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Management Of Self-Studies During Assignment Hours In Multigrade Classes

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Abstract

One of the study types that is particular to multigrade classes is self-study of students. This study style offers a comfortable work environment for teachers who teach all grades together. The method of study that distinguishes multigrade classes from others is that assignment and teacher hours are planned. Assignment hours are the times when students study by themselves. These times should not be considered as the times when students study without purpose, excursively and freely. On the contrary, it is needed to plan and practice learning and teaching process, and then make evaluation through the studies. The purpose of this study is to establish recommendations and practical examples on how the planning, application and evaluation of self-study of students during assignment hours in multigrade classes can be managed.

Keywords: Multi-grade classes, self-study, practice hours

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1. Introduction

In Turkish education system, there are practices like mobile education, education in multigrade classes, normal education, and dual education depending on the settlements where the school is located. Education in multigrade classes is a type of education that is offered through one, two or three teachers in settlements where the number of students is low. Education in multigrade classes is also implemented in certain countries in the world and alternative solutions to this practice are sought (İzci, Duran and Tasar, 2010). About 35% of elementary schools in Turkey consist of schools with multigrade classes. According to data of Ministry of National Education for the school year of 2011-2012, 305,201 students study under the practice of multigrade class in 10,413 schools (Ministry of National Education, 2012a). Education in multigrade classes is a practice that is not specific to Turkey but implemented in countries like U.S., England, Sweden, Netherlands and Canada, and it is an alternative to applied education (Little, 2001 & cited by Kulekci, 2013). With the Law on Making Amendments to the Primary Education Law and Certain Laws, dated 30.03.2012 and no. 6287, it is established that 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades constitute the elementary school. According to a research conducted by Kulekci (2013), the 4+4+4 intermittent compulsory education has positive and negative impacts on multigrade classes. It is positive that not five grades but four grades are taught all together and the number of students has decreased. In physical terms, the school space has increased as fifth grades were separated, but the fact that children who are 60 and 72 months old are in the first grade all together causes many negative issues for students and teachers. Studies in these classes, especially the first grade, should be planned separately, and game-oriented studies should be featured for younger students and students who are not mature enough for school should be prepared for school. Self-studies of students during assignment hours in multigrade classes are specific to these classes. It especially offers a comfortable work environment for teachers who teach all grades together. The method of study that distinguishes multigrade classes from others is that assignment and teacher hours are planned. Assignment hours are the times when students study by themselves. These times should not be considered as the times when students study without purpose, excursively and freely. On the contrary, it is needed to plan and evaluate the studies. It has become more possible to implement assignment hours in a more planned way based on the new program introduced and books prepared by the Ministry of National Education. Student workbooks are designed in a way that students can read and understand and do homework or assessment by themselves without teachers. Students who cannot benefit from the workbook by themselves are first grade students. Therefore, a separate should be assigned to that class if possible. If not, the teacher should give assignment to first classes together with assistant students from third and fourth classes and younger students who are illiterate should not be left out of interest. The workbooks provide convenience for students, but these studies may cause boredom in students after some time or it may be needed to do extracurricular studies under the supervision of teacher at the school. These well planned studies which are evaluated at the end of course are learning opportunities that prepare students for life. School is life-oriented to the extent it teaches students who prepare for life the self-learning, making use of the time well and developing the self (Fidan, 1987). Schools which multigrade classes are the schools that exist due to geographical conditions, distance of settlements and limited number of students in small settlements but considered as if they do not exist, taught as a 2-hour course in faculties of education and realized by teachers when they are appointed. The number of studies conducted about these classes is limited in this field. Teachers who serve in such classes need publications about the subject. It is believed that this study will contribute to the literature about multigrade classes and management of self-studies during assignment hours in these classes, and thus it is important.

2. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to establish recommendations and practical examples on how the planning, application and evaluation of self-study of students during assignment hours in multigrade classes can be managed. Therefore, the study seeks answer to the following questions.

- 1- What should students who will study by themselves know?
- 2- What are the studies to be made in courses and classes and how should they be planned?

3. Method

In this study, a literature review was made using the general review model. Also, application examples are covered. General review model is described as research approaches that define an existing situation as is, and aim to collect data to determine certain characteristics of a group (Karasar, 2006 & Buyukozturk et al. 2010).

Self-studies during assignment hours

The management of teaching in multigrade classes is planned as teacher and assignment hours. In these classes, teacher should teach the courses of classes with teacher and plan and implement assignment work of classes with an assignment. Assignment hours allow the teacher to work with less students and groups. Assignment hours are a period of time which offers many advantages for students when they study by themselves and learn individually with a good planning, but students should have acquired certain behaviors before starting self-study. According to Alpaltun (2012), in such practices, it is essential for students to learn self-study and solve problems that they experience when studying. Students who prepare for life at the schools should be equipped with the habit of self-study and good time management during assignment hours. Giving assignment to students who lack the habit of using encyclopedia and dictionary may cause problems and prevent students from studying. At the beginning of school year, students should be checked if they acquired these behaviors, and missing behaviors should be taught through practices individually or as a group or class. A preparatory exercise should be made on how to look up in dictionary the words that are determined by the class. Some behaviors should be transferred in the form of game and competition, practices should be summarized in brief, in writing and orally, mistakes should be corrected together and good works should be displayed on boards. Classroom environment is a functional beauty and art space as well as a motivational center and offer convenience for students based on their characteristics (Aykaç, 2001). Classrooms should be arranged to make easier the application of teacher and assignment courses. Classroom library should be readily accessible to students, and have science and math, reading and activity corners. These corners should be equipped with various tools that will be used by the students. If students study outside the classroom, necessary and adequate measures should be taken, teacher should check the tools before the works start, sharp objects, bottled gas and electrical works should not be allowed. Students should not be allowed to get outside the schoolyard and it should be remembered that teacher is responsible for all students at the school. Measures should be taken against unexpected accidents and medicine cabinet should be available for use.

Behaviors to be acquired by students who will self study

Silent reading exercises

This habit should be brought in students starting from the first grade, and student should be asked questions about the text after silent reading and what and how much they have understood should be measured. To do so, questions with short answers may be asked in writing or orally. Questions under the text will also help the teacher.

Problem solving skill

Problem solving skill should be brought in not only in math courses but also other courses and activities. Students should do little exercises on how to solve a problem alone or as a group when they encounter any problem. In life studies, science and technology and social studies courses, looking for solutions to a common problem in the classroom or village and developing interesting solution proposals are necessary gains for the problem solving skill.

Reading, reading comprehension, summarizing

A written summary on what student understands at the end of oral and silent reading and finding main idea of the text are such exercises. Summarizing the texts, unit and theme preparation exercises, displaying these summaries on boards and sharing them with other students will bring in the skill of summarizing. All exercises will be checked and evaluated by the teacher or assistant students and mistakes will be corrected immediately.

Making research

Students should be given short research assignments such as determining weekly expenses of the family and times of spending, foods sold at the market and their prices, foods sold at the school canteen and their dates of expiry, how to make use of old toys and old books, public bodies in the vicinity and their way of operation, way of determination and procurement of school or classroom requirements, and measuring rise and fall times of the sun or moon, to make sure that they recognize problems suitable for their level and understand daily events, and then their results should be checked and these exercises should be displayed on the board.

Ability to use computer and internet

Besides computer courses, 3rd and 4th grade students should be taught how to use computer and tablet as a group or individually and assistance of students who know how to use the computer should be received. Students should do exercises at proper times to do homework online and make research.

Ability of group work

Study activities should be made during teacher courses and group work techniques should be implemented. Lower grades should do group work in company with higher grades or assistant students and students should be able to do necessary group work during assignment hours.

Ability to use atlas, map, mute maps, graphics and figures

These exercises should be made under the supervision of teacher during teacher courses first, and games like mountain and sea, creating map and finding country and city can be played during outdoor physical education courses. Afterwards, such habits should be brought with the assistance of older students.

Ability to create simple course tools

A help may be received from families or tool masters in creating simple course tools. The masters who are invited to the school may create or repair simple tools with the participation of all students. Students who are skilled in creating tools may accompany the students during assignment hours and they should create simple tools together and teacher must carry out creation of tools with the assistance of students.

Board preparation

Board preparation should be made by teacher and assistant students first and assistance of younger students should be received. At first, they should be created with the help of assistant students and then simple boards should be prepared.

Use of dictionary and other resources

The use of dictionary, encyclopedia and spelling book should be taught especially in Turkish courses starting from the first grade. Games like finding words in dictionary and finding items, mountains and seas by letters should be played during spare times and student should learn using dictionary in an entertaining way.

Using the bookcase of library

Students who are responsible for the books should organize practices for students about how to use the library during spare or suitable times. Students should select and study any book from the library during assignment hours.

Written, verbal, visual and figure expression

During the painting course, students should do practical exercises on written, verbal, visual and figure expression of their thoughts.

Habit of studying organized, orderly, planned and carefully

Students should be equipped with the habit of studying organized and orderly starting from the first grade. Inattentive studies should be warned and corrected by teacher or assistant students. Students may develop their awareness in this respect by checking the works of each other. Planned study is among the purposes of many courses. When assignment hours are planned and implemented with teacher or individually, then it will be observed after some time that students start acquiring this habit.

Time management

One of the important behaviors that students should acquire is the habit of using the time well. If the time is not used well during assignment hours, then these hours may be easily used as unproductive and idle times. Teacher should monitor the studies of assigned students from time to time and intervene when necessary or direct assistant students.

Chess, draughts, sudoku, tangram

Many habits such as problem solving, thinking and carefulness are brought in through such activities. These games also provide a silent environment required for assignment hours. In particular, these games may be played during hours with math assignments.

Observing, reporting the result

Lower grades may start studying by observing activities of higher grades, their schoolyard games, agricultural activities, the plants they grow, as well as the insects and birds in the garden. Observations which are once told verbally should be expressed in writing as students develop their literacy and this habit should be developed with the help of assistant students.

Agricultural exercises in the practice garden

Children who live in the village help their families in agricultural activities starting from young ages. They will be willing to participate in agricultural exercises at the school. Teacher may assign many agricultural exercises with 4th grades in the schoolyard. They may also support peasants by growing fruits and vegetables that are found less or not at all in the village.

Exercises to be made based on courses and classes

Social Studies:

Creation of a season chart may be covered with respect to the themes. Preliminary exercises related to themes may include research, review and observation, review from various resources, watching movies and slides, creating an album, board, and preparing texts, images and graphics that will be used on the board. Examining tools, instruments and models related to themes, preparing and making simple tests, writing results in report and presentation and reading books, magazines and articles may be suitable. Images and texts are researched in newspapers and magazines and a file is created.

First Grade

First grades should be able to cooperate with 2nd and 3rd grades in the beginning. Students may be divided by level groups and each group may study with the help of a student. Various puzzles about the themes will attract the attention of these grades. Activities such as painting and drawing about the theme, making observation about the themes, monitoring the exercises of 2nd and 3rd grades, and expressing observations through pictures, may be carried out. Exercises may be performed, such as creating family, city, occupation, fruit and vegetable album, making exercises about drawing on tales, cutting and pasting, cutting caricatures and images from newspapers.

Second Grade

Activities such as theme-based reading, writing and drawing may be carried out with these students who do not have any literacy problems. Suitable exercises for this grade include answering questions, making research and preliminary work about the themes, preparing documents to be displayed on the board, writing story, poem and observation results, preparation for festivals or special days and weeks, and preparing images and texts for the season chart.

Third Grade

Making theme-based research, observation, projects and season chart and arranging activity corners based on their levels are among the activities that the students will do willingly. In the social studies corner, it would be suitable to do free exercises, cooperate with 2nd grades, prepare and make trials, and observe and report the results. Writing preparatory questions about the theme and answering them, preparing visual presentation and slides and displaying them on the board are among the exercises.

Turkish

There are reading and writing exercises which include all courses It is not true to wait for the Turkish class for the reading and writing exercise. Students should write stories, poems, games, memories, free articles and texts about the themes in all courses. A game that is played in the physical training course, a song that is learnt in the music course, and a memory about a historical event covered in the social sciences course should be a part of the reading and writing exercises. Silent

reading and free reading exercises may be organized about novels, stories, articles, and anecdote. All works that are read, trips and observations and ceremonies may be written in summary. Free reading from resources like newspaper and magazine other than the textbook, and online blogs, various poem and story websites, school websites and student columns may be read.

First Grades

Reading and writing exercises should be made and these exercises should not bore the student. Recently learned words or sentences should not be written in several pages, and exercises should be made under the supervision of higher grades or assistant students. Edging the texts, writing poems, stories and anecdotes by looking, decorating the edges of notebooks with figures and images are among the exercises that the students will do without getting bored. Also, exercises may include writing on sand table, writing with beans and similar items, and creating and writing with news words, sentences and texts made of letters and words prepared from cardboard.

Second Grades

Preparing poems, anecdotes and stories about festivals and special days and weeks, reading them in silence, writing, preparing texts for boards, and reading free stories, newspapers and magazines may be suitable exercises. Answering questions about the theme covered in teacher courses, finding unknown words, using them in new sentences, making exercises about the theme in the workbook, creating self stories, and writing them are among the example exercises for this course.

Third Grades

Free reading exercises from story books, newspapers, magazines, computer and encyclopedia, free study and poem writing trials, writing diary and memories, preparing texts for display at the boards, arranging the boards and preparing various texts for the class or school newspaper may be some exercises. Answering assessment questions, answering written exam questions of Turkish course, writing games, songs, poems and stories on social studies themes, helping activities of first and second grades, evaluating their activities, reading, writing and memorizing poems on festivals and special days and weeks will be suitable exercises for these grades.

Fourth grades

They could read and write from various resources, help the activities of younger students, especially first grades, direct them, evaluate their activities and tell them stories and poems. Also, they could write about folk songs, local foods and games and display them on the board. Reading and writing exercises, writing free stories and poems, preparing articles for classroom corners, and preparing school website or blogs as part of social studies, science and technology courses may be among the activities. Introduction of an author and a book every month could be an interesting activity. Activities such as reading books, newspapers, magazines, book supplements of newspapers, online reviews, book and author reviews about the theme, preparing board with visuals like photos and pictures, communication with other schools and students online, and creating online blog, website and panels are suitable. Reading and writing exercises could be made about social clubs, and files about clubs and board may be prepared. Answering questions about reading text, looking up in dictionary and finding and writing it, and writing short drama plays are among the activities that these classes can do.

Math

Creating math board, preparing math related article, puzzle, crossword, columns like question of the week or month, playing intelligent games, doing exercises like puzzles and sudoku, writing math

problems, intelligent games, poems about puzzles, drawing pictures, graphics and figures, preparing tangram, unit cubes, geometrical figures and origami tools, doing assigned reinforcing exercises, drawing geometrical figures and painting, developing problems about the theme as a group, grouping numbers or drawing rhythmic counting items, creating graphics, doing exercises to develop skills of four operations, creating three dimensional geometrical figures from papers or different items, making measurements related to given items and writing the results on notebook can be done depending on the level of grade.

1st Grades

Making edge decorations about figures, drawing figures and pictures about problems, simple additions and subtractions, writing numbers, forward and backward rhythmic counting and writing, counting with abacus and various tools in the math corner, making simple operations, drawing and painting geometrical figures and tangram, folding papers, and creating figures by cutting are suitable for the level of this grade.

Second and third grades

Finding problems suitable for the level, solving problems and doing exercises in the textbook, various intelligent games, asking problems to each other and responding them, drawing figures about problems, preparing pictures, stories and drama plays, displaying them on the board and rhythmic counting and writing are possible activities. Drawing graphics for items and individuals in the classroom could be an interesting activity for students.

Fourth grades

Chess exercises could be inside the classroom or spaces like library, teacher's room or principal's room may be used and teacher may teach lower grades the chess. Activities like solving problem, playing intelligent games, preparing questions and evaluating exercises could be made with lower grades.

Science and Technology

Preparing trials, doing trials, reporting trial results, writing summary, doing observations and writing their results, and discussing and writing common features of livings could be listed among the activities that the students will do willingly. Activities also include getting ready for topics by using internet, encyclopedia and science and technical publications, creating unit corner, science and technology corner, and participating in any activity in science corners, and students read, summarize, write and draw painting, map, figures and graphics. The student is given the opportunity to self realize in these corners (Guleryuz, 2001). Activities may include preparing report about the unit, publishing it on the school's website, determining problems related to school or environment, working on solving these problems, being able to develop solutions, participating in related exercises, doing research and trial about such exercises, preparing for the end of unit, and year-end science and technology event, holding an exhibition, creating in-class science and technology corner, arranging this corner by units, and doing agricultural activities in the schoolyard.

Social Studies

Activities such as literature review, reading, taking notes, creating season chart about the unit, making research from map, atlas, encyclopedia and other publications about the unit, developing unit corner and social studies corner, preparing articles and images for the corners, making review online and preparing presentations and slides may be suitable for higher grades. It is recommended to

prepare reports at the end of unit, write summary, share unit-related activities online, write details about the unit on classroom and school newspaper, to publish them, prepare plans, sketches, maps, manual and relief maps and repair worn out maps. Information about vegetation cover, climate, land forms, rich resources, mines, and agricultural products may be compiled or shown on charts. Interesting activities include researches about social lives and traditions, collecting or arranging collection materials, animations, drama plays, and researches about local cuisines.

Evaluation of self-studies by teacher in the next class, assessments through written examinations and tests, and evaluation of assignment of lower grades by higher grades would be suitable for making use of these times.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Seeming difficult at the first sight, these activities will be productive and effective with a good planning and assistant students. However, regardless of the assessment, all exercises and results of assessment must be reviewed by the teacher.

If teacher and assignment hours are planned and implemented well in multigrade classes, this may have a positive effect on the success of students. These hours should not be used coincidentally. National education has been restructured and duration of elementary school was decreased from five to four grades. Decreasing the number of grades is a positive development. Education in multigrade classes is more complicated and difficult than education in independent classes. In these classes, teacher should make more effort and spend more time when implementing educational activities than other teachers. The teacher should use many methods and techniques well. It is underlined in a study that teachers who serve in multigrade classes mostly continue using traditional teaching methods, and methods like group work, guideline of older students, and creating level groups are used less (Dursun, 2006). The curriculum should be adapted to multigrade classes. It is suggested that failure to introduce a new practice based on multigrade classes in the new system, the same curriculum used in normal classes are also used in multigrade classes, and make physical arrangements make it more difficult for teachers (Kulekci, 2013). Multigrade classes challenge teachers and students in many aspects and disadvantage of these classes may be turned into an advantage if they are managed good. Measures should be taken with respect to younger students starting the school, create alternative solutions for them and prevent emergence of age difference with students who start the first grade, and children between 60-68 months old should directly start preparatory class or 0th grade. Courses and themes for younger students should focus on plays and assistance of pre-school teachers should be received in this respect. Activities of multigrade classes should be re-arranged, in-service trainings should be offered for teachers who serve in such classes, number of courses in faculties of education should be increased, students should be directed to schools with multigrade classes as far as possible, and sufficient level of tools should be provided for these schools.

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