Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE October 2012 ISSN 1302-6488 Volume: 13 Number: 4 Article 10

TO LEARN FROM TEACHERS AT SCHOOL, IDEAL TEACHER OR E-LEARNING APPLICATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF GIFTED STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study, aimed at revealing the views of elementary school gifted students about the roles and behaviors of their teachers in class as well as about the in-class roles and behaviors that they expect from an ideal teacher with respect to different variables. Another question in the study was directed to determine students' views about learning academic subjects via e-learning applications instead of at teachers. The participants of the study were 46 gifted students identified with the diagnosis system of "Education program for the gifted" executed in the Department of Gifted Education at the Education Faculty of Anadolu University. The research data were collected via a five-point Likert-type scale developed and tested by the researcher for its validity and reliability. For the analysis of the research data, paired sample t-test, one of descriptive parametrical statistical techniques, was applied. The findings obtained in the study revealed that according to gifted students, the in-class behaviors demonstrated by the course teachers were mostly those related to their roles of guidance for students. The behaviors of the course teachers within the scope of this role were followed by those related to providing information and maintaining the discipline, respectively. The behaviors least demonstrated by the teachers were those related to the role of supporting the students and those related to being a model for them. According to the students, an ideal teacher should at most demonstrate behaviors in class regarding the role of guiding the students and those regarding the role of providing information. According to the gifted students, the roles and behaviors of their teachers in class are quite different from the behaviors expected from an ideal teacher. Students do not regard e-learning applications as an alternative to learning from teachers. Rather, they prefer learning from their teachers to technology-aided learning environments. According to students, compared to structure academic learning, technology is a better environment to make good use of their time, to satisfy their curiosity about certain subjects, to establish communication with others and to play games.

Keywords: **Gifted students, teacher roles, teacher qualification, e-learning, distance education, teacher metaphors, elementary schools, student's perceptions**

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are those who undertake the responsibility of preparing individuals for the current society in line with the instructional goals determined within curricula. One important factor that influences the related success of teachers is considered to be their roles and behaviors that they demonstrate in class in the teaching process. It is a common fact that teachers' in-class behaviors influence students' cognitive, affective and kinetic developments as well as their academic achievements. When an efficient environment appropriate to learning is made available, students can effectively gain the

efficacies set forth by the education program (Walker et al, 1996; Jones, 2000; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003). One of the variables that best-predict the goal-oriented efforts made by students in class is considered to be not only their relationships with their teachers but also the in-class behaviors of their teachers (Osterman, 2000).

Teachers' in-class roles and behaviors constitute a su bject long-discussed in related literature. Modern education philosophies and learning theories and approaches persistently emphasize that learning is a student-centered process in which individuals structure their own knowledge (Webb, 2002; Leithwood et al, 2006) and that teachers should immediately avoid their conventional roles (Holt-Reynolds, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 2000) and undertake new roles (Johnson & Johnson, 1998; Cornu & Peters, 2005). Today, the basic roles expected from teachers require them to consider students' individual differences and their learning styles (Ackerman, Kyllonen, & Roberts, 1999; Maltby, Day & Macaskill, 2007), to become an expert designing and managing a learner-centered teaching process (Fosnot, 2005), to become a guide that facilitates learning (Dufy & Cunningham, 1996; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2008) and to become a counselor that could be asked for help when needed (Dilworth & Imig, 1995).

Teachers are supposed to become those who demonstrate behaviors contributing to the cooperation and interaction between students and learning sources (Slavin, 1996) and who have the necessary methodological knowledge and skills to create interesting and good-quality instructional environments that will help motivate students and draw their attention (Brooks & Brooks, 2000). Karagiorgi & Symeou (2005) and Mayer (2008) point out that in today's instructional environments, teachers should act as a guide and students should be those who make out the meaning and that instructional environments have to be designed in line with these criteria. Training individuals who create meanings on their own and who search interrogate and are sensitive to their environment can only be possible if teachers carry out their new roles as required (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Richardson, 1999; Windschitl, 1999).

Teachers' in-class roles and behaviors are mentioned and classified under certain headings in related literature. Some of these classifications are as follows: teachers as those who provide information, teachers as those who maintain the discipline, teachers as those who shape students, teachers as those who support students, teachers as a guide, teachers as a model, and teachers as those who help achieve the goal.

Teachers as Those Who Provide Information

As an expert in the field, a teacher is a person who transfers the learning content and information to students. As required by this role, the teacher, the source of information in class, is active, while students demonstrate passive behaviors mostly as those who receive the information provided. Students are expected to demonstrate behaviors towards learning the information and skills transferred to them (Brown & Atkins, 1986; Harden, 2000).

Teachers as Those Who Maintain The Discipline

Teachers make efforts to take the control of the class, to help students become individuals who behave as appropriate to in-class roles and rules by informing them about their duties and responsibilities, to stay within the scope of the learning goals by preventing unwanted behavior of students, to organize students for the learning goals, to make effective use of time, to manage in-class communication and to plan and manage the instructional activities in line with the mission of the school (Bailey, 2000; Smith, Lynch & Knight, 2007).

Teachers as Those Who Shape Students

Teachers determine the learning needs of their students by considering their individual characteristics; give feedback to their students regarding the field open to development; play the role of a development coach who sets goals for improvement by making

evaluations based on research and observations; and act as an expert who support and guide their students' individual and collective developments (Charles, 2002; Alberto & Troutman, 2003).

Teachers as Those Who Support Students

Teachers motivate their students in accordance with the learning and development goals and with the results they have obtained; help students gain self-confidence; reinforce and award students' appropriate behaviors; assign students duties and responsibilities to help them become successful; and provide the necessary support in the process via clues, feedback and corrections (Pianta, Stuhlman & Hamre, 2002; Wentzel, 2002).

Teachers as A Guide

Teachers help students make efforts in line with the learning goals; contribute to the solution of any problem students are likely to experience; respond to their students' questions; and act as a guide for their students. Students are active participants in their own learning. Students' interest and internal motivation play an important role in achieving learning. Teachers, knowing their students' individual differences and their learning styles, help their students make choices appropriate to them (Cotton, 2003; Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2009).

Teachers As A Model

Teachers become a model via their behaviors and actions for their students; make efforts to set good examples for their students; concretize an appropriate personality in students' minds via their behaviors; and demonstrate sincere, principled, balanced and disciplined behavior (Loughran, 1996; Lunenberg, Korthagen & Swennen, 2007).

Teachers as Those Who Help Achieve The Goal

Teachers help students achieve the learning goals by acting as a facilitator instead of directly transferring information to students (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Richardson, 2001).

Depending on the individual characteristics of gifted students as well as on the meanings they attribute to the learning and teaching process, it could be stated that teachers' in-class roles and behaviors are important in developing good-quality environments to meet the expectations and in increasing students' interest and motivation. Thus, it is important to answer the question of how the gifted students perceive their teachers' in-class roles and behaviors at school. The meanings attributed to teachers' behaviors by gifted students most of who have to share the same learning environments with normal learners could provide important clues for explaining not only the situation they are in but also their academic achievements. In addition, use of scientific data while revealing gifted children's expectations regarding teachers' in-class roles will help develop teacher training programs but also guide in-service trainings for teachers.

Taking certain variables into consideration, the present study aimed at revealing comparatively the views of gifted students about the in-class roles and behaviors of their teachers at school and in-class roles and behaviors that expect from an ideal teacher. The research questions directed in the study are as follows:

1. **What are the gifted students' views about the roles and behaviors of their teachers in class?**
2. **What are the gifted students' views about the roles and behaviors that an ideal teacher is expected to demonstrate in class?**
3. **According to the gifted students, do the roles and behaviors that an ideal teacher is expected to demonstrate in class resemble to the in-class roles and behaviors of their teachers?**

4. **Do the views of the gifted students about the comparison of the in-class roles and behaviors of an ideal teacher with those of their own teachers differ with respect to their gender and class grades?**
5. **What are the gifted students' views about learning academic subjects via e-learning applications instead of the teachers?**

METHOD

The present study, which, with the help of metaphors and open ended question, aimed at determining the views of elementary school gifted students about the in-class roles and behaviors of their teachers at school and about the roles and behaviors they expected from an ideal teacher, and views about learning academic subjects via e-learning applications instead of teachers has a descriptive research design.

Participants

The participants of this study were 46 gifted students who were attending the 7th, 8th and 9th grade classes of elementary schools and who were identified with the diagnosis system of "Education Program for the Gifted" executed by the Department of Education for the Gifted at the Education Faculty of Anadolu University in the city of Eskisehir in Turkey. The participating students were from 15 different elementary schools. Of all the students, 18 of them were female, and 28 of them were male. In addition, among the participants, 17 of them were 7th-grade students; 14 of them were 8th-grade students; and 15 of them were 9th-grade students.

Data Collection tools

The research data were collected with the help of a data collection tool titled "Teachers' in-class roles from gifted students' perspectives" developed by the researcher. The way for developing the data collection tool was as follows: First, the related literature was examined in line with the purpose of the study, and the studies focusing on the metaphors used by students for their teachers' in-class roles were examined in detail. As a result, a pool of metaphors was formed. Following this, examination of the related literature also allowed determining which role of a teacher each metaphor belonged to, and the metaphors were classified under the related teacher roles. For reliability purposes, this structure was presented to the views of 3 experts from the fields of teacher training and curriculum development. The result obtained revealed that the experts agreed with a rate of 93% on the structure established by the researcher. This result demonstrated that the structure established had a high level of reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The metaphors associated with teacher roles were then presented to 27 elementary school students who were from the same class grades as the study group. The 27 elementary school students were asked to determine the first five metaphors that best represented each teacher role. The underlying purpose of this application was not only to test the cultural appropriateness of the metaphors - found in international literature–for Turkish students but also to avoid the possibility that the participating students might misinterpret the metaphors to be chosen for the research scale. Based on the data collected from the students, a table of frequency was prepared, and for each teacher role, the first five metaphors which were best adapted by the students and which had the highest representation capacity were included in the scale.

Two important points play an important role in deciding to determine the gifted students' views about the in-class roles of teachers with the help of metaphors: (1) metaphors are conceptual structures which include the emotions (Ogborn, 1997; Goatly, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) and cover the current situation (Munby, 1986; Sweetser, 1990); and (2) metaphors can reveal the feelings and thoughts of elementary school students about the subject. It is a method used to investigate the metaphorical images and to reveal the reasons underlying teachers' in-class roles and their beliefs regarding students and education (BenPeretz, Mendelson & Kron, 2003). On the other hand, as the purpose

of the present study was not to demonstrate the metaphors the participating students would use in naming the in-class behaviors of teachers but to determine the roles and behaviors of their own teachers as well as to reveal their views about the roles and behaviors of an ideal teacher, the metaphors in the measurement tool were chosen and structured based on the related literature and on certain criteria.

The scale had a five-point likert-type structure: "I completely disagree", "I disagree", "I am neutral", "I agree" and "I completely agree", which were scored as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively. The first part of the scale included questions regarding the demographic backgrounds of the students. The second part was prepared for the gifted students to help them evaluate their own teachers' in-class behaviors with the help of metaphors. As for the third part of the scale, the students were asked to state their views about the in-class roles of an ideal teacher with the help of metaphors. The second and third parts of the scale were made up of 30 items.

For validity purposes, the draft form of the scale was presented to the views of 6 academicians from the fields of curriculum and instruction, elementary school teaching and education for the gifted. The structure organized in line with the feedback provided by the experts was applied twice in 17 days to 34 elementary school students who were from the same class grades as the gifted students in the study group. The whole scale reliability result obtained for the two applications was found as α=.885. The reliability results obtained for the dimensions of teacher roles are presented in Table 1.

Table: 1
Reliability Results Regarding the Sub-Scales for Teacher Roles

Teacher role	Metaphors	α
Providing information	Encyclopedia, computer, google, sun, library	.832
Providing the discipline	Commander, leader, judge, guardian, guard	.762
Supporting the students	Parent, harbor, farmer, ladder	.878
Guiding the students	Lighthouse, compass, conductor, coach	.891
Being a model	Actor-actress, artist, theater player, mirror	.764
Helping achieve the goals	Ship, train, bus, postman, driver	.892
Shaping the students	Gardener, sculptor, painter, tailor, factory	.901

Considering the criteria mentioned by DeVellis (1991, p. 85) and George & Mallery (2003, p. 231) regarding the meanings attributed to the reliability coefficiency scores (_>.9 excellent, _>.8 good, _>.7 acceptable, _>.6 questionable, _>.5 poor, _<.5 unacceptable), it could be stated that the cronbach's alpha values obtained in the present study were at an acceptable, good and excellent level.

In order to provide an answer to the last research question, the students were asked an open-ended question and requested to give a written response to this question.

Data Collection Process

The research data were collected via the application of the data collection tool to gifted students in July, 2011. Before the data collection process, the students were informed about the purpose of the study. Following this, the application was conducted.

Data Analysis

In the process of deciding on the statistical techniques to be applied for the analysis of the research data, first, the distribution of the data obtained from the students was determined. The analyses carried out for this purpose demonstrated that the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the data distribution were in the range of normal distribution values (-+2) (Akbulut, 2010). Depending on this result, paired sample t-test, one of the

descriptive, parametric statistical techniques, was used for the analysis of the research data.

FINDINGS

Based on the views of the participating gifted students, the first question in the study was directed to determine which teacher roles the in-class behaviors of their teachers were related to. As can be seen in Table 2, the mean scores of the students demonstrated that the in-class behaviors of the teachers were at most related to the role of guidance for students ($\overline{X}$=17,152). In the second place, the in-class behaviors of the teachers were those related to the role of providing information ($\overline{X}$=16,087). The behaviors related to the role of providing discipline were those demonstrated by the teachers in the third place ($\overline{X}$=15,087). The behaviors of the teachers in the fourth place were related to the role of shaping the students ($\overline{X}$=14,826). These behaviors of the teachers were followed by those related to the role of helping students achieve their goals ($\overline{X}$=14,326). According to the views of the gifted students, the behaviors least demonstrated by the teachers were related to the role of supporting the students ($\overline{X}$=12,565) and the role of becoming a model for the students ($\overline{X}$=11,783).

The second question directed in the study aimed at determining the views of gifted students about what roles and behaviors an ideal teacher should have in class. As can be seen in Table 2, the mean scores obtained revealed that according to the gifted students, the behaviors an ideal teacher should demonstrate in class were related to the role of guiding the students ($\overline{X}$=19,957) and the role of providing information ($\overline{X}$=19,696). According to the students, the behaviors regarding the role of shaping the students ($\overline{X}$=16,087) were those in the third place that an ideal teacher should demonstrate. These behaviors were followed by those related to the role of helping the students achieve their goals ($\overline{X}$=14,565), the role of becoming a model for the students ($\overline{X}$=14,565), the role of providing the discipline ($\overline{X}$=14,500) and the role of supporting the students ($\overline{X}$=14,435).

Table: 2
Views of Gifted Students about the In-Class Roles and Behaviors of Their Own Teachers and About Those of an Ideal Teacher

Teacher roles	Situation	$\overline{X}$	SD	df	t	p
Providing information	Teacher at school	16,087	4,943	45	-3,405	,001
	Ideal teacher	19,696	5,378			
Providing the discipline	Teacher at school	15,087	4,376	45	,652	,517
	Ideal teacher	14,500	5,386			
Supporting the students	Teacher at school	12,565	3,236	45	-3,245	,002
	Ideal teacher	14,435	4,806			
Guiding the students	Teacher at school	17,152	4,402	45	-3,231	,002
	Ideal teacher	19,957	5,457			
Shaping the students	Teacher at school	14,826	4,905	45	-2,769	,008
	Ideal teacher	17,043	5,672			

Being a model	Teacher at school	11,783	4,253	45	-4,020	,000
	Ideal teacher	14,565	4,108			
Helping achieve the goals	Teacher at school	14,326	5,271	45	-,303	,764
	Ideal teacher	14,565	4,108			

Depending on the views of the gifted students, the third question directed in the study aimed at determining the extent to which the in-class roles and behaviors of an ideal teacher are similar to those of their own teachers at school. According to the findings obtained related to this question, the in-class roles and behaviors of their teachers at school were far away from those of an ideal teacher except for the behaviors regarding the role of providing the discipline in class. The results obtained from the paired sample t-test applied to determine the statistical significance of the difference observed between the mean scores regarding the roles and behaviors of their teachers at school and those regarding the roles and behaviors of an ideal teacher revealed that the differences between the mean scores were statistically significant in favor of an ideal teacher in terms of the roles and behaviors regarding providing information (t=-3,405; p<.001), supporting the students (t=-3,245; p<.002), guiding the students (t=-3,231; p<.002), shaping the students (t=-2,769; p<.008) and being a model for the students (t=-4,020; p<.000). With respect to the behaviors related to the role of providing the discipline (t=,652; p>.05) and the role of helping the students achieve their goals (t=-,303; p>.05), the difference between the behaviors of their own teachers at school and those of an ideal teacher was not found statistically significant.

The other one question in the study was directed to determine whether the gifted students' views about the comparison of the in-class roles and behaviors of an ideal teacher with those of their own teachers in class differed with respect to the gender and class grades of the students. The results of the paired sample t-test applied depending on the variables of the gender and class grades of the gifted students revealed that the students' views did not statistically differ depending on their gender (t=,441; p>.05) and on their class grades (t=,574; p>.05).

The last question in the study was directed to the gifted students to reveal their views about learning academic subjects via e-learning applications instead of teachers. Before the students responded to the question, they were informed about such subjects as e-learning; its functions, its advantages, and its facilities for learners and the diversity of learning environments for help to the students raise awareness of e-learning. For this research purpose, the students were asked to respond to the open-ended question directed to them.

The findings obtained via the analysis of the data collected from the students are presented in Table 3.

Table: 3
Gifted Students' Preferences about Learning Resource for Academic Subjects

Theme	(f)
It is much better to learn the lessons from the teacher at school.	28
It is better and more fun to learn from a human.	21
It is fun to learn from the teacher together with classmates.	14
E-learning is too mechanical.	12
It is boring to learn the lessons via technology.	10
Technology only gives information.	9
Nothing can be replaced with the teacher.	7
Technology is good for games and entertainment.	7

Depending on the students' views about the subject, it could be stated that for academic learning's conducted at school in line with the curriculum, the students gave quite conservative and defensive responses when e-learning applications was presented as an alternative to learning from teachers. In addition, it could be stated that the students preferred learning from a man to learning via technology and perceived learning as a process involving not only cognitive but also affective and social aspects.

[S4. "It is much better to learn from a man. A family-like environment occurs in class when the teacher starts teaching me and my friends."]. [S7. Technology seems to be beautiful at the beginning, yet I get bored in a short time"]. [S9. Well, we don't just learn some information during the lessons. Besides information, we learn emotions related to every subject; we make jokes with one another and laugh and sometimes feel happy and sometimes sad. Technology is too mechanical, not nice"].

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

It is a pleasing result that according to the gifted students, the in-class behaviors most demonstrated by the teachers were those related to the role of guiding the students. However, it is also an important finding that these behaviors were followed by those related to the role of providing information and the role of providing the discipline, respectively. In addition, the finding that the behaviors least demonstrated by the teachers were those related to the role of supporting the students and the role of being a model for the students supports the concern mentioned above. This result primarily means that teachers have not sufficiently internalized the roles and behaviors required by the new elementary school curricula which were developed based on the constructivist learning approach in Turkey and which have been in practice since 2006. The result obtained also shows that teachers still demonstrate their traditional in-class roles and behaviors to a considerable extent. This result is also supported by the findings obtained in studies carried out by Polat (2006) and Celikkaya and Kus (2009). The fact that teachers mostly demonstrate behaviors regarding the role of guiding the students could be the differentiation caused by the national exam–known as Secondary School Placement Exam (SSPE)-applied to elementary school 6th, 7th and 8th grade students in Turkey. Moreover, in this exam, the high level of expectations of the students, teachers, school administrators and parents as well as the pressure caused by these expectations on teachers could be one of the reasons for teachers' roles and behaviors regarding the role of providing information and the role of providing the discipline. SSPE leads to an increase in the anxiety levels of elementary school students and to an increase in personality disorders, causes a number of children to develop an asocial personality and increases suicide attempts (Aydin, 2001; Kabalci, 2008; Erdogan, Cifcili and Meseci-Giorgetti, 2009; Ocak, Akgul and Yildiz, 2010; Turkish Association of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, 2010). This result is also supported by a research finding obtained by Eristi and Tunca (2012) who, in their study, investigated the problems experienced by elementary school science and technology teachers in the process of having students acquire affective efficacies and who reported that elementary school teachers cannot resist to the pressure of school administrators and of students' parents regarding students' achievement in the exam conducted on national basis and that these teachers thus feel obliged to teach in a way to make their students become successful in the exam.

The fact that the gifted students considered the most frequent in-class behaviors of an ideal teacher to be those related to the role of guiding the students and the role of providing information was another interesting result obtained in the study. This situation supports the idea that students are expected to be successful in the exam and they intensely experience this anxiety. This result is similar to that of another study titled "gifted students: meaning attributions to teaching and learning concepts, opinions on teaching profession priorities on teacher characteristics", which was carried out by Eristi (2012). In his study, the researcher reported that the most important qualification expected from teachers by gifted students was "being knowledgeable". In addition, according to the results obtained in a nation-wide study titled "Student Profile in the 21st Century" by the Ministry of National Education (MNE), 99.5% of students give great importance and value to 'being knowledgeable' (MNE, 2011). In other studies carried out by Saban, Kocbeker & Saban (2007), and Cerit (2008a, 2008b), it was found out that teachers are perceived as individuals who provide information. This result in the present

study might have been due to such individual characteristics of gifted students as being different from normal students, focusing on achievement in exams (Piechowski, 2009), being motivated to learn new information and skills (Schultz & Delisle, 2006; Eristi & Sak, 2008; Sak & Eristi, 2012) and being perfectionist and idealist (Berger, 2006). Lastly, the success of instructional applications based on modern learning approaches and especially on the constructivist approach could be said to be influenced negatively by the fact that students want to regard their teachers as a source of information even in today's classrooms and that they do not efficiently undertake their learning responsibilities for various reasons. It is thought-provoking that gifted students consider education to be a process of transferring information to students and that they regard the teacher, one of the critical elements in the process of transferring information, as a source and distributor of information.

According to gifted students, the in-class roles and behaviors of their own teachers at school are far away from the behaviors expected from an ideal teacher. Considering the mean scores obtained from the students, the only role for which the gifted students' own teachers obtained higher mean scores than an ideal teacher was the role of providing the discipline. This result supports the finding of a study carried out by Eristi (2012) who reported that gifted students do not regard the profession of teaching as their future profession due to their reaction to the undesired teacher behaviors towards providing the discipline. The frequent behaviors of the teachers regarding providing the discipline might have been due to such factors as the quality of elementary school teacher training programs, in-service trainings of teachers (Karnes, Stephens & Whorton, 2000; Van Tassel-Baska & Johnson, 2007), qualities of educational environments, students' behaviors towards the school, their levels of attention and motivation (Davis & Rimm, 2004), classroom atmosphere (Brophy, 2001), the high number of students (Emmer, 2001) and unwanted behavior of students (Balay and Saglam, 2008).

The result that the views of the elementary school gifted students about the comparison of the in-class roles and behaviors of an ideal teacher with those of their own teachers at school did not differ with respect to their gender and class grades could be said to be important as it revealed that independent of their gender and class grades, gifted students have similar thoughts about the in-class roles and behaviors of their own teachers at school and about those of an ideal teacher.

Lastly, gifted students do not consider e-learning applications to be an alternative to learning from their teachers for academic subjects. It could be stated that while deciding on this subject, their emotional responses overweigh the results they will obtain regarding the quality and richness of learning and that they favor their school, class, friends and teachers rather than technology. This result could be explained with the developmental phase and developmental characteristics of elementary school students. Socialization and the desire for interacting with others are among the priorities for these children. The learning environment preference is not independent of this desire and expectations. Students prefer not only learning academic subjects from a human being (teacher) who have emotions and thoughts like them but also learning together with their friends to technology-aided learning environments. In addition, depending on this result, it could be stated that students identify e-learning with technology and that they perceive it as more appropriate environments to make good use of time, to satisfy their curiosity about certain subjects (Downes, 2002), to communicate with others (Van Scoter, Ellis & Railsback, 2001) and to play games (Kubiatko and Halakova, 2009) rather than structured academic learning.

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