

The Study of Sunbeam Composition Method in Guidance Schools of Iran, Hormozgan

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Abstract: This study investigates the effect of sunbeam composition method on student's participation in Hormozgan guidance schools, one of the provinces of Iran. Since participation is known as a democracy index, this study aims to investigate whether the application of this method can help students to increase their classroom participation. The sunbeam composition method which is proposed by the literature course book compilers is performed in two ways in guidance school composition classes. The main focus of this approach is on students' participation. Although, students participate individually, the initial aim is cooperating and working in groups. The results revealed that the application of sunbeam composition will increase students' classroom participation and consequently develop democracy in education. Through this investigation, we also concluded that the application of sunbeam composition method not only develops students' participation as a democracy indicator but also has an effect on other democracy indexes.

Key words: Democracy, students' participation, sunbeam composition, school, indexes

INTRODUCTION

Repeated emphasis of many thinkers like Rousseau and Dewey (1956, 1997) on students' participation in education and its important role in education development, reveals the significance and necessity of this theorem.

Participation, in a number of related democratic thoughts is known as one of the characteristics of democracy (Mikel, 2000; Hansen, 2004; Harber, 2006; Sleeter, 2008; Dewey, 1997). Hansen (2004) considers participation as an integral part of democracy and believes that it has an effect on individuals' knowledge. Participation causes students of different knowledge to be with each other. This companion or knowledge differences leads to students' growth and might change their knowledge logically. Harber (2006) also considers participation as one of the main principles of democracy in education and believes that it can appear in the forms of group works, discussion sessions, students program designing, question and answering activities and so on.

Considering different definitions presented for students' participation in education, we focus on Mikel's (2000). He defines students' participation as an active cooperation in activities and decision makings. In his viewpoint, participation would appear in activities and decision makings in school, classroom, curriculum, educational planning, teaching, evaluating and so on.

The present study is an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of sunbeam composition method (through interview and questionnaire) among teachers of Iran, Hormozgan., 30 teachers that have performed this method. In fact the aim of this study is to examine whether this method can help students to increase their classroom participation (a democracy indicator in education) or not. It is also done to see whether applying this method would encounter teachers with opportunities and challenges.

THE SUNBEAM COMPOSITION

Composition is more related to writing than reading or accounting, so it has been one of the three main parts of literacy and instruction, i.e., reading, writing and accounting. The two main elements in writing are: proper writing or dictation and well writing or composition. In sunbeam composition, the teacher writes different words on the board, then students choose one as the sun and draw a circle around it. The sun has rays on which words and/or sentences related to the sun are written. If any or all students don't agree with the teacher sun, they can have their own sun and choose the word they like.

The sunbeam composition method which is proposed by the literature course book compilers performs through two ways in guidance school, composition and dictation classes, the two subclasses of literature are considered as the main classes among Iranian educational courses. Dictation emphasizes on correct writing and composition

on phrasing and proper writing; composition classes. There are three educational courses in Iran before entering University: Elementary course (5 year), Guidance course (3 year), High school course (4 year). In the first case, students are put in to groups. Each group includes four members. They are asked to choose a word or a topic from among those introduced by teacher. When the topic is selected, students individually start writing about the topic in a sunbeam way. Then, the members of each group join together to select the desirable sentences with each other's communion. Finally each group compiles a composition and presents it in the classroom.

In the second case, students are again classified into groups of four but here after selecting the topic, the members of each group gather together and each says a word or a paragraph about the selected topic. While they are discussing about the topic, the best sentences are selected and written. Those sentences which are considered as the beam of sun, form one or two pages and are edited by the group members. Finally, the edited text would be their compositions and will be presented in class by one of the members of groups.

In this approach, objects or their images can be used as the sun., therefore the objects available in the class (e.g., Flower vase, chair, table), their images or any other images that could be drawn on the board might be used by the teacher as the sun. As the introduced objects or images accepted by students, the composition writing starts.

The main focus of this approach is on students' participation. Although, students can participate individually, the primal aim is to cooperate and to work in groups. Each group is usually included four members (but there is leniency here) and there could be also groups with two, three and even more than four members.

This method promotes students' participation. As they write in groups, they have more contact with each other and consequently participate more".

THE EFFICACY OF SUNBEAM COMPOSITION

Analyzing data obtained from questionnaires and interviews, we came into conclusion that the sunbeam composition provides students with both opportunities and challenges. Providing students a situation in which they can participate more is considered as the best opportunity. What increase students' participation is indeed group working. This is what a teacher emphasizes by saying that

Based on this statement, the sunbeam composition could be a kind of participating learning, an instructional

method in which students work in small groups to achieve a common goal. They are both responsible for their own learning and have a sense of responsibility to others (Keramaty, 2005). It is believed that participatory learning facilitates knowledge formation, accelerates democratic decision making and encourages students' conversation.

Observations show that this method increases students' interest and their desire to composition class. Composition is one of the lessons on which Iranian educational specialists emphasize more but little attention has paid to it. It is presently criticized by internal media. In fact, one of the main reasons is the teaching approach which amazes students in the classroom. The sunbeam composition, on the other hand, can increase students' interest to composition classes. Through this approach, students show more interest to composition class and to each others. In fact promoting students' motivation and interest is the positive effect of this approach. The sunbeam composition also, increases students' vocabulary knowledge. Students will be acquainted with new vocabularies through the presentation of a variety of words in groups. This is what a teacher emphasizes by saying that:

"Students' writing skills increase through this approach. For example, by saying a word "adolescent", students start making new words. As they use number of words, their vocabulary knowledge will increase. Sometimes it is difficult for students to produce a word immediately after the word or the topic introduces as the sun and nothing come to their mind. But after a short time thinking, they start producing words. Although, it seems difficult at first, they find it an easy task afterwards".

The opportunity provided by sunbeam composition, can be converted in to a challenge for students. They will be uninterested to composition class, if they can't find an appropriate word in the writing task. In fact, studying deficiency in our country causes many students to have low vocabulary knowledge and to be disappointed in classroom. The director of composition courses in Hormozgan states that: "Students' low lexical knowledge resulting from studying deficiency, leads them to have difficulty in remembering words which form semantic network".

CONCLUSION

The sunbeam composition promotes students' classroom participation and consequently develops democracy in education. This kind of participation is done both in composition class decision-making and in classroom activities. Therefore, students make decisions

about the sun word, its beams (words and sentences) and their grouping. In fact, what they do in composition classrooms is based on their interest and their choices.

In an investigation, we noticed that the sunbeam composition not only affects classroom participation as a democracy indicator but also has an effect on other democracy indexes like: Election (Locke, 1988; Dewey, 1997; Held, 1987; Habermas, 1997; Kolouh-Westin, 2004; Mikel, 2000) and Tolerance (Gallagher, 1996; Oral, 2008). Mikel (2000) also says that Freedom and Equality, the two main words in democracy discussions, are prerequisites in active participating in decision making and activities (for freedom you can refer by Locke (1988), Mill (2005), Dewey (1997), Fromm (1984), Held (1987) and Chomsky (1991) for equality to (Held, 1987; Dahl, 2000; Dewey, 1997).

There are different challenges and opportunities in educational system of Iran. The sunbeam composition aims to struggle with challenges in direct instruction or lecturing. Direct instruction or lecturing, an effective method in inspiration and induction of beliefs and contents had been the dominant teaching method in schools (except the religious seminaries with more antiquity in which discussion was used as a dominant teaching method, Shariatmadari, 2005). This procedure however, is changing and has been changed to a high extent. The use of educational instruments and facilities such as videos and projectors is increasing. Universities and scientific centers' emphasis on the use and effectiveness of applying different educational methods have been proved. The main reason in using direct instruction such as Lecturing was the unfamiliarity of teachers with educational sciences specially teaching approaches. Another reason was related to teachers who started teaching after being graduated from high school and receiving their Diploma. But today after graduating from high school, teachers are to pass a two-year teacher training course (which is itself criticized for being insufficient) or to be graduated from universities. In each case, they need to pass educational sciences and psychology courses. In fact lessons like: educational psychology, principles in education, methodology, philosophy of education and history of education will be included in their curriculum. In spite of these changes, direct instruction is still a dominant method in Iranian schools (Shariatmadari, 2005), the method in which the teacher is a lecturer and there is little participation of students in teaching and learning. This issue is considered as an important challenge in democracy promotion. Pervading this method will cease any other

operative methods and consequently encounter the performance and development of democracy with problem (Yilmaz, 2009).

The performance and development of sunbeam composition in Iran is facing an important challenge. In fact hard centralization and strong bureaucracy of Iran's educational system negatively affects teachers and principals' choices, decisions and freedom of the will. This important issue which is currently a common issue among educational responsables can be discussed as one of the main challenges of democracy propagation. Therefore, in the 5th annual seminar of the Iranian curriculum society which focused on centralization and decentralization in curriculum planning, most of the specialists defended decentralization and offered techniques to decrease centralization in Iran's educational system. Research also shows the negative effects of centralization and bureaucracy on democracy. Barkhordari (2003) did a study on civic education and concluded that civic education in Iran's educational system is facing different challenges, challenges like: management and focused educational planning, lack of students' civic formations, absence of active and participative teaching methods. Hashemifar also did an investigation and concluded that the educational system of Orumiye (in the second district) is unable to step in democracy path for its extended scope, the lack of relative autonomy and deserve democracy.

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