

An Application of the Decision-making Model for Democracy Education: A Sample of a Third Grade Social Sciences Lesson

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Abstract

This research which aims at sampling the solution of a life problem using the decision making model and showing the contribution of this application to democracy education was planned in accordance with the objective research technique. Student worksheets and camera recordings were used for data analysis. Sixty-six third grade students studying in a public primary school were participated in this study. Based on students' responses to open ended questions, content and descriptive analyses were carried out. 39 students decided against cutting the tree and 19 ideas were put forward. Students evaluated their ideas and made their final decisions. It can be emphasized that an atmosphere where different ideas and decisions are put forward can contribute to democracy education.

Key Words

Social Sciences, Social Studies, Decision Making, Democracy Education.

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The purpose of social sciences and social studies is to enable students to gain knowledge analytically in problem solving, to develop the values and attitudes of a democratic society and to take action as a citizen to establish a democratic society (Barth, & Demirtaş, 1997). The purposes mentioned above (*i*) knowledge, (*ii*) skills, (*iii*) attitudes and values and (*iv*) social participation can be evaluated as the universal purposes accepted all over the world (Öztürk, 2009).

Decision making is one of the most important abilities because people are always in the position of making decisions both in their private lives such as where to live, which job to choose, and in social issues such as which leader to elect and which team to support. They have countless number of issues to decide on in their daily lives and their daily lives are shaped by the decisions made by themselves or other people (Armstrong, 1980; Naylor, & Diem, 1987). Making decisions is an ability to be learned (Parker, & Jarolimek, 1997; Smith, 1998).

Decision making is defining the alternatives and choosing one of them by applying certain criteria. Effective decision making ability is closely linked with creative and critical thinking abilities. Creative thinking is needed to produce the necessary alternatives to choose from in decision making and critical thinking to evaluate these alternatives. Shirley Engle, the well-known social sciences instructor (1960), argued that the criterion to be a good citizen was the quality of the decision made in private and social issues. Thus, she was of the opinion that to develop the ability of decision making should be the main target of social studies teaching (cited in Naylor, & Diem, 1987). The interests of adults and children are different. Decisions made easily by children may be the decisions which adults don't approve (Thomas, 2000). When children make wrong decisions on trivial subjects, it is important for parents not to interfere in because they mostly learn from their mistakes.

Decision making, in short, is to choose one from different alternatives. Those who study cognitive psychology define decision making as activities of mind in the position of choosing one out of many alternatives (Galotti, 2002). If there is only one alternative, it means there is no decision making. Yet, even in such a limited situation, there is a need to make a decision on whether to act or not. One or two alternatives are evaluated in decision making other than habits. We should keep in mind that in order to develop the ability to make decisions, additional knowledge, personal values and abilities are needed. Besides these, the

person who will decide needs to know the opportunities around him, limits and possibilities for change (Katey-Walker, 1987). Decisions are made under vague conditions. Therefore the decision-maker may not be sure whether his decision will bring the best results or not. Making logical decisions depends on choosing the ways of thinking and behaving in a manner to serve the aims, results and ethical values (Vars, 1993).

According to Brooks & Brooks (1993) constructivist approach makes it necessary for individuals to have much more responsibility and to be more active in the process of learning. For this purpose, approaches such as cooperative learning, problem based learning etc. which makes it possible for students to interact with their environment is applied in this approach (cited in Kılıç, Karadeniz, & Karataş, 2003).

There may be differences in the stages of the process without changing the general rules (see Adair, 2000; Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2005; Michealis, & Garcia, 1996). In this research, the 6 stages of decision making process have been used defined by George M. Schuncke. These stages are (i) defining the problem, (ii) planning to collect data on alternatives and results, (iii) creating alternatives to solve the problem, (iv) considering the alternatives and the probable results of them, (v) making the decision and (vi) applying the decision (Schuncke, 1988).

Decision making process begins with the need to change. This is the stage to create the questions to be answered. The question to be answered may be very clear in some situations whereas it may be extremely vague in others. Defining the problem is one of the most difficult stages for people (McNamara, 1999). The decision maker needs data before making a decision. As many alternatives as possible should be searched for in order to solve the problem. Complicated decision making methods also contain measuring the probability of indefinite events. Thus, evaluating stage is a hard one in this manner. In general, this examination is made based on personal values rather than facts. Fifth stage is making the decision (Schuncke, 1988). Each student's decision may be different (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). The process of decision making does not end with the decision made; it is necessary to think about how to apply the decision, as it ends the process and provides an aim (Schuncke, 1988).

Democracy is a form of government in which all the citizens participate in every social activity and decide freely. The values of democracy are independence, freedom, self respect, respect to human dignity, friend-

ship, helpfulness, cooperation, equality, secrecy, honesty, responsibility, justice, respect to differences and environment, international human rights, peaceful solutions to conflicts and supporting the weak (Sarı, Sarı, & Ötünç, 2008).

Purpose

It is important in the countries such as the United States, England and Germany where the educational system is based mostly on the freedom of the individuals to stress the importance of application rather than theory of the democracy especially in the second half of primary education. However, research on democracy education is scant in Turkey (Yeşil, 2002). In a study conducted by Üste (2007), it has become clear that students who don't feel confident, don't express themselves freely and they can't solve their problems in a peaceful way. In addition to these, teachers are sometimes too severe and the punishments are hard.

Research on decision making in Turkey is mostly limited to decision making like democracy education. However, in primary school social studies curriculum of 2005, developing skills beyond mere knowledge accumulation has been stressed. Developing skills, which can be used in real life situations, such as problem solving, decision making, critical and creative thinking has become important. In primary school classrooms, applications in social studies are significant to help student develop primary democratic values and attitudes besides gaining knowledge and skills. Applications of decision making models in classrooms to advance decision making skills can also promote democracy education expected to be given in social studies courses. The main purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of decision making model in democracy education. This study also aims at enlightening academicians, teachers, pre-service teachers and others interested in this topic through sampling of the application of decision making model.

Method

Participants

This research took place in a primary school at the province of Kadıköy in Istanbul during the second term of 2005-2006 academic year. There were two reasons in selecting this school for the given study. The first reason was that the management and teachers were willing to take part

in the research. The second reason was that its students were used to participate in such activities because the students in the Department of Primary School Education were visiting there regularly for the purpose of teacher training application. Sixty-six third grade students were participated in this study.

Measures

The research has been carried on helping by teacher trainees who have had the necessary education on problem based learning approach, its application and willing. The application has two stages. In the first stage the teacher trainees said that they would design the lesson in a different way after talking with the students about the problems they face in daily life. Then they said to the students that the method has some stages and wrote them on the board. Individual work is done in the second stage. Each student was provided with worksheets concerning the prepared problematic situation. Problematic situations which contain conflicts and need to be decided on have been searched for in order to use in the application. A problematic, conflicting real life situation has been chosen to attract interest and develop the motivation of the students (Baysal, 2005). The problematic situation is that one of the two pine trees in the garden of Manolya Apartment is leaning over the road in front of it. Uncle Lütfi is worried about the situation as it might fall on somebody passing by. He wants the tree to be cut down. Aunt Sevda, another resident in the building, is opposed to the tree being cut down due to her love for nature. Students were requested to write item by item what could be done. In the sixth question, they were asked to write what they themselves would do in such a situation. At the end of the worksheet they were requested to write a letter to the students of the building stating their own decisions, which they did. Visual data obtained by the camera were watched by the researcher. The data obtained from the worksheets were examined and analyzed. Visual and written data were quoted directly in the research.

Procedure

The research has been arranged in accordance with sample issues (Karasar, 2002). In this research, both visual and written data have been obtained. The data obtained have been evaluated within the principles

of objective searching method. Both descriptive and content analyses have been made (Arseven, 2001; Kuş, 2003; Mayring, 2000; Yıldırım, & Şimşek, 2004). Content analysis has been made by another expert other than the researcher. The purpose of this is to prove inter coder reliability among categories defined by the coding experts (Bernard, 2000). The reliability between to the coding experts is 0.90, which is considered to be at the desired level.

Results and Discussion

Classrooms are small samples of societies. Thus, the first condition to be a democratic society is to be able to create a democratic atmosphere in the classrooms. Democratic application should take place in the classrooms so that the young generation could be active and democratic citizens (Selvi, 2004). Methods used in classrooms have a great role in becoming democratic. Cooperative learning, problem solving, discussion methods both develop the sense of responsibility and respect to others (Gözütok, 1995). Sample events, different alternatives, comfortable and respectful communication atmosphere are important factors to create a democratic society.

In this case what teachers should do is that they should participate in the activities and cooperate with the students instead of having them fully recite what they taught them. In sharing the activity, as the teacher is a student and the student is a teacher without knowing it, the students can think, make decisions and reach conclusions by struggling with the problem and finding solutions themselves (Dewey, 1996).

Educators who believe that students should be given democracy education in the classroom in order to transfer it to life are of the opinion that they should learn decision making, critical thinking, participating in the problem solving activities, developing responsibility and respect to others (Allen, 2000; Duman, 2008; Gözütok, 1995; Rainer, & Guyton, 1999; Şahin, & Çokadar, 2006; Yeşil, 2004). Students make their decisions themselves in this research. Each student's decision may be different, but they learn to visualize things from different perspectives and to respect different views (Engle, & Ochoa, 1988). As for the teachers, they have the role of a guide during the teaching and learning process in addition to the evaluation of what has been learned just like in the traditional approach. They can help students with their questions to enable

them to make their own decisions. They can help create a democratic atmosphere. They listen to different points of views and thoughts without criticizing them. They also help solve the disputes which may occur when they work in cooperation. They focus on developing students' abilities and attitudes rather than helping them gain mere knowledge.

While 21 students have decided to have the tree cut down, 39 students have decided against having it cut down. It has generally been preferred in Turkey for years to have students memorize some facts such as "we mustn't cut down trees" in traditional learning atmosphere without letting them think and find out for themselves.

Under the light of the data obtained from the visual registers, students think about applying the decisions in real life in different ways. Most of the students thought that they should hold a meeting in the building, inform the residents of their decision and make it the common decision of all. A student who had thought of piling old furniture in front of the apartment building thought of asking the residents to put the furniture which they don't use in front of the tree. Some proposed that they ask the municipality for help. Another student who had wanted to have the tree cut down suggested that they put signs saying "the tree is being cut down" at the both ends of the road to prevent people from walking under the tree while it is being cut down.

The following items can be suggested under these conclusions: (i) The Ministry of Education should take the necessary measures to equip teachers with knowledge which will enable them to apply the productive approaches in their classes. (ii) Teachers should be given democracy education and should thus be open to all ideas in the classrooms and create a respectful environment. (iii) Teachers who have been using teacher centered methods in the classrooms for years should be supported to transform to decision making approach and to achieve the role of a plan maker, a guide and evaluator. (iv) Teachers should increase the applications of process based learning models and thus apply the decision making process in their classrooms. (v) The teaching staff at faculties of education, training teachers, should not only tell the theory of these models but also apply them in their lessons themselves. (vi) Researchers on the educational issues should work on more specific subjects such as decision making ability rather than general subjects. (vii) Scientific studies on democracy education in the first half of primary schools should be increased at universities.

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