

ACTIVE LEARNING IN HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES

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Introduction

A teacher goes into the classroom, takes registration and writes about the objectives of the lesson on the classroom board. Having done a quick recap, either her/himself or one volunteer student or a student who has been assigned before starts explaining about the topic that is to be covered that day. The teacher asks some questions towards the end of the lesson and gets some answers. And the lesson is completed. The materials used in such lesson almost always are textbook, university examinations books and sometimes maps. Although rarely, a documentary or film related to the topic could also be watched.

Today, a history lesson in secondary school level is generally carried out this way in Turkey. Such features as the teacher's pedagogic content knowledge in history, her/his teaching skills and personal commitment, the school's physical capacity and the attitudes of school management team could result in a little different teaching practice than what is depicted above.

In such a system we can ask many questions about effectiveness: to what extent are students are motivated to learn? To what extent are, and how many, students active in the lesson? To what extent is learning ensured? Which high level thinking skills do the students gain? What are the satisfaction levels of teachers and students? We could ask more questions like these, but The more these types of questions are asked, the more it becomes obvious that teachers and students alike have problems in terms of what takes place in the classrooms.

The most prominent issues that educators persistently pursue are undoubtedly related to learning, relating to how learning takes place and make it better in the future. For example: What teaching principles and methods should teachers adopt in order to provide a successful learning environment for students? The debates and development concerning these issues have been continuously on the agenda of educators; they were debated in the

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past and are still being debated today. In fact such debates have led the way to questioning the quality of education of subject areas such as history and geography education, and raise how an effective history and social studies learning can be ensured? Which learning approaches, teaching methods and techniques provide us with learning that is easy, effective, persistent and fun? This paper will argue that active learning approach offers us opportunities to ensure the effective teaching of history and social studies.

Active learning

Teachers obviously cannot do the act of learning on behalf of students, and students should be engaged actively with the learning process if we want them to understand the lesson. For this reason active learning is meaningful learning. Some authors use the expression of 'deep learning' or 'meaningful learning' as opposed to 'shallow learning' where very little understanding takes place. Active learning provides students with meaningful learning by allowing them to take more responsibility in their own learning (Allen-Taylor-Turner, 2005:258). Such active learning takes place when students take responsibility in carrying out activities. Those who are in favour of this approach assert that the key to successful learning lies in the emergence of pupil personal interests and a developing sense of ownership and belonging. Active learning is described as interacting with materials, people, ideas and concepts (Allen-Taylor-Turner, 2005:261) and may require reading, writing, listening and talking or engaging with such tools and materials as paint and wood. Active learning is a learning process through which students are given opportunities to take responsibility, make decisions and self-regulate themselves. They are forced to use their mental skills, to take decisions in aspects of how and to what extent the learning will take place, how motivation will be established, from where and whom help will be sought and provided, when such help will be asked and the objectives of learning process (Açıköz, 2004: 17–18).

What emerges when we look at the definitions related to active learning is a student centred teaching-learning process. This points out an opposite situation than traditional behaviorist approach where students are rather passive. Active learning has become popular in the education systems of many countries as a result of criticisms of behaviourism, and was part of the emerging response to cognitive approaches and, thus, constructivism. It may be useful to look at the differences between cognitive approaches and behaviourist approaches: 'Behaviourism is an approach that was influential until 1970s. The goal of behaviourist approaches is to examine observable behaviours and the causes of these behaviours and to focus only on observable reactions and

the stimulus that cause these reactions. The theoretical underpinning is that behaviours can be controlled and shaped if we understand the link between stimulus and reaction' (Açıkgöz, 2004:78). Furthermore this school of thought argues that since human behaviour is determined and controlled by the environment, if we create a proper environment, children can be moulded and steered as wished. In essence people not believed to be not self-determining in terms of how they act.

However, this approach started to lose its influence in 1970s firstly criticised on the grounds that the behaviours of learners could not be shaped as wished, and secondly on the grounds that learning that is a very complex process cannot be explained by a simple stimulus-reaction link. Finally, since the findings resulted from experiments conducted with animals critics questioned the transferability of this research data to human learning. The decline of behaviourism led to cognitive approaches, with an interest in the thought or mental dimensions of learning. Cognitivists try to explain the structure of knowledge; the ways it is acquired and understood; the ways it is recalled and the ways it is utilised in problem solving situations. In this approach the learner is believed to learn about something in an environment where s/he is active; and therefore could control and construct her/his own learning (Açıkgöz, 2004:78-83).

In considering the transition from behaviourism to cognitive approaches we also have to consider constructivism because 'the theoretical underpinnings of active learning are based on both constructivism as well as the cognitive sciences'. Both approaches show an interest more in learning than teaching processes, with active learning a product of attempts to put theories of constructivism and cognitive science into practice. 'According to constructivism, knowledge is not considered to be out there to be received through communication channels. On the contrary, the knowledge is produced and constructed by the learner her/himself. For this reason constructs are personal'. Constructivism requires students to construct knowledge themselves and to engage with the process. It also involves a variety of activities, sharing ideas and formative assessment (Açıkgöz, 2004: 59-61, 65). Although emerged as a reaction to behaviourism, active learning does not totally deny the methods of behaviourism, but involves a number of dimensions which be discussed in the following sections.

Active Learning and Motivation

The lesson's objectives should be clear to both teacher and pupils if active learning is to be realised. Students are usually motivated when the knowledge

given in the school is related to their future. Put differently, if students believe that school prepares them for life after school, then they become motivated to learn. No matter what the content and characteristics of any lesson, what is important is whether that lesson meets the needs of students. Students' objectives should overlap with what is offered to them in the classes. Too much focus on knowledge in schools might not actively harm young people but it does cause problems such as a developing negative attitude towards 'learning' problems with engagement and motivation and memorisation, prioritisation and recall. Students may even start developing some misbehaviour (Allen-Taylor-Turner, 2005:261).

Thus what is taught in schools: knowledge and skills, values and aptitudes should also be useful for students *throughout* their lives. The issue of relevance and significance becomes key in history and social studies classes. For example: What might students get out of learning about a series of events thousands of years ago? How relevant is the material and concepts offered, how valid are the skills and values involved? To ensure effectiveness, first of all the of Abdullah Saydam, so covering issues of the recent past more than distant past. But the greatest responsibility is for teachers to relate what is learned to 'real life' and young people's lives and needs. Teachers could show engage pupils by implementing active learning methods and techniques, by telling students how learning certain concepts and skills will be useful for them for the rest of their lives. Techniques such as the analysis of cause and effect; considering different perspectives through group work, the preparation of posters, case studies, problem solving activities and brain storming could all link what is learned in history and social studies to 'real life' therefore lead a higher motivation in students. By implementing the above mentioned active learning techniques what is aimed is not only to gain necessary knowledge about an event, but also to provide students with appropriate learning habits and with skills of problem solving which is to be used in complex real life situations.

Active Learning Methods and Techniques

Allowing students to take control of their own learning by actively participating in learning process is the principal difference that distinguishes between active learning and traditional learning approaches. There are a number of benefits in implementing history and social studies lessons based on more active learning than traditional methods of lecturing and question-answer. In order to realise such lessons, teachers must provide students with a very rich content. This could be achieved through providing students with materials rich in breadth and scope as well as a variety of learning activities. It

is important to get to know those active learning activities that save students from a boring, authoritative, and heavily disciplined atmosphere and create a learning environment that is fun and in which learning is easy.

Some of the techniques that could be considered in the framework of active learning could be stated as follows: snowball, fish bowl, buzzing, writing poetry, mental maps, concept maps, creative groups, learning through research, role playing, case study, panel, debate groups, forum, card sorting, brain storming, explanatory learning, educational games, problem solving and decision making activities (Açıkgöz, 2004: 127-169).

Active Learning and Group Work

One important element of active learning is cooperative learning which focuses on group work: 'Cooperative learning is a learning process that could be simply considered as students working in small groups and helping each other in their learning'. What lies in the beneath of grouping is the thought that students gain more through group work than they do individual/independent work (Açıkgöz, 2004: 172). Of course like any other method, if group work is not organised well, it does not contribute much to student's progression possibly because students will be reluctant to take part in group work; the domination of the group by some students; or an inappropriate layout of the class act all may act as barriers to an effective session. However, if such barriers are overcome and if students are motivated well, group work prevents students from being passive receivers. When implemented well, group work is a perfect mean to achieve learning objectives.

Teachers should bear some points in mind to obtain efficiency through group work. First and foremost, the lesson should be carefully planned by considering every phase, with a clear lesson plan to give a clear role to students in order for them to carry out their tasks adequately. Tasks should be organised allowing cooperative work and opportunities for students to do 'hands-on activities', to think, to feel, and to interact. These mental activities shape students' understanding (Curtis-Bardwell, 1994:172-173), but it is important that students have adequate prior knowledge about the topic in order to tackle the task itself. While the teacher should take gender, ability and peer groups into consideration when forming groups, they must also give some thought about the nature and share of work within the groups. The materials should also comply with the principles of good group work. The most important issue of group works is, however, to have a final product that represents the efforts of the group, for example presenting the group's decisions to peers to the whole class.

As stated earlier teachers should give responsibility to the students and allow them take responsibility of their own learning during the group work.

In this respect five main elements of group work are:

1. Positive cooperation-solidarity,
2. Face to face interaction,
3. Individual responsibility,
4. Interpersonal communication and small group skills,
5. Group progression and development.

Such active learning techniques as envoys, snowball, rainbow and jigsaw could effectively be used in history teaching (Haydin, Arthur, Hunt, Stephen, 2008:80–82):

Active Learning Strategy 1: Envoys: The decisions of a group could be told to other groups by a member of the group in ‘envoys’ technique. The envoy then learns about other group’s decisions and brings the news to his/her own group. Such envoys could effectively be used in history and social studies lessons particularly for controversial issues. For example, the following questions could be discussed within groups: ‘Do you think that Abdulhamid II deserved to be dethroned by the incident of March 31st?’ and ‘Do you think that II. Monarchy era was useful or harmful to Ottoman State?’

Active Learning Strategy 2: The Jigsaw Activity

The ‘jigsaw activity’ (Johnson, 2003:30-31). Is a process where different groups are given or collect information and have to share this to get one or more overall narrative or interpretations. For example a class consisting of 25 students is arranged into five groups of five students each. To evaluate different perspectives about the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I, each group is assigned with a focus such as ‘women, soldiers, farmers, traders, and bureaucrats’. Each group then does a research about the issue with respect to their assigned social group. Group members preferably could be asked to carry out their research individually. Then findings of each group member are presented within the group. Then new groups consisting of one student from previously organised each group is formed. In these new groups then there are representatives of different social groups such as military persons and farmers etc. share their perspectives about the defeat of Ottomans. Such cooperation leads to the development of individual responsibility, communication and the development of group spirit. The teacher would take a role in the introduction to the lesson, providing resources and in the evaluation of the lesson.

In addition to these, what is required from the history and social studies lessons is to cover some other educational activities which provide students

with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. In fact, these activities are usually a part of the above mentioned techniques and help those techniques to be more functional.

Other active techniques can include:

- creating slogans;
- applications to the real life;
- finding out hidden thoughts;
- 'under the surface';
- making inferences;
- preparation of advertisements;
- empathising with teacher;
- creating a painting/visual;
- writing a story;
- writing a caption or dialogue for a picture;
- classification of sources;
- having an order;
- puzzles;
- keeping a lesson or learning journal;
- finding a title for a text; or picture;
- self-assessment;
- re-writing and summarising or simplifying text;
- preparing posters;
- writing a letter;
- conducting interviews;
- preparing a newspaper account of front page;
- making a field trip and perhaps a display afterwards;
- making a concept map;
- making list of what skills or concepts was learned in a session or activity;
- using analogy and metaphors;
- writing a song;
- using active, problem solving based work sheets;
- empathy activities;
- predicting and completion of story;
- staging a mock press conference or trial;
- and making of various graphs (Açıkgöz, 2004: 85–113).

Both history and social studies lessons have a rich content base as for implementing/realising active learning principles. Having students to create slogans would result in fun, creative and lasting learning experiences for them. When the above mentioned techniques and other learning activities are known and applied by teachers, there will be a significant difference from

traditional approach in terms of teaching social studies and history in the class. Teachers equipped with a rich knowledge of different techniques and methods can plan and organise an appropriate learning environment based on specifications of the curriculum and students' levels and prior learnings (Davison-Leask, 2005:79).

Active Learning Strategy 3: Slogan Making

Students could be asked:

'If you were Sadrazam (equivalent of prime minister) during Tanzimat era, what slogan would you use to protect the State from emerging nationalist movements?'

Or they could be asked:

'If you were a journalist who is in favour of national uprising during the Independence War, what kind of heading (caption) and article would you write in your newspaper to support Mustafa Kemal and his friends?'

Active Learning Strategy 4: Card Sorting Activities

Sequencing and Sorting Cards- The causes of World War II could be written on cards, and students within groups could be asked to sort those cards according to their sequence of events, or the same cards used to consider significance and cards placed in order of importance by pupils.

If students are given opportunities to engage with the lesson by reading, writing, discussing and listening, then we can ensure a deep and meaningful learning for them. In this respect, when constructing the lesson plan, teachers should pay attention to include activities which caters for the principles of the theory of 'multiple intelligences' (Gardner, 2004). By doing so, teachers could also keep students motivations high.

Active Learning Strategy 5: Letters Home

This is an exercise developing empathy, and it is important that pupils understand that they cannot actually '*know*' what it was really like in the past, but that we can use reliable information to speculate about impact on real people of historical events. For example, an activity which consists of letter exchanges between a soldier at war and his mother could be very interesting for students. Some pupils could write letters in the role of soldiers writing to their mothers and other could write letters to their soldier sons. While on the one hand empathy is ensured, on the other hand the skills of writing based on historical facts and associated mental activities are developed.

Active learning does not mean that students are engaged heavily with many tasks (Allen-Taylor-Turner, 2005:262-63). For instance, if students are copying what is written on the board or slides into their notebooks or they are lecturing certain topics throughout the whole class time, we cannot say that active learning is taking place. Teacher could do an introduction to the lesson by doing re-cap, introducing the objectives of the lesson and tasks of the students. Then, teacher could show a film, do a 'brain storming activity', and may ask questions when necessary. Students then could work with work sheets and through them could classify and list concepts, make concept and mental maps. It should be remembered that these activities should conform to curriculum requirements in terms of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

Active Learning Strategy 6 Using Text Sources

Co-operative learning is more appropriate when a problem solving and project-based activity is carried out. For example, students could work towards validity and reliability of an account/event by comparing and contrasting different sources in respect to the same event. Every group then could present their findings to the class (Zevin, 2007:58).

Active Learning Strategy 7. Using Images

By using visual materials to increase interaction between students could also catch students' interests. These visuals could be of pictures, posters, artefacts, PowerPoint presentations, or smart boards. Visuals are important tools that contribute to active learning because they focus attention on certain points, make recalling easier, and make the topic more meaningful. Various maps and graphs could be utilised to interpret statistics and explain concepts. By using PowerPoint, one part of a picture could be hidden and student could be asked to make deductive comments about the remainder of the picture. Similarly, they could be asked to complete a text which is left uncompleted on a PowerPoint slide. Moreover, students could do their presentations through such visuals (Allen-Taylor-Turner, 2005:273-274). Those schools that have adequate ICT infrastructure can do Internet-based lesson to stimulate students even further with the vast amount of resources available on the Internet.

Photographs are also important visual materials that support learning. Students could inspect photographs showing fashion, entertainment, family life, technology, transportation, street life, war scenes, strikes, and the role of women from different times in history. Students then analyse change and continuity by comparing pictures taken in different eras and question the reasons for these. Photographs could be analysed from different ways by

asking questions such as: 'When this was taken?'; 'What time of the day could this be taken?'; 'Where this could be taken?' Students could give their degree of assertion of these questions through a likert scale of 1 to 5. If they are pretty sure of answer they could mark 5, if pretty unsure they could mark 1. Some questions will offer more value than others, and pupils should be led to think about how questions can build on each other to lead to more sophisticated learning.

Just like pictures, cartoons could also be effective materials. As primary sources, cartoons are usually interesting for students and they help us to understand what people thought of, how they thought of and the perspectives of people in the past (Stradling, 2003:92–94, 99–100). Both pictures and cartoons could be analysed through group works. Group work is also very important in developing student' skills and ability to empathise, respect for difference and for multi-perspectivity.

Active Learning and Teachers

The backbone of the active learning is teachers: although they *seem less involved* compared to traditional approaches, more responsibility and commitment is required from them, but the results are worth the extra effort and professionalism. Active learning does not undermine teachers but changes their roles, with teachers engaged with every phase of learning process from planning to assessment. They are to encourage students; create opportunities for them; give feedback and expect high achievements from them. Since active learning develops skills of self-learning and problem solving, students should be given a solid basis in terms of certain skills and academic rigour which requires planned interventions from teachers. Active learning is useful for teachers as much as it is for students. Since students work individually and in groups, teachers are better placed in terms of carrying out assessments and feedbacks. Furthermore, teachers find more opportunities to respond individual needs of students (Allen-Taylor-Turner, 2005:261).

If not carried out properly, even the best strategies would fail. Maybe the best strategies are the ones that put into practice easily and effectively. For this reason, teachers' perspectives concerning active learning are very important. On this account, although basic principles and theoretical underpinnings of active learning are well constructed, it is important to consider teachers' attitudes towards active learning in Turkey. In the context of the project which is mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, there have been a series of workshops carried out based on the principles of active learning. Having completed the workshops, an evaluative research was conducted with teachers by the means

of a survey and a number of interviews to find out teachers' perspectives with regard to active learning. Constructivist and active learning approaches have started to be implemented in primary schools of Turkey for some time now. But since teachers were educated and trained in line with behaviourist approach, this has brought problems in implementation of constructivist approaches in the classrooms. Some teachers find it very difficult to adapt this new system so they tend to keep to their teaching habits which largely based upon traditional approaches. Secondary history teaching is often still carried out in the context of 'traditional teaching'. In such circumstances, teachers' attitudes towards active learning gain a special importance.

Firstly it should be stated that the overwhelming majority of teachers believe that history or social studies lessons should be done through innovative methods rather than traditional methods (while 87.1% of the teachers strongly agree, 12.9% of teachers agree with the statement). They also asserted that if these innovative methods are used, the objectives of the curriculum in terms of skills and knowledge would be achieved (90% believes it strongly). Moreover, all of them (74% being strongly) believe that innovative methods would help us to relate issues to the real life situations.

Although teachers usually strongly believe the merits of active and innovative methods in teaching history and social studies, they have slightly different intentions and thoughts in terms of implementing active learning approach in their own classes. While 45 respondents or 16% stated that they strongly consider applying innovative methods in their classes (exemplars of such lessons are given them through the workshops), 35 respondents or 48% and 19 or 35% stated that they are considering and have intention to apply those methods in their classes respectively. 45% of the teachers who participated in the workshops also stated that they immediately started using what they experienced in the workshops in their practice. 5% (35) of them showed an interest saying that they have intentions/plans to apply those methods, while 50% (19), do not have any plan to apply them for now.

Those teachers who already started applying above mentioned methods wrote about their impressions and provided feedback about their new practice. All of them stated that they had a very positive response from students. One teachers wrote that 'I started using the methods from the very beginning...I could see a stark difference. The achievement rate of students is increased. Students' contentment is also noticeably increased'.

Similar feedback was provided by other teachers too. Another example is that 'I applied what I learned in these workshops. My students loved these lessons. Their achievement is also increased'. Commenting on the same issue,

another teacher also stated that 'I implemented what I learned in my class and will carry on doing it. I had positive feedbacks from my students. Lessons became more enjoyable and easy to comprehend. To learn about active learning actively in the workshops enabled me to better my practice and make use of workshops effectively'.

There were also comments with regard to techniques and activities used in the workshops and how they use them in their practice: 'I think that brain storming could be used practically for all topics. This is now a technique that I use most. I will use mental maps and competition activities next year'.

Understandably there are also teachers who have hesitations concerning implementing active learning in their classes. They do not object the active learning in principle but bring out some concerns in terms of viability of this approach in Turkish context. For them conditions in Turkey act as barrier to implement such approach in Turkey. In this respect, while 32.2% (6.4%) of them support it strongly of the teachers believe that Turkey has appropriate conditions to apply active learning, 38.7% of them stated that it is partly possible to do so. Almost one third of the teachers by 28, 9% (9 or 6% of them strongly disbelieve) also do not believe that conditions in Turkey yet allow active learning.

Teachers revealed why they are pessimistic about the application of active learning in history and social studies classes: the main reason for their pessimism stems from the conditions they have in schools. What is meant by school conditions are usually centered on explanations about crowded classes, lack of materials and low levels of student ability. While one teacher in this respect stated that 'active learning is applicable provided that class level and cohort is appropriate', another one said that 'I could implement active learning to the extent that school conditions allow me'. Teachers usually stressed inappropriateness of school conditions rather than inappropriateness of active learning. The following words of a teacher clearly indicate this notion: 'What we experienced in these workshops are well thought and prepared methods. If they are applied in the classroom they could be really productive but I think that it is not possible to do such lesson in schools where we even cannot obtain basic materials'.

To implement active learning in schools effectively and adequately, many factors should conform to the demands of such education. A wide range of factors such as school leadership, teachers' competence, supply of materials, the number of students, and layout of classrooms should conform to requirements of active learning. However, teachers' attitudes and competence concerning with the active learning is the most important factor because many activities

such as brain storming, writing of letter, story, poetry or press conference do not require extra finance or materials. On the other hand though, it is obvious that it is not possible to implement every active learning technique in crowded classrooms.

It is useful to stress the position of traditional methods in respect to active learning. The idea of that students would learn everything themselves is a misleading one. Teachers' primary responsibility / task is to have their students learn (Leask-Moorhouse, 2005:8). Teachers should take needs and objectives into account. While encouraging and supporting students when they do the right things, teachers should correct students if they do wrong. In this stage students are in need of listening to their teachers (Allen-Taylor-Turner, 2005:261). Since teachers have higher levels of knowledge and skills than students, they are required to explain some complex concepts or issues when necessary by intervening the activities. While teachers sometimes explain specific issues that are needed by students, other times the explanation could result from teachers' professional judgment. For these reasons, lecturing/ explaining things that are usually considered in the context of traditional approach could not be thought as something outside of active learning, since when used appropriately it is also an important technique in active learning.

Active Learning and Students

At the heart of active learning lie students because they experience the learning process by doing it first-hand. They are not the receivers who accept and take in everything transmitted to them. On the contrary, they take in the knowledge by re-constructing and re-processing it. For students there are a number of advantages of active learning. First and foremost they usually get enhanced personal enjoyment and satisfaction out of their learning experience compared to traditional methodologies and rote learning. Then they have opportunities to interact and work with their peers within teams, they are enabled to access a wide degree of class participation in tasks, and may also see the value of co-operative learning rather than competitive learning: hands-on learning requires co-operation between students, and the emphasis is placed upon thinking though discussing with peers and especially with the teacher (Allen-Taylor-Turner, 2005:261).

Greater participation of students in their learning process and the realisation of learning based upon experiences means more hands-on learning, and it is known that those students who learn through hands-on activities achieve more highly than those who learn by traditional approaches. Besides, students prefer hands-on activities as they are more motivated in such activities

(Sundem, M.M, Dikiewicz, 2008:4). As for hands-on activities, students could be asked to read, write and work with maps through work sheets. Students have different preferences for learning such as reading, writing, drawing and acting. Classroom activities should include and harmonise visual materials, numeric data, concepts and primary sources. These activities then could be organised into tasks that small group of students attempt to achieve. Small groups are more productive and effective than large groups (Davies, Lynch, Davies, 2007:1–4).

The main criticism brought to traditional methods in teaching history and social studies is that it leads students to have reduced memorisation skills, because active learning takes time and less ground is covered than in didactic, lecture style, lessons. Almost all teachers believe that active learning prevents students from memorising as much information, but the same teachers feel that *understanding* and transferability of skills are enhanced greatly; and that learning to learn independently is very important. This notion was stressed by a teacher as follows: ‘The best side of active learning is to engage students with finding/constructing knowledge rather than memorising’. Another teacher commented on the easy and fun nature of active learning, saying that ‘active learning supports a fun, hands-on and participative learning and prevents students from clichés and memorising. It keeps students’ motivation high and allows teacher to reach every student. It allows us to see different perspectives’.

Therefore, instead of students who isolate themselves and achieve a surface learning because of traditional teaching methods, a student who is taught using active learning is active in every phase and dimension of the class. One teacher who shares this view said that ‘instead of traditional, habitual, monolithic methods, we should use interesting, attention gathering, participative methods’. Another one asserted that ‘to me the most useful side of active learning is to help solving common problems through group work’.

Assessment

Assessment in a learning environment in which students are at the centre of active participation in classroom activities is multi-dimensional assessment. Since active learning emphasises activity-based learning, assessment should be designed to reflect the process and achievements of students during these activities. It is, of course, not necessary to measure everything, nor to assess things about which we already have a secure and recent understanding of the level of pupil skills and knowledge. Creative assessment techniques are needed for active learning. By these alternative methods, what is aimed is

to see the achievements of students after activities, to encourage further achievements, to help students recognise their achievements and strengths and identify developmental targets and extend their achievement; feedback to students, to teachers themselves and to parents about students' progression and how to support them in further development are also desirable.

Some of the techniques that could be used in history and social studies lessons could be summarised as follows:

- observation forms;
- self-assessment forms;
- group evaluation forms;
- attitude scales;
- concept maps;
- performance evaluation;
- portfolios;
- rubric scales;
- multiple choice tests;
- research sheets;
- projects;
- interviews;
- discussions;
- demonstration;
- anecdotes and
- open-ended questions.

On many occasions students might not even know they are being assessed, and not all of any class need be assessed, provided a balance is provided over time and teachers *and* pupils have a good grasp of their performance and targets.

Conclusions and Implications

The road from behaviourist approach to constructivism and active learning reflects a contemporary transformation in teaching and learning process. Constructivism, popular since the 1970s, is now accepted widely and has been changing the nature of teaching ever since. Although a great range of materials are available to plan a lesson in history and social studies in the context of active learning, the access to these materials requires some effort, and teachers must work to provide these materials. However, this should not be used as an excuse not to implement an active learning approach in lessons. Those teachers who embrace the philosophy and principles of active learning can still actively engage their students despite limited materials and with minimum costs.

When constructing curricula, developers should take active learning requirements into account. Even if the curriculum is constructed conforming to active learning principles, we still have two important issues: textbooks and teachers. The writing and design of textbooks are important as many teachers in Turkey tend to follow what is in their textbook. However, an individual teachers' approach to active learning is even more important. In order to ease teachers' transformation from behaviourist approaches to constructivist and active learning approaches, they should go through effective in-service training. In the workshops provided to history and social studies teachers in the context of project clearly showed that teachers are open to innovative learning and teaching methods and do not find it difficult to adapt these new methods and techniques Once they are demonstrated in a conducive atmosphere and in a supportive professional context.

The responsibility to provide students with learning experiences, which helps to bring out their abilities and qualities, supports them to realise themselves, and does not see students as empty containers, falls upon every educational stakeholder from the central ministry to local educational authorities, school management, teachers, learners and parents. What is immediately needed to be paid attention is to re-organise learning in schools to cater for active learning environment, starting with classroom layout; the number of students in classes; supplies of materials; and copying facilities- the immediate problems that need to be resolved.

It is also important to remind ourselves that active learning does not totally remove or ignore traditional , but provides a wider skills base for teachers and in fact may cause traditional approaches to be used more effectively. Under this approach the teacher has a role in every stage of the lesson from planning to organise learning within the classroom and assessment.

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