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Participation Status of Primary School Students

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Abstract

In this study, the aim was to determine participation status of primary school students at school, in the family and in society. Research sample was composed of 348 students studying at the 6th, 7th and 8th grades in a primary school in Kırşehir which is found in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey. In the research, data collection tool named “participation status of primary school students” which was developed by the researcher was used as data collection tool. At the end of the study, it was observed that participation of students was high in terms of classroom and teacher while their participation was low in terms of school and management. The most important factors affecting the participation of students in the school are the place where they study and the level of the class. Within the family, children are allowed to participate except for financial decisions. On the other hand, the general participation levels of students are low in the society. The most important factor affecting the participation of children within the family and society is the education status of the father.

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1. Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. This international legal instrument identifies a specific body of rights for children in such areas as protection, provision and participation (Jonyniene & Samuelsson, 1999). According to this Convention, “Contracting Parties recognize the right of a child who has the ability of developing his/her own ideas to express these ideas freely in every relevant field by giving due importance to these ideas in accordance with the child’s age and maturity degree.” (Article 12). Besides, the children are entitled with the right of expression (Article 13), freedom for thought, conscience and faith (Article 14), right of organization and peaceful assembly (Article 15) and the right of respect for private life (Article 16) (UNICEF, Turkey).

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The Convention, being more concerned with protection, does not emphasize the responsibilities which go along with rights. Children need to learn that responsibilities come with the rights of citizenship. In order to learn these responsibilities children need to engage in collaborative activities with other people including those who are older and more experienced than themselves. It is for this reason that children's participation in community projects is so important (Hart, 1992). Children need to be involved in meaningful projects with adults. It is unrealistic to expect them suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved. An understanding of democratic participation and the confidence and competence to participate can only be acquired gradually through practice; it cannot be taught as an abstraction (Hart, 1992).

Child participation is simply identified as "taking the child's opinion on any decision to be taken in relation to the child". Child participation renders the children's roles functional by taking their opinions both on the decisions about them and the social issues in the school, immediate vicinity and society starting within the family, paying importance to these opinions or by informing them about different decisions to be taken in line with their own benefits (Polat and Gezer, 2007).

The Ladder of Student Involvement in School



Adapted by Adam Fletcher from Hart, R. (1994). *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. New York: UNICEF.

Survival of primary schools in line with democratic principles is closely related to the democratic management of these schools. A repressive school environment, a repressive classroom environment can complicate the teaching activity and reduce its effect. Management is important to create a democratic environment in schools. This environment can only be achieved with a democratic management by the school principals who have internalized the democracy (Kontaş, 1997; Bülbül, 1989; San, 1985).

The graphic and explanation offers a typology that explores a variety of ways students are involved in schools. Educators and students can use apply this tool to the everyday involvement of students by using it to identify how schools currently engage students in their classes, programs, and other leadership opportunities. The Ladder can also encourage individuals and schools to aspire to higher levels by presenting the possibilities of meaningful student involvement.

The primary education period is considerably important in bringing up individuals that the democratic society needs as well as those who adopt democratic principles internalize the democratic lifestyle and put

these attainments into practice in the real life situations. However, there is only a limited number of studies which determine the participation status of students in school, family and society in this period. In this study, it was aimed at determining the participation status of primary school students in school, family and society.

2. Method

2.1. Study Group

The universe of this descriptive research based on survey model consisted of the 6th, 7th and 8th grade students studying at a primary school in Kırşehir at the 2011-2012 school year. On the other hand, sample of the research was composed of 348 students, 190 (54%) of which were studying in the city center while 158 (46 %) of which were studying in the villages. 94 (27 %) students were the 6th grade students, 156 students were the 7th grade students while 98 (28 %) students were the 8th grade students. 152 students were female (44 %) while 193 students were male (56 %). In general, their mothers were primary or secondary school graduates (50 %) while their fathers were high school and university graduates (50 %). Average income of the families varies between 1000 and 2000 Turkish liras (about 600-1200\$).

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