

OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHING

(The Field Trip Method)

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“The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.”

Marc Van Doren

INTRODUCTION

The socio-cultural changes experienced in today’s world, rapidly developing communication systems and the developments in science and technology all inevitably affect “education”. Thus, it has become a necessity for each and every country and society to adapt to these new conditions. In this regard, in Turkey, in addition to the global developments, it was the political, social and cultural changes that took place within the country since the proclamation of the Republic that shaped the “national education policies”.

Ministry of National Education of Turkey has initiated the works to renew and update the curriculum as of 2005 in line with the necessities of the time, and in this way the global and social developments were reflected in the curriculum. In the mean time, in line with the debates carried out to give a new direction to the education system, the necessary revisions are continuously being made in order to increase the quality and efficiency of education and to meet the changing needs of the society and individuals (Gelen& Beyazıt, 2007). Accordingly, additional curricular works based on the development works of 2005 were initiated as of 2016-2017 academic year in order to comprehensively update, review, revise and supplement the entire curricula. Consequentially, it was decided to extend the implementation of the new curriculum, which was implemented only in the 4th and 5th grade levels during the 2017-2018 academic year, to all grades in the elementary and middle school levels as of the 2018-2019 academic year (TTKB, 2017).

Ministry of National Education Board of Education (2005) set forth the principles followed in the development of the new curriculum as follows; “Lessons shall not be based on rote learning, shall be aligned with the necessities of daily life, fun and usable; teachers' shall make use of guiding activities instead of relaying information directly;

alternative assessment approaches based on constructivist learning approach shall be used in assessment and evaluation; integration with the world shall be ensured and in this regard, European Union standards shall be taken into account in particular; and critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, research, inquiry, problem solving, information technology and entrepreneurial skills shall be developed”.

Working life in today's world demands individuals who question and criticize, who are creative and entrepreneurial, and who exhibit positive communication skills. Nevertheless, it is not likely for individuals who are raised with a “teacher-centered” approach in the education process to acquire these skills necessitated by the 21st century.

Effective learning necessitates active participation in learning activities and making connections to daily life through hands-on learning. The changes in the methods and techniques used in educational activities led to changes in the areas where learning activities are carried out, which are no longer limited to classroom environments (Laçın&Şimşek). In view of the foregoing, in this section, several relevant phenomena, i.e. “out-of-school learning”, “out-of-school learning in social studies teaching” and “field trip method” are discussed in terms of providing content related to daily life and ensuring learning by experience.

Definition, Scope and Importance of Out-of-School Learning

Learning is a phenomenon that takes place at every stage of our life. As the interest in “learning” in the sphere of education has increased, so has the number of studies conducted to explore different learning methods and evaluate the effectiveness of these methods. The conditions of today’s world lead individuals to actively learn at every moment of life and develop the necessary skills rather than just to acquire knowledge, and it is a known fact that individuals learn from the experience gained while exploring environment, culture, society and the world.

Learning is a process in which individuals associate the new knowledge with the knowledge they have gained previously. Learning is divided into two categories as formal and informal learning according to the environment in which it takes place. *Formal learning* aims that the individuals gain certain knowledge and skills in line with specific goals within a plan and program in specialized institutions ranging from pre-school to university (Laçın Şimşek, 2020; Salmi, 1993; Tösten, 2020). Nevertheless, learning takes place not just in school environment but in all stages of life. To exemplify, an important part of learning takes place during daily life activities or while at home or at a park, visiting museums, and reviewing books and magazines. Such processes, in which individuals actively take part, exploring new things and enriching their experiences, are considered within the scope of informal learning (Tösten, 2020). Intrinsically, informal learning includes a wide array of activities which vary greatly. Informal learning environments allow the individuals to gain awareness and the skills related to life and society. Accordingly, learning can take place in

a circle of family or friends, while reading a book or newspaper, or watching television. Taking into consideration the time students spend outside of school, it is undeniable that a great deal of learning takes place in other environments.

Between formal learning and informal learning, there is also *non-formal learning*. The concept of non-formal learning emerged in the 1960s in line with the concept of “out of school learning” which was introduced to respond to newly emerging educational needs (La belle, 1982). Non-formal learning takes place in a planned and adaptable way in institutions or locations other than the institutions where formal education takes place (Esha, 2007; Akman, 2016). From this point of view, “out-of-school learning”, which is the main theme of this section, is in fact related to non-formal learning.

Learning is the process that primarily takes place by experience, that is through interaction with cultural and social environment. An educational approach that considers the learning process to consist only of transferring knowledge and supervising learning rarely encourages learning. Information can be transformed into knowledge and become more permanent by experience only. On the other hand, in today's conditions, information quickly loses its validity, as new information is continuously produced replacing the existing information. In parallel, the importance of learning information is decreasing with each passing day, and at the same time, learning is no longer limited to classroom environment but extended to every stage of life (Fer, 2014).

Education researchers conduct numerous studies on the effects of different teaching methods, in search of ways to make learning more effective and permanent. Teachers make an effort to discover the interests and talents of their students, thereby to turn their lessons into fun experiences that are of interest to students and prompt their participation. At this point, “out-of-school learning” activities come to the forefront as indicated by the findings of relevant studies which emphasize that out-of-school environments should be utilized for educational purposes.

The primary objective of education is to ensure the individual, social and academic development of students, and schools are an indispensable element of the education process in that regard. Given the changing individual and social needs, increasing human mobility, environmental problems, technological developments, and emerging concepts such as inclusive education and out-of-school learning environments, it is inevitable for schools to undergo a transformation and turn into structures that can update themselves based on the necessities of the time (Yavuz, 2018). School is an institution that has appropriate interior and exterior space and equipment, which has relations with the society and uses all the opportunities provided by the society, cooperates with the family, carries out educational activities within the framework of a certain program, and does not limit learning and teaching to the physical boundaries of the school building (Balıkçı, 2020; Oktay, 2020). Demirel (2017) stated that learning shall take place through activities planned outside of school as well as inside the school. At this point, the idea of teaching

in out-of-school environments as well as in-school environment emerges. From a broader perspective, out-of-school learning also encompasses activities carried out within the premises of the school yet not in the classroom building and all other extracurricular activities.

It is a known fact that in the Turkish education system, educational activities are generally carried out in the school environment and classroom setting. This is not because the content necessitates the education to be carried out in the classroom, but due to the lack of efforts to make use of other options that can be carried out outside the school building.

It is very important to support the education carried out in the school environment and classroom setting with out-of-school teaching activities (Demir, 2007). Out-of-school learning has been addressed in the literature within the scope of different terms, such as “out-of-school/outside-of-school education/learning”, outdoor or out of doors education/learning”, “out-of-class learning work” (Kuh, 1995; Şimşek & Kaymakçı, 2015). In point of fact, out-of-school learning is not a new concept, and there have been many scholars over the centuries who have affirmed that experiences in different learning environments contribute to learning (Davies ve Hamilton, 2018). Among them are; Comenius, one of the pedagogues of the 17th century; Rousseau, the advocate of naturalistic education of the Enlightenment; Pestalozzi, one of the representatives of the age of Humanism; Froebel, who is accepted as the father of pre-school education; and Dewey, one of the pioneers of pragmatism, have addressed the “out-of-school learning”. Consequentially, the theoretical framework of “out-of-school learning” has been defined as the integration of school and environment in the 18th and 19th centuries (Tokcan, 2015; Topçu, 2017).

Out-of-school learning is defined as the education that takes place in the institutions and environments outside the school building but during the class hours and within scope of the curriculum (Salmi, 1993). In this sense, out-of-school learning processes serve to attain the acquisitions targeted by the course through the activities carried out in parallel with the curriculum.

Out-of-school learning has more potential to support children's cognitive and physical development, communicative, social and emotional development, socio-cultural identity, levels of concentration and motivation to learn. Students are more likely to initiate interaction, engage in shared thinking and questioning during out-of-school learning activities (Davies ve Hamilton, 2018). Considering that the life experiences of students both in- and out-of-school have an impact on their academic success and on their place in society, the learning of students should take place not just in school, but also in out-of-school environments (Eshac, 2007; Yavuz Topaloğlu, 2016). As a reason, education carried out through teaching of theoretical or conceptual content in the classroom environment in schools usually does not go beyond the dimension of theoretical information, whereas education carried out through out-of-school learning helps students to establish a connection between the theoretical and practical information and to process

this information transforming raw information into processed knowledge.

Nichols (1982) listed the important features of curricular activities in out-of-school learning environments as follows (as cited in Katircioğlu, 2019);

- They are carried out outside the physical school building.
- Students participate in the activities first hand.
- They incorporate real objects.
- Lessons are linked to real events.
- They appeal to many senses.
- They encourage student participation as they are fun and engaging.

The results of the relevant studies available in the literature revealed that out-of-school learning experiences support students' cognitive, academic, and personal development (Kuh, 1995; Strauss & Terenzini, 2007). Nevertheless, there is an ongoing need for further studies on out-of-school learning, considering that one of the main objectives of education is “to enable students to learn on their own outside of school”. In this regard, students should be able to learn new knowledge and skills about subjects not taught in the school curriculum and make well-reasoned decisions about choosing a career, participating in politics, purchasing products, and the like. Besides, the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills related to one’s hobbies can provide a lifelong source of satisfaction. Learning in a wide array of contexts will not be possible unless the individual learns how to learn by him/herself effectively (Bergin, 1996). In today’s world, there is a growing need for individuals who know how to access information, who can distinguish the accurate information from the inaccurate information, and who know how to make use of the accurate information. In this context, education should be implemented in environments closest to the real environments in order to raise individuals who can read and understand, make use of the information, produce and create (Fer, 2014; Yıldırım, 2018).

The time students spend on new technologies resulted in a decrease in the time they spend to explore the local environment outside their home. This situation, combined with the concerns about the safety and protection of the child, has made the parents to adopt a more risk-averse attitude with regards to the activities they allow their children to do. The solution to this problem is that schools should offer more out-of-school learning activities (Power et al., 2009). Learning outside of school allows the use of local resources and community-focused content, and students can develop their own unique learning experiences. Ensuring that the students learn by experience, through inquiry and hands-on activities will undoubtedly make education easier and permanent (Bamberger & Tal, 2006; Tösten, 2020). Not limiting learning to the classroom environment through making use of out-of-school learning activities will also enable students to interact with their surroundings in addition to supporting the education given in the classroom setting.

Bunting (2006) stated that out-of-school education consists of three dimensions, *which*

are: *extension, content and teaching methodology.*

Extension is the process of extending the structured learning activities by changing the setting where the learning takes place to natural environments that are more relevant to the subject being taught. To this end, students leave the classroom setting to thoroughly research any curricular topic. The second dimension of the out-of-school education is the content or the subject taught.

Content covers topics such as natural environments, the relation between humans and environment, skills to be used in activities carried out outside the school, and responsibilities to be fulfilled as an individual and as a society.

Teaching methodology refers to the methods and techniques that are to be used in out-of-school activities to teach various subjects and concepts, and to emphasize any connection there is. Out-of-school activities, as a method of teaching, incorporate the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. Additionally, students gain multidimensional learning abilities in out-of-school environments such as collaborative learning, the ability to correct incomplete and incorrect concepts, express their feelings and thoughts freely, and bring a different perspective to events and situations (Öztürk, 2019).

Out-of-School Learning Environments

Out-of-school learning environments are defined as environments, where the students are allowed to interact with the environment first hand, in order to enable them to establish an experiential connection in relation to the subject being taught (Bakioğlu, 2020). In another definition, out-of-school learning environments are defined as the institutions and environments other than the school building, where educational activities are carried out in a planned manner in parallel with the curriculum to attain specific acquisitions thereof (Salmi, 1993).

Out-of-school learning environments cover a wide range of spatial areas and activities, such as (Fidan, 2012, as cited in Saraç, 2017)

- Field trips and field studies.
- Excursions and visits to social, cultural, industrial and scientific places, including but not limited to the museums in general and natural history museums and science and technology museums in specific as well as planetariums, botanical gardens, zoos, meteorology stations, water treatment plants, dams, industrial establishments, etc.
- Virtual reality applications, nature trainings, environmental club activities.
- Assignments and projects directly related to the out-of-school environment.
- Sporting events.

- Social, cultural and scientific programs, including but not limited to exhibitions, meetings, congresses, panels, conferences and symposiums.
- Spatial applications intended for lifelong learning.

Education and training environments serve the permanence of learning provided that they are used effectively as areas where learning takes place. The adoption of the constructivist approach in the curriculum has increased the importance of activities carried out in out-of-school environments (Malkoç & Kaya, 2015). Out-of-school learning environments that support the content and acquisitions of the courses offer a great opportunity in that regard. In this context, a well-planned out-of-school teaching activity will enable students to construct their own learning and relate to reality. Therefore, activities carried out in out-of-school learning environments should be organized in line with specific objectives and acquisitions of the course.

Social Studies Teaching in Turkey

Prior to addressing out-of-school learning environments in the context of social studies teaching, it would be useful to briefly explain social studies teaching in Turkey in terms of its definition, background, current state, and the associated learning approaches. In Turkey, social studies course is deemed as one of the courses that incorporates out-of-school teaching. According to the definition provided in the education program prepared by the Ministry of National Education in 2004; “Social studies is a primary education course that reflects social sciences and civics subjects such as history, geography, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political science and law in order to help individuals realize their social existence, that combines learning fields under a unit or theme, that addresses the interaction of the individuals with the social and physical environment in the context of the past, present and future, and which is formed based on a collective teaching approach.” (MEB, 2005, p. 46).

A review of the history of the Social Studies course in Turkey reveals that the content and structure of the course has changed from time to time. Geography and History, as the courses that would form the basis of social studies course in the later period, were included in the 1924 elementary school curriculum, the first education program of the Republican period. In the draft 1962 elementary school curriculum, Geography, History and Citizenship courses were combined under the “Society and Country Studies” course. The title of the course was changed to “Social Studies” in the 1968 elementary school curriculum. In the 1973-1974 academic year, Social Studies course was also included in the middle school curriculum, and remained in the middle school curriculum until the coup of September 12th, 1980. After this date, Social Studies course was replaced by the National History and National Geography courses. Curriculum development studies in respect of Social Studies course, which started in 1998 taking into consideration the developments in the world, were completed in 2005 (Kaya, 2020; Öztürk, 2011).

Collective education approach was effectively utilized in the social studies course curriculum within the scope of the curriculum development studies carried out in 2005. The 2005 social studies curriculum was updated in 2017 in line with the collective education approach, and the new social studies curriculum was put into practice as updated in 2018.

In 2005, it was stated that the social studies curriculum needed to be arranged in a way that would allow students to learn the ways of accessing information and develop their problem-solving and decision-making skills. The new approaches used in the development of the social studies curriculum to that effect attracted attention. Social studies curriculum that was developed “promotes students to effectively participate in life, make the right decision, and solve problems, featuring constructivism with a supportive and developing approach, taking into account the value of knowledge and the existing experiences of the students”. It was aimed with this new curriculum to adopt an understanding that is student-centered and which allows students to interact with the environment, by taking into account their own experiences and individual differences (MEB, 2005).

Social studies curriculum aims to provide students with skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, environmental literacy, using evidence, location analysis, observation, perception of space and collaboration (MEB, 2018a), yet teaching activities carried out in the classroom environment only will not be sufficient to provide students with these skills. As a matter of fact, “making use of out-of-school environments in social studies teaching” has been brought forward as one of the issues to be addressed in the implementation of the 2018 Social Studies Curriculum; and accordingly, it was emphasized that the activities to be organized can be held in a variety of locations from the immediate surroundings of the school such as the school garden to government offices, factories, exhibitions, archaeological excavation sites, workshops, museums and historical places (MEB, 2018a).

Out-of-School Learning in Social Studies Teaching

In terms of the learning and teaching processes, the social studies course curriculum was developed based on student-centered activities, in order to provide students with the desired knowledge, skills and values through activities (Özdemir, 2014). In this context, the approach adopted in the development of the social studies curriculum, which started to be implemented in 2005, has been the “constructivist approach”. In this approach, “learning” is an active process, students gain affective skills that contribute to constructing knowledge in addition to learning by constructing new ideas based on their current and past knowledge (Erdamar-Koç & Demirel, 2008; Pagán, 2006).

Out-of-school learning activities provide a constructivist learning environment in terms of providing content related to real life in which the students also take part and ensure learning by experience. In today’s rapidly changing world, teaching activities that do not give students the opportunity to construct knowledge will not be sufficient. In the learner-centered approach, appropriate learning environments are provided so that teaching

processes can take place in a positive way.

The social studies course was formed as a result of bringing together the subjects of social sciences and natural sciences with an interdisciplinary approach. For this reason, it will not be sufficient to carry out the learning activities mostly in the classroom setting, considering that the real resources for the subject to be taught are outside the classroom. Out-of-school learning environments can be divided into two categories: the natural environment and the social environment. The content of the social studies course includes acquisitions that concern both of the said categories (Altın & Demirtaş, 2014). Accordingly, real learning opportunities should be provided to the students through efficient planning in line with the targeted acquisitions of social studies teaching activities. It is important that the teachers understand that the outside environment is at the center of experiential learning and that it is important for the relational bond between them and their students (Foran, 2008).

There are several challenges to overcome in the teaching of the social studies course, the most important challenge being concretization of the abstract issues. The fact that the education system is based on exams and tests forces students to memorize rather than understand (Şanlı, 2018). Meaningful learning in the social studies course can only be achieved by elaborating the learning activities to be implemented within the scope of the course in a way that is related to life and meets the interests, needs and expectations of the students, considering that social studies course curriculum is a comprehensive curriculum that is based on verbal information (Tünkler, 2019).

Kincheloe (2001) attribute the problems experienced in social studies teaching to the limited experience of students in respect of values, the excessive adherence of teachers and students to the textbook, traditional teaching methods that restrict innovative practices, the alienation of teachers from the field of education, the fact that academic activities carried out to improve students cognitively are not reflected in practice, and the lack of public awareness about the importance of social studies (as cited in Foran, 2008). Teaching activities carried out only in the classroom setting would never be sufficient, taking into consideration the fact that social studies course aims to prepare students for social life. Various learning environments that can be used to attain the acquisitions set forth in the curriculum would provide the opportunity to implement out-of-school teaching activities in social studies teaching.

Various out-of-school environments have been cited in the literature in the context of social studies teaching (Akkuş & Meydan, 2013; Altın & Demirtaş, 2014; Öner, 2015; Öner & Öztürk, 2019; Şimşek, 2015; Tösten, 2020; Tuncel & Dolanbay, 2018), including not limited to historical places, i.e. ancient cities, ruins and historical buildings, historical martyrdoms, monuments and tombs, museums, geographical places, national parks, public institutions, private sector institutions, non-governmental organizations, and science centers.

Out-of-school learning and social studies are two concepts that are highly relevant, even more so than other subjects. Out-of-school learning in the context of social studies teaching is about making knowledge meaningful and experiential for the student as per innovative thinking education. Social studies teaching provides extremely convenient and various opportunities for out-of-school learning as it is a course created using an interdisciplinary approach and the primary acquisitions of which are providing students with individual and social life skills and creating awareness in students by having them adopt historical and cultural heritage.

Field Trip Method in Social Studies Teaching

Structure of the social studies course has changed in line with the change in the philosophy of education experienced in Turkey in 2005. This change in philosophy was also reflected in the curriculum updated in 2018, as it can be inferred from the skill-based teaching approach adopted in both curricula (Erdoğan, 2019). In the course of time, out-of-school environments have gained even more importance in terms of providing students with skills such as research, problem solving, critical thinking and inquiry. In parallel, it was emphasized in the 2023 Education Vision document (MEB, 2018b) published by the Ministry of National Education in 2018 that there will be more cooperation with science centers, museums, art centers and universities on the restructuring of primary and secondary schools. The field trip method was mentioned in the “Out of School Learning Environments Guide” (MEB, 2019) published by the Ministry of National Education within the scope of the 2023 Education Vision as one of the teaching methods to be utilized within the scope of out-of-school learning, as it is a method that provides students with first hand experience and appeals to many senses.

The field trip method, which can be applied at every grade level, is one of the primary methods that supports student-centered teaching approach in social studies teaching in elementary and middle schools. Social studies course was created with an interdisciplinary approach by making use of many disciplines that concern the individual, society and nature such as history, geography, law, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc., which is why the field trip method can be used to teach a good part of the social studies course content.

The field trip method includes visiting places where the events of relevance have taken place or still take place and making on-site observations and evaluations to make inferences about the events, in order to supplement the classroom work and make it more meaningful (Açıkgöz, 2006; Garipağaoğlu, 2001). We can define the field trip method as a teaching activity that is used to give the opportunity to students to get to know their immediate environment, to make sense of the knowledge they have gained at school by making a connection with real life, and to access the information first hand.

Observation, which is a component of the field trip method, is the meticulous and planned

evaluation of an event, object or fact to determine its qualities in order to achieve certain educational purposes (Çetin et al., 2010). Additionally, field trip includes visiting a natural or cultural place, experiencing events, phenomena, formations and objects through observation and acquiring knowledge first hand, in line with the objectives of the course and the targeted acquisitions of the curriculum. Importance of out-of-school education in today's world is increasing with each passing day, and given its nature and content, social studies course emerges as an appropriate course within the scope of which field trips can be organized to allow students to get connected both with nature and with the cultural and social environment.

Use of field trip method, which forms the basis of geographical research at the academic level, within the bounds of possibility in both elementary and middle school settings has proven to be beneficial. Observation method used within the scope of field trip emerges as one of the basic methods used in teaching social studies and geography, given that natural environment serves as a sort of laboratory in the teaching of geography subjects (Kızılçaoğlu, 2003). A number of subjects included in the Social Studies course, which was created with an interdisciplinary approach, are actually subjects of “geography”. Geography comes to the fore when all human activities carried out in relation to the place the humans live are considered. The knowledge and ideas produced by other fields of social sciences take place within their own unique geographical spaces. Disciplines such as history, sociology, economics, etc. cannot be isolated from the geographical locations where they are materialized. In this context, as it would not be possible to think of social sciences without Geography, it would not be possible to think of Social Studies without Geography as well (Taşlı, 2020). Here, geography is the science that examines the relationship between human and location and the distribution of natural and human events within the framework of the causality principle (Ünlü, 2020).

The importance of geography teaching in the field of social studies is an undeniable fact. The 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th grade social studies courses cover the “people, places and environments” and “production, distribution and consumption” learning fields of the geography discipline. Geography aims to provide students with the spatial basic knowledge, skills and values necessary for human life. In parallel, the geography-focused “people, places and environments” learning field of the social studies course, as set forth in the MEB 2018 social studies curriculum, aims that the students recognize the environment and the interaction of people with the environment, understand the causes and consequences of this interaction through the use of various skills and values, and gain an individual or social perspective for the future in respect thereof.

The interaction of humans, places and the environments creates a wide and colorful spectrum. In the context of the “people, places and environments” learning field, it is aimed to provide the students at all grade levels in which Social Studies course is taught with “*research, environmental literacy, perception of change and continuity, observation, map literacy and spatial perception skills*”.

On the other hand, in the context of the “production, distribution and consumption” learning field that is based on the discipline of economics and which is also related to “economic geography, it is aimed for students to realize that the resources of the country's economy are limited, to believe in the importance of protecting existing resources, to compare their own economic life with the economic life of others and to set out any differences and/or similarities in between, to examine the economic conditions of the places where they live, and to make efforts to improve these conditions.

As is the social studies course, the disciplines of history, citizenship and economics, topics of which are included in the social studies course, are closely related to geography, as well. Geography offers important clues for understanding the past, as migration routes in history, settlements as well as the emergence and dissolution of civilizations have a lot to do with landforms and climate characteristics (Gençtürk, 2013; Akman, 2016). Geography discipline has an apparent effect on the learning fields of the social studies course is apparent, which is expected considering that the social studies course is created with an interdisciplinary approach. The aims of geography teaching can be summarized as providing students with the ability to examine and synthesize the causes and effects of the geographical distribution of geographical elements, events or activities in the context of a specific geographical location, to think geographically and thereby to approach and analyze geographical problems scientifically, and to develop awareness of using maps, projections and diagrams by making sufficient use of geographical resources (Topçu, 2013).

Geography enables students to understand and make sense of the place and world they live in. As a reason, humans' spatial perceptions are directly related to the location characteristics of the place they live in. Geography education is needed in order for the individuals of the 21st century to understand the political, economic and cultural system and ecological developments, and to take congruous and conscious steps in their interaction with these systems and developments (Ünlü, 2014). Geographical events cannot be comprehended and taught without visiting and seeing different parts of the geographical earth. The field trips that are organized to that effect have both didactic and educational aspects as they encourage students to do research and observation and provide them with the skills to make connections between the events, express their opinions and make inferences (Sağdıç & Demirkaya, 2015).

Geography is a discipline that is suitable for learning activities outside of school. In a broad sense, the field study and the field trip method offers the opportunity to visit the places where the events took place and to make observations and on-site evaluations (Ünal, 2014). The methods and techniques used in the classroom setting will not be as effective as the teaching activities carried out in the geographical location, where students can access information first-hand. In this regard, field trips will also facilitate the attainment of the acquisitions stipulated by the course curriculum. The specific objectives set forth in the 2018 Social Studies course curriculum entail that the students “explain the

interaction between humans and environment by recognizing the general geographical features of the world and the environment they live in, and develop spatial perception skills” and “be aware of the limitations of the natural environment and resources, thereby try to protect natural resources and adopt a sustainable environmental approach”. It will be more effective and appropriate to make use of out-of-school environments in order to realize these specific objectives that are directly related to the discipline of geography.

Field studies, which are accepted as a pillar of geography by many geographers, refer to scientific geographical trips and practices carried out in the field. Geographical field trips can be organized to various sites such as industrial facilities, historical places, touristic areas, factories, museums, exhibitions, dams, lakes, streams, plateaus, etc. depending on their proximity (Aydın, 2020).

A review of the acquisitions of the geography-focused “*people, places and environments*” learning field included in the 2018 Social Studies curriculum and which aim to provide students with the spatial basic knowledge, skills and values necessary for human life reveals that the “**field trip**” method can be readily applied within the scope of the social studies course provided that it is planned in accordance with the said targeted acquisitions.

To be more specific, field trip method can be used for the attainment of following acquisitions targeted by teaching of the geography subjects included in the social studies course:

Elementary school 4th grade social studies course “people, places and environments” learning field

SB.4.3.1. To make inferences about the location of any place within the environment.

The concept of direction, which was aimed to be taught within the scope of the acquisition in question, is important both in respect of geography and our daily life. Considering that it is an abstract subject, it is important to teach the concept of direction by concretizing, and field trips will serve the purpose. The theme of “direction” included in the elementary school 4th grade social studies course aims to help students find the location of any object around them relative to their position using various methods. Nevertheless, 4th grade students, who are transitioning to abstract intelligence, find it very difficult to understand the concept of direction (Karatekin, 2006). Direction-finding activities can also be organized in the school garden, but short field trips will undoubtedly provide more opportunities for practice and observation in respect thereof.

Middle school 5th grade social studies course “people, places and environments” learning field

SB.5.3.5. To explain and exemplify the effects of natural disasters on social life.

Turkey is a country, where natural disasters such as earthquakes, landslides, forest fires, avalanches, floods, droughts frequently occur, due to its geographical location, geological structure, landforms and climate characteristics. Therefore, disaster and earthquake education should be given to the students not just theoretically but also practically (Şahan & Dinç, 2021). In this context, field trips to Disaster Training Centers can be organized in order to raise awareness of the students in that regard and have them learn the content by practicing the measures to be taken for protection against disasters in person.

Middle school 6th grade social studies course “people, places and environments” learning field

SB.6.3.2. To examine the landforms, climatic features and vegetation of Turkey's basic physical geography features on the relevant maps.

The acquisition in question aims to provide students with spatial perception and map literacy skills, values of patriotism and sensitivity to the natural environment (MEB, 2018a). In a broad sense, geographical field trips can be organized including the use of maps to attain this acquisition. Specifically, field trips directed at the teaching of a specific type of landform, i.e. “mountain, plateau, plain, valley, etc.” or vegetation, i.e. “steppes, maquis, etc.”, included in the course content can be organized. As a matter of fact, the results of the studies conducted to investigate students’ misconceptions about certain concepts of geography revealed that students often confuse various types of land forms, i.e. plains, plateaus, valleys, slopes, etc. as well as vegetations, i.e. maquis, prairies and steppes (Alım, Özdemir & Yılar, 2008; Boz & Çoban, 2019). With field trips, students get the opportunity to understand the subjects, the theory of which they were already taught, yet they had difficulty understanding, by observing, studying, evaluating and associating geographical events and formations on site and making inferences in respect thereof (Aydın, 2020). Hence, use of field trips in the teaching of geographical themes will help students to avoid any related misconceptions.

Middle school 7th grade social studies course “people, places and environments” learning field

SB.7.3.1. To make inferences about the factors affecting the settlements from the past to the present through case studies.

World's first settlements, which emerged from the effort to create space, one of the basic needs of human beings, can be found in every corner of the Anatolian lands. The use of the field trip method in order to attain this acquisition will be expedient in terms of both instilling historical awareness in students and providing them with the opportunity to evaluate the factors affecting the settlements from the very first settlements to the present.

Field trips to be organized to sites that cast light on the history of humanity such as Catalhöyük (Konya), Hacılar (Burdur), Göbeklitepe (Şanlıurfa), Çayönü (Diyarbakır), which are among the very first settlements in the world, will provide students with the opportunity to learn by experiencing and observing the effect of geography on settlement and civilizations on site.

Prior to using the field trip method in the social studies course, it is essential that the teacher first determines the site to be visited and then the scope of the teaching activity in accordance with the objective, acquisition, skill and value aimed to be gained. It is crucial that the field trips made to out-of-school environments are well-planned sufficiently in advance. Buting (2006) stated that the planning phase of an out-of-school teaching activity is just as crucial as the activity itself. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the objectives of, and plan, the field trips made to out-of-school environments and the activities organized in these environments.

Accordingly, the principles to be followed during the planning phase of the field trip and during and after the field trip are as follows:

Preparations to be made before the field trip

- Students should be informed about the site to be visited within the scope of the field trip and the objective of the field trip in advance.
- Field trip should be planned in detail, and the parents of the students should be provided with a sample of this plan.
- School administration's and parents' consents must be sought prior to the trip, particularly taking into consideration that the teacher who plans the trip bears legal responsibilities.
- Students should be informed about the preparations they should be making, including clothing, and to take their field trip log books with them.
- In the event of long-distance field trips including overnight stays, necessary official correspondences should be exchanged between the management of the place of stay and the school administration in advance.
- The list of the names of the students participating in the field trip should be submitted to the school administration.

Principles to be followed during and after the field trip

- Appropriate safety precautions should be taken during the field trip.
- It should be ensured that students take notes about the observations made during the field trip.
- Students should be allowed to discuss the observations they made during the field trip and express their opinions in respect thereof and ask questions.
- It should be made sure that the impressions, information, and the experience

gained during the field trip are discussed after the field trip.

- It would be very helpful to have students prepare a report on the outcome of the field trip.

It is commonly thought that the implementation phase of the field trip is difficult, which is in fact true to a certain extent. Nevertheless, field trips made to geographical sites come with a lot of benefits such as instilling the concept of “observation”, which is one of the most rooted and most important aspects of the scientific method of research, in students, and enabling them to make connections between the environment, people and events (Doğanay, 2014). As a reason, the field trip method provides students with the opportunity to learn by experience, as opposed to the theoretical studies carried out in the classroom environment. However, it is important that an evaluation is made on the outcomes of the field trip afterwards, in order to achieve permanent learning. To this end, notes taken during the field trip, materials collected, photographs taken, films shot, sound recordings, etc. should all be evaluated in detail. It would be wise to use the field trip method to gain students the habit of taking notes during an observation. In this way, students can remember the things that they would have forgotten otherwise, during the evaluation of the field trip made in the classroom. In this context, students may be asked to tell, write or draw about their thoughts and observations regarding the field trip, or even to draw a layout, model or map, as applicable (Tok, 2021). It is important that the students present their observations about the field trip in a concrete way during the evaluation activities carried out afterwards, in order to determine the extent which the targeted acquisition was attained.

CONCLUSION

A systematic curricular development process in Turkish education system was initiated in 2005 in line with the changing needs of the time. As a result, the curricula were changed to a substantial extent and maintained until today with revisions made in 2018. This curricular development process, which is based on the constructivist approach, has also directly affected the learning and teaching methods used in association with the curricula. The aim of this curricular development process is indicated as to raise qualified individuals with learner-centered and skill-oriented practices based on active learning. Nevertheless, appropriate learning environments should be provided to students to that effect. At this point, out-of-school learning, as a method of learning based on the constructivist approach that provides such environments and offers real-life opportunities, stands out as a method that best serves the purpose of this curricular development process.

Social studies course, as a course created by an interdisciplinary approach, is a suitable course for the implementation of out-of-school learning activities by its very nature. Out-of-school learning allows students to experience the theoretical knowledge they learned at school in appropriate environments. To this end, content of the social studies curriculum includes the principles for choosing learning environments suitable for teaching the subjects of social sciences and carrying out the activities in these environments. The most important feature of out-of-school learning activities is that they offer a different learning setting other than the classroom environment and provide the student with the opportunity to learn by experience in a setting that is more relevant to the acquisition targeted with the teaching of a specific lesson. In this context, the field trip method, which is an out-of-school learning method based on student-centered activities developed in accordance with the constructivist approach, emerges as a particularly relevant method for the social studies course, given the acquisitions, skills and values aimed to be attained within the scope of specific learning fields of this course.

Field trips are planned under the supervision of the teacher of the respective course within the framework of the acquisitions of the course curriculum, and provide the opportunity to examine and evaluate the events on the spot. As is the case with all learning fields included in the social studies curriculum, holding activities within the scope of the field trip method in the context of learning field of “people, places and environments”, which is a learning field that includes geography subjects, will ensure that efficient learning takes place.

Turkey is a very rich country in terms of natural and cultural resources. There are many geographical sites which can be visited and utilized in the context of teaching of geography subjects included in the social studies course. Field trips to be made to such sites will allow students to gain experience in the geographical sense and to have the opportunity to examine geographical elements, events or activities on-site through observations they will make within the scope of group work.

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To Cite This Chapter:

Kozaner Yenigül, Ç. (2021). Out-of-school learning environments in the context of social studies teaching (the field trip method) In Ö. Akman, F. O. Atasoy, & T. Gür, (Eds.), Education, social, health and political developments in Turkey between 2000-2020, 194-216. ISRES Publishing.