was found that the most difficult situation for pre-service preschool teachers were kicking/biting and throwing toys. Besides physically aggressive behaviors, pre-service preschool teachers have not found themselves competent to get children’s participation when play is refused by children. It is also found that pre-service preschool teachers had the most confidence level when children had difficulty in expressing play progress and when they did not help cleaning up.

Key words: Play, challenging behavior, preschool, pre-service.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood educators and caregivers are sophisticated that social and behavioral skills are necessary for children’s future achievement. There is a relationship between children’s social-emotional development during the preschool years and their success in school and their later lives (Raver, 2003). Children, who participate in play activities, maintain positive relationships with peers and solve social problems, have better learning levels (Campbell, 2002; West and Germino, 2000). Supporting children’s play and addressing their challenging play behavior influence children’s development and learning.

Challenging behavior refers to inappropriate, disturbing, or harmful behaviors that might be a pervasive social excess or deficit, situational disturbances, low activity engagement, and episodic crises (Field, 1999). Challenging behaviors not only affect a child’s involvement in play, but also affect the whole play group. Teachers have to deal with these behaviors to be able to reach the program objectives. Educators achieve better teaching performance when they use appropriate pragmatic skills with children with challenging behavior (Dunlap and Kern, 1996). Nevertheless, many early childhood practitioners do not feel prepared to meet the needs of children who have significant challenging behavior. Teachers report disruptive behavior as one of the single greatest challenges they have to deal with to provide a quality play experiences (Main and Hammond, 2008). Many early childhood educators explained that their first training need is addressing challenging behavior and behavior modification (Hemmeter et al., 2006).

Early childhood education services serve two main
purposes. One is to fulfill the young children’s child care needs and other is to provide early childhood education. Turkish Early Childhood Education Program (2012) clearly states that it is a play based program granting children’s healthy development. The program also explains that teacher self-assessment is one of the parts of the evaluation progress. It is expected that teachers would gain learning from their self-assessment to improve their competency in early childhood education (MEB, 2012). This special feature has to be taken into account when assessing the opportunities and means of furthering early childhood education teachers’ expertise. Therefore, pre-service teachers should learn how to learn and how to organize their knowledge to be able to deal with challenging behaviors.

Self-competence, which involves the interrelationship between self-perception of personal worth and efficacy, is an important component of academic achievement (Chang, 2007; Pereis et al., 2003). All students are capable of developing and expressing some degree of self-competence. Early childhood education teachers’ competence consists of contextual knowledge, interaction and cooperation skills, and pedagogical knowledge (Pickard, 2005). It is results from the successful manipulation of one’s environment, from the realization of goals (Tafarodi and Swann, 1995). When teachers’ teaching intentions during play and children learning correspond, and they take this correspondence to be due to their actions, then self-competence is increased. High self-competence enables teachers to interact more effectively and behavior modification in preschool settings (Happo et al., 2012).

It is significant that researchers should focus on how to prepare early childhood teachers to work with young children with challenging behaviors. Challenging behaviors of children can cause complicated circumstances in the play settings. Pre-service teachers may not be able to help the children behave appropriately because of their inadequate experience level. There is relatively little known information about how pre-service preschool teachers handle challenging play behaviors. The purpose of this study was to determine pre-service preschool teachers’ self evaluation of children’s challenging play behavior.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Challenging Play Behavior Survey (CPBS) was given to participants to obtain their self competence evaluation. CPBS was developed using a content analysis approach following guidelines provided by Yildirim and Simsek (2006) to identify survey questions. Initially 20 pre-service preschool teachers from two public universities involved in semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked the types of children’s behaviors they confront during play. Two researchers independently identified and labeled each statement from the participants that indicated challenging play behaviors. The researchers then compiled their lists of challenging play behaviors based on this independent analysis. The agreement was 90% between the researchers. Researchers then worked together to complete the behavior list. It was applied to 20 pre-service preschool teachers to verify whether there was confusion with the overall meaning of the behaviors. Finally, CPBS was employed a five-point scale (1-the least confident; 5-the most confident) and completed.

The participants were 210 pre-service preschool teachers from two large public universities in Ankara, Turkey. The participants were selected in an effort to equally represent a variety of preschool settings found commonly across the city of Ankara. These preschool settings were independent preschools and public kindergartens. Before completing the survey, the participants received a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. Participants worked independently to provide written responses and there was no time constriction for the completion of the survey. Answers were analyzed descriptively using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The first five challenging behaviors were determined as the least competency level of pre-service teachers, the second five challenging behaviors were determined as moderate competency level of pre-service teachers, and the last five behaviors were determined as the most competency level of pre-service teachers in order to mean scores.

RESULTS

Pre-service preschool teachers reported aggressive types of challenging play behaviors in low and moderate competence level. While pre-service teachers did not report any aggressive types of behaviors in the most competence level, social withdrawn and leading to conflict type behaviors mostly placed in moderate and high competence levels.

Means and standard deviations of 5 challenging play behaviors of children reported as the least competence level by pre-service preschool teachers are presented in Table 1.

It was found that pre-service preschool teachers had the least competency level in physically aggressive behaviors. These behaviors were kicking/biting ( średni × = 1.42), and throwing toys ( średni × = 1.55). They also reported that they had low level of confidence in children’s behaviors of refusing to play ( średni × = 1.70), disobeying play rules ( średni × = 1.74), and frequent changes among play ( średni × = 1.79). The study showed that one of the anti-social behaviors of children, refusing play also get pre-service preschool teachers’ attention. Because this behavior can emerge for many reasons (Denham and Burger, 1991), pre-service teachers might find getting child’s cooperation rather difficult right on the spot. Disobeying play rules causes a conflict to solve involving many children. Frequent changes among play is important for an individual need of a child. Because this behavior was reported in the least confidence level behaviors, we can say that the individual needs of each child also get pre-
service preschool teachers’ attention. Yet, they are having difficulty with meeting the needs of those children. Means and standard deviations of 5 challenging play behaviors of children reported as moderate competence level by pre-service preschool teachers are seen in Table 2.

Pre-service preschool teachers found themselves moderately competent with children’s behaviors of ignoring progress of play (\( \bar{x} = 2.30 \)), threatening play mates (\( \bar{x} = 2.35 \)), disturbing play mates (\( \bar{x} = 2.42 \)), ignoring play mates (\( \bar{x} = 2.44 \)), and grabbing toys (\( \bar{x} = 2.45 \)). Children usually follow and cooperate with the play progress naturally (Hughes, 2010). When one child starts to ignore the progress of play, a conflict may arise among all children. Pre-service preschool teachers reported that they were moderately competent with this behavior. Ignoring play mates also shows the individual needs of the child. Threatening play mates, disturbing play mates and grabbing toys are related to physically aggressive behaviors. These behaviors also take major part of the challenging play behaviors that pre-service preschool teachers had moderate level of competence.

Means and standard deviations of 5 challenging play behaviors of children reported as the most competence level by pre-service preschool teachers are in Table 3. Pre-service preschool teachers reported that they had the most competence level in children’s behaviors of playing alone (\( \bar{x} = 3.67 \)), no interaction in play (\( \bar{x} = 3.77 \)), inability to transition (\( \bar{x} = 3.85 \)), inability to express play (\( \bar{x} = 3.91 \)), and no cleaning up (\( \bar{x} = 3.96 \)). Preschool pre-service teachers have not reported physically aggressive behaviors in the most competence level behaviors. The study shows that pre-service teachers found themselves quite competent when challenging play behavior has an individual or social withdrawn aspect.

### DISCUSSION

Current study indicated that pre-service preschool teachers were not competent in children’s physically aggressive behaviors. They reported two aggressive behaviors of children (kicking/biting and throwing toys) in the least confidence level of study but also they reported two behaviors (threatening play mates, disturbing play mates and grabbing toys) in moderate confidence level that could create a conflict harming both children and play progress. Findings show that preschool pre-service teachers’ low level of competency gathers around physically aggressive behaviors and behaviors that can lead to physical aggressiveness easily. Nungesser and Watkins (2005) also reported in their study that teachers consistently rate more aggressive behaviors as highly disruptive in the preschool classroom. Aggressive behaviors are obviously problematic in preschool classrooms. The reason teachers separate physically aggressive behaviors from anti-social behaviors in terms of disturbance is that aggressive behaviors may more directly influence play progress as compared to socially withdrawn behaviors.

The study showed that pre-service preschool teachers had low level of confidence in refusing play as well. This behavior is reported as the third of the low confidence level behavior after physically aggressive behaviors. However, it is in the first place of socially withdrawn behavior.
behaviors. When children refuse to play, teachers might find themselves in a difficult situation between respecting children’s choices and engaging them to play. While a socially withdrawn behavior was reported in the low level of competency, other socially withdrawn behaviors such as playing alone and no interaction in play placed in the most competency level. They also had the most competency level with behaviors of children not helping clean up, inability to express play progress and inability to transit. Socially disturbed behaviors such as ignoring play mates and grabbing toys were listed as moderate level of confidence behaviors. These results explained that pre-service preschool teachers have priority and difficulty when children’s behavior damages classroom order. In consistence with these results, it has been suggested that children who display social withdrawal get less attention from teachers (Fujiki et al., 2001). This seems to be a significant issue because teachers need to intervene with the social withdrawal behaviors as well.

The study provided some preliminary information about competency level of pre-service preschool teachers regarding children’s challenging play behavior. Findings suggested that teacher educators should design preschool practicum periods which cover all types of intervention strategies for challenging play behaviors of children. Pre-service preschool teachers are in need of being supported to address the needs of children with challenging behaviors. Stormont (2002) also stated that educators should be immensely trained to be able to solve the challenging behaviors of children. Further research is needed on effective methods for challenging play behavior of children.

REFERENCES


