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THE EXAMINATION OF ALTERNATIVE MODEL RELATED PARTICIPATION RIGHT OF CHILDREN*

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Abstract

According to the 12th article of United Nations, convention on the rights of the children; children have the right to express their views on any subject regarding themselves and this article necessitates direct involvement of the child. In the 13th and 15th articles of the convention on the rights of the children rights for free expression of ideas, right to form associations and right of peaceful assembly are constructed. At the present time, while the number of studies on the involvement right of children is increasing, it is seen that new models on involvement process are also developed. One of the models which examine the involvement process of children was developed by Harry Shier in 2001. This model was developed as an alternative to the other models which examine the involvement process especially to enable educators to discover various aspects related to involvement process of the children. This model examines the involvement process of children in 5 levels on the basis of 12th article of convention on the rights of the children. In the first level, the process of listening to the children; in the second level, the encouragement of children to express their views; in the third level, taking the views of children into account; in the fourth level, the involvement of children to decision making processes and in the fifth level, children's taking responsibility and having right to speak in decision making are examined. The questions in every level of the model aim to define involvement levels of the children. The aim of this study is to introduce this model developed by Harry Shier to support the involvement process of the children to our country and to explain how involvement levels of the children are defined in this model.

Keywords: The Rights of Children, Participation Right of Children, Alternative Model.

1. INTRODUCTION

From the very first day human kind existed, democracy has been one of the most important needs of the societies in forming the modern society. When making the description of democracy, human rights stand out as the foundation of the democratic society. The basic indications of democracy culture are sharing, participation, social justice, freedom, equality and pluralism. Democratic approach requires a society where humans are in the centre, democratic state structure is applied; participation, social solidarity and sharing is achieved, mutual love and respect and tolerance are grounded on in human relations and conscious citizenship is dominant and a society which is based on human rights (Cılga, 2001). Democracy and human rights are a life style rather than a regime of a state.

Human rights are one of the basic factors that feed cultures of democracy and social justice. As a conscious being, humans have the responsibility of keeping and actualizing the knowledge and savings of human rights. As for the children, they are the little members of this society. As individuals, depriving children of human rights and democracy culture cannot even be thought. Actually, bringing up individuals who have cultures of human rights and democracy ranks among basic prerequisites of bringing up generations who preserve democracy, human rights and republic (Kepenekçi, 1999; Şahin & Polat, 2012).

By standardizing and developing human rights for children, International Convention on the Rights of the Children was constituted. A very important investment from the point of children, International Convention on the Rights of the Children has importance in terms of guiding children to grow up as conscious individuals in all aspects and to build happy future lives for themselves. In a sense, by taking all rights of children into account, their life standards have been created (Cılga, 2001). 12th article of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children is children's right to express his/her thoughts in every subject concerning themselves and this article is directly related to the participation right of children. 13th article of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children emphasizes children's freedom of

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expression, 14th article emphasizes liberty of conscience, freedom of religion and thought and 15th article emphasizes right of organization and peaceful assembly (Şahin & Polat, 2012).

When all articles of Convention on the Rights of the Children are studied, it is seen that right of participation comes forward as a prerequisite. Listening to the conversations, sentences of the children seriously, valuing the opinions of children, recognising their experiences are all important for protecting the rights of the children. According to Dewey (1916), if right of participation is an important part of democracy culture, the most appropriate environment for experiencing participation is education. At the same time, child rights should be borne in mind in all aspects (in judiciary and criminal circumstances, cultural activities, workplace, physical violence circumstances, emergencies, social environment, migration circumstances) of life (Şahin & Polat, 2012).

Democracy can be defined as being able to make decisions on their lives for children (Güleç & Özdemir, 2006). At the present time, children's being active citizens, being able to search and obtain knowledge, expressing themselves as part of democratic culture are all important traits. One of the most basic rights of being a citizen is participation (Hart, 1979). Even if right of participation has different descriptions, it is basically children's involvement in decision making processes which effect themselves or children's being the decision maker about subjects concerning themselves (Sinclair, 2004). In a study to find out what participation means and what it reminds to teacher, teachers stated participation reminds them concepts like belonging (to someone/somewhere) and influence skills (Sandberg & Erikson, 2006).

From the moment they are born, children get involved in the social environment and naturally they earn the right of participation. For example, children can realize how they can affect the people around them by crying and they can have their voice in the decisions taken (Hart, 1979). In practice, below are the important points in order to get the children to obtain their right of participation: Creating an environment where children can express their views comfortably; organizing a setting where children live according to their suggestions and thoughts; having the children to embrace their school by valuing their opinions; regulating curriculums after getting children's opinions; encouraging the children and youth to organize within the frame of certain aims; in short getting children's opinions and taking their opinions into consideration in all management mechanisms (Sinclair, 2004; Şahin & Polat, 2012).

When children feel that their ideas are taken serious and valued, their needs and interests are considered; they will accept themselves as more effective individuals in the society. Thus they will experience participation in their real lives (Sandberg & Erikson, 2006). In this sense, below are some suggestions to make children's participation more fruitful: As many students as possible should be encouraged to participate. The participation should be made meaningful for the children. If there are conditions that hinder participation, they should be analyzed and solved. Appropriate environment for participation should be formed and most particularly, the children should be motivated in the process to make the participation fruitful (McNeis & Newman, 2002).

With confirmation of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children, different models dealing with participation processes of children have been developed. Different models analyzing participation processes will help the experts making researches on this subject develop a more comprehensive insight (Dudley, Ivanoff & Danijela, 2011). One of the effective models which analyze participation processes of children and which was supported by various researches is "Ladder of Participation" model developed by Roger Hart (Shier, 2001). In his model, Hart (1992) cascaded participation processes of children and divided these steps into sub-degrees according to the participation level of the children. This model, originally named as "Pathways to Participation" which supports children's participation in decision making processes related to 12th article of Convention on the Rights of the Children was developed by Harry Shier as an alternative model. The aim of this study is to introduce this model which was developed to support participation processes of children by Harry Shier in Turkey and to explain how the participation level of children is determined in this model.

2. ALTERNATIVE MODEL: PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION

Harry Shier founded a charity organization named "Play train" working on child rights, games and creativity (Shier, 2008). This charity organization provided essential information, ideas and sources to experts working on games, personnel, educators, managers and local administration with the application 31st article of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children (CRIN, 2013). Within this framework, in the projects carried out in England, first steps were taken to develop "Pathways to Participation" model (Shier, 1998). The project at which children work as mentors to help cultural institutions develop children friendly programs and facilities made important contributions in the development of this alternative model (Shier, 1999).

This model was developed to enable the institutions which confirm the Convention on the Rights of the Children, teachers and other grown-ups who work with children to discover different aspects of participation processes (Shier, 2001). Shier (2006) explained the aim of his model was to determine the necessary steps for children to get the best results and help teachers and schools about application of these steps. Harry Shier has continued his efforts for the application and generalizing of his alternative model in an education centre which makes organizations on health and environment in Nigeria since 2001 (Shier, 2008).

This model which deals with participation processes consists of 5 levels (Shier, 2001):

First Level: The children are listened.

Second Level: The children are supported to express their own opinions.

Third Level: The opinions of children are taken into consideration.

Fourth Level: The children participate in decision making mechanisms.

Fifth Level: The children share responsibility and authority in decision making mechanisms.

Table 1: The levels, steps and questions of this alternative model

First Level: The children are listened.	The opinions of children are listened by adults curiously and carefully.	The participation level at which listening occurs when the children want to express their opinions.
Second Level: The children are supported to express their own opinions.	In order for children to express their opinions comfortably, they are given necessary support and confidence.	The participation level at which adults set the necessary environment in order for children to express their opinions comfortably.
Third Level: The opinions of children are taken into consideration.	12 th article of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, "the right to express their opinions freely on the subjects related to themselves" comes into effect.	The participation level which has to be implemented by all the countries and institutions that confirmed United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children.
Fourth Level: The children participate in decision making mechanisms.	Children start to take active roles in decision making processes along with expressing their opinions.	The level at which children participate actively.
Fifth Level: The children share responsibility and authority in decision making mechanisms.	Children start to share responsibility with adults in decision making processes.	The participation level at which children undertake responsibilities in decision making processes appropriate for their ages.

Table 2: The levels, steps and questions of this alternative model

Step	Introductions	Opportunities	Necessities
5. The children share responsibility and authority in decision making mechanisms.	As an adult, are you ready to share responsibility and authority you have with children?	Do you any procedure in action to enable adults and children to share responsibility and authority in decision making processes?	Do you think adults' and children's sharing responsibility and authority in decision making processes is a political necessity?
4. The children participate in decision making mechanisms.	Are you ready to let the children participate in your decision making processes?	Do you any procedure in action for the children to participate in the decision making processes?	Do you think children's taking part in decision making processes is a political necessity?
3. The opinions of children are taken into consideration.	Are you ready to take the opinions of the children into consideration?	Do your decision making processes enable you to take the opinions of the children into consideration?	Do you think taking the opinions of the children into consideration in decision making processes is a political necessity?
2. The children are supported to express their own opinions.	Are you ready to support the children to express their own opinions?	Do you have authentic ideas and activities to support the children to express their own opinions?	Do you think supporting the children to express their own opinions is a political necessity?
1. The children are listened.	Are you ready to listen to the children?	Do you try to listen to the children?	Do you think listening to the children is a political requirement?

For every step of the levels in this alternative model, 15 questions were prepared in total (Shier, 2001). The questions of the model help adults determine to what extent they support participation of the children (Smith, 2002). The answers to the questions will help teachers increase their roles in the participation process and determine the necessary steps to be taken to increase the participation levels of the students (Shier, 2006). Especially when the questions are answered by "no", necessary discussions should be made on these subjects. For example, such questions as "Do you think this question should be answered by yes?", "What should be done to answer by yes; do you think we can make these changes? Are we ready to answer these questions?" etc. can be discussed (Shier, 2001). Besides, the answers given will guide the

institutions about what can be implemented and what kind of changes can be done in that institution (Sinclair, 2004).

According to Shier (2006), in addition to determining which step they are at, the teachers who use this model can make evaluations about which step they desire to reach and what they need to do to reach that step by using 15 questions in the model. For example, teachers or school personnel can make use of the steps in this model to provide active participation of students in decisions related to content of the curriculum, the administration of the school, school environment and equipments, the rules the students and personnel have to obey and school uniforms (Shier, 2006).

Shier (2001) expressed that using the alternative model only as a scoring scale isn't appropriate. It is stated the students shouldn't be forced to take part in the steps which aren't suitable for their levels or the ones they don't want to during its implementation (Shier, 2006). The necessity to create environments at which students can participate in decision making processes and undertake decision making responsibilities during the implementation of the model is also emphasized (Shier, 2006).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This alternative program of Harry Shier analyzes the participation processes of children and enables children to discover different aspects related to the participation process. When children feel that their opinions are taken into consideration and valued, their needs and interests are considered, they will view themselves as more effective individuals in the society and thus the children will be provided a chance to live all the stages of their lives as happy, self-confident and successful individuals. This model which evaluates participation process of children in five levels guides the users to find which level they are at with the help of questions. These questions enable both students and teachers to self-evaluate themselves. It is thought that the evaluation of the stages through questions and making necessary adjustments on participation processes in accordance with the results of the questions are important in terms of active implementation of the model. Children's making progress in participation levels is based on the support given by the adults and the balance of power established between adults and the children to a great extent (Smith, 2002). It is thought that the alternative model will be effective in developing and implementing new projects for all public enterprises and non-governmental organizations working for the benefit of children to support participation processes of children (Shier, 2001).

Starting from this point, these suggestions can be made to all public enterprises and non-governmental organizations working for the benefit of children:

1. Development of new projects to support participation processes of children related to the alternative model.
2. Working on implementation of the projects developed in educational contexts.
3. Organization of seminars, meetings and in-service trainings for educators related to the participation processes.
4. Providing support to educators to implement participation processes in educational contexts.

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