Teacher Opinions on the Concepts Preparing Students to a Democratic Life in the First Grade Social Studies Course

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to determine the teacher opinions on whether the concepts preparing the students to the democratic life in the first grade social studies course theme "My School Excitement" are convenient for the level of the students. In the present study, the phenomenon science model, which is one of the qualitative research models, is used. Criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, is applied. The study group consists of 13 primary school first grade teachers who are teaching at 4 primary schools in Hendek district of Sakarya province in 2010-2011 Education period. For the interviews, semi-structured interview form, which is prepared by the researcher, is used. Content analysis is employed in the analysis of the data. According to the research results, all the teachers, who have participated the research, do not find "ballot and club" concepts appropriate for the first grade level. "selection/election, and vote" concepts are not found appropriate for the first grade level by almost all of the teachers who have taken part in the research. Teachers who find the related concepts appropriate for the first grade level state that they find the concepts appropriate in terms of experience, awareness, readiness and development. Teachers who do not find the related concepts appropriate for the first grade level gave reasons such as; the concepts are abstract, students' readiness levels are not appropriate, they act individually and the concepts are not included in their lives. For these concepts while some of the teachers suggest that it would be appropriate for the second term of first grade, the majority of the teachers suggest that it would be appropriate to teach these concepts in the second, third or fourth years.

Key Words

Appropriateness of the Concept to the Level, Concept, Primary Education, Social Studies Course, Teacher Opinions.

Concepts is a kind of classification that is used to group similar objects, people, events, ideas and processes (Klausmeier, 1992; Senemoğlu, 2005). There are a lot of concepts that students need to gain in the process of teaching and learning in educational institutions. The richness and clarity of the concept is an important factor of the individual in learning. Although some of the concepts can be learned in everyday life, they are not always learned accurate and fully. It cannot be said that concepts can always be learned accurate and fully in planned education process (Fidan, 1985; Kılıç, 2008; Kuşakçı-Ekim, 2007; Turan, 2002; Yükselir, 2006).

According to Piaget's view the structure in the process of concept formation reaches an equilibrium. So like all the descriptive information, recognizing the misconception information begins to start as a "gap" (Rowell, Dawson, & Lyndon, 1990). A concept that is formed in the mind of an individual is not easy to replace and in mislearning it

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negatively affects other learnings (Dündar & Aksoy, 2010; Ülgen, 2004). The causes of misconceptions have been examined in many studies (Cin, 2010; Coştu, Ayas, & Ünal, 2007; Köksal, 2006; Tekkaya, Çapa, & Yılmaz, 2000; Yağbasan & Gülçiçek, 2003).

A good knowledge of a concept contributes to learn the other concept correctly, but learning a concept incorrectly causes negative effect of learning the next concept. The most important sources of understanding how the misconceptions are formed are teacher experiences (Atasayar, 2008; Bal & Akış, 2010; Memnun, 2008). In this respect, it is a very important feature for teachers to understand the world of children (Gelbal & Duyan, 2010).

Giving the concepts in abstract terms at an early age makes student's understanding difficult and especially the abstract concepts are tried to teach as rote learning (Erdem, Yılmaz, & Morgil, 2001). Traditional education directs students to learn mechanical or rote learning answers instead of active or creative thinking (Öğülmüş, 2006).

The formation of the meaning of the concept democracy "elected representatives in a free electoral system established as a result of the public administration" lasted about two thousand year period of time (Doğan, 2003). Although according to a widespread view democracy is to see vote, election, political parties etc. as an official policy (Levin, 1998), the reason for emergence of democracy is based on the individual's struggle for honor and appreciation by Dewey (1938). Although it is difficult to achieve democracy, the desire to be treated equally is in human's nature (UNESCO, 1998).

With the addition of 3 concepts in 2009 (selection/election, voting and ballot), there are 46 concepts in first grade social studies course theme "My School Excitement". The list consists of concepts related with democracy such as; ballot, vote, selection/election, rules, clubs, responsibility, cooperation, teamwork and task (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı [MEB], 2005, 2009).

There are many studies in the literature related to the concepts (Adeyemi, 2002; Alım, Özdemir, & Yılar, 2008; Buluş-Kırıkkaya & Güllü, 2008; Coştu, Karataş, & Ayas, 2003; Dündar, 2007; Farris & Fuhler, 1994; Kılıç, 2007; Klausmeier, 1992; Koray & Tatar, 2003; Koray, Özdemir, & Tatar, 2005; Taşkın & Şahin, 2008; Taşlı, 2005; Üstün & Akman, 2003). However, the concept of learning styles of children and adults differ (Şimşek, 2006).

This research is made to determine the teacher opinions on whether the concepts preparing the

students to the democratic life in the first grade social studies course theme "My School Excitement" are convenient for the level of the students.

Method

The Model of Research

In the present study, the phenomenon science model, one of the qualitative research models, is employed.

Study Group

In the research criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, is applied (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel 2013). The working group consists of 13 primary school first grade teachers who are teaching at 4 primary schools in Hendek district of Sakarya province in 2010-2011 Education period.

Data Collection Tool and Data Collection

The research data is obtained from the interviews with the teachers after finishing "My School Exitement" theme that is made in the vice principals rooms that are made by the researcher in accordance with appointments. For interviews, a semi-structured interview form was used that was prepared by the researcher. In the interviews the questions are asked in everyday speech language. In the interviews, which are recorded in 70 minutes, questions about each concept are asked to the teachers.

Data Analysis

Content analysis is used to analyze the data. For the reliability, Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula is applied for the encodings that are made by the three researchers and the correspondence percentage is calculated as 95%. Since the correspondence percentage is more than 70%, the research is accepted as reliable. While teachers' expressions are given in the research, a code name is used for each teacher that is eligible for the gender.

Validity and Reliability

a) In order to increase the internal validity of the study, a semi-structured interview form is developed. After the interviews are completed, the sound recordings are brought into written

text carefully and this text is sent back to the person who is interviewed and is asked to check it. On the other hand, the interviews are made in a friendly atmosphere and the interviews are made by mutual trust while they are provided to remain confidential.

b) In order to increase the external validity of the study, the research process and those made in this process are described in details.

c) In order to increase the internal reliability of the research, the relevant parts of the findings are given directly as an example without making any comments.

d) In order to increase the external reliability of the research, the researcher described all the things in details that are made in the process.

Results

When the views of teachers, who participated in the research, whether the related 9 concepts are appropriate for the first grade level are examined; the concept of task was found appropriate by 8, the concept of rule was found appropriate by 7, the concept of group work was found appropriate by 6, the concept of cooperation was found appropriate by 6, the concept of responsibility was found appropriate by 5, the concept of selection/election was found appropriate by 2 and the concept of vote was found appropriate by 2 teachers for the first grade level. While all the teachers who participated in the research did not find the ballot and clup concepts appropriate for the first grade level, almost all of them did not find the selection/election and vote concepts appropriate for the first grade level. The other concepts were defined as appropriate or not appropriate about half of the teachers who participated in the research.

When the views of teachers, who participated in the research, about finding the related concepts appropriate for the first grade level are analyzed; teachers' views are collected totally in 7 codes and 4 themes that these codes formed. These themes are experience, awareness, readiness and development.

When the views of teachers, who participated in the research, about finding the related concepts appropriate for the first grade level are analyzed; teachers' views are collected totally in 8 codes and 4 themes that these codes formed. These themes are abstract, readiness, individuality, and experience.

When the views of teachers, who participated in the research, about finding the related concepts are not

appropriate for the first grade level are analyzed, they suggested these concepts for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade levels.

Discussion

All the teachers, who participated the research, do not find "ballot and club" concepts appropriate for the first grade level. "Selection/election, and vote" concepts are not found appropriate for the first grade level by almost all of the teachers who participated in the research. The determinations in the literature of Ergün and Özsüer (2006), Woolfolk and McCune-Nicolich (1984) and Senemoğlu (1999) are parallel with the study results.

Teachers who find the related concepts appropriate for the first grade level stated that they find these concepts appropriate in terms of experience, awareness, readiness and development. The determinations in the literature of Seifert (1983) and Hayran (2010) shows parallel with the experience theme that the teachers who participated in the study and outlined the compliance level of the concept. Teachers who participated in the research emphasized the importance of awareness of Langer's (2000) statements. Searchers expressions in the literature like Ülgen (1997), Woolfolk and McCune-Nicolich (1984) and Carmichaeal and Hayes (2001) corresponds with the emphasis on the concept of readiness that the teachers who participated in the research and stated that the concept is appropriate for the level. Researcher's expressions like Child (2004) and Fidan (1996) corresponds with the emphasis on the concept of development that the teachers who participated in the research and stated that the concept is appropriate for the level.

Teachers who did not find the related concepts appropriate for the first grade level stated reasons such as the concepts are abstract, the students' readiness levels are not appropriate, they act individually and the concepts do not take place in their lives. The researcher's expression like Charles (2003) and Bektaş (2009) show similarities with the expressions of the teachers who participated in the research and stated that on the concepts of abstract are not appropriate for the level. While the teachers who participated in the study and stated that the concepts are not appropriate for the level and pointed out the reasons that the students stand out individuality shows similarities with the researchers' expressions in the literature like Bruner (1957) and Bacanlı (2006), it does not show similarities with Senemoğlu's (2005) expressions.

Teachers who participated in the study and stated that the concepts are not appropriate for the level and pointed out the reasons that the concepts do not take place in students' lives show similarities with the expressions of researchers in the literature like Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1990).

While some of the teachers are suggesting the related concepts for the the second semester of 1st grade level, the majority of the teachers are suggesting most of these concepts for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade levels. It is difficult to gain students abstract concepts who are not yet in abstract thinking stage (Doğanay, 2003). However, some teachers' efforts to gain these concepts to students may be caused by concept teaching method that they applied. Bruner (1960) stated that in concept teaching when and how the concept is taught is important.

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