

Teacher Opinions and Experiences Related to Themes, Skills and Values Included Within the Scope of Life Science Course

Yadigar Dogan

*Uludag University, Education Faculty, Elementary Education Department, Social Studies
Education Division, Bursa, Turkey
E-mail: yadigardogan01@gmail.com*

KEYWORDS Teacher Opinions and Experiences. Themes. Skills. Values. Life Science Course

ABSTRACT Parallel to the rapid increase in the importance of information in the world, the concept of information and understanding of science have also been on the rapid increase. The concepts of democracy and management are becoming different, technology is advancing rapidly and parallel to all these, problems are lived in processes of globalization and transition from industrial society to information society. Pluralization of life-styles and social relations, changing the world through new technologies and media means, bringing the phenomenon of ecology to the agenda as a problem, population growth and migrations, life relations' becoming international and changes in values force both individuals and educational institutions to change. Today, individuals with the ability to organize information, produce new information and present it to the service of other people are needed rather than those with independent pieces of information. Changes and developments occurring in the world in individual, social and economic areas are supposed to be reflected into educational systems and programs. In the direction of this understanding, it was aimed to emphasize the importance of opinions and experiences of teachers, one of the fundamental elements of the educational process, related to themes, skills and values included within the scope of Life Science course, remove troubles and inadequacies, and achieve development by making self-criticism. The results of the interviews held and the observations made with teachers and students at 15 private and state schools in Bursa and some other provinces were evaluated.

INTRODUCTION

While the importance of information is increasing rapidly in the world, the concept of information and the understanding of science are changing rapidly as well. The concepts of democracy and management are becoming different, technology is developing rapidly, and parallel to all these, problems are being faced in the processes of globalization and transition from industrial society into information society. Pluralization of life-styles and social relations, changing the world through new technologies and media means, bringing the phenomenon of ecology to the agenda as a problem, population growth and migrations, life relations' becoming international and changes in values force both individuals and educational institutions to change (Hesapçýoglu 2001). Today, not individuals with independent pieces of information but

individuals with the ability to organize information, produce new information and present it to the service of other people are needed. Aslan and Eraslan (2003) reported in their study that the value of information appears in cases when information is regarded as a transient accumulation acquired meaning according to individuals and courses require understanding themes and events in detail, are based on thinking critically and aim at multi-directional mental development.

Changes and developments occurring in the world in individual, social and economic areas are supposed to be reflected into educational systems and programs. In the direction of this understanding, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of opinions and experiences of teachers, one of the fundamental elements of the educational process, related to themes, skills and values included within the scope of Life Science course. Sonmez defines Life Science course as "pieces of dynamic information based on proving by natural and social realities and acquired through the process of setting-up links and at the end of this process". Starting from here, it can be stated that this course has specific characteristics in the first stage of elementary education and forms a basis for the courses in the second stage of elementary education. A teach-

Address for correspondence:
Dr. Yadigar Dogan
Uludag University, Education Faculty,
Elementary Education Department,
Life Science Education Division,
Gorukle Kampusu, Bursa, Turkey
Cell: 00905055446491
E-mail: yadigardogan01@gmail.com

er of Life Science course is supposed to contribute to social development of children, be happy, make others happy, solve problems by making correct decisions, view critically and support participation. A democratic environment should be created (Baysal 2006).

Moreover, Turkish National Education has started to renew itself in this process as well. In the process of education and teaching, rather than memorizing pieces of information, phenomena, concepts, principles and processes, the process of using information becomes primarily important. In this context, the concepts of skill and value gain importance. Primary school pupils start to learn about phenomena, concepts and generalizations related to society, region, country and world. In this period, during which basic skills and values are made to acquire, Life Science course becomes the course undertaking this function most. The general aim of Life Science course is to develop individuals' skills related to adaptation to events, situations and their environments actively, successfully and healthily. The know-it-all human type, the most valuable human type of old times, has been replaced by the human type knowing where and how to use information when necessary. New program shows spiraled characteristic. Themes are expanded and taught according to physical, mental and affective development characteristics of children. It is student-centered and at the same time it is essential to create an education, teaching environment where intelligence is boosted, strengthened, used and transferred. Being able to train a good person, a good citizen in our country, is possible primarily through a well-prepared teaching program and teachers continuously developing themselves and equipped with many skills and values. Adapting goals and contents according to students' needs, planning field visits and visits by source people in the classroom, planning other experiences to help students related what they learn in the classroom with their lives outside the classroom, and planning activities and lessons to introduce contents to students are among those which must be done. Laycock (2002: 111) revealed that although drama, dance, music and art were included in the curriculum related to creative aspects in England, they were not applied commonly at elementary schools. Sometimes activities might aim to develop and prevent rather than solve the problem. Moreover, only if activities are per-

formed in an environment where students feel themselves in secure and according to their levels, they can reach their aims (Erkan 1999).

Individual difference means taking only one of a person's constant characteristics into consideration and stating that the person is different from others in one characteristic. The concept of individual differences refers to children's being different from one another in more than one constant characteristics and it is a very important matter in education (Ozyurek 2010). Results of studies made on child development have indicated that trying to teach children values which should be made to adopt in young ages becomes difficult, perhaps impossible after the primary school age as children grow old. Moreover, prior to the application of activities related values education, misconceptions and confusions in teachers' minds should be removed. Meanings of values should be examined by everybody. While activities are performed, students' attention states are important. Values are concepts reflecting personal characteristics. Not presenting fundamental values within the inclusion of a regular and systematic program leads to mis-developments in children. Educators are supposed to know very well about what the values are, why they are important, how children's motivation about this matter is activated and how children should be helped during applications. Acquisition of social values is also important in this context. For children to internalize values, their parents should be cooperated (Uyanik 2009).

According to the new Life Science program, students' performances and how they learn more easily should be emphasized more. Teachers should guide and develop students about activities. Teachers should undertake some new roles related to themes, acquisitions, activities and personal qualities (Guvenc 2005). Within the scope of Life Science source discussing the concepts of human, nature and society together and aiming to train individuals who are happy, successful, compliant in terms of social, cultural, economic and other aspects, it is essential to train equipped individuals who do not learn by heart but understand, comprehend, apply what they learn. According to the study by Voogd (1998), working for a long time decreases teachers' effectiveness in their professions. Preparing students' files, coming together in groups or making plans to discuss classes' or children's

needs in general is limited because teachers do not have enough time. It was found that people who choose the profession of teaching to be able to be together with their children after school and on holidays are likely to stand up to attempts extending the time which they spend away from their families. It was also revealed that teachers working in certain poor, rural population of the city are obliged to deal with children deprived of socially and emotionally and with parents exhibiting behaviors such as teaching them harmful habits, using authoritative behavior method and ignoring their children's needs, and for this reason, the obligation of teachers working in these environments to meet the social and emotional needs of children in their classes has increased.

The most important components of education are educational programs taking students in the center, teacher and school. Teachers are the leaders and indispensable elements of education. For this reason, education and quality of education are directly related to qualities which teachers have (Ozcan 2010). In the direction of this understanding, it is necessary to reveal and emphasize the importance of the opinions and experiences of teachers, one of the fundamental elements of education process, about themes, skills and values included within the scope of Life Science course.

State of the Problem

"What are the opinions and experiences of teachers related to themes, skills and values included within the scope of Life Science course?"

Purpose of the Study

It is necessary to diversify activities related to themes, skills and values included within the scope of Life Science course taught at elementary schools, lay groundwork for the formation of new activities and reflect new changes and developments taking place in individual, social and economic areas in the world into education systems and programs. In the direction of this understanding, with this study, it was aimed to emphasize the importance of the opinions and experiences of teachers, one of the fundamental elements of education process, with respect to themes, skills and values included within the scope of Life Science course, remove troubles

and inadequacies and achieve development by making self-criticism. The results of interviews held and the observations made with teachers working in many private and state schools in Bursa were evaluated.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive study. As it is known, screening models are research approaches aiming to describe a past or current situation as it was or as it is. In this study, too, since it was aimed to evaluate a current situation, the model used in the study is a screening model.

Sample and Procedure

The population of the study included students and teachers at elementary schools and students' families. Teachers giving Life Science course and students were selected randomly. In this context, the study included teachers giving this course to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades and students at 15 elementary schools, most of which in Bursa, in the 2010-2011 education/teaching period.

Elementary Schools

- 1) Private Tan Elementary School
- 2) Suleyman Cura Elementary School
- 3) Narlidere Elementary School
- 4) Istanbul-Umraniye T.E.F. Zahide Zehra Garring
- 5) Nilufer Koc Elementary School
- 6) Akpınar Elementary School
- 7) Bisas Elementary School
- 8) Davutkadi Elementary School
- 9) Private Ilkbahar College
- 10) Aksemsettin Elementary School
- 11) Balıkesir, Edremit Cumhuriyet Elementary School
- 12) Tahtali Elementary School
- 13) Pilot Sanayi Elementary School
- 14) Mumin Gencoglu 1 Elementary School
- 15) Yenimahalle Elementary School

Data Collection Tool

In this study, the scales and questionnaires prepared by the researcher beforehand were used as data collection tools and their reliability and

validity studies were made by the researcher. Moreover, observations and interviews were held.

In the processes of entering the quantitative data obtained in the study in the computer and analysis of them were used ("SPSS program and "Excel program).

The statistical calculations and studies made are frequency tables, correlation analysis, and also one-way analysis of variance and independent sample t-test were applied.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reasons for Students' Participation in Classroom Activities

In creating a positive classroom atmosphere, communication can be enhanced through activities. Activities, at the same time, should be of the quality to meet the needs of interest as well. And what students need most is to find an opportunity to express themselves.

According to this research, the majority of the students (52.5%) participated in classroom activities "to express their thoughts" (Table 1). While the percentage of the students having participated in classroom activities "because they were good at those topics" was 24.3, that of the students having participated in classroom activities "to be together with their friends" was 12.6 (252). Moreover, about 10 of every a hundred students stated having participated in classroom activities "because their teacher asked". These results indicate that students need an environment where they can express their thoughts. When lessons are taught through various activities, students can express themselves, taste the pleasure of success in topics which they are successful and be motivated. In Life Science course, expression of thoughts in appropriate ways is aimed as well. While activi-

ties are performed, different working groups can be formed. It is attracting attention that students have negative attitudes towards types of discussion related to the discussion method.

Relationships were established between students' defending their own views against a view which they know incorrect and behaviors such as being externally-controlled, doing homework in time, participation in activities at school, being helpful, obeying rules and following how works are going on. When students' critical thinking skills are developed, their sense of responsibility can be developed as well. Students' acquiring and using information and being willing and hardworking change according to learning environment. In the arrangement of internal and external conditions, we can say that not only teachers and students but also their families should know and get to know well about classroom environment and activities.

When families made aware of in-school and out-of-school activities as a result of communication to be set up encourage their children, children's social skills can be developed. Hughes et al determined that although in recent years students' parents have made many criticisms about schools, they were generally pleased with their children's schools (Cited by Dean 2000:142). With respect to the reasons why activities are performed, students state that they develop their abilities, help them overcome their problems, help them express themselves well, and when they study in the direction of their interests, they help them become more successful.

In this course, children are made to examine the natural and social environment around them and it is aimed to have children acquire information and habits necessary for individuals to get to know the environment in which they live better and live in harmony with the environment such as knowing about themselves, understanding the environment and events happening in the environment, finding ways of living better, knowing about places of things around them and how to use them, knowing about Atatürk, showing interest in daily events related to close environment, comprehending the importance of collective living, exhibiting behaviors desired by the society and acquiring the habit of living healthily and regularly. Since the Life Science courses prepare children for life, it is very important that lessons should be made active by being materialized and creating experience environments (Gok 2011).

Table 1: Reasons for participation in classroom activities

Question	Percentage (%)
Because the teacher asks	10.7
Because I'm very good at this topic	24.3
To express my thoughts	52.5
To be together with my friends	12.6
Total	100

The best way of achieving acquisitions is to perform activities, share and being able to express oneself. Moreover, from the statement of "I spend time until that activity becomes good, nice and excellent", it can be stated that positive thoughts about effort and target determination acquisitions have developed. Students' liking lessons where they can express and enjoy themselves by doing activities more varies according to socio-economic status.

The Life Science course teaching program has been transformed into a program aiming to have students develop as a whole and become harmonious and successful in their lives outside the school. Education is realized through learning and comprehending. Activities create an environment of curiosity, research, discovery, analysis, sharing and practice for students (Karabag 2006). The topics of the Life Science course were selected based on having children acquire the skills related to children's knowing their natural and social environment, adapting to these environments in which they live. A human is obliged to learn some of the principles of both natural and social environment for living.

Related to activities and motivation, teachers have positive attitudes and behaviors. Related to this, a teacher's opinion is like this:

"Many activities can be done to perceive creatures around us and become sensitive against them. I observed in the activity I performed that the animal which we brought to the classroom was watched carefully by the students and this increased their motivation toward the lesson. In many similar activities, students' participation in lessons can be increased and they can enjoy themselves in the education process."

"The methods most frequently used in lessons may change according to the content of a topic and the participation of students."

"I feel that I enjoy myself more in activities enabling me to do more activities with students."

Self-confidence and Self-esteem

Related to how they gave children self-confidence and self-esteem, the teachers made these explanations: "We are having them acquire these behaviors with activities they do in the lesson. In the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades, the theme of My School Excitement is a very appropriate way to

give these behaviors." Teachers should observe their students during activities (Baysal 2006). All the schools, teachers should give more place to activities related to planning and being aware of the codes of law. Environmental awareness and sense of responsibility should develop together. Individuals with increased awareness of individual, social responsibility think that environment is an element which is important and should be protected. Families' being conscious about this matter and teachers' arranging supplementary activities increase children's awareness toward environment. Students' reaching different resources, families' being sensitive about this matter and students' feeling self-confident might have effects on students' being knowledgeable about these kinds of matters.

Research Study

While developing students' research skills, they should be made to be curious about next stages. In this context, children should be motivated by using questions, activities and every kind of material and method. For students to understand the topics taught in the Life Science lessons, the learning strategies appropriate for multiple intelligence domains to which they are closest should be used. Related to participation in activities in lessons, the middle SES school students exhibit more negative attitudes. To achieve more active participation in activities in Life Science lessons, teachers should give feedback soon after activities. One of the values included in the Life Science program, self-confidence should be attached more importance and activities should be done about this matter. A teacher's view: "The first and most important point of this skill is its making students become curious. This curiosity arouses a sense of research in students. And as a result of this, students reach new pieces of information both from the Internet, books and magazines and as a result of their observations. Moreover, ways and methods which they follow while searching for those pieces of information and new situations which they face leave marks as pieces of experience in students' lives as well. Moreover, they also try to practice their experiences in their future lives. The research skill is also appropriate for group work. That is to say, students can do research by forming groups among themselves and create a meaningful whole by bringing to-

gether the data which they obtain as a result of their research. Group work both prevents students from wasting time and enables them to do this work without feeling bored. In group works, students live the happiness of achieving a work together, feel themselves important in the group, live the sense of self-confidence by feeling that they contribute to group work in research studies they made and learn to share. In order to see what students have acquired via the research skill, I think this subject matter is appropriate for me. However, it should not be forgotten that although it is students that play actual roles in this skill, that is, it is students that are active in the research, the importance of teachers in this matter should not be disregarded. It is teachers that are supposed to raise students' awareness and motivate and guide them about this matter. For this reason, teachers should be broadly knowledgeable about both research skills and other skills and be conscious in this area. But only in this way, students can acquire these skills and take firm steps forward in this area. In this case, too, an education in line with the constructivist approach is realized." It was determined that students showed significant differences among themselves according to SES in terms of firstly evaluation and writing activities in lessons and then about such matters as research and effective use of resources and being social.

In Life Science lessons, in the discovery, explanation and deepening process, students should be followed very well with activities included in the preparation part. Activities can be of quality to develop and prevent rather than solve a problem. Moreover, only if activities are performed in an environment where students feel themselves in secure and according to their levels, they can reach their aims (Erkan 1999). Being inclined to group works help increase friendship and working efficiency (cooperation). Group activities include not only direct and explanatory instruction but also activities such as story. Group works can be replaced by individual works showing differences as well (Pollard and Triggs 2000). Besides this, experimental studies related to the locus of control have indicated that individuals with locus of control participate in learning more actively and directly. Those with locus of control choose more challenging activities, can maintain their effort and are inclined to lifelong learning. It was determined that students who "work more than their friends to understand

topics and like participating in activities at school" form the majority.

Drama

When the Life Science course preparing the child for life is done via the method of drama, learning and reaching acquisitions is achieved actively, learning and teaching process is organized and becomes rewarding and enjoyable (Gogus 2011). Drama is an activity performed to help students reflect feelings or events. Thus, with students' own participation and experiences, learning and remembering of 80% is achieved. Drama makes students get involved with historical, political and social events and achieves students' active participation. Drama not only helps students to act but also make comments. Thus, it develops students' attitudes and thoughts and helps them acquire information (Barth and Demirtas 1997). Watching films related to topics also helps teaching and learning of empathy and other skills in children (Grech 2003).

Teachers drew attention to dramatization, simulation and new curriculum, especially to the positive sides of its being student-centered and also to the fact that the method of dramatization is very suitable for the new curriculum but they stated that due to the crowdedness of the class they could not practice it very often.

Book Reviews

New curriculum provides a lot of opportunities to use the method of dramatization and the technique of simulation very often. We understand this from activities in books. In every 3 grades and in every 3 themes, there are absolutely activities requiring the use of the method of dramatization and the technique of simulation among activities. But the most frequently used technique is informal drama. For in the technique of informal drama, no preparation is needed beforehand.

According to the Life Science Teacher's Guidebooks in our hand, the following topics make use of dramatization and stimulation:

Language of Signposts

Life Science 1:

Microbe, You Can't Make Me Sick!
Here Is My Classroom

Classroom Objects
 Rules Are Everywhere
 Uncle Driver, Watch out!
 Ways of Protecting From Natural Disasters
 Sounds of Animals
 What Is My Profession?
 We Help Each Other
 Do You Get Angry, too?
 Let's Know Them By Their Sounds
 Weather Observation
 What We See In The Sky

Life Science 2:

We Can Protect Our Health To Be Trim
 Can You Help Me?
 Only If People Talk To Each Other = Hacıvat – Karagoz
 Who Are The Rules For?
 How Should We Behave?
 Is There Anything We Forget?
 On The Way To School
 People That We Encounter
 What If An Earthquake Happens?
 Why Do Our Teeth Decay?
 I Have An Idea, Too
 I'm Working
 Money-Box
 Try To Keep Calm
 How Should We Eat?
 Fortunately There Are Different Professions
 My Curriculum Vitae
 World Is Revolving

Life Science 3:

Let's Help!
 He Who Gets Up In Anger Sits Down With A Loss
 It's No Use Crying Over Spilt Milk
 Conscious Consumer
 Solution Is Just Next To You
 What Is Your Idea?
 Forms of Politeness
 Our Friends and Beloved Sevdiklerimiz
 What If I Did Not Have You
 I Have Found A Good Idea
 Earthquake
 We Are All Together

Among the methods used in the teaching of social skills are role-playing, demonstration, being a model and direct teaching method. Drama is a technique performed to help students reflect their feelings and events. Thus, with students' own participation and experiences, learning and remembering of 80% is realized. Drama makes students get involved with historical,

political and social events and achieves students' active participation. Drama not only helps students to act but also make comments. Thus, it develops students' attitudes and thoughts and helps them acquire information (Barth and Demirtas 1997).

Use of Material

The teachers' opinions related to the matter are as follows:

"Compared to the 4th and 5th grades, we especially use more materials for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades. For in these grades, visuality is more important. If we do not offer visuals, students cannot understand fully. For example, when we teach the phases of the moon, we show figures but since it still remains abstract, it cannot be understood fully".

"As it was in the past, lessons are not taught in a teacher-centered way. There is student-centered teacher guidance in the new program and for this reason now we use three different books: coursebook, activity book and workbook."

"Our activities are material-weighted. For example, we studied the activity of 'how plants perspire' in a material-weighted way. We studied the topic of 'let's know about our regions' by making models. By doing jigsaw puzzles, the children learned the regions."

"I also worked in a state school. There was only a coursebook as a material. As far as we could, we tried to create materials. I taught a multi-grade class; since we had no possibilities, we could not make materials; here we can find any material which we like."

"We rather give individual homework assignments. Since children have possibilities, it is better. Since children have computers at their homes, they can do it. In fact, these educational tools and materials were provided by the educational tools and materials directorate in the past. However, today these needs are generally met by private firms and from the school's own budget."

As a result, the child's teacher finds only what he/she thinks instructive, if the topic is enjoyable, if he/she likes the topic, if he/she adapts it to life valuable; we can state that when a topic is taught with activities and when children participate in activities, they like lessons, learn them better and more easily and forget later. Topics' being related to one another is also an important effect in their learning.

Cooperative Learning

Case study and cooperative learning methods are two appropriate methods for learning to be achieved. They are appropriate for the development of students' within-group communication, their taking roles in social environments and their skills of discussion, establishing empathy, independent thinking and creative thinking. Although time and student number are limitations, these two methods are two necessary methods for learning.

The teachers' opinions and experiences related to the matter are as follows:

"I do not use the cooperative learning method very often. The most important reason for this is the big class size. For this reason, I prefer group works more often."

"I do not have detailed information about cooperative learning method."

"In groups to be formed when applying the cooperative learning method, first of all, students' ages and developmental levels should be the same. If this is not considered, we can cause students who cannot understand in a group to be overwhelmed. To each group should be assigned pioneer students with leadership talents. Groups should be given the same topics but their different aspects can be given."

"Students should be primarily directed toward researching a given topic. Students should not be receptive; they should solve the problem on their own. First of all, they should search and learn by themselves and then arrange the pieces of information by coming together."

"The reason for applying most of the cooperative learning at school is that classes are very crowded. The duration of a lesson is 40 minutes, but there are 50 students in a class and a student cannot find time of even a minute to speak. In such an environment, it is rather difficult to implement cooperative method."

"Every time student-centered education brings more success."

Creativity

Uncovering students' creativity during the performing of activities might increase their efficiency. The teachers explained their opinions about this matter as follows: When the answers given to the question of "What do you think we should do to uncover children's creativity?"

were examined, it was observed that the teachers at all SES levels mostly answered like these: "Activities/practices should be performed", "We should determine the areas related to their individual characteristics", "We should have them do works related to their skills". In addition to this, the teachers at high SES level stated opinions like this: "Group works should be done." According to Warnock Report, meeting of individual needs is of importance (Lloyd 2002). In the study by Akdag and Gunes (2003), it was revealed that teachers' creating a classroom environment with such characteristics as commitment to democratic values, being open to new ideas, not over-restricting students' behaviors, resorting to students' views in determining in-class activities and not over-criticizing students for their behavior develop creativity. The teachers' opinions related to the matter are as follows:

"In order to develop our students' creativity, more frequently we use the technique of brainstorming in the direction of the program specified in the curriculum. Of course, we do not go on with this technique all lesson long. According to the situation in the classroom, we get benefited from other techniques."

"Related to the state of students' participation in brainstorming technique, firstly very different ideas are appearing, but this is generally resulting in confusion. Since we need to take everybody's idea, we are left no choice but to limit ideas. When children find environment empty, they say things out of topic. And we do not continue this work any longer. But in terms of general participation, mostly question-answer technique is helping. Almost all students are speaking."

"We can give every student the right to speak. We are usually short of time. For this reason, we cannot perform many activities. An ideal class should be composed of 20- 24 students. If it is so, the level of success increases. Another problem is doubled-instruction. It is a negative situation both for us and for students."

"In discovering gifted students, project and performance assignments which we give students are resources which are the closets to us. We are getting to know students better. They show themselves sufficiently in in-class activities, too."

"After reading a story, I asked them what the title can be. Almost every student stated their opinions and later we wrote the titles on

the board and again we put the title which most of them accepted and approved. We hanged the story on the pin board by saying 'we've got it anymore.' They got proud of themselves."

"And with guidance questionnaires which we administer to students, we learn about at what subjects they are more successful and in which direction their talents can be developed. This method is very effective."

"While guiding students who we believe are very talented in the direction of their talents, I do not say this directly to them. At meetings which we hold with their families, I inform their parents about these matters and ask them to make the guidance".

Work during the practice, concentration and discipline applied to children have effects on success achieved. Again, there are also studies revealing the fact that the use of the course book and timing watched while studying the units are important in the same process (Cortazzi 1998). Since the courses of social studies prepare children for life, it is important that they should be made active by materializing and environments for experience should be created (Gok 2011). In the Life Science teaching program, there are skills specific to the Life Science course such as the effective use of resources, achieving security and protection, self-management, getting to know about the basic concepts of science, getting to know about basic concepts related to the themes. Moreover, observing students by creating real life environments like in the technique of drama will be useful in terms of collecting information (Semerci and Duman 2010).

Computer-assisted Instruction

Computer-assisted instruction achieves the ability to establish social communication, one of the basic aims of Life Science course, through exchange of information.

Thanks to the multimedia techniques it offers to students (displaying pictures, playing video/sound/animation), an enjoyable learning environment can be prepared by creating powerful and different environments. And this might make Life Science lessons more understandable and enjoyable.

Related to negative consequences caused by computer-assisted instruction in Life Science lessons, teachers made explanations like these: "There is a negative consequence which I per-

sonally observe and also can make a generalization, that is, the same in all lessons. Thanks to this teaching method, students access information easily, but they do not search and understand a topic, they just bring information as it is on the Internet and they do not do necessary investigation."

Educational Games

Related to the practicing of educational games, the classroom teachers made explanations such as "I'm playing the educational games; moreover, with the 2005 elementary education program, I believe educational games has had a lot to do. However, negative conditions in classrooms are affecting negatively the teaching of even a part of a lesson". "The class size is 26 (the size is suitable on the average). However, there are 3 students taking inclusive education. In educational games, I'm trying to make the students taking inclusive education sociable and self-confident by especially assigning duties to them. I'm usually using the games with songs. These kinds of games are of quality to contribute children's physical and mental development. Besides these, in Life Science lessons, I'm practicing works such as puzzles, etc. These kids of works can be examples of educational games." As a result of these examinations, it appears that it is necessary to attach more importance to educational games through teachers' individual efforts.

Educational games support and develop students' physical, mental, social and psychomotor developments. Educational games are played not in the form of teaching students pieces of theoretical information directly or having them memorize them but in the form of playing enjoyable games in which they reach information on their own by doing and experiencing. It is these lessons taught in this way that make learning environment enjoyable and away from being monotonous. Using audio-visual materials affects more than one sense organ and hence contributes to permanence in mind.

Traditional Method

The teachers' opinions about this matter are as follows:

"I thought traditional method would be appropriate, while introducing a new topic, to

draw attention to it and prepare students for it, in the middle of a lesson, to prevent students from going away from the topic, and in the end of the lesson, to sum up and make clear and more understandable what I had taught until there. In the end of the lesson, they can understand from the pictures that disasters are sad-denening, harmful events and, if no precautions are taken, they might result in a huge loss of lives and property and also they can understand which disaster it is when they look at any picture of a disaster."

"They become more willing and participate more; they become more interested and more curious and you see that students make effort to learn, are happy and content with their situations, which is sufficient for a teacher to be happy and take pleasure from his/her profession."

"I do not want to spend the whole lesson by using traditional method."

"I absolutely use the traditional method at the beginning and end of a lesson. Sometimes I use it in the middle of a lesson, too. You talk, explain, do activities and experiments and play games during a lesson. Within the course of time, the child forgets what and why he or she has done and pieces of information cannot form a whole in his or her mind. In this case, I prefer traditional method."

"Children are energetic and curious innately. They want to speak, play around things and do anything on their own. But in the traditional method, they are not paid very much attention and what has been learned is stored in the short-term memory. The aim of education is desired behavior modification. In this method, they cannot even transfer what they have learned to the next lesson, let alone modifying their behavior. They become unwilling. We cannot get any feedback, but the method of question-answer is very suitable."

"Participation is not at a desired level. If you give homework assignments a day or a week before, participation might increase."

"Children learn best from one another. For this reason, cooperative working is ideal. I think traditional method is beating a dead horse."

Trip-observation Method

The teachers' opinions about this matter are as follows:

"Many activities can be performed to have children perceive and be aware towards living things around them. In an activity, I saw that the children watched the animal I brought to the classroom very carefully and it increased their motivation toward the lesson. In many activities similar to this, we can increase students' participation in lessons and make the education process more enjoyable."

"In the activity I prepared within the framework of the topic of the Trip-Observation method, I choose places with historical and cultural values from many cities of our country and I tried to share this with the students in the class. I brought the pictures of these beautiful cultural and historical places to the classroom and hanged them on the board and then I introduced them one by one. I asked them if there were any students who had visited those places before. I asked those who had visited them before to explain their opinions about those places and share their experiences with us. We saw that while they expressed themselves, they mentioned about things which had affected them mostly". I realized that this activity which I prepared in the direction of the Trip-Observation method was important in terms of learning facilitated learning. It was a beneficial activity both for the students and for me."

Since the Life Science courses prepare children for life, it is very important that lessons should be made active by being materialized and creating experience environments (Gok 2011).

Being Fair

The teachers explained what they did to have children acquire the sense of justice and create a fair environment in the classroom as follows:

"While giving students assignments, I'm doing this fairly. For example, on certain days and weeks, I'm not charging the same person continuously. On each special day, I'm giving priority to those not having been charged with any duties before. I have been doing this practice since the first grade. For this reason, the students have acquired this behavior. For example, on days when ceremonies and celebrations are to be held, students suggest that their friends not having been charged with any duties before be charged without any intervention from their teachers. They show respect to their friends' rights."

"I'm dwelling upon the necessity of practicing justice in even the least important events. For example, even at times when photocopies are to be handed out the class, I'm not choosing the same student. Each student is assigned this duty according the order of their student IDs."

"Especially at schools in big cities, groups are appearing according to various characteristics. Some students are being cast out. For example, some girl students are forming groups for themselves according to their financial situations. Situations are likely where students with worse financial situations are usually left out of play. Or for example, during a football match, students take strong students in one team and less strong students in another team. They may not be determining the rules of a game fairly."

"Especially starting from the first grade, in places like the canteen, they should be made to acquire the behavior of getting in line."

Responsibility

The teachers' opinions and experiences related to this matter are as follows:

"To have students make good use of tools and materials inside and outside the school, I'm teaching them to use them as they use the doors and windows at their homes."

"We should teach children to use desks or other tools and materials as if they belonged to them. I think all teachers should make children acquire this habit. If a child uses his or her locker, notebooks, desk, etc. possessively, he/she never gives any damage to them. In the same way, we are trying to teach this in the general of the school. All the teachers, the principal and the vice-principals regard giving students this thought as a fundamental philosophy."

"I have a hyperactive student in my class. I'm in good communication with the family of this student. The mother of this student never touches the child's bedroom. The student tidies his bedroom, makes its weekly cleaning and makes his bed in the morning on his own."

"If students do not undertake their responsibilities at an early age, later they live more difficulties. Taking responsibilities becomes difficult for them. Communication with families becomes more likely and more frequently in classes where these students are present."

"While giving students responsibilities, of course we take their age and situation into consideration. The possibilities of children studying at our school are good. The children have their own bedrooms and do and hand in their homework assignments in time. However, at state schools, there are problems for teachers in such cases. For families are crowded and students do not have their own bedrooms and do not do their homework assignment correctly."

"At the beginning of semesters, our principal reminds all the students at the school of their responsibilities especially toward the school. Later the vice-principal collects the 1st and the 2nd graders in the conference hall one after another according to their levels on different days and explains them the school rules one by one."

"In our classes, we are trying to have the children acquire the school and classroom rules within the course of time. Since we think that it is difficult for children, we match them. They are matched in twos. They control one another. They are close friends."

"Those who do not obey the rules are being given punishment on the condition that it is not heavy. For example, I'm giving the child the punishment of collecting the rubbish he/she finds in the corridors and in the classroom within the day. Punishment should not be given with the aim of giving harm. However, if children are made to acquire a different responsibility, it becomes permanent."

Individuals with developed individual, social awareness think that environment is an important element which should be protected. If families become conscious about this matter and teachers arrange supplementary activities, this will increase children's sensitivity to environment. Students' being able to reach different resources, their families' being sensitive about this matter and students' feeling self-confidence might have an effect on students' being knowledgeable about these kinds of matters. At low SES schools where the awareness of responsibility, one of the important concepts of democracy, is low, activities related to this matter should be increased and maintained. Activities such as story completion, forming maps of concepts and making summaries from related books with respect to the importance of the sense of responsibility should be included.

CONCLUSION

Reasons for Students' Participation in Classroom Activities

In creating a positive classroom atmosphere, communication can be enhanced through activities. Activities, at the same time, should be of the quality to meet the needs of interest as well. And what students need most is to find an opportunity to express themselves.

When lessons are taught through various activities, students can express themselves, taste the pleasure of success in topics which they are successful and be motivated. In Life Science course, expression of thoughts in appropriate ways is aimed as well. While activities are performed, different working groups can be formed. It is attracting attention that students have negative attitudes towards types of discussion related to the discussion method.

Relationships were established between students' defending their own views against a view which they know incorrect and behaviors such as being externally-controlled, doing homework in time, participation in activities at school, being helpful, obeying rules and following how works are going on. When students' critical thinking skills are developed, their sense of responsibility can be developed as well. Students' acquiring and using information and being willing and hardworking change according to learning environment. In the arrangement of internal and external conditions, we can say that not only teachers and students but also their families should know and get to know well about classroom environment and activities.

When families made aware of in-school and out-of-school activities as a result of communication to be set up encourage their children, children's social skills can be developed. With respect to the reasons why activities are performed, students state that they develop their abilities, help them overcome their problems, help them express themselves well, and when they study in the direction of their interests, they help them become more successful.

In this course, children are made to examine the natural and social environment around them and it is aimed to have children acquire information and habits necessary for individuals to get to know the environment in which they live better and live in harmony with the environment

such as knowing about themselves, understanding the environment and events happening in the environment, finding ways of living better, knowing about places of things around them and how to use them, knowing about Atatürk, showing interest in daily events related to close environment, comprehending the importance of collective living, exhibiting behaviors desired by the society and acquiring the habit of living healthily and regularly.

The best way of achieving acquisitions is to perform activities, share and being able to express oneself. Moreover, from the statement of "I spend time until that activity becomes good, nice and excellent", it can be stated that positive thoughts about effort and target determination acquisitions have developed. Students' liking lessons where they can express and enjoy themselves by doing activities more varies according to socio-economic status.

The topics of the Life Science course were selected based on having children acquire the skills related to children's knowing their natural and social environment, adapting to these environments in which they live. A human is obliged to learn some of the principles of both natural and social environment for living.

Self-confidence and Self-esteem

Related to how they gave children self-confidence and self-esteem, the teachers made these explanations: All the schools, teachers should give more place to activities related to planning and being aware of the codes of law. Environmental awareness and sense of responsibility should develop together. Individuals with increased awareness of individual, social responsibility think that environment is an element which is important and should be protected. Families' being conscious about this matter and teachers' arranging supplementary activities increase children's awareness toward environment. Students' reaching different resources, families' being sensitive about this matter and students' feeling self-confident might have effects on students' being knowledgeable about these kinds of matters.

Research Study

While developing students' research skills, they should be made to be curious about next

stages. In this context, children should be motivated by using questions, activities and every kind of material and method. For students to understand the topics taught in the Life Science lessons, the learning strategies appropriate for multiple intelligence domains to which they are closest should be used. Related to participation in activities in lessons, the middle SES school students exhibit more negative attitudes. To achieve more active participation in activities in Life Science lessons, teachers should give feedback soon after activities. One of the values included in the Life Science program, self-confidence should be attached more importance and activities should be done about this matter. A teacher's view: "The first and most important point of this skill is its making students become curious. This curiosity arouses a sense of research in students. And as a result of this, students reach new pieces of information both from the Internet, books and magazines and as a result of their observations. Moreover, ways and methods which they follow while searching for those pieces of information and new situations which they face leave marks as pieces of experience in students' lives as well. Moreover, they also try to practice their experiences in their future lives. The research skill is also appropriate for group work. That is to say, students can do research by forming groups among themselves and create a meaningful whole by bringing together the data which they obtain as a result of their research. Group work both prevents students from wasting time and enables them to do this work without feeling bored. In group works, students live the happiness of achieving a work together, feel themselves important in the group, live the sense of self-confidence by feeling that they contribute to group work in research studies they made and learn to share. In order to see what students have acquired via the research skill, I think this subject matter is appropriate for me. However, it should not be forgotten that although it is students that play actual roles in this skill, that is, it is students that are active in the research, the importance of teachers in this matter should not be disregarded. It is teachers that are supposed to raise students' awareness and motivate and guide them about this matter. For this reason, teachers should be broadly knowledgeable about both research skills and other skills and be conscious in this area. But only in this way, students can acquire these skills

and take firm steps forward in this area. In this case, too, an education in line with the constructivist approach is realized." It was determined that students showed significant differences among themselves according to SES in terms of firstly evaluation and writing activities in lessons and then about such matters as research and effective use of resources and being social.

It was determined that students who "work more than their friends to understand topics and like participating in activities at school" form the majority.

Drama

Teachers drew attention to dramatization, simulation and new curriculum, especially to the positive sides of its being student-centered and also to the fact that the method of dramatization is very suitable for the new curriculum but they stated that due to the crowdedness of the class they could not practice it very often.

Book Reviews

New curriculum provides a lot of opportunities to use the method of dramatization and the technique of simulation very often. We understand this from activities in books. In every 3 grades and in every 3 themes, there are absolutely activities requiring the use of the method of dramatization and the technique of simulation among activities. But the most frequently used technique is informal drama. For in the technique of informal drama, no preparation is needed beforehand.

Among the methods used in the teaching of social skills are role-playing, demonstration, being a model and direct teaching method. Drama is a technique performed to help students reflect their feelings and events. Thus, with students' own participation and experiences, learning and remembering of 80% is realized. Drama makes students get involved with historical, political and social events and achieves students' active participation. Drama not only helps students to act but also make comments.

Use of Material

The child's teacher finds only what he/she thinks instructive, if the topic is enjoyable, if he/she likes the topic, if he/she adapts it to life valu-

able; we can state that when a topic is taught with activities and when children participate in activities, they like lessons, learn them better and more easily and forget later. Topics' being related to one another is also an important effect in their learning.

Cooperative Learning

Case study and cooperative learning methods are two appropriate methods for learning to be achieved. They are appropriate for the development of students' within-group communication, their taking roles in social environments and their skills of discussion, establishing empathy, independent thinking and creative thinking. Although time and student number are limitations, these two methods are two necessary methods for learning.

Creativity

Uncovering students' creativity during the performing of activities might increase their efficiency.

Computer-assisted Instruction

Computer-assisted instruction achieves the ability to establish social communication, one of the basic aims of Life Science course, through exchange of information.

Thanks to the multimedia techniques it offers to students (displaying pictures, playing video/sound/animation), an enjoyable learning environment can be prepared by creating powerful and different environments. And this might make Life Science lessons more understandable and enjoyable.

it appears that it is necessary to attach more importance to educational games through teachers' individual efforts.

Educational Games

Educational games support and develop students' physical, mental, social and psychomotor developments. Educational games are played not in the form of teaching students pieces of theoretical information directly or having them memorize them but in the form of playing enjoyable games in which they reach information on their own by doing and experiencing. It is these lessons taught in this way that make learning

environment enjoyable and away from being monotonous. Using audio-visual materials affects more than one sense organ and hence contributes to permanence in mind.

Responsibility

Individuals with developed individual, social awareness think that environment is an important element which should be protected. If families become conscious about this matter and teachers arrange supplementary activities, this will increase children's sensitivity to environment. Students' being able to reach different resources, their families' being sensitive about this matter and students' feeling self-confidence might have an effect on students' being knowledgeable about these kinds of matters. At low SES schools where the awareness of responsibility, one of the important concepts of democracy, is low, activities related to this matter should be increased and maintained. Activities such as story completion, forming maps of concepts and making summaries from related books with respect to the importance of the sense of responsibility should be included

RECOMMENDATIONS

By considering the opinions and experiences of the teachers and students, the following suggestions were made:

More time should be allocated to drama, cooperative learning, trip and observation, discussion, brainstorming technique and case study method.

Teachers should definitely be taught the cooperative learning method.

Children should be provided with the opportunity to express their own feelings and thoughts.

Reading studies should be done for learning.

In skills and values education, proverbs should be benefited.

Teachers should feed such feelings and thoughts as being appreciated, accepted, listened and valued.

Teachers should not let the appearance of such feelings and thoughts as not being productive, accepted, and being humiliated, frustrated.

Teachers should be equipped with themes which they like to see in their students.

Teachers should determine their strong and weak sides.

Teachers should get to know their students and their families from physical, social, cultural, economic, psychological aspects.

Children should not be regarded as a walking library.

It should be known that if there is no reward, there is punishment.

In Life Science course, the principles of individual differences, according to child ocality and scientifically should definitely be emphasized with care.

Relating to other subjects should be made healthily.

Topics related to Principles of Ataturk should be taught in accordance with the objectives of affective domain.

Skills and values should be taught in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades by considering the cognitive, affective, kinesthetic domains and according to that environment, time, place and principles of flexibility and functionality.

Students' levels should be determined well.

It is very important that teachers should use the blackboard well and write fast and correctly.

Sensitivity related to the disabled should be increased.

Teachers should use and develop guide-books.

Teachers should adopt most of the skills and values.

Teachers should do museum visits in a game-playing manner.

Teacher candidates should be made to acquire positive values through various activities such as seminars, conferences.

Meanings valued by individuals are different.

Media is decreasing the effects of school and learning in values education. Related to this, supplementary works and cooperation should be done.

Teachers should be more eager and conscious about communication with students.

Students' adopting negative behaviors exhibited by teachers even if without being aware of.

Arrangement of activities according to their interests and needs.

Making requests inappropriate for children's ages and developmental characteristics.

Schools' having insufficient physical environments.

Families' not desiring to cooperate with the school.

Families should be made conscious about the importance of education.

It should be kept in mind that the works done related to physical education and music in Life Science course contribute to the habits of obeying the rules.

While students' research skills are developed, they should be made curious about next stages.

Students' readiness levels should always be taken into consideration.

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