The Reflections of Layered Curriculum to Learning-Teaching Process in Social Studies Course

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The purpose of this research is to set the effect of Layered Curriculum on learning-teaching processes. The research was conducted on 2011-2012 educational year. The implementation process, which lasted for 4 weeks, was carried out with the theme named "The World of All of Us" in Social Studies lesson at 5th grade. Observation and interview methods are used for collecting the data needed for the research. As data collection tools semi-structured interview form and researcher's diary were benefited from. The data obtained during the study was assessed with the content analysis and descriptive analysis method. According to the findings of the study, it is found that layered curriculum increased the motivation and attendance of the students to the lessons by making the learning-teaching process pleasurable for them however sporadically a noise environment could occur and it could become difficult to manage the time effectively reserved for the lessons due to the activities enforced simultaneously.

Key Words: Education, Social Studies Education, Layered Curriculum, Reflections, Learning, Teaching, Social Studies

INTRODUCTION

Education is the most important instrument utilized for developing the hereditary powers of humans and acquiring a personality intensified with desired characteristics. Beyond acquiring humans with knowledge and skills, education bears the responsibility of producing values at an extent and with the quality of enabling the maintaining of and improving society, preventing the deviation of existing values, harmonizing old and new values. Today, the view of education conveying knowledge has gradually lost its validity and instead the view of educating individuals, who easily adapt to developing and changing society, can make rapid and rational decisions, and establish effective communication with each other and their environment.

Thus, "social sciences" have significant responsibilities, in terms of acquiring individuals living in society with the required knowledge skills, attitudes, and values. According to Safran (1993), the fact that social sciences examines persistence and change, has led to social sciences gain a significant position in education, which has the objective of socializing the individual, and education becoming both a branch of social sciences and also an area of practice of social sciences has generated the concept of "*Social Studies*".

The concept of social studies is defined in various forms. According to Sönmez (Sönmez, 2007), "Social studies are dynamic information that are obtained with and at the end of the process of correlation evidenced with social reality". According to Erden, who is another person conducting studies on social studies in our country, "Social studies is a field of studies, where students are acquired basic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values regarding social life based on information selected from social studies disciplines in order to educate good citizens that know their responsibilities in primary school" (Erden,1998). According to Barr, Barth, and Shermis, "Social studies are the combination of information and experience concerning human relations for citizenship education purposes" (Ind. Karakuş 2006).

As it can be observed from all these definitions, the general focus of social studies is human behavior and all matters concerning society are under the scope of this course. The content of social studies education is closely related to social life, in which individuals are present. With this course, individuals have the opportunity to become closely familiar with especially their near and distant environment, their past, present, and future. Thus, it will not be a mistake to say that social studies education is liable for acquiring individuals with the ideals of society (Sözer, 1998). In order to fulfill this liability in the most effective manner, social studies education must demonstrate parallelism with social change and developments just as the case is with the overall of the education system. Within the framework of this understanding, social studies education must acquire new quests, orientations, and new perspectives. One of these perspectives is the "Layered Curriculum".

Layered curriculum is an approach developed by Nunley in 2003. In this approach learners are presented the tasks that go from simple to complex, indicate the relation of progressivity and the tasks, for which the right to choose is recognized. The learners are obliged to conduct activities expected from them within the scope of the tasks they choose at each layer in the approach. All the learners' active participation in the process is ensured thanks to the learning activities presented under a wide menu.

Layered curriculum approach is based on the understanding that each learner's learning styles, dimension of intelligence, readiness, and thinking systems are different from one another. Each learner in the school environment is unique. The learners have different structures in terms of all their characteristics (Nunley, 2004). The learning process is arranged in three layers, considering these differences of the individuals.

These layers are as follows:

The C Layer: It was built upon basic knowledge and meanings. The learners constitute their basic knowledge in this layer.

The B Layer: The knowledge learnt in the C layer are implemented and arranged. The learners perform the problem solving task and other top level tasks at this level.

The A Layer: Critical thinking, designing original ideas or outcomes (products) are performed in this layer. This layer requires top-level and the most complicated thinking (Goad, Kelly, 2002).

Figure 1: Learning layers of layered curriculum
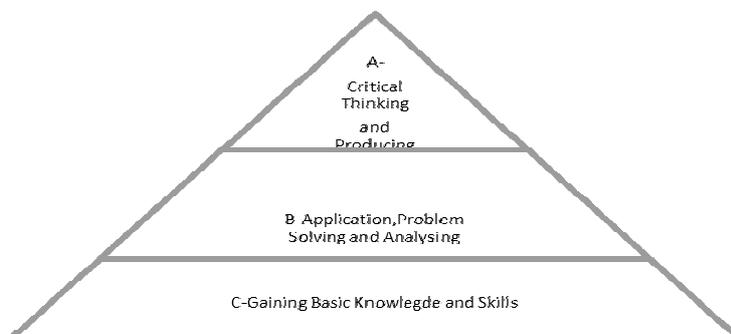
For the implementation of layered curriculum Nunley mentions five steps:

1st Step: Learning unit is divided into three layers. Each layer represents the depth or level of the study performed over the subject. The aims, tasks, and behaviors that will be acquired in that lesson or unit are presented to the students. Among them they can choose whatever they want.

Each selected task has a score weight. The student is aware of this and makes a selection accordingly.

2nd Step: The learners are free to choose the tasks they want from the task list. The tasks have different score values and these scores are determined according to the complexity of the tasks. The learners are obliged to complete these tasks in order to move from the lower layer to the upper layer.

The C layer is the layer of acquiring and understanding knowledge. Here what they will do and acquire and what scores they will receive in case they perform their tasks were specified. In this layer the students have tasks such as reading course books and newspapers, watching videos and computer programs, selecting and listening to songs and cassettes, and examining the models. The student is also free to choose these tasks.

3rd Step: The B layer is related to problem solving by using knowledge. Like in the C layer, the scores that will be received by the learners were determined; however, it is harder and more complicated in comparison with C. This step contains activities and tasks such as interpreting what s/he reads, writing and composing songs, preparing banners and brochures, etc., regarding the subject, installing the mechanism in the lab and then performing tests, searching different sources and presenting them in a report form, summarizing them, planning and performing interviews with concerned people. Like in the C Layer the learners are free to choose the tasks they wish to do. If they wish, they may conduct a different task, which is not contained in the list, depending on the permission of the teacher.

4th Step: It includes the process of analyzing the knowledge in the A layer after the student acquired and used it and then acquiring new knowledge. The scores s/he will receive here were determined. It is harder, abstract and complicated in comparison with

the other layers.   Tasks and activities such as examining and criticizing books, analyzing them, writing an original article, report, and an essay, designing and presenting an original model are within the scope of this layer. As the tasks in this layer are harder and more complicated than the ones in the C and B layers, the score value must also be kept high. The multiple-choice task list in the C layer was reduced in this layer and it is aimed that the learners should deal with one or two tasks.

5th Step: Students are requested to tell verbally what and how they have obtained and acquired so far. A thorough interview is performed with the learners regarding the process. An effort is made to determine whether they have really learned the target behaviors or not (Sönmez, 2009).

In addition, the outcomes they created are also taken into account and assessed. To that end, the grading rubric prepared by the teacher may be utilized. The grading rubric makes it easy for the teacher to assess quality through rating and the operations required to be performed regarding the task.

The aim in layered curriculum approach is the execution of all learners' top level thinking skills. The learner is expected to conduct the assigned task at his/her own pace while moving from the C layer to the A layer. Within this framework especially in learning activities avoidance of lack of motivation resulting from individual pace difference or separations from the process may be ensured. Within the scope of this understanding, the activities that will be performed at school and out of it are discussed in three layers as C, B, and A depending on the level of difficulty and the relations of progressivity. The learners in these layers conduct different tasks and responsibilities and they perform the activities by assuming responsibility on the subjects they are interested in through multiple task preferences (Başbay, 2006).

One of the most important features of the layered curriculum approach is the flexibility it provides to the learner. In addition to the learners' execution of the tasks assigned to them, they themselves bring to the class environment the tasks that are suitable for the layer to be studied regarding the area of subject and receive scores, completing these activities. It is rather a difficult task to involve the learners in the learning process and make them part of the learning activities. Within the framework of this understanding, the learners' integration with the learning activities and the learnt unit is achieved (Başbay, 2006).

One of the important points that need to be emphasized in layer curriculum approach is the assessment step of this theory. According to this approach the essential thing in the assessment process is the realization of the learning rather than the completion of the activities. Basically, assessment is performed depending on development files and in order to make the process effective, verbal defense and scoring rubrics are utilized. Verbal defense is an assessment technique that is very frequently used in choice and assessment of activity. A couple of questions are asked to the student regarding what s/he has learned when s/he completes the activity. The verbal defense enabling the examination of knowledge of the student on the subject is a tool in revealing to what degree the student masters the subject (Demirel, 2007).

The Purpose of the Research

In this study, it was aimed to assess the implementation, which was conducted according to the layered curriculum approach; identify the positive and negative features encountered during the process. In accordance to this purpose, following questions were tried to be answered:

What are the effects of the layered curriculum to learning-teaching process in social studies course?
1. What are the researcher's observations regarding the layered curriculum in the social studies course?

2. What are students' views on layered curriculum in the social studies course?

METHOD

Method of the Research

In order to obtain necessary data in the study, interview and observation methods that are widely used in qualitative studies, were utilized. Interview is a fairly effective method to obtain information regarding the individuals' experiences, attitudes, views, complaints, feelings, and beliefs (Briggs, 1986). Because of this reason, it was used to receive the views of learners thoroughly in the study group regarding the process. The observation method was preferred as the implementation was conducted by the researcher himself. With this method it was aimed to obtain a detailed and extensive picture that extends over a period of time regarding the process (Bailey, 1982) and to support the findings obtained through the interview method.

Study Group

Thirty-seven students receiving education in the 5-B class of Kaşgarlı Mahmut Primary School in the Altındağ district of the Ankara province in the 2011-2012 academic year constitute the study group of the study. Numeric data regarding the students in the study group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Numeric data regarding the students in the study group

	Female Students		Male Students		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Study Group	20	54	17	46	37	100

Data Collection Tools

In the study as a data collection instrument a semi-structured interview form and researcher's diary were benefited from. The interview form prepared by the researcher was developed and arranged after receiving and assessing experts' views. The measurement instrument prepared was applied to the students in the study group at the end of the study and the learners' views on the layered curriculum process were determined. In order to confirm the data obtained with the interview, the notes in the researcher's diary were benefited from except these data. It is aimed to assess and give

meaning to the findings in different perspectives through these data depending on the observations performed by the researcher.

Collection and Analysis of the Data

The data obtained during the study was assessed with the content analysis and descriptive analysis method. Interview data obtained from the students in the study group was analyzed with the content analysis. Accordingly, themes and codes were constituted according to the responses given by the students and the findings were interpreted by presenting them according to these codes. The observation process performed by the researcher throughout the process was interpreted briefly by using descriptive analysis. This method was also utilized during the phase of quoting and assessing the students' views in the interview form. In the analysis of data as the final phase all the findings that were defined and presented in a detailed manner were interpreted by the researcher and then put in a report form for the purpose of obtaining some results (Yıldırım, Şimşek, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings Regarding the First Sub-problem

What are students' views on layered curriculum in the social studies course?

Findings Regarding the First Sub-problem of the study was obtained with the interview form that was applied to the students in the study group after the implementation. As a result of the qualitative analyses performed according to the views expressed by the students through this form the following teams were formed.

    1. Its contributions to student development
        1.1 Motivation
        1.2 Development of Self-Confidence
        1.3 The Sense of Achievement
        1.4 Enjoying Oneself
        1.5 Making Decisions
        1.6 Assuming Responsibility
        1.7 Discovering Talents (abilities)
        1.8 Self-Recognition

    2. Its Effects on the Implementation Process
        2.1 Active Participation
        2.2 In-Class Interaction
        2.3 Diversities
        2.4 Discrepancies
        2.5 Permanence
        2.6 Interdisciplinary Approach

    3. Its Negative Aspects
        3.1 Dullness of the activities performed over the paper.
        3.2 Vagueness of activity rubrics

The general views of students on layered curriculum implementation, the positive and if any, negative aspects of the process and their views on choosing and performing their favorite activity, and whether they wish to conduct this practice in other courses or not were received together with the reasons they recommended through five questions in the interview form.

Examples of responses given by the students to the questions in the form are provided below.

Kemal: *I like social studies course very much but it is very hard. But when I achieve it, it is very fun. I always score one hundred when I do the activity I wish. The best course is the social studies course.*

Büşra: *It was fine to choose our favorite activity. We can do what we want to do.*

Ramazan: *I liked this course, developing my mental abilities. I liked the drama activity most because I wanted to prove my abilities to my friends and also I have self-confidence about that. It was nice to choose our favorite activities because some of them were hard; some of them were easy for me, so I have a right to choose what I wish to do.*

Safiyenur: *The course was very entertaining because elective activities were great. I was confused about what to choose.*

Furkan: *The activities we performed were very entertaining. I liked painting the most because I find it very entertaining. I wish there were elective activities in the maths course. I would wish to choose one among the operations of division, multiplication, and subtraction and then perform it.*

Göksu: *It is very nice to perform what we choose to do. I liked the painting activity most; I enjoy myself very much while painting. I would wish to paint in other courses, too.*

Burak: *I enjoyed myself very much in this course because I can perform my favorite activities. I would wish to perform similar activities in other courses we like to do.*

Seher: *I liked the activity of writing poems most because writing poems gives happiness to man.*

Murat: *I liked elective activities the most among the courses we covered because it is more different than the other courses; I choose what I wish to do and then perform it.*

Ece: *I liked painting most because I develop my manual skills in painting and I like it so much because it is very entertaining. I liked this course very much as I do different things.*

Mustafa: *I enjoyed myself very much in this courses and I liked the maths course (activities). It must be the same with the other courses; some of the activities must be hard and some of them easy.*

When the responses received with the interview forms and the themes formed according to the views of students were examined, it was observed that generally the students assumed a positive attitude towards the implementation and that they found the

activities within the process entertaining.   When, the negative aspects of the process were asked to the students, it was stated that all of them except two students responded this question positively and that as for the negative aspects determined by these students, they found the activities performed over the paper very boring and that the rubrics regarding the optional activities were not understandable. It is remarkable that all the students expressed the freedom of making preferences among the optional activities, which is the most distinct feature that separates the implementation from other current approaches as the positive feature of the process. Of course, this attitude may be presented as the indication of layered curriculum where multiple methods and techniques were set to work, was internalized by the learners at the consequence of the individualized education.

When the students in the study group were requested to determine the activity they liked most among the other ones that were presented during the process, it was concluded that they mentioned several activities according to their individual interests and skills and that likewise these activities must be included in the other courses. Accordingly it was determined that preparing the activities within the implementation process in consideration of individual differences so as to present several alternatives to the students increased the students' interests and participations in the course. Starting from all these findings, it will be true to say that the activities conducted according to layered curriculum enrich the process, increased the students' interests in the course, developed their self-confidence through the sense of making preferences and achievement and generally contributed to students to develop a positive attitude towards the course.

As is known, constructive approach was based on the current Social Studies Curriculum prepared by the Ministry of National Education and learners' active participation was emphasized within the process. Within the framework of this approach education processes were defined as arranging the education statuses on behalf of the student and ranking the learning experiences that were planned to be acquired according to a mechanism. Starting from this definition, with the expression of "on behalf of the student" the said approach considering the individual differences in layered curriculum to a large extent draws attention.

According to the constructive approach, the necessity of ensuring several other features in education environments that will be arranged was also stated. Accordingly, the importance of arranging education environments so as to provide possibility for the students to interact more with the learning environment and thus, to have rich learning experiences was expressed (Yaşar, 1998). Through these experiences that will be arranged, it is expected to obtain a conscious, creative, and inquisitive learner profile that knows why, what, and where s/he learns, and produces his/her own technology, as targeted by the approach (Jonassen, Peck, and Wilsom, 1999). In order to realize this expectation it was stated that in constitution of the knowledge, the learners must be involved in different activities that were arranged according to every subject, field or learner.

When all these expressed features are considered, their having a lot in common with the learners' views on the layered curriculum draws attention. When the themes formed with the interview forms are examined, it is observed that both the contributions of layered curriculum on student development and its effects on implementation process are parallel with the constructive approach that is taken as a basis in curricula. Due to this reason, it can be said that the layered curriculum plays an effective role in the formation of in learning-teaching processes that are defined within the framework of constructive approach.

Another feature frequently expressed by the learners in their views regarding the layered curriculum is the positive effect of the said approach on the students' motivation for the course. In constructive approach where as individuals the students' complete management of their learning experiences is aimed, undoubtedly, ensuring the learners' attention for the course carries great importance to achieve this aim. This element achieved with the layered curriculum is considered to be the basic element needed for the realization of "learning" in learning-teaching processes as well as the formation of other positive features in learners. As a result of these comments, it is predicted that the layered curriculum will assume a supportive role in achieving students' profiles in curricula.

Findings Regarding the Second Sub-problem

What are the researcher's observations regarding the layered curriculum in the social studies course?

While setting forth the effects of implementation on the process, observations from the researcher who himself conducted the implementations in the study group were utilized in order to determine the teacher's views on the education environment, strengths and weaknesses of the study, problems encountered and recommendations regarding implementation as well as the views received from students. Hereunder it was observed that by virtue of conducted activities during the process an effective teaching-learning process realized in the study group and that students were willing to participate in all kinds of activities performed within the class. As the students were able to choose the activities they considered to be the most relevant ones to their own interests and capacities, it was observed that their participation in the course was also accompanied by success. As is known, the length of time spent by the students for education during education processes is associated with their success considerably. Because of this reason, there was no difficulty in sustaining the students' attentions as the most important element required for the effectiveness of the education during the implementation.

The most distinct feature of the layered curriculum is the option of multiple activities presented to students. Thanks to these activities employed during the implementation process, as the process was structured and individualized multiple learning environments were conducted by considering the fact that the process was formed with the students with different cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills, it was observed that necessary class atmosphere could be created at the end of the process in order to obtain expected acquisitions. Accordingly, the students became the central point of the

teaching process by virtue of the activities they determined according to their own preferences throughout the implementation and they were able to constitute the knowledge they learned individually. It was determined that the communication that is necessary to exist in an effective class environment as another positive feature could also be sustained effectively throughout the process. Thanks to the layered curriculum activities presented to the learners, a democratic class environment was created and an opportunity was provided for the students to express themselves. Moreover since students were supported regarding the subject of group work through these activities and the interaction of student-teacher was activated through "verbal defenses" as one of the differences of layered curriculum during the process, in-class communication was observed to be at the requested level.

In order to obtain the targeted outputs during learning-teaching processes, one of the important factors is that apart from the used learning approach, this approach assigns roles to the teachers as the implementers of the course. According to a specified approach, an effective management of teaching processes, planning and implementation of teaching activities and teaching principles may certainly be realized in parallel with teachers' behavior types they demonstrate directly within the process. In line with this perspective when the roles assigned by the layered curriculum to the teachers are examined, their utmost similarity with the changing teacher profile draws attention. During the implementation thanks to active learning environments prepared by the researcher, students themselves could create the knowledge and this is one of the observation results supporting this argument. During the process conducted within the framework of the layered curriculum, as the researcher was in the position of a guide to ensure the interaction in the learning environment and the students controlled and managed the learning through the activities the they participated in according to their individual preferences, it was observed that this approach was successful to make individuals creative and efficient but not the teachers.

Problems that are specified regarding the implementation may be listed as the increased noise due to various activities conducted simultaneously in the classroom and the difficulty in the effective use of class time. One of the most distinct characteristics of layered curriculum is the flexibility it provides to learners. Hereunder, as the students were involved in different activities where they made preferences among multiple choices that were offered to them during the implementation, it was observed that the noise level increasing at times in the class environment prevented sustaining the current positive atmosphere to a certain extent. In order to perform an effective teaching, of course it is necessary to use time efficiently in teaching processes. If the time designated for the acquisitions is not used efficiently, it is certain that some deficiencies will appear in achieving the targeted outputs. Another problem observed regarding the implementation process emerges in this matter. Due to various activities where the learners participate, the need to perform some arrangements and interventions in the process emerged for the researcher's effective management of time.

It is considered that the reason of these two unwanted elements expressed regarding the process is the student number in the study group and that the learners have not been previously involved in an education process that was prepared according to the layered

curriculum. In case similar implementations are conducted routinely with small groups, the said problems are considered to be occurring less. In addition, although these two negative factors are regarded as obstacles for an effective class management, thanks to various activities where the students achieve active participation and interaction, as the student motivation that is one of the objectives of modern class management understanding is ensured and activities contribute to develop the students' abilities such as self-confidence, responsibility development, planning, implementation, decision-making, and inquiry, it is observed that all these prevent these problems from reaching a level to avoid conducting the process efficiently. Starting from these findings, thanks to the implementation based on the layered curriculum performed in the study group, it can be said that learning-teaching environment reaches a level, where students enjoy themselves and a learner-centered and democratic structure that is targeted in current curricula. Accordingly, it was concluded that the observations of the researcher had similar characteristics to students' interview forms.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings obtained in the research, the students' increasing interest in the course and their participation in the process, the process becoming more entertaining for the learners by virtue of the activities they prefer among the other ones, thanks to this positive attitude constituted in students providing possibility to sustain the requested class atmosphere in the learning-teaching environment are the designated main effects of education process based on layered curriculum realized in the study group over the process. In addition, even if the students' simultaneous execution of different activities causes a noisy class environment at times and makes it difficult to conduct effectively the time reserved for the process, it is concluded that the activities are conducted in the requested efficiency by virtue of the high motivation observed in students. According to these findings, it is considered that this approach will be benefited from to achieve the requested and targeted learning-teaching processes by placing the layered curriculum that is not contained in the current programs into the education programs that will be prepared in the future. Moreover it is predicted that this approach will provide contribution to achieve the acquisitions that are requested to be obtained at the end of education processes through informing the teachers as implementers of the programs on the layered curriculum and presenting educational precedents.

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