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# A Comparative Study on Primary Pupils' Historical Questioning Processes in Turkey and England: Empathic, Critical and Creative Thinking

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## Abstract

This study is part of a larger ongoing Project. In this project, the documents (video recordings and transcripts) which were collected by the recording of history lessons that were taught in different countries, have been analyzed in order to identify ways in which children are involved in historical enquiry rather than didactic teaching, as a basis for comparison, discussion and development. According to the project aim, in this study, history lessons taught in a primary school in Turkey and in England were comparatively analyzed. In the Turkish lesson, pupils work in groups to interpret information in texts, maps and pictures, in order to reconstruct events surrounding the Battle of Ankara in poetry, art, drama and music. In the English lesson, children found out about Ancient Egypt's ways of daily life, also working in groups. The data gathered from these lessons –through a case study in England and an action research in Turkey- were recorded via video and the video recordings were transcribed. The documents were analyzed through document and descriptive analyses. The analysis explores ways in which pupils extract information, transfer it to new contexts and express it from different viewpoints. It shows how, in discussing sources, pupils gradually become independent of adult support, spontaneously use special vocabulary introduced by the teacher in new contexts and use causal vocabulary. It is concluded that pupils are engaged in the process of historical enquiry to the extent that, in an embryonic way, they explore the past, interrogate sources to construct interpretations which include presenting the information from different perspectives and developing arguments, using specialised vocabulary. The significance of classroom organisation and ethos in developing historical enquiry is considered.

## Key Words

History Teaching, Turkey, England, Historical Resources, Collaborative Learning

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The current approach to the discipline of history emphasises that historical enquiry involves asking questions about different kinds of sources, in order to make deductions and inferences about the past (Collingwood, 1939), and so learning that, because evidence is often incomplete and of varying status, and is selected and combined to construct accounts of the past, interpretations may vary but be equally valid. This process underpins the new history teaching, which has been a common approach for some time.

Below we will briefly explain the new history teaching approach and its main principles that may help to interpret our research findings.

### **New History Approach and Use of Sources**

The process mentioned above is used not only by historians but also by history educators. Because there is no unique perspective of history (see Jenkins, 1997) the discourse of history is the interpretation of historians, in which they reflect their thoughts and perspectives (Karabag, 2002), as well as historical facts. There is no single, correct view of the past. These arguments are agreed not only by historians but also by specialist history teachers. Recently, there has been a ‘constructivist’ approach, reflecting the relation to the ‘procedural’ discipline of historical enquiry. This has been called “new history teaching”. It includes the use of sources, enquiring, interpreting and comparing, solving historical problems ...etc. and is adopted widely in Europe. According to numbers at top, Stradling (2003, s. viii) emphasizes the importance of students developing a critical approach to historical facts and findings. And that they should learn and apply thinking skills that are important in terms of historical consciousness and interpretation.

According to Nichol, “to get pupils to ‘Do History’ in the round, the Nuffield Primary History Project established seven principles: challenge, questioning, depth, authentic sources, economy, accessibility and communication” (cited in Yapıcı, 2006, pp. 34-35). The English National Curriculum for History (<http://curriculum.qca.uk>) is based on similar principles. When we examine these principles, we can conclude that the use of sources or evidence based learning is an important skill in the new history teaching. Copeland (1998) states that “the important factor in a constructivist approach to teaching

history is the ability to inquire of the evidence". He also says "wherever possible children will have access to real sources of evidence" ( p. 122).

Bruner (1963) says that re-construction is an important factor in learning process. Both in Turkish and English classroom practices, students worked in groups in order to make different versions of historical interpretation. They managed to re-construct knowledge in a different form by using variety of sources.

### **Historical Imagination**

We cannot know how people in the past thought and felt because they lived within different social structures, knowledge bases, and value systems. We can only infer this through making suppositions, based on what is known. Collingwood (1939) tried to clarify the relationship between interpreting evidence and interpreting the thoughts and feelings of the people who made it. Elton (1970) called this 'historical imagination'. Suppositions are valid if they are based on what is known, seems reasonable and if there is no conflicting evidence. Using historical imagination is a skill, which this history teaching approach aims to develop.

It's known that historians use historical imagination when they think the data are inadequate or incomplete to make historical accounts (Dilek, 2002a, pp. 98-99). Yeager and Foster (2001, p. 15) indicate that "historical imagination also comes into play, not as a fanciful notion but, as Roger asserts, as an intelligent re-creation of a situation given an understanding of its context, outcomes, and evidence". They claim that (2001, p. 13) empathy "is a powerful tool for understanding history" and "empathy merits specific attention because historians must bring it to their inquiry in order to analyze the events, and words of key figures in the historical record". However they believe that historical empathy is more than simply sympathy or 'imagination exercises'.

### **Collaborative Learning**

In each lesson, the children were involved in collaborative group work and try to answer questions about the past. Collaborative group work allows pupils to work as teams, draw on their collective ex-

expertise, support each other and work together to solve problems. It requires commitment (Belbin, 2003). Learning to work in a group is also an important to social and emotional development and a life skill. Well-structured, collaborative activities increase time on task. Research has suggested that such small group activities enhance learning since cognition is intrinsically social (Hamlyn, 1982; Bennett & Dunne, 1992; Galton & Williamson, 1992).

Although history as a discipline has no specific aim for developing democratic attitudes, learning to question, to form opinions, develop arguments and respect to others' ideas is central to an open society (Dilek, 2002a; Öztürk & Dilek, 2003; Safran, 2002).

Ashby and Lee (1987) found that children reached higher levels of understanding when discussing an historical event or problem amongst themselves than they could achieve on their own.

Group work also facilitates dialogue which stimulates and extends children's thinking, as children construct meaning from interaction between what they know and what they encounter and also from spoken language with children, teachers and the wider culture. Children must think for themselves before they know and understand (Alexander, 2006).

### **Historical Language**

History is a kind of discourse and a linguistic and textual structure according to the current historiography paradigm (Jenkins, 1997; Munslow, 2000; Oppermann, 2006). Since the past cannot be directly experienced it can only be investigated through language. Some concepts used to investigate and describe the past are not peculiar to history yet are not used in 'everyday exchanges' for example, customs, empire, border, irrigation. Some concepts are developed by historians: Ancient Egypt. Some are words no longer in common use (shaduf, quern, and underworld). Some are words particular to a period in the past (pyramid). Some language describes the process of historical enquiry, of the passing of time and cause and effect, (because, therefore). Some concepts are organizing ideas, which run through human societies: law, trade. Children need to be introduced to such concepts and to have opportunities to use them in discussion. Vygotsky (1962) showed that concepts are learned by

trial and error; by hearing new concepts, then having the opportunity to try them out. He said that concept development could be promoted by careful use of significant new concepts by the teacher and that this promotes intellectual growth and discussion.

Piaget (1926) identified a pattern in the development of children's ability to relate a statement to its premise. Young children leap from a premise to an unreasonable conclusion. Maybe because of their lack of vocabulary, adults make no sense at first glance about their conclusions (see Dilek & Yapıcı, 2003). Next, they communicate facts and descriptions. Later, the statement is followed by explanations, which become increasingly explicit. Gradually, they learn to use words such as 'because'. It's also important to teach the concepts of causality in history teaching.

We can understand how the language constructs a historical narrative and the role of the language of causality by examining the Ricoeur's sentences below:

"It doesn't limit itself to saying: the King died, the Queen died. It says: the King died, then the Queen died of grief. A "because" has sneaked in between the two events, testifying to the fact that even the most insubstantial story contains a passage from "this and then that" to "this because of that". It's the story's inherent explanatory potential that history raises to a higher critical level, and in so doing makes the narrative connection itself a mode of argument." (quoted in Yapıcı, 2006, p. 59).

It's important to help developing students to use the language of causality and give them opportunities to use this language.

### **Aim of Research**

Current history teaching approaches and practices that are emphasised above aim for children to study, in an embryonic way, like an historian and to acquire "doing history" skills. It is mainly focused on applying historical enquiring and thinking to first and second order historical sources and so a project called "Teaching History to Ten Year Olds in a Range of European Countries" has been organized in order to find out how these skills are being acquired in a range of European Countries including England, France, Switzerland, Romania and Turkey.

The aim of the project is to identify the extent to which ten-eleven year olds in a range of European countries learn history through the process of historical enquiry, irrespective of content, as a basis for comparing similarities and differences and for further development.

According to the project's aim this study also aims to analyze history lessons comparatively which were taught in a primary school in Turkey and in England. Thus, Alexander (2003, p.27) says that "education positively requires, and positively benefits from, a comparative imagination and comparative understanding".

The other aims of the study can be seen below

- Comparing the topic and the content of the lessons
- Comparing the working groups and learning activities during the lesson
- Comparing the similarities and differences in classroom layouts
- Comparing the process of using sources and the process of historical enquiring/thinking.
- Analyzing the collaborative learning comparatively
- Comparing the using of language and historical concepts

It's important to investigate classroom processes but these "are very seldom studied in depth cross-culturally" (Schweisfurth, 1996, p. 7). Similarly also in Turkey cross-cultural investigations are usually focused on analyzing history text books and the curricula. So this study is important to investigate classroom processes cross-culturally.

## **Method**

Qualitative approaches allow us to make deep analysis in order to find out actual meaning of the phenomena (Kuş, 2003, s. 78). Qualitative research methods are used in this study, because learning processes including historical thinking and learning can be analyzed deeply through these methods. As this is a qualitative research, population is not mentioned (see Ekiz, 2003; Muşlu & Macaroğlu Akgül, 2006). Participants are grade 6 pupils from a primary school in Istanbul/Turkey and the pupils aged eleven from a primary school in Ambleside/England. Document analysis is used to investigate the documents of the teaching practices. The documents of the

study are the video recordings and the transcripts of history lessons in Turkey and in England.

Yıldırım and Şimşek (1999, p. 140) emphasize that it can be used as a single method to analyze data or with the other qualitative methods together. So it's aimed to analyze comparatively the learning activities and the processes of historical thinking/enquiring.

Through document analysis data can be investigated from different perspectives and in different contexts by different researchers (Yapıcı, 2006, p. 63). "In a case study a level of validity can be reached by comparing researchers' point of views on the same data or can be reached different results from the same data" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 1999, p. 142).

Although some people argue that there is no need for validity and reliability in a qualitative study (Golafshani, 2003), some researchers think that there can be reliability and validity in low levels. Asking another researcher to analyse data for supporting the findings is one of the strategies used in order to increase the degree of reliability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 1999, p. 83). Data gathered from Turkey was analyzed in this study by the researchers and also analyzed by Yapıcı (2006). Her work is about history teaching approaches in different European Countries' (England, France, Switzerland, and Turkey). This study supports her research findings. It can be said that this study, to some degree, has reliability. There is a minimum space in qualitative research for generalizations because of the changing nature of social phenomena.

The history lesson recorded in England is defined as "a typical good practice" by the English researcher. This means the findings of the English lesson can be generalized to a low degree. On the other hand a teaching technique (thematic) applied in Turkey's social studies (history) lesson encouraged pupils to make historical enquiry and collaborative learning. Similar results were found when this teaching technique was applied in other works (see Dilek, 2002b; Canbaz, 2006). One can argue that it is possible to make some generalizations, which show the study's degree of validity.

The researcher in Turkey decided to do action research and participated in the research actively (Ekiz, 2003, p. 146) because there were no constructivist approaches in 2003 for social studies. There-



fore, the lesson was planned and practiced according to constructivist ideas in which the lesson was based on pupils' use of sources to make historical interpretations in Turkey.

### **Data Collection**

In this study, a history lesson taught to a class of eleven year-olds in Ambleside, England is compared with a history lesson taught to six grades in Istanbul, Turkey.

The data gathered from these lessons –through a case study in England and an action research in Turkey- were recorded via video. The video recordings were transcribed. The transcript of the Turkish lesson was translated into English and the researchers exchanged the data. At a meeting of researchers into history education convened by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (1995), it was agreed that young pupils can engage with historical enquiry in this way, that it is important that they should, before stereotypical ideas develop, and that small scale case studies may be the best way forward (see Capita & Cooper, 2000). A case study aims at deeply analyzing, understanding, interpreting and changing a specific case. The Turkish lesson was recorded in 20.07.2003 and the English lesson in 27.03.2003.

### **Procedures**

Data were analyzed through document and descriptive analysis in the following categories: the lesson topic and content, working groups and activities, classroom layout, use of sources and the processes of historical thinking, collaborative learning, language and concepts.

### **Results**

Both lessons involved collaborative group work, which allows pupils to draw on collective expertise, to discuss and to work as a team.

In the Turkish lesson, children used sources to create accounts of the Battle of Ankara (1430) in poetry, art, writing, music and role play. In the English lesson children found out about Ancient Egypt. They used photographs of primary sources in books and from the internet to create 'radio programmes', and investigated

Ancient Egypt through kinaesthetic activities (Bruner, 1966). These included: a puppet show about an Egyptian myth, making Ancient Egyptian costumes, writing their names in hieroglyphics, decorating mummy cases, making a model shaduf and to trying to find out how pyramids were constructed.

In the English class, children worked for a whole day on the theme, in small, rotating groups. In the Turkish class children worked in one of five groups to create their reconstructions of the Battle of Ankara, then each group presented, in turn, to the class.

In both classes there were links with other subjects. The Turkish class used illustrations of the Battle, written documents and maps. They presented their accounts through drama, poetry and music. The English lesson involved design and technology (pyramids, puppets, costume), science, (shaduf, quern), mathematics (Egyptian game), and role play.

There is a trend to advocate social and cultural history. An understanding that focuses on human behaviours and actions started with Annales School instead of pure political history tradition (Burke, 2006, p.24). Likewise, thoughts and feelings of people in the past can only be inferred from shared humanity, what we know of their actions, and of the societies in which they lived (Collingwood, 1939). There were several examples in the Turkish class of pupils drawing on sources to express opinions from the point of view of a given person; arguments from the point of view of Timur, different opinions amongst Beyezit's advisors. The English children tried to understand what a guest at an Egyptian banquet might have felt like and to explain myths by making inferences from sources and combining these with their own experience of life.

Both the English and the Turkish adults offered clues to initiate discussion. 'That's a good suggestion. What should we do?' (Turkey). 'What question are you trying to answer?' (England). Adults intervened to check understanding. 'There were two opposite ideas. What were they?' (Turkey). 'How do you know they had jewellery like that?' (England).

#### Pupil/Pupil

Vygotsky (1962), and most recently Alexander (2006), emphasised the importance of dialogue in taking thinking forward. There were

examples of this in both classes.

A Turkish group: ...'We'll say until sunset....'

'When the letter arrives four sunsets will have passed!'

'So how long will it take to convey the letter from here to there?'

'How many days does it take by horse?'

'We'll give it a week....'

An English group

'How did Isis become pregnant after Osiris died? He was away a long time before he died.'

'It's a mystery. We shall never know.'

'In one version Isis turns into a kite and flies over her body!'

'I don't think that can be true.'

'There are different versions...'

Sources must be interpreted through language. Historical concepts may be organising ideas which run through societies (power, conflict). Others are not exclusively historical (law, trade). Some are words no longer used. Some are devised by historians to describe an historical period or event. Vygotsky (1962) showed that concepts are learned by trial and error. By selecting and encouraging pupils to use specialised concepts teachers can promote intellectual growth. Pupils in the Turkish lesson spontaneously used concepts introduced in the introduction by the teacher: empire, edict, military campaign, Battle of Ankara. Special vocabulary used by the English pupils included: mummified, pyramid, wall painting, shaduf.

Piaget (1926) identified patterns in children's ability to use causal connectives. Perhaps because of lack of vocabulary young children sometimes appear to leap from one premise to an unconnected conclusion (Dilek & Yapıcı, 2003). The Turkish children, however, used a great deal of causal vocabulary. Perhaps this was because they were discussing a sequence of events: 'so that', 'therefore', 'because', 'the reason why...'. The English children, who were comparing and contrasting Ancient Egypt and their lives today, used more comparative vocabulary: now / then; similar/ different.

## Discussion

Consequently, as Ata (2002) points out, the use and re-production of documents and of other sources, is related to both historical enquiry and educational theory based on the thought that pedagogic (school) history should introduce methods of academic history through which pupils may develop historical skills.

Despite the very different content, it was possible to demonstrate that both Turkish and English lessons were based on constructivist theories of learning which enabled pupils to engage, in embryonic ways, with the processes of historical enquiry employed by historians.

The analysis also reveals the need to capture and analyse more small group discussions, (Cooper, 1996) if we are to discover how interaction develops thinking. Following this analysis we may use microphones for each group to record all of their dialogue and allow them to work outside the classroom to minimise extraneous noise.

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