

BOUNDLESS CLASS LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to clarify teachers' opinions about a TÜBİTAK project funded by 4005 Science and Society Innovative Educational Practices, which provide life-long professional development opportunities to teachers. The aim of this project was also to refresh the knowledge of social studies teachers, to inform them about new approaches and increase the diversity of their teaching approaches and methods in their lessons. Within the framework of this overall purpose, the target group of this project was social studies teachers participating in the TÜBİTAK 113B258 coded "Boundless Class" project and working in primary schools. The number of participants was limited to 20. The project activities were held in the period between 2 and 7 September 2013, in Kayseri Erciyes University. The "Project Final Evaluation Questionnaire" consisting of 12 questions (5 Likert type and 7 open-ended questions) was used to determine the impact of the project. Data obtained from these questionnaires were analyzed using the content analysis method. Teachers responded very positively to the program, and almost all of them stated that many of the methods and techniques are new to them. As a result of the study, it was found that new approaches will develop when more teachers embrace and adopt this perspective.

Keywords: Active learning, cooperative learning, outdoor learning, evidence-based learning, teaching social studies

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Öz

Bu çalışma, alanda görev yapan öğretmenlere yaşam-boyu mesleki gelişim olanaklarının sağlanmasını hedefleyen 4005 Bilim ve Toplum Yenilikçi Eğitim Uygulamaları kapsamında desteklenen TÜBİTAK projesi hakkında öğretmen görüşlerini ortaya koymak amacıyla üretilmiştir. Bu proje sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin bilgilerinin tazelenmesi, yeni yaklaşımlardan haberdar edilmesi ve derslerinde kullandıkları öğretim yöntem ve tekniklerinin çeşitliliğinin artırılması için tasarlanmıştır. Bu genel amaç çerçevesinde çalışmanın hedef kitlesini, TÜBİTAK 113B258 kodlu "Sınırsız Sınıf" Projesine katılan ve ilköğretim okullarında görev yapmakta olan 20 Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretmeni oluşturmuştur. Proje etkinlikleri tek dönem olarak 2-7 Eylül 2013 tarihleri arasında Kayseri Erciyes Üniversitesi'nde düzenlenmiştir. Proje kapsamında katılımcılara verilen teorik eğitimler, uygulamalar, drama ve atölye çalışmalarının etkinliğini ölçmek

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amacıyla 12 soruluk (Slikert tipi, 7 adet açık uçlu) “Proje Sonu Değerlendirme Anketi” uygulanmış ve elde edilen veriler içerik analizi yoluyla değerlendirilmiştir. Projeye katılan öğretmenlerin program hakkındaki dönütleri oldukça olumlu olmuştur ve proje sürecinde gördükleri öğretim yöntem ve tekniklerin birçoğunun kendileri için yeni olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Çalışma sırasında katılımcıların, sosyal bilimlerin metodolojisi ve bunun derslerde nasıl vurgulanabileceğine yönelik farkındalıklarının aslında pek olmadığı gözlemlenmiştir. Yapılandırmacılığa doğru büyük değişimin temsilcisi olan yeni yaklaşımların, öğretmenlerin benimsemesi ve içselleştirmesiyle başarıya ulaşabileceği unutulmamalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aktif öğrenme, işbirlikli öğrenme, sınıf dışı öğrenme, kanıt temelli öğrenme, drama, sosyal bilgiler öğretimi

1. INTRODUCTION

With the implementation of educational reform in 2005, radical changes occurred in the curriculum. These changes brought about various alterations in the content and delivery of the curriculum, learning-teaching process and the roles of teachers and students. These programs, which were developed by taking into consideration the education systems of developed countries, were prepared with a modern, student-centered approach, based on progressivism as the philosophy of education, grounded on constructivism and collaborative learning and with emphasis on individual differences.¹

Since then, the constructivist approach has begun to play a greater role in the curriculum and in the examination system. On the other hand, it should be noted that the main determinant of the quality of education system is the teachers who are the practitioners of the system. In this context, the teacher is the main and most important factor for all types of reform that will take place in education. For social and economic development, applications targeting the development of teachers should be implemented first. Since, no educational model can produce better results than the quality of the human resources who run it, the pre-service and in-service teachers’ training process becomes a key for the quality of the educational activities in schools.² If teachers are not taken into account in the reform process, they will not show enough effort to reach the desired levels and reforms will not be successful. Thus professional development opportunities should be provided for the teachers, emotional support should be offered and a sense of competence - about their job - should be given. Teachers' professional development practices should be a

¹F. D. Gözütok, E. Ö. Akgün ve C. Ö. Karacaoğlu, *İlköğretim Programlarının Öğretmen Yeterlikleri Açısından Değerlendirilmesi*, Yeni İlköğretim Programlarını Değerlendirme Sempozyumu, 14-16 Kasım 2005 Kayseri; B. Yangın, “*İlköğretim Türkçe Dersi Öğretim Programı Ve Klavuzunun Değerlendirilmesi*” Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri, 2005, 5 (2), 477-516; B. Akpınar and K. Aydın, “*Eğitimde Değişim Ve Öğretmenlerin Değişim Algıları*”, Eğitim ve Bilim, 2007, 32(144), 71-80.

²N. Aykaç, “*İlköğretim Sosyal Bilgiler Dersi Eğitim-Öğretim Programına Öğretmen Görüşleri*”, Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 2007, 6 (22), 46-73.

process that is continuous, endless and open to change and development.³For all these reasons, both the domestic and foreign literature emphasize the questioning and continuous improvement of all the components of the teacher training system in a continuous evaluation process in order to educate teachers who will fulfill today's and tomorrow's needs in terms of quality and quantity. In this context, teacher education should be viewed in a wider sense rather just as the vocational preparation of teacher candidates during four-year undergraduate education programs, it should be perceived as a "life-long learning process" which endures until the retirement of the individual. For this purpose, this project aimed to increase the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Faculties of Education to provide life-long professional development opportunities for teachers who work in the field and to develop the teacher's researcher identity.

The most prominent part of 21st century teacher training is the placement of the teacher at the center and taking the knowledge and perceptions of teachers as the base for each application related with innovation in education. For effective professional development and compatibility, the focus should be on the training of teachers, providing them with continuous information on the process of innovation and deepening their knowledge. Concrete expression of this understanding can be articulate such as providing continuous in-service training for teachers. For a teacher, the prerequisite of being professional is that he/she possesses detailed and extensive professional knowledge. Today's teachers should be raised with the consciousness that life-long education is needed and this training should endure as long as their teaching life continues.⁴However, in the literature review it was found that there are significant differences between the formal program and the applied program in Turkey. The main reason for this is that teachers do not have enough knowledge and skills about the requirements of the new program. The studies of Arslantaş, (2006)⁵, Atbaşı, (2007)⁶ and Akgül (2006)⁷, which aimed to find out the methods that classroom teachers were using in social studies and the problems that they were encountering, concluded that teachers were using teaching methods based on the constructivist approach, such as "historical empathy, fieldwork, observation, in group training", only to a small extent due to obstacles such as lack of time, lack of support from the management, vehicle-equipment failure, lack of theoretical knowledge and overcrowding of classes. Similarly in the EARGED 2005 report, which aimed to determine

³C. Day, "School Reform And Transitions In Teacher Professionalism And Identity", International Journal of Educational Research, 2002, 35, 677-692.

⁴Verloop, N., J. V. Driel, and P. Meijer, "Teacher Knowledge And The Knowledge Base Of Teaching" International Journal of Educational Research. 2001, 35, 441-461.

⁵S. Arslantaş, 6. Ve 7. Sınıf Sosyal Bilgiler Ders Program Uygulamalarında Karşılaşılan Sorunların Öğretmen Görüşleri Açısından İncelenmesi (Malatya İli Örneği), Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, F.Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Malatya 2006.

⁶C. Atbaşı, İlköğretim II. Kademe (6. Ve 7. Sınıfta) Sosyal Bilgiler Dersinin Öğretimi Ve Öğretiminde Yaşanan Güçlükler (Aksaray Örneği), Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, S.Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü. Konya 2007.

⁷N. İ. Akgül, Sınıf Öğretmenlerinin Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretiminde Kullandıkları Yöntemler Ve Karşılaşılan Sorunlar (Niğde İli Örneği), Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, N.Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Niğde 2006.

the social studies achievements of primary school students, it was stated that teachers often took the traditional teacher-centered approach. It was noticed that the lesson was often given by the teacher; students just copied what was written on the board into their notebooks and usually some exercises about the subjects covered were done (MEB EARGED, 2007)⁸.

In a similar study conducted by Polat (2006)⁹, it was observed that there were some inconsistencies between what was done and what should be done. Social studies teachers believed that trip and observation methods should be used more during social studies education, but they preferred to use them less during the implementation phase. However, outdoor learning, fieldwork and observation, role-playing and empathy are techniques that should be used more in social studies. Some important shortcomings, which were related to the usage of local opportunities for determining the activities and taking advantage of local examples to explain the content, were also detected in the same study. It was recommended that, when teachers' place of employment changes, local governments should provide trainings to introduce the local environment to teachers, thus enabling them to take advantage of local opportunities in their lectures. Lack of social interaction, communication problems, problems with classroom management, equipment failure, inability to develop appropriate materials to support teaching, adhering to the textbook while teaching, not being able to implement the constructivist approach in a real classroom environment, lack of sufficient time to teach the curriculum and crowded classrooms were reported as frequently encountered problems in social studies' teaching.¹⁰

Social studies education is not limited to the transfer of knowledge and skills; it should also work for the benefit of society by transferring specific values and trends to students. No other course is so closely related to the needs of today's society, politics and ideology as social studies courses. Addressing local, national and global connections during the course and making use of the local environment have been discussed in the social

⁸MEB-EARGED, *Earged Öbbs (İlköğretim Öğrencilerinin Başarılarının Belirlenmesi) 2005 Sosyal Bilgiler Raporu*, Ankara2007.

⁹F. Polat, *İlköğretim 7. Sınıf Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretiminde Öğretmenlerin Kullandıkları Yöntemler Ve Karşılaştıkları Sorunlar (Afyonkarahisar Örneği)*,Yayımlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Gazi Üniversitesi,2006.

¹⁰C. Kan, "Etkili Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretimi Arayışı",Kastamonu Üniversitesi Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi,2006, 14 (2), 537-544; M. Arslan, "Eğitimde Yapılandırmacı Yaklaşımlar",Ankara Üniversitesi Bilimleri Fakültesi Dergisi,2007, 40 (1), 41-61; Aykaç, *agm.*,46-73; P. İskender, "İlköğretim Okullarında Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretiminin Öncelikleri Ve Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretmeni Yetiştirmeye Yönelik Çıkarımlar", Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Kırşehir Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi, 2007, 8(1), 21-29; K. Yılmaz, "Lisans Düzeyinde Sosyal Bilgiler Eğitiminde Karşılaşılan Sorunlar Ve Çözüm Önerileri Öğretmen Adaylarının Görüşleri", Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi,2009, 27(3), 31-53; T. Çelikkaya-Z. Kuş, "Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretmenlerinin Kullandıkları Yöntem Ve Teknikler",Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi, 2009, XXII (2), 741-758; M. Taşkaya-T. Bal, "Sınıf Öğretmenlerinin Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretim Yöntemlerine İlişkin Görüşleri", Selçuk Üniversitesi Ahmet Keleşoğlu Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi, 2009, 27, 173-185.

studies curriculum in Turkey.¹¹ However, for the overall program, it is not possible to say that the issues are addressed and handled with their local, national and global connections. In the social studies curriculum, it has been mentioned that observation trips should be emphasized and trips to museums, historical buildings, monuments, archeological excavations, and historical places should be arranged. Studies in this area showed that schools in Turkey had various problems in organizing these types of activities, the national and global connections of historical and cultural heritages with local events were not defined, and local history was mostly used to give examples from national history.¹² The value of the local environment, which is a rich resource for social studies, is often ignored in the curriculum. The evidences of history and old ways of living can be found in the streets, in various buildings, monuments and memorials and in different landscapes. All of these are easily accessible and therefore they can be studied. The local environment has been shaped by different people, communities and events. Local studies offer us the opportunity to question our own environment and improve our understanding of our local environment that we see every day. Local environmental studies provide the opportunity to apply the “education through discovery” learning approach in social studies. In this context, it attracts students' attention considerably. In addition, studies of local history provide us with various opportunities for outdoor learning; such as visiting museums and historic buildings, or walking on certain streets and roads and examining different things around the area. This allows pupils to recognize many resources that can be found in their local environment, to synthesize this information and to make some inferences about the history of that region. Outdoor activities contribute to better learning in pupils, to their emotional and physical development and to being more sensitive to the environment.

In the light of the studies mentioned above, it can be said that social studies teachers have difficulties in implementing the approaches and methods required by the new program. It should be noted that, successful implementation of the new program depends on the recognition, adaptation and internalization of it by teachers.¹³ For these reasons, the project addresses how the local area can be used as an educational tool (Kayseri and environment), for example in understanding the differences among the civilizations, people and communities which settled here throughout history and enable the observation of how these differences which formed the identity of the city. In addition, this project also aims to get teachers to comprehend the impacts of natural conditions on human activities and the different ways the environment is shaped with the change of cultural values, religious beliefs, technical, economic and political systems. In addition, renewing the formation knowledge of teachers and following developments in the field can also be mentioned as the targets of this project. The activities involved working in small groups and were practice-based, in order to enable social studies teachers to use modern teaching methods

¹¹MEB., *Sosyal Bilgiler 6.-7. Sınıf Programı*, MEB Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı, Ankara 2005.

¹²S. Aktekin, *The Inclusion Of Local History in The Secondary History National Curriculum in Turkey: Problems And Potential*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, School of Education, Nottingham 2004.

¹³T. Çengelci, “*Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretmenlerinin Sınıf Dışı Öğrenmeye İlişkin Görüşleri*”, *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 2013, 13(3) 1823-1841.

and techniques more effectively(evidence-based social studies teaching, active learning, collaborative learning, outdoor learning, drama, etc.).

It is an indisputable fact that to ensure the success of the social studies course, which has a multi-disciplinary nature, something, more than classrooms and textbooks, is needed. This project is intended to encourage social studies teachers towards "getting out of the classroom", "using the local environment as a teaching material", and "preparing projects with their students".

The most important target of the project is to allow social studies teachers to learn by personal experiencing; different learning experiences performed outside the classroom offer perfect opportunities for the development of skills in areas such as working with others, thinking, problem solving, use of information technology, and communication. It was expected that, at the end of this project the multi-view, critical thinking, and empathy skills of teachers would be improved, their social communication and collaborative practices skills would be developed by working together and they would be able to implement training and testing conditions, based on the constructivist theory, in practice.

As a result, with the help of these kinds of projects, the disconnection between the Ministry of Education and Faculties of Education, which are two organs connected to each other in terms of working area, each using the other's output as input, may be resolved.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 20 social studies teachers who were working in primary schools in Turkey. Maximum variation sampling was used to determine the participants. In the context of maximum variation sampling, teachers with different professional service periods and working in schools that differentiate in terms of the socio-economic characteristics of the students were included in the study group. Ten of the participants were women and the remaining 10 were men. The lengths of service of the teachers were as follows: 7 teachers 0-5 years, 7 teachers 6-10 years, 3 teachers 11-15 years and 3 of them 16-20 years. Three of the teachers were working in private schools, 9 of them were working in the countryside and 8 of them were working in the city center, thus representing Turkey's different types of primary schools. In this way, teachers working in the schools with different socio-economic levels were combined (for example, private school, boarding primary school, schools located in the city center and in the country).

2.2 Pattern of the Study

Many of the skills which are intended to be given to students within the Social Studies Curriculum require outdoor learning and using what they have learned- especially observation skills, the ability to perceive space, detection of time and chronology, understanding continuity and change, social participation skills and empathy skills.¹⁴

The purpose of the study was to give practical experience to social studies teachers about outdoor learning. Outdoor learning allows students to become active participants of

¹⁴MEB., *Sosyal Bilgiler 6.-7. Sınıf Programı*,2005.

the democratic process rather than being passive observers. The main characteristics of outdoor learning can be listed as follows: it is based on experience, allows the students to learn by doing, and requires the use of all the senses, focuses on interdisciplinary topics and deals with the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Outdoor learning supports development and learning in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The social studies course is interwoven with daily life in terms of its contents and achievements. Therefore, it cannot be separated from civic society and the environment and cannot be limited to a classroom environment. In this study, we can define the working environment as any place outside the classroom(which is formed by four walls and a black board), where learning is realized via first-hand experience. Considering all these reasons, the project is called the "Boundless Class".

Social Studies is a very important discipline in terms of both its content and its mission. People and societies are continuously changing and dealing with complex problems and questions. Thus, the significance of social studies is quite high for communities and people. Social studies is a field that handles human interaction with the physical and social environment through an interdisciplinary approach, considering the time dimension, using the contents and methods of social and other human related studies and it aims to raise deliberative, democratic and capable citizens who are equipped with basic democratic values about living in a globalized world. Therefore this study was organized using a multi-disciplinary structure and 14 academicians from 11 different disciplines (history, geography, biology, sociology, education, study, counseling and guidance, drama, etc.) took part in the project as instructors. Two German academicians were also included in the project team in order to give an international dimension to the project and pursue new approaches.

Project activities were conducted between 2 and 7 September 2013, in Erciyes University. During the project, practical activities related to the following field-specific skills were conducted:

- Observation skills,
- Space detection capability,
- Ability to perceive time and chronology
- Change and continuity detection capability
- Social participation skills
- Empathy skills

In order to improve observation skills the Kayseri Archeology Museum, Kayseri Kadir Has City Museum and Gevher Nesibe History of Medicine Museum were visited and observed with the participation of all participants and project staff during the "Discovery of the Historical Heritage" activity. A worksheet was given to all participants, on which the participants noted significant characteristics that they noticed during the tour, enabling them to distinguish abstract, concrete, and behavioral dimensions of our culture's reflections to today. The "*Fake pleasures*" event was also prepared for the improvement of observation skills. During this activity the Kayseri Forum Shopping Center was observed, then the increasing number of shopping centers and their effects on our consumption habits were discussed. Thus, the participants made inferences about the relationship between

globalization and culture. In the “*Journey back in time and across space*” activity, neighborhoods in Talas in which historical houses are located, the Talas underground city, Yaman Dede Mansion, Gupgupoglu Mansion, and Yaman Dede Mosque (Church) were visited and the "Time-Continuity-Change" dimension, which is a significant element in social studies education, was observed. In addition some interesting facts such as Yaman Dede mansion's door knockers being different for female and male guests, so that the host was able to distinguish the gender of the visitor from the sound of the knocker and sections of the Gupgupoglu Mansion, separated as harem and selamlik (the part of a large Muslim house reserved for the men) presented evidence about the social and economic life, family structure and male-female relations in the past.

Within the project, it was planned to conduct restructuring activities with the help of old cognitive patterns, by using drama techniques and developing games in a group setting. Drama activities were aimed at enabling learning, interaction and socialization, as well as establishing confidence, enhancing self-esteem, promoting the feeling of power arising from being a member of a group, as well as improving communication and problem-solving skills. Drama activities were combined with museum training. In addition, "*Children's Rights*", "*Communication*" topics and "*Meeting Events*", which were included in the social studies curriculum, were covered using the drama method.

The Living Graph activity aimed to interpret the charts, to see the relationships between variables, and to improve thinking and discussion skills. In this activity, 10 real life statements and the “Demographic Transition Model Chart” were given to the participants and they were asked to make the connection between an abstract chart and the people and events behind it. Living graphs enable students to think, speak and have different opinions. This activity encourages students to ask more questions and leads to discussions. Students look at the charts in a completely new light. *The Reading Photos* activity was aimed at improving visual literacy skill. In this context, the respondents were asked to look at the photos more deeply, to try to see more and carefully examine instead of browsing. In the second stage participants were asked to go beyond what they saw and establish a link between what they have saw and what they knew. *The Mystery* activity was designed to encourage students about handling uncertainties.¹⁵ During this activity, participants tried to answer a question which is similar to just like in real life and does not have a single correct answer. They were not even sure about the validity of the information that they had in hand. The skills targeted with this activity were as follows:

- Sorting relevant information from irrelevant information
- Interpreting information
- Making links between disparate pieces of information
- Speculating to form hypotheses
- Checking and refining
- Explaining

¹⁵ D. Leat, *Thinking Through Geography*, Black Bear Press Limited, Cambridge, UK1998.

Far too frequently pupils are given written tasks in which they have a page of text and all they have to do is retrieve the right words from the page to complete the task. There is little challenge in this and learning skills are not developed to any significant extent: they just learn how to perform a ritual. This is not how problems and issues present themselves in higher education and real life problem solving. In these cases, they have to take discrete pieces of information, which are not linked to each other, and put them together in a way to render irregularity sensibly, to read between the lines, to produce a variety of ideas and to evaluate them. This strategy reflects this situation completely. For Mysteries, the required information should be offered in “semi-digested” form and it should be written on small pieces of paper, allowing physical movement among the students.¹⁶

“*Evidence Based Social Studies Teaching*” activities emphasize the presentation of historians' research, analysis and interpretation processes to the participants and create the experience and skills related to these processes for them. During these activities, participants should examine controversial issues, recognize the existence of various perspectives, and conclude that there is no absolute right in social studies; they should understand the existence of a possible bias occurring as the result of different perspectives, values, beliefs and ideological attitudes in the historical information and reviews, they should understand that first and second hand sources should be treated with suspicion and their validity should be questioned. The title of the activity was selected as “An Overview of the Population Exchange with Humanitarian and Political Aspects: Population Exchange Was it Necessary or not According to You?” During the activity, various sources such as newspaper articles, photographs, and several clauses of the Lausanne Treaty related with the population exchange, letters, memoirs, poetry, film posters, etc., were used. Using historical sources, recognizing different perspectives, separating facts and truth, and recognizing propaganda ensures the development of important methodological concepts and the sensitivity of social scientists, in the process of knowledge production. In this work, evidence-based learning is seen as an activity which will create a meaning in the development of students' identities and values, and encourage them to adopt a personal attitude. Consequently, teacher/textbook writers stop being an authority figures that determine the approach and the whole truth, on the contrary they act like guides who prepare the learning environment, who solve the problems encountered, and who allow students to see different dimensions.¹⁷

In addition, participants also obtained examples of activities, which they can apply in their classes, and they understood that social studies lessons do not have to become synonymous with memorization depending on the method used.

Within the content of the study, *The Walking Debate*, *Class Conflict Resolution* and *Interpersonal Relations and Communication at School* activities were organized for counseling. The ways of addressing controversial issues by using effective communication skills (unbiased approach, showing respect, active listening, empathic understanding,

¹⁶D. Leat, *Thinking Through Geography*, 1998, 55.

¹⁷Y. Kabapınar, *Kuramdan Uygulamaya Hayat Bilgisi ve Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretimi*, Pegem A, Ankara2012.

concrete talking and talking with “I” language) were discussed with the participants. In addition, they did exercises regarding the following subjects creating awareness regarding conflict situations encountered in the school, becoming aware of the literature dealing with conflict and how to achieve reconciliation in a classroom environment.

Within the project, the portfolio and its applications, which is one of the alternative measurement and assessment techniques, were organized. In addition, peer and self-assessment techniques were presented with applications. New techniques were shared with participants by performing each day’s assessment with a different active and cooperative learning method and technique. Thus, participants could see the value of cooperative learning and peer education. In this way, participants personally experienced a classroom atmosphere demonstrating an active learning class and teacher-student roles, using different activities from the traditional classroom practices.

2.3 Instrument and data analysis

The qualitative research approach was used in this study in order to determine the knowledge, skills and attitudes that teachers were expected to gain during the project. To measure the effectiveness of the theoretical education, applications, drama and workshops realized within the project, the "*Project Final Evaluation Questionnaire*", which consisted of 12 questions (5Likert-type, 7 open-ended) was prepared. In the Likert questions, the active learning form (2003) developed by Kalem and Fer was used. The form was used to determine the thoughts of the teachers about the learning settings. The form is composed of five parts. These are in order, cognitive awareness, respectability, individual responsibility, cooperation and active participation. There are four options for each statement. The teachers are asked to choose one of these options which is suitable for themselves. Expert opinions were asked about the questions in the questionnaire. After making the recommended revisions and additions, the *Project Final Evaluation Questionnaire* was applied to the participants. The questions posed to the teachers were as follows:

- How did you find the active project environment?
 - Cognitive Awareness
 - Respectability
 - Individual Responsibility
 - Cooperation
 - Active Participation
- Open-ended questions
 - What are the new things that you learned during the project?
 - What was the most (important, fun, helpful, engaging) part of the project?
 - What did you gain from this project?

- Did you encounter any difficulties during the project? If yes, how did you overcome them?
- How will you integrate this project into your future works?
- Do you have any idea / recommendation for future projects?
- If you were to sum up in one sentence what was the most important/valuable aspect of the process, what would it be?

Data obtained from the questionnaire were evaluated via correlation analysis, which is commonly used in screening studies. In the assessment of the survey, each response was examined separately and content analysis was performed.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings obtained from the analysis of survey data. That findings were supported by taking direct quotations from teachers' opinions.

Regarding the answers about the “cognitive awareness” levels of the participant; 11 participants (55%) stated that “I’ve been fully aware of what was happening around me at all events during the project” whereas 8 of them (40%) stated that “I’ve been very aware of what was happening around me at all events during the project”. These answers can be interpreted as expressing that the participants' motivations were quite high and activities were at a level that stimulated their interest (Table 1).

Table 1. Survey Findings Related to Teaching and Learning Process

| <i>Cognitive Awareness</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Individual Responsibility</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Respectability</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--|-----------|------------|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| I’ve been fully aware of what was happening around me | 11 | 55 | I had the opportunity to show preference | 9 | 45 | I felt very positive and relaxed. | 9 | 45 |
| I’ve been very aware of what was happening around me | 8 | 40 | I felt responsible for the realization of all events during the project | 10 | 50 | I felt positive and relaxed. | 11 | 55 |
| I’ve been a little aware of what was happening around me | 0 | 0 | I drifted alone at all events during the project without using willpower | 1 | 5 | I didn’t feel good. | 0 | 0 |
| I felt bored | 0 | 0 | I didn’t take any responsibility, | 0 | 0 | I thought I was bad. | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 20 | 100 | Total | 20 | 100 | Total | 20 | 100 |

Regarding the answers about “*individual responsibility*” levels of the participant, 9 participants (45%) said that “*They had the opportunity to show preference at all events throughout the project*”, 10 of them (50%) stated that “*I felt responsible for the realization of all events during the project*” whereas 1 participant (5%) indicated that “*I drifted alone at all events during the project without using willpower*” (Table 1).

Therefore, we can say that 95% of the respondents were personally involved /active in the activities. One of the most important purposes of this study was to enable participants to experience learning by doing, we can say that this goal was reached. All of the participants stated that they felt very positive and relaxed in all activities throughout the project. We can connect this to the use of methods such as group work and cooperative learning during all the activities, which creates a more intimate atmosphere by breaking down social barriers. In addition, we can see similar results regarding the answers about the “*cooperation*” level of the participants. Sixteen participants (80%) stated that “*I felt that I was part of a group and I was accepted by the group in all activities throughout the project*” whereas 4 of them (20%) stated that “*In general, I had positive feelings about class members in all activities throughout the project*”. In addition, 13 of the participants (65%) stated that they were active participants in all activities throughout the project, and 7 of them (35%) stated that they felt alive and vibrant at all events (Table 2).

Table2. Survey Findings Related to Teaching and Learning Process

| <i>Cooperation</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Active Participation</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---|-----------|------------|--|-----------|------------|
| I felt that I was part of a group and I was accepted by the group | 16 | 80 | I was on active participant in all activities throughout the project | 13 | 65 |
| In general, I had positive feelings about class members | 4 | 20 | I felt alive and vibrant at all events | 7 | 35 |
| I felt accepted by the group by myself | 0 | 0 | I did not spend much energy on my work | 0 | 0 |
| I felt alone and ostracized by others. | 0 | 0 | I felt myself motionless and passive. | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 20 | 100 | Total | 20 | 100 |

Cooperative learning, problem-solving and drama activities improved participants' leadership, teamwork and communication skills. The active classroom environment was a suitable place for the development of skills such as oral communication and group work. In addition, the working environment broke down social barriers between participants and faculty members, allowed one to one contact with the instructor and consultancy in the field, which provided an important learning environment. Thus, the study was effective in increasing the motivation of participants to share their experiences with their colleagues, getting information about recent developments related to their fields and following developments in their areas.

If given the opportunity, outdoor learning may have the benefit of turning average

classroom students into scientists. Enquiry skills such as observational skills, data collection, data analysis, map work and investigation skills can be acquired. Outdoor learning activities are also ideal for the physical and emotional health of students.¹⁸ Also, outdoor learning plays an essential role in delivering real world relevant content, developing technical skills and provides important experience of the research process and design. The ability to subject conceptual and theoretical understandings to the test of empirical evidence and encounters with real people and places is the perceived strength of fieldwork.¹⁹

The timing of the study was matched with the seminar period of teachers. As mentioned by the teachers during the study, our belief about the benefit of using the time of teachers in the training sessions offered by universities during the meaningless seminar period was justified. The programs of the seminar periods, which are conducted at the beginning and end of the terms, should be prepared in such a way that teachers can plan in-service training with faculties, enabling them to choose the activities and lectures in which they want to participate. Thus, the disconnection between the Ministry of Education and the Faculties can be eliminated and teachers will have the opportunity to continue their professional development.

The answers given to the open-ended question “*What are the new things you learned in the Project Process*” are as follows; Creative Drama (75%), Evidence-Based Learning (60%), Photograph and Graphic Interpretation (30%), Portfolio (30%), Conflict Resolution (20%), Historical Trips (%15), Cooperative Learning Techniques (%15), Soil Structure (10%), and Peer Education (%5). This shows that participants' expectations and interests were different, and we reached the targeted heterogeneous group of participants. One of the participants answered this question as “*I learned that there is no boundary for a learning environment, I especially liked the “fake pleasures activity”*”. This activity aimed to raise awareness about “*consumer culture*” in Kayseri Forum shopping center.

Another participant in the project stated that “*I learned how to use the local environment as a course material*”. Another one said that “*80% of the activities and the method carried out were new to me*”. This participant's period of service was considerably low (8 years), which is interesting and in fact it is an indication of how much participants need these kinds of studies. Another participant expressed his thoughts as “*I recognized that evidence- based history teaching triggers students' higher-order thinking skills, enables them to see different perspectives and lets them understand that the truth is not unique/absolute in social studies*”.

It was observed that almost all participants lacked awareness about the methodology of social studies and how to highlight it during the course. Therefore, I believe that the study changed the participants' perspective towards social studies rather than just teaching new approaches. “*Evidence - Based Social Studies Teaching*” activities

¹⁸S. Aksit, F. Aksit & C. Kayacilar, “*Geography Teaching: Without Walls*”, *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2012, 46, 4487–4492.

¹⁹M. Mc Guinness, and D. Simm, “*Going Global: Long-Haul fieldwork in Undergraduate Geography*”, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 2005, 29(2), pp. 241-253.

were very significant in revealing the methodology of social studies and the systematic of knowledge production for the course, which has a multi-disciplinary nature. Thus, the main emphasis of social studies education was set as introducing social scientists' research, analysis, and interpretation processes to the teachers and creating the required experience and skills for this process. For this purpose, during the project, the evidences were presented to social studies teachers in raw form and they were asked to choose the evidences that they wanted to cut and paste them, write sub-questions/instructions under them, and eventually prepare an evidence based worksheet. Thus teachers had a chance to see that knowledge was not the purpose of the social studies, it was a tool for the development of skills related with social studies. Moreover, they had the opportunity to see that in spite of using the same evidences, social scientists might produce different perspectives and interpretations; in other words their awareness about bias was increased.

In addition, participants also stated that activities based on application were quite useful. Most of the participants said that they were quite willing to transfer the methods that they had learned in the project to their classrooms. After the completion of the project, some of the participants shared their classroom practice and assessment experience with the whole group via the created Facebook page.

One participant answered the "What did your gain from this project" question as *"My vision has expanded and it has increased my motivation and my idea about inapplicable things has changed"*.

One participant answered the question "How will this project be integrated with the participant's future studies?" as *"I noticed the importance of acquiring the perspective of social studies for the students; I'm planning to give it first. I will increase the number of field trips and activities"* whereas another one stated that *"These projects should be especially for teachers who were graduated before 2007 and the seminar period of the schools should be used for them"*. Although this project was primarily designed as a professional development outreach program, rather than a research program, it provided insights into effective ways to improve teachers' attitudes and abilities in using outdoor learning to support social studies lessons.

The problems related to the project were reported as "program being very intensive / physical fatigue" (40%) and "social life being stagnant in the place they were accommodated and in the city" (20%). Two participants stated that the use of narrative methods, which was a small part of the project, was boring. Thus, the participants had the chance to personally experience the limitations of the narrative method. As for recommendations for future projects, they suggested *"The increase of TÜBİTAK contribution to such studies and extending the time"*.

The answers given to the question "If you were to give a sentence about the most important / valuable aspect of the process, what would it be?" are as follows:

"I had the opportunity to look at my own world from a different planet. I asked the question if I am a good social studies teacher"

"As the universe has unresolved secrets and they are discovered as time goes on, similarly learning is a discovery process and this process is "boundless" "

“It was like an intense degree program. I've stored energy and morale”

“Getting aware of working with groups”

Boundless class project is “Stepping out of our own world”

“I saw that truth is not what we actually saw, it is the possibility of reaching what we've not seen”

“Education, everywhere, every time, without class and time limits”

We believe that this study developed participants' perspectives on social studies courses and provided experience in the application of new approaches. Participants gained knowledge, skills and attitudes about nature, which can be transferred to elementary school students in their class. It is an undisputable fact that more than classrooms and textbooks are needed for ensuring the success of the social studies course, which has a multi-disciplinary structure. We believe that this project encouraged social studies teachers to go beyond the classroom walls, to perform nature education with their students and to prepare projects with students. It was observed that the perspectives of the participants on the nature developed in a positive way, their skills regarding use of scientific methods improved, and their social communication and the ability to work together improved with cooperative learning applications.

The outdoor learning approach offers a good opportunity to “test” the information learned in the classroom and to identify the key concepts underlying the discipline. In other words, outdoor learning is a tool for integrating theoretical knowledge and practice. Also the problem-solving process of the study provided them with critical information about the insufficiency of textbook based views by linking the issues of the real world with classroom education via sorting, classification, and inference. The outdoor studies offer unique opportunities for understanding and studying on complex problems, which cannot be reflected in the classroom environment and improve the student's learning. In the Final Evaluation Questionnaire, teachers stated that the biggest gains of the project were new approaches, intellectual and professional development.

4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to clarify teachers' opinions about a TUBİTAK project funded by 4005 Science and Society Innovative Educational Practices, which provide life-long professional development opportunities to teachers. The aim of this project was also to refresh the knowledge of social studies teachers, to inform them about new approaches and increase the diversity of their teaching approaches and methods in their lessons. Within this general framework, the sample of the project consisted of social studies teachers. Teachers were expected to transfer the knowledge, skills and attitudes which they have gained during the project, could be used to the elementary school students in their class. In other words, the activities undertaken during the project will enlighten the road of teachers in regulating educational status in their classroom, according to the “*Constructivist Approach*” on which the new curriculum is based.

At the end of the study, it was discovered that the issues that were learned should include interdisciplinary links and they should be integrated into the life of the individuals.

In this context, it can be said that preparing learning environments, in which classrooms and outdoor activities support each other, will increase both the quantity and quality of teaching. In particular, social studies teachers should pay attention to observation trips. These trips can be directed to the market place, government offices, factories, exhibitions, archaeological excavations, workshops, museums and historical venues (historic buildings, museum-city, and battle fields). These trips should not be considered as just a fun day out; every step should be planned and evaluated. Also the location of outdoor learning and how to plan such visits should completely depend on the creativity of teachers.

It is an indisputable fact that to ensure the success of the social studies course, which has a multi-disciplinary nature, something more than classrooms and textbooks, is needed. This project is intended to encourage social studies teachers towards "getting out of classroom", "using the local environment as a teaching material", and "preparing projects with their students".

During the project, participants had the opportunity to personally see that cooperative learning activities and teaching were a team work effort and productivity was achieved through the team work itself. It is believed that each teacher who participated in the study will be more open to contribute to his/her own development, as well as to the development of all the other teachers in the schools and to perform interdisciplinary works with colleagues. Such a point of view is expected to inhibit loneliness and alienation in the school environment.

In general, at the end of the study the perspectives of all the participants towards outdoor learning practices in social studies lessons were observed to be positive. The teachers participating in the project stated that they gained theoretical knowledge and they practiced skills related to new approaches. Teachers who have experienced outdoor learning, are more likely to use it in their teaching than those who have not had this experience. Therefore, developing an elective course about outdoor learning applications in the education faculties is expected to contribute to the development of candidate teachers. Also, the schedules of the seminars, which are conducted at the beginning and end of the terms, should be prepared in such a way that teachers can plan in-service trainings in cooperation with faculties, enabling them to choose the activities and lectures in which they want to participate. Thus, the disconnection between the Ministry of Education and the Faculties of Education can be dissolved and teachers will have the opportunity to continue their professional development.

As a general evaluation, it was observed that this study made the participants more willing to achieve learning outcomes and motivated them. The findings of this study revealed that outdoor learning improves both the use of social skills and field knowledge and understanding. Outdoor learning has a key role in the social integration of the students. As a result of the study, it was found that the use of new approaches is representative of the larger shift toward constructivism in education, and if more teachers embrace this perspective, most of the existing limitations concerning the reform may be resolved. As a result, with the help of these kinds of projects, the disconnection between the Ministry of Education and Faculties of Education, which are two organs connected to each other in terms of teacher training, each using the other's output as input, may be resolved.

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