R546 Instructional Strategies for Thinking, Collaboration, and Motivation

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Thought Paper

 My experience as a social studies teacher back in Turkey and my passion to have knowledge on instructional strategies lead me into this class. There was an educational reform in Turkey that the whole education system is changing from the teacher oriented to student- oriented. This change actually started with the negotiations with the European Union that Turkey started making changes on educational system. This change was fist implemented to the elementary grades, and there is still need for teacher education and implementations to secondary school curriculum. As a future academic in the social studies education, I want to teach the instructional strategies to improve future teachers’ instructions in my field.

Being a student in the elementary and secondary schools in Turkey was pretty different than today’s schools. We were basically taught the traditional methods and the teacher was the main figure in this educational environment, and we as students were passive receivers. Also, the examinations in the nation made students memorize the information. With the educational reform, the perspectives of the teachers’, students’, parents’ and the persons who are in this environment were totally changed.

With the excitement and the new knowledge on the student-oriented curriculum, I worked as a social studies teacher in two different public schools. When I looked back to my teaching, my teaching was mostly about motivation, and if I ranked or gave value of my teaching experience in Turkey, motivation would be the highest in the rank other than the instructional strategies. I believe that the class should be the environment that the teacher and the students are passionate to learn. As we drew a diagram in the first class of this course, motivation captures the creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative learning.

As I believe that my teaching was heavily on motivation and I should give more value on to the creativity and critical thinking. With the knowledge I got from this course so far, first thing that I would do is give more emphasis on to the creativity. In order to make my students more creative, the class environment should first be open to the new ideas and give value and support these ideas. After giving the ideas of creativity, the creative strategies can be applied to the instruction. There are several of them to use in such teaching that the most interesting strategies to me are creative story telling or writing, creative role play, six hats, and webbing.

Social studies in Turkey is an integrated subject that includes history, geography, and citizenship. This course is taught in elementary schools’6, 7, and 8 grades. Moreover, the units in the textbooks are designed with history and geography in 6 and 7th grades. And in 8 grade students are taking Turkish history class and one credit citizenship class. These are the courses that social studies teachers teach in Turkey. With taking all these account, I think one of the best creative strategies is creative story telling or writing. As it is a social science, this strategy let students narrate a story or write a story. This would improve students’ imagination, new ideas. Moreover, this would be more useful in history units of this class. Because, history is a kind of story of past. A tell a tall tale would be a good example of creating a story that in a social studies class teacher might ask a student start a story on a history unit and everyone in this class adds something to this story and it becomes a big story. This activity can be used at the end of the instruction to sum up what they have learned in the class. In this activity teacher can choose the order of the story telling by different ways.

Creative role play is one of my favorite creative strategies that it allows students to act in a certain character on a specific issue or problem. In this case students’ role play is based on assigned role. I think with this strategy, students can see the other perspectives of the issue or problem with the assigned role that they are acting. They are also active in this strategy that learning percentage would be high. The teacher in this strategy can guide and give directions with his or her questions. The other creative strategy that I like is six hats. This is almost the same in terms of assigning the role and playing the assigned role. The difference between the creative role play and six hats is the number of hats is limited.

Webbing is another creative strategy that I like and would give emphasis on my future teaching to the future teachers in Turkey. Basically, teacher writes a topic in the center and lets students link ideas or questions to this centered topic. I think this activity requires students have knowledge related to the topic, make relations with the centered idea, and organizing these thoughts to the center. On the other hand, this is way of making connections with the brainstormed ideas on the topic. This strategy might be used at the beginning of the instruction to have idea of what students knew about the topic, and teacher can teach after having idea of what students need to know. However, this strategy might also be used at the end of the instruction to have summative assessment of what students have learned in the class. Finally, this activity allows students be creative in the class.

In conclusion, as an experienced social studies teacher and future academic in the field, I believe that there should be some improvements on the creativity of students after the educational reform in Turkey. I also believe that current teachers in Turkey are trying to make their instructions as much as student-oriented, and the improvement of the students’ creativity comes after this idea. There are too many strategies to improve students’ creativity and I picked the most interesting ones to me.