

Activities In Children’s Universities: The Case Of Istanbul Kemerburgaz Children’s University

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Abstract

Children’s universities have become a something of importance in the last decade, and in Europe alone, more than 350 children’s universities have been established. With there being no single model for a children’s university, their common goals are as follows: introducing children to science and art at a young age, allowing them to be curious, allowing them to develop their skills and problem solving, training them to pursue new and original information, instead of repeating it, and helping children to be able to grasp and understand science and its related disciplines.. One of the most important common goals of children’s universities surfaced because of the differences in education quality and facilities between different schools.

One of the newest emerging institutions with regard to this subject is the Istanbul Kemerburgaz Children’s University. Being founded with İSTKA project support in 2013, it began with five different programmes, and has reached out to approximately 1000 children. . Within this proposal, the Istanbul Kemerburgaz Children’s University is under the umbrella of the Sustainable World School. Under the Sustainable World School, which has two programmes called “My Own Garden” and “Not Plastic; Cloth” have been executed. When determining which elementary schools should participate in these programmes, Başakşehir, being a socio-economic disadvantaged district, was chosen. As participants both 3rd and 4th grade students from five different elementary schools were chosen. A total of 400 students from 22 different groups, on different dates, participated in the programme. In the workshops, the necessities of environmental sustainability were discussed, ideas were formed, and applications were made. This program’s aims: we are aware consumers, meaning our choices for

consumption should be in favor of a more pollution free world, how to make them see how our personal behaviour affects the whole world, teaching children that even the smallest step taken by them contributes to the world's pollution outcome; thus it is very important to have a sustainable world, and to teach a generation about a quality sustainable environment. In the foundations of the applications process a "teaching through art" mentality resided.

In the proposal structures for children's universities in both Turkey and the world were mentioned. Istanbul Kemerburgaz Children's University's programme for a Sustainable World School has been defined in detail; including its applications and its research environment, and participant opinions have been reflected in a descriptive manner by using open ended questions.

Key words: Children's university, Teaching with art, Workshops

Introduction

What is a children's university?

A children's university is an organization which provide children with the tools for basic life skills through subjects such as scientific and critical thinking, creativity, reasoning, questioning, curiosity, problem-solving by interacting with the university; , making things,, living, and having fun. With this purpose in mind, it introduces children at an early age to the fun side of arts and sciences fun. (1.)

Objectives of the Children's University

Although there are different embodiments and models, a children's university's general objectives can be grouped as follows;

To provide equal educational opportunities to disadvantaged groups, to introduce children to the culture of the university, to ensure children have an idea regarding their education and future options, to improve accessibility to the scientific knowledge of society, to ensure students at elementary and high school receive reliable and updated information regarding the scientific field that they are interested in from leading scientists, to affect the relationships between the universities and other institutions positively, and to improve coordination and integration between them, to be an example for formal educational institutions to develop and renovate themselves , to ensure that universities become more open and flexible, to examine the activities carried out by other children's universities at both national and international levels, and to cooperate with these organizations.

Organizations of Children's University

Children's Universities are established in the form of many different embodiments in the world. These can be grouped under eight headings:

Project based initiatives within the university, permanent organizations in the university, civil society organizations associated with the university, children's universities belonging to the civil society organizations, multi-stakeholder organizations, children's universities belonging to the municipalities, non-profit corporations, and commercial enterprises use the name children's university.

Models of Children's University

Countries apply different methods by creating the context of the Children's University program. There are six different models from various universities' studies. These are;

Presentation centered courses carried out in the amfi, activity-based courses, which are conducted in the amfi, practice-based programs in the form of workshops, camps supporting the activities implemented during the holidays, individual courses and programs carried out throughout the year in the same area, and individual courses and programs carried out throughout the year in different areas (2).

Children's University in Turkey

The first children's university in Turkey was founded in 2007 by Ankara University. The Ankara Children's University, which started its education courses in 2009, also is a founding member of EUCU.NET. Ankara Children's University continues to provide training and education in 15 programs; “ Is there anyone who does not like math?” , “ Insect Party School”, “Children Discovering Modern Art in *Çer Modern*”, “Who Shakes the World?”, “The School of Philosophy”, “The School of Astronomy”, “ The Human Rights Theater”, “The Little Gardeners”, “ The School of Architecture”, “ The School of Water”, “The School of Earth Sciences”, “The Savings Detectives”, “Creative Ideas”, and “The School of Life Sciences”.

Istanbul, Anadolu, and İnönü Universities, started their own programs after Ankara University. İnönü University is also one of the founding members of EUCU.NET.

Our country has had a history of children's university for about 5 years, though it is spreading rapidly. Especially the last two years, children's universities have become quite common in our country, and many children's universities have been established at the universities. Universities established or progressing to becoming establish in recent years are listed as follows: Bilgi University, Sinop University, Medeniyet University, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Enderun University, Hasan Kalyoncu University, Namık Kemal University, Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Uludağ University, Harran University, Mersin Çocuk University, the Middle East Technical University Institute of Marine Sciences, and Ege University.

When Children's Universities are examined, it can be seen that some provide education during the summer months, but there are also universities which continue all year round. In many of the programs there is no condition for participation, but there are special programs for gifted students. Studies are conducted completely free of charge for disadvantaged groups, as well as paid training universities that provide scholarships to students who are disadvantaged.

İstanbul Kemerburgaz Children's University

Istanbul Kemerburgaz University has one of the recently established Children's Universities. Istanbul Kemerburgaz University Children and Young People Skills, and the Future Supporting Research and Implementation Coordination Project" is supported by the "İstanbul Development Agency Children and Youth Entrepreneurship, The Skills and Future Supporting Financial Program" and Children's University was established in December 2012. The goal of the project is to make children individuals who are more active in their social life by improving their knowledge, skills, and awareness, and by increasing their access to education, science and art; offering children more equal opportunities and thus, building a healthy society in the city of Istanbul, which has a population of over 17 million.

Two different institutions (The University of Istanbul Kemerburgaz and Basaksehir District

Education Directorate) have taken part in the project and five different primary schools were chosen (Hikmet Ulugbay / Mahmut Sevket Armour / I.MKB Alpaslan / Gul Haji Ali Osman / Mehmet Yaren Gümeli) for study. With five different programs; “Environmental Detectives”, “Environmental Panorama”, “Designing My Own Toy”, “Not Plastic; Cloth” and “My Own Garden”, a total of 42 workshops, two parents education modules, two workshops, and an exhibition and a symposium were organized.

Sustainable World School

For a sustainable world, it is necessary to provide economic, environmental, and social sustainability. In this school, the requirements for environmental sustainability are discussed with the children, and the ideas are produced and implemented. The school provides two programs; “Not Plastic; Cloth” and “My Own Garden”.

The workshops which are conducted for these programs are planned in order to raise awareness regarding reducing the use of non-renewable energy sources to a minimum, increasing the efficiency of renewable energy, and being more responsible towards the environment.

As consumers, being conscious of the necessity to adapt our behavior to help towards creating a cleaner world, creating an awareness of how individual behaviors affects the whole world, helping children understand that even the slightest step to be taken for a sustainable lifestyle is very valuable, raising a generation that cares and demands quality, and sustainable care of the environment are the aims of the Sustainable World School .

Not Plastic; Cloth Workshop

Discussed topics / activities: people throw away 22, 17622 plastic bags into the environment throughout their life.

Plastic bags, which utilize petroleum-derived substances, and are produced from polyethylene, are not biodegradable and thus, remain in the environment for a thousand years,

with only 1% of plastic bags being recycled. When nylon bags begin to deteriorate, they emit harmful chemicals into the environment, and gradually pollute our food chain. In addition to this, the production of plastic bags leads to an increasing reduction of non-renewable energy such as oil and natural gas. According to the World Wildlife Foundation, over 100,000 whales, seals, turtles, and birds, are dying each year due to these plastic bags. This causes environmental disasters such as global warming, floods, storms, and the depletion of water resources. In many countries in the world, to use plastic bags is against the law. . As conscious consumers, we need to redirect our choices for a cleaner world before it is too late. In order to incorporate this understanding and approach, taking action as early as possible is of great importance. This workshop aims for students to create cloth bags which have their own designs on them, and when shopping, to use g them instead of plastic bags, and thus, make them more responsible and give them the potential to play an active role in nature conservation. This means that the children will realize the extent of the damage caused by plastic bags to the environment, and thus, create an awareness of how individual behaviors effect the entire world, and that even the slightest step is very significant in order for a sustainable life. With the awareness they gained in the workshop, they would be an example to their peers and their families in respecting the environment we live in and protecting it as the long term goal. While transmitting a sustainable world message and wanting them to carry conceptual and aesthetic concerns was the other main goal.

The Process of the Workshop: As an introduction, a presentation in the form of questions and answers is made to determine the damage of the use of plastic bags to our health and the world. The presentation is supported with photos and animations. Only using their own designed bags place of plastics ones will reduce the use of six plastic bags per week, and 288 per year; and if only one in five persons would behave like that in our country, 31 billion 46 million 400 bags would never be thrown away in a life time. Thus, they are helping to protect

the health of their loved ones and many other animal species, protecting the world's resources, reducing a major problem for both a clean and healthy environment in which they are living, as well as contributing to the national economy. Later, a graphic designer wanted them to create a design for their bags in 20 minutes. They were helped to develop their ideas. After the completion of their sketches, the students applied their designs to the bags.



Different painting techniques were mentioned and supported and the students could choose the most efficient ones.



At the end, the students and their bags were photographed and a presentation made. In the presentation their bags and what they had drawn or written, were shown to friend. Finally, it is reminded they can live in a cleaner world by using their bags in school, shopping and on trips.

Results of this Activity: 16 workshops were performed within the project (between 14.03.2013/ 21.03.2013 / 28.03.2013 / 04.04.2013 / 11.04.2013 / 18.04.2013 / 25.04.2013 /

02.05.2013 / 08.05.2013). A total of 48 hours of training were provided. 267 students have participated in the workshops. 270 products have been designed in workshops.



University students from different faculties participated as volunteers in the workshops and have been in contact with students.

My Own Garden Workshop

Discussed topics / activities: People have gradually severed ties with nature, and in urban life have lived without stepping on soil for many months. Green areas have been destroyed as a result of distorted and unplanned urbanization, especially in some districts of Istanbul, gray buildings are the only view. Only a few of those children can see plants, and for children growing up in apartments such contact is short-term and shallow. Since the children cannot create an emotional bond with nature, they may not internalize issues such as plastic waste poisoning the soil, polluting the environment, and harming plants and animals.

Having a garden belonging to the child itself, creating and altering this garden with their own hands and taking responsibility for its maintenance, will help to internalize these micro experience to universalize it. For this purpose, the aim is to create a generation who love and respect nature, for whom environmental awareness is high, and who cares about the quality and sustainability of the environment.

Process of the Workshop: As an introduction a presentation in the form of questions and

answers is given to the students containing the benefits of the world's vegetation, reasons for deforestation, and what will be experienced if vegetation is lost. The presentation is supported with photos and animations. What should be done to protect the world is discussed with students. . It is stated that the whole solution is to love the nature, and each of them will have a miniature garden at the end of the workshop. Pots are shown to the children and they are asked to imagine their own gardens. They draw their imaginary gardens on paper and pick flowers that they want to pot and plant.



This is shared in the later presentation “how they designed their gardens”. And on their way home, students take their gardens with them. They are reminded that the plants are alive and the care of their garden is their responsibility now.

Results of this Activity: Two different institutions (The University of Istanbul Kemerburgaz and Basaksehir District Education Directorate) has partaken in the project and in the workshops which 156 students attended from two different primary schools (Tepe Primary School/ Mehmet Yaren Gümeli primary School) to study. Two workshops were carried out within the project (between 09.05.2013/ 16.05.2013 / 25.05.2013 / 30.05.2013). A total of 18 hours of training was provided. 156 products were designed in the workshops.



The university students from different faculties participated as volunteers in the workshops, and were in contact with the other students.

Student Survey Results

To get their opinion Education Completion Questionnaire-Child Form has been given to the children who participated in the workshop. Since some of them were unable to read, 423 questionnaires were evaluated.

In the survey, students were asked nine questions about education, and were asked to respond by selecting one of "no", "little", "somewhat" or "very much".

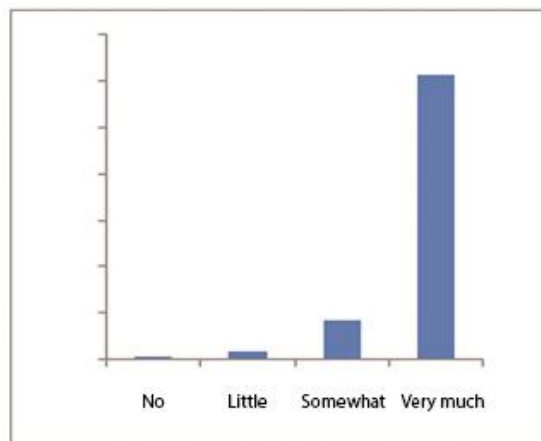


Table 1

Students who participated were asked “If they had obtained new information about the topics covered in the training, and to what extent they had learned the subject”.85 percent of

participating students (n = 359), participated in the training had learned a lot of new information, and 12 percent (n = 50) stated that they had obtained some new information (table 1).

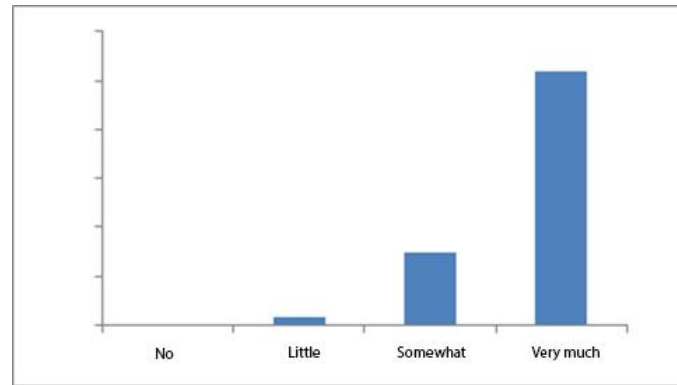


Table 2

When asked “To what extent they now know/remember the new information they learned” students, 71 percent (n = 300), know / remember most of the new the information, 20 percent (n = 84) know / remember little of the new the information (Table 2).

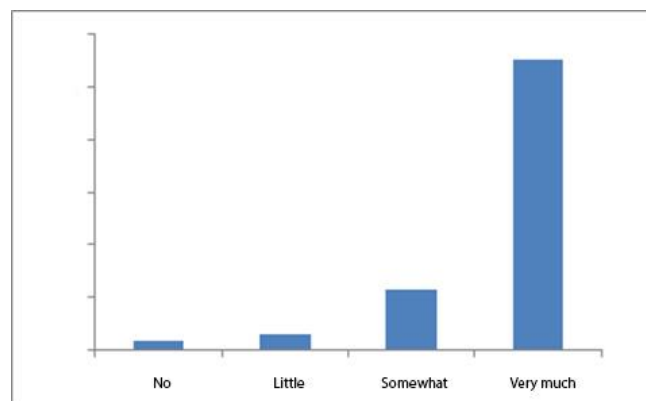


Table 3

When asked “How interesting they found the topics covered in the training“; 75 percent of the students (n = 317) found the topics covered very interesting, and 16 percent (n = 67) stated that the subject attracted little attention (table 3).

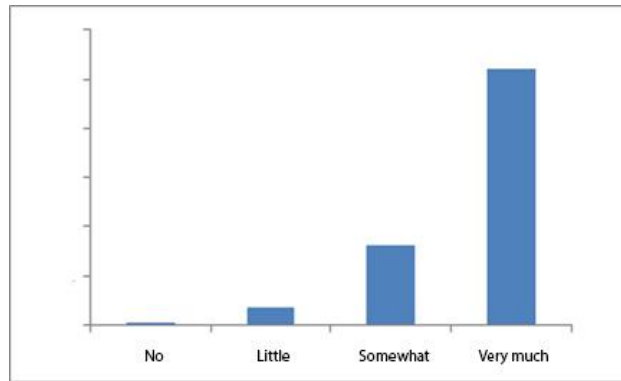


Table 4

When asked “Your views on the duration of training and on the materials used”; 71 percent of the students (n = 300) stated that there was enough time allocated for education, and 22 percent (n = 93) stated that the time was partially sufficient (table 4).

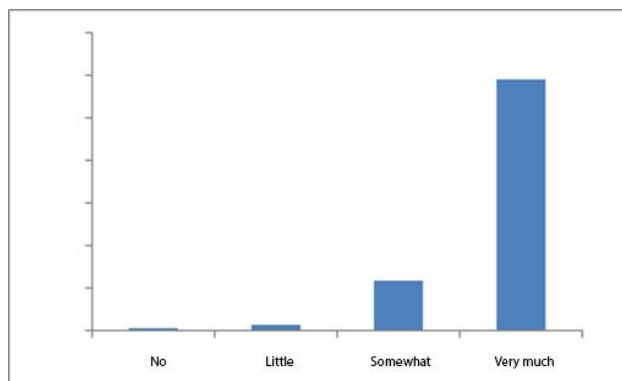


Table 5

When evaluating materials that were asked by the students, 81 percent (n = 342) indicated the material used were more than enough, 16 percent (n = 67) indicated the materials were partially sufficient (table 5).

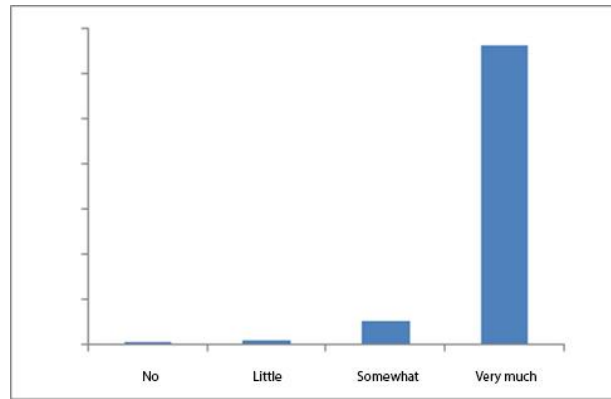


Table 6

When asked about student opinions regarding the workshop teacher; 91 percent of the students (n = 384) indicated that teachers teach the subject very well, 7 percent (n = 29) stated that the teachers taught well (table 6).

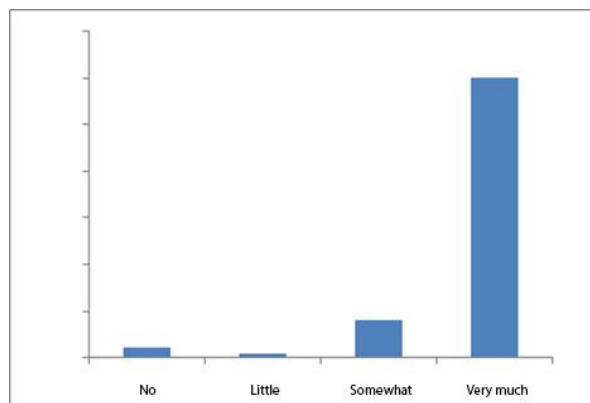


Table 7

When asked “If the teachers were clearly expressed their desires”; 82 percent of the students (n = 346) indicated that teachers used very clear language, while 11 percent (n = 46) has emphasized that the language used was partially unclear (table 7).

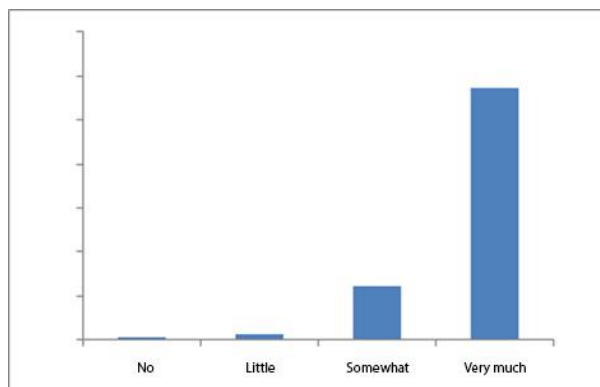


Table 8

The student, were asked about the courses overall assessment, and 78 percent of students (n = 330), thought it was generally very good, and 16 percent (n = 68) found it ok (table 8).

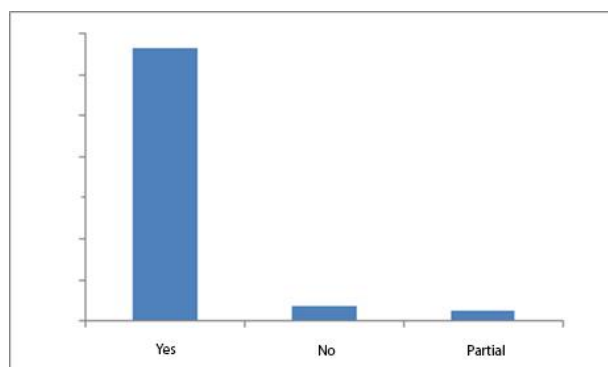


Table 9

Students were asked “If they would like to participate in a different activity next time”. 90 percent of students (n = 380) would want to join a different e, 3 percent (n = 13) stated that they would partially like to join a different course (table 9).

Teacher's Opinions

To obtain teachers opinions about the education conducted under the Children's University Education-Teacher Form Completion Survey performed, 22 teachers from the participating schools were surveyed. In the survey, questions asked about the quality of the courses, and asked them to responded by selecting one of “Yes”, “no” or “partial” to express their opinions.

When asked “Was the information presented in the course clear and useful for students?” All of the participating teachers stated that was clear and helpful.

When asked “Were the students satisfied with the education?” In a similar manner to the above findings, all of the teachers expressed that they were satisfied.

The teachers, were asked their views on the organization of the training. All of the teachers expressed that they had found the organization sufficient.

Results

Traditional education is based on memorization, is teacher-centered and requires strict discipline. It is also submitted to supervision and strictly followed-up. Since it is based on abstract thinking; it is based on the subject and not the solution. A systematic and sequential method is carried forth. Therefore, it is wanted a certain level of information which is taught via a curriculum and abilities; values which are in a pre-decided level (3).

Being based on voluntary participation, with a no scoring/exam resulting approach, with interdisciplinary studies, and working together on the same problem with children of different ages and at all levels could be a solution for students, teachers, and academics who are oppressed by the pressure of traditional education. Children's universities give an opportunity for students to look in a different way at scientific and aesthetic problems, to research within their curiosity and interest, to think freely without the pressure of notes concerns and hierarchy, and to meet different people and be open to new ideas.

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