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The implementation of oral history on child games and toys: Computer games versus hand-made toys

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Abstract

After the new educational programs launched in 2005, the new teaching methods used in Social Studies courses came to the fore. The oral history is one of those teaching methods highlighted in the Turkish Social Studies Teaching Program. Oral history as a way of teaching method is new to both teachers and students. Thereby, the present study aims to implement oral history within school settings and to find out students' viewpoints about the process that they experienced as well as their achievement in conducting oral history on child games and toys. The study is planned in the line of constructivist research orientation where action research among qualitative designs is benefitted. The state school students (n=60) who are 5 graders participated in the study. Students in groups of three make a research about "change and continuity" of child games and toys from past to present. Additionally, they carried out interviews with adults above 50 using the principles of oral history. They compiled their research and interview data to form their oral history report. Students' oral history reports and interview forms and diaries are the data collection tools of the research. Content analysis was realized in the study. The results of the analysis indicated that most of the groups were successful in conducting oral history. Also majority of the groups emphasized that they were happy to function as "little historians".

Keywords: Social studies, oral history, action research.

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1. Introduction

Oral history, the term globally used by historians, confronts us as a data collection method. The data collection method in which, especially, the witnesses based on investigated historical phenomenon or conception come to the fore particularly draws attention within bringing out 'history from below' (Counce, 2001; Carlson, 2002; Danaci, 2010; Thompson, 1999). Although oral history includes political history and its related issues, it mainly focuses on the issues and conceptions of social and cultural history.

Apart from the usage of academic historians, oral history also functions as a teaching method at school level. It lasts long time as a project assignment. Nevertheless, thanks to oral history, students find an opportunity to experience the steps academic historians pursued. Therefore, students function as 'little historians' (Kabapinar & Koc, 2013). Moreover, some of the skills that students are able to obtain thanks to oral history studies are mentioned below:

- The students' research skills can be improved.
- Their questioning skills can be developed.
- It can be contributed to develop their chronologic perception.
- The students find an opportunity to learn by experience and practice.
- It helps students learn such conceptions as continuity and change.
- The students' skills to prepare interview questions, collect data, analyze and interpret.
- It functions as a bridge between school and life.
- It is possible to gain information based on documents.
- It can be the voice of the individuals at the bottom of the society.
- Observation skill can develop.
- Organization skill can improve.
- The students gain a new point of view (Demircioglu, 2005).

To utilize oral history in educational area allows the student to get through the history textbook and to perceive history from a different point of view. Moreover, it provides the student to ascertain an issue that nobody knows or does not occur to anybody and, thereby, explore a new world (Sari, 2007). The learning activities process, based on oral history, structured in primary, secondary and, even higher education level involves four steps (Kabapinar, 2005):

1. *Preparation Stage:* Investigating primary/secondary sources.
Identifying the participants to be interviewed.
Determining the questions of interview.
2. *Practice Stage:* Addressing the question and recording the answers via tape recorder.
Analyzing the recorded data.
3. *Reporting Stage:* Managing the data.
Writing the report with primary and secondary sources.

4. *In-class Presentation Stage:* The stage of present the work to the students, parents and all the ones who are interested in history via exhibition.

Since the process of oral history is highly intensive, it is crucial that teachers share the subjects between the groups of 2-3 in terms of enhancing the quality and socialization. In this context, another important characteristic of oral history emerges, that is, oral history; far from a study based on a competition, improves and reinforces group solidarity. The groups are happy to have the opportunity to research together and succeed. However, in Social Studies Curriculum in 2004, 'listening, observation, asking a question, managing the information, finding the related information from a pile of information, having a better understanding of previous generations and perceiving the change and continuity by appraisal' (Ministry of National Education, 2005). After completing the oral history studies, it is also important for students to present it to their friends. Therefore, the teacher has the opportunity to evaluate the students in terms of the steps mentioned above via 'Oral History

Evaluation Form', 'Self- Assessment Form' and/or 'Peer Assessment Form' they prepared (Kabapinar, 2007).

As a result, the present study aims to launch oral history studies as a new teaching method in class, receive and evaluate the students, teachers and parents' opinions based on this issue. In this context, the research question is determined as 'How do the practice steps of teaching method process of oral history realize?'

2. Method

The present study is a qualitative research and the research design is action research. 60 students (36 female, 24 male) who are in 5 grades in state school in Sultangazi, Istanbul participated in this study. *Oral History Project Reports, Pre and Post Test, Diaries and Parent Questionnaire Form* are utilized as data collection instruments. At the end of the project, students are asked to prepare, as a group, a project report based on the definition of oral history, what they have learnt during the process and how the project has had an impression on them. The rubrics related to the project have been distributed to students. It is aimed to reveal how oral history conception is perceived by the students via *pre and post tests* which are the first and last steps of the projects. The students are also expected to report a diary as a data collection instrument to find out their experiences, feelings and opinions during the project. Moreover, an interview was held with 9 students, participating in oral history process, based on their studies. A 4-question-form was prepared for the parents with the purpose of evaluating the process the student participated in and it was distributed the ones who attended in exhibition. 17 parents out of 32 gave a feedback.

Content analysis, one of the methods of qualitative data analysis, was fulfilled on the obtained data. The data, coded under certain categories, were digitized and the results were offered as tables. The data were analyzed by a second researcher. "Reliability= Number of reconciliation/Reconciliation + Number of irreconcilableness" formula was realized. Percentage of coherency is revealed below:

Pre and Post test on average	% 89
Diaries on average	% 86
Student interviews on average	% 81
Parent Questionnaire on average	% 87

It is assumed that the consistency of analysis in both researchers is high since the rates are over %70 (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3. Findings

3.1. How do the practice steps of teaching method process of oral history realize?

Before preparing the work, students were separated into 20 groups, the name of which they chose themselves. Briefly, each group includes 3 students. The groups were distributed in a way that, within two subjects, ten groups had games and other ten groups had toys. Some of the names the groups preferred are listed: 'Little Historians', 'Scholars', 'Fantastic Historians', 'Wise Historians', 'History Road', 'Little Scholars', 'The Children of History', 'The History Hunters', 'Time Travel'.

During the process, a student (S8) summarized the needs for the oral history below:



Sadece somutlarda yapayın insanlarda geçmişime yaparız.
Yitip, internet gibi kaynaklarda yararlanabiliriz.

Figure 1. An answer (S8) about oral history

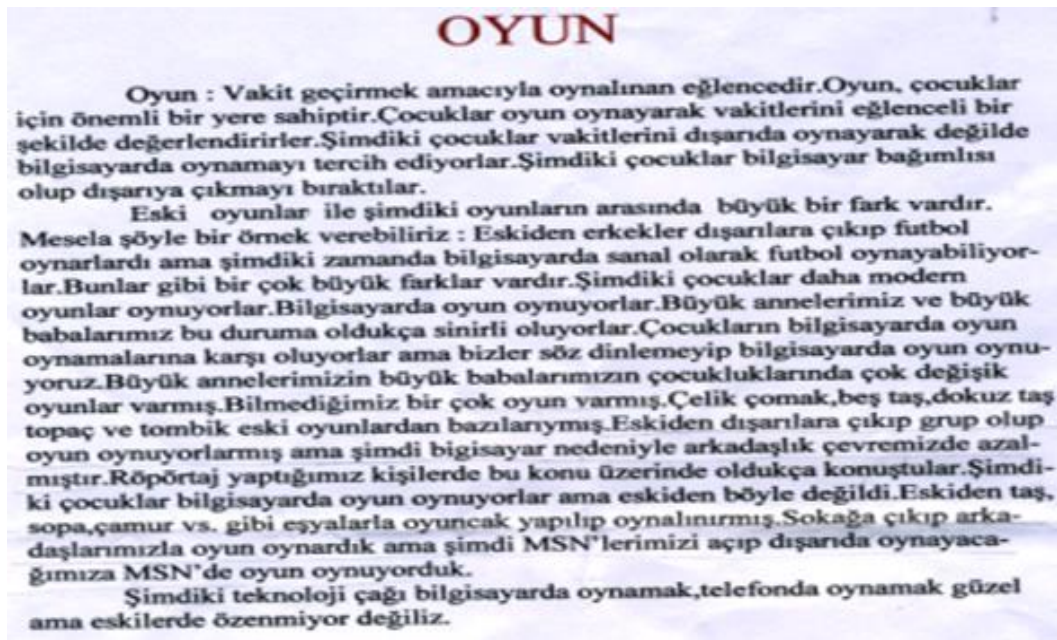
**S8: By interviewing the people lived in old times.
By benefitting such resources as books, internet, etc.**

The students are able to both gain information related to the subject by benefitting from such resources as books and internet, called as secondary resources, and gain the necessary perception for the question they would ask. The interviews commenced following the preparation of questions and teacher's confirmation. Each group is asked to interview at least 4 individuals over 50. Then, they prepared their research reports in light of the information obtained from both the interview and secondary resources. The grades given to their reports, prepared as groups, via rubric are listed below:

Table 1. The analysis results of outputs based on students' oral history project study

Grade Interval	Level of Quality	Number of Students
85-100	Excellent	7
70-84	Very Good	5
45-69	Fair	6
0-44	Poor	2
Total		20

The oral history study has been fulfilled with these participants for the first time. However, it can be stated that, when investigated the process and outputs, oral history teaching method is relatively successful. Throughout the research process, the students prepared a file both as an individual and a group. The file was included the works the gained from the study, their own outputs, CD's which involve video record samples, game/toy chronologies and photo/drawings of the toys exhibited in the exhibitions by them. Among the students' other outputs are the diaries written as an individual or a group, the works prepared as a group, their interviews and game/toy material they prepared. A section from the prepared work is mentioned below:



**Figure 2. A part of interview
Game**

Games are often carried out for entertainment. Game is of important place in a child's life. Children spend their times enjoyably by playing games. However, nowadays, children prefer playing computer games instead of playing games outside. They become addicted to computer and abandon going out.

There is a huge difference between games in today and past. For instance, boys used to go out and play football in the past, but, now they can play football on computers. Today's children play more modern games. They play computer games. Our grandparents are very angry about this. They are opposed to play games on computers, but, we, as children, do not obey them and keep playing. There used to be different games in their times. There are so many games that we do not know such as tip cat, jacks, 'Nine Men's Morris, Bayblade and tombik (a local toy). In the past, they used to go out and play as a group. Now, we have less friends due to the computers. The ones who we interviewed stated this issue. Nowadays, children play on the computers, but, in the past, they did not. In the past, the toys were made from stone, stick, mud, etc and they used to go out and play with their friends. However, now, we play on MSN instead of playing outside. It is good to play in computers and mobile phones but we also emulate the past.

When investigated carefully, students underlie 'the conception of game and its importance for the children' in the introduction section in their assignment. Then, they compare the games in the past with the today's games in terms of their positive and negative dimensions. The students interpret the today's children's preference playing games on computers instead of going out as 'addiction to computers'. Playing football on computers substitutes with playing football outside. The data from the interviews reveals that grandparents are not happy with this situation. Then, in light of the data from the interviews, they mention the names of the games in the past: 'tip cat, jacks, dokuz (nine stones), bayblade and tombik' the games are foreigners to them. The data from the interviews stated that these games were played by groups. The toys were made from such materials as stone, stick, mud. Nowadays, they prefer MSN to playing outside. The students expressing that technology is good for our era also emulate the past. The whole assignment reveals that the students present the change and continuity dimensions successfully. Both the present and the past, the positive and the negative were mentioned. After preparing the assignment, it has been decided to prepare an exhibition which has student- parent meeting come to fore. The students presented their assignment and illustrations on the board in the exhibitions. Moreover, they presented the toys which they borrowed from the elders and they produced together. They, even, play the games, played in the past, they learnt during the research with the elders in the schoolyard. It should be noted here that some of the students' parents also experienced nostalgic moments. Some of the photographs from the exhibition are presented below:



Figure 4. Photographs about exhibition

The students are happy to exhibit their assignments and samples based on games and toys. The main purpose of education is to enhance self-confidence of the students. It has been assumed that it was managed thanks to this study. The parents, similarly, are happy to witness what their children did and they are proud of this. However, one of the parents in Parent Questionnaire summarizes as below:

Kızımın bu araştırma esnasında en çok beni tatmin eden başarısı tek başına benim desteğim olmadan bir şeyleri basarması, öğretilen gelmesi ve gönüllülerini grup içinde yönetmesi, guruba liderlik yapması Basarmak için çaba sarfetmesi beni gerçekten memnun etti!

Figure 5. Parents (P6) view about exhibition

P6: *The most satisfying thing is that my daughter managed something without my support, her being self-confident, presenting her opinions and being a leader in a group. I am very happy to see that she really struggled to success.*

P6 is one of the parents who attended the exhibition and questionnaire. S/he expresses her/his opinions on his/her daughter who prepares an assignment during the process. Among the statements, 'success', 'enhancing self-confidence', 'presenting her opinions to a group', 'being a leader in a group', 'struggling' may be regarded as the other skills oral history can develop. There are the statements of a student from her/his diary and the statements of a student in the interviews below:

Bugün "Sözlü Tarih'i" araştırdım. Kendimi bir araştırmacı gibi hissettim.

Figure 6. A student's (S26) statement

S26: *Today, I research about 'Oral History'. I feel like a researcher.*

S26 states in her/ his diary that s/he 'feels like a researcher.' It is one of impressions that oral history make the students feel. Gaining experience like 'a little researcher/ historian.' S7, however, states in the interview as below:

S7: It was entertaining to listen to the games in the interviews and old games. We have learnt a lot of new games. I play the games both at school and outside. My friend, Şevval, for instance, was playing jacks. They have learnt the games from the elders. She had beautiful marbles. Then, we began to play, and now, I play it with my friends outside.

S7 states that s/he is happy to hear about the old games from the elders during the interviews. However, it appears that s/he adopt the games into her/his real life. Moreover, s/he is not the only student who managed this. Two students out of the other students who are included in the study have begun to play games with their friends outside. In this context, it should be well-noted here that oral history communed with, at least, these students' life.

4. Results and discussion

Although oral history method is a student- centered method, it is possible to realize it either as an individual or a group. The statement of this study is game and toy. It is, similarly, possible to realize this study within social and cultural issues such as 'neighborhood in time', 'old and new feasts', 'love and falling love in time', 'being a woman in past and present', 'entertain in past and present.'

The students, relatively, have become successful in this study although they are 5th grades and participate in this kind of study for the first time. They have learnt about the games that they do not know and experience from their elders. Moreover, two generations, 40 years apart from one another, have struggled to grasp and empathize with one another. However, primary school students have experienced that game and toy have acquired new quality within change and continuity context, but they have understood about the continuity of the context of children's need for games and toys. In conclusion, oral history, beyond an ordinary textbook, comes to fore as a teaching method which offers new perceptions and experiences to students.

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