PART 13

Reflective Thinking in Social Studies Curricula

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"If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's,
we rob them of tomorrow.".
John Dewey

1. Introduction

Thinking is one of the most important skills that separate humankind from other living organisms. This concept has deep meanings and no boundaries. Thinking has existed from the first day of humankind on to this date, and it is a foundational skill that enabled humanity to reach today's level. Humankind has overcome their psychical weaknesses against nature through the power of thinking, and ruled many things in history. Mankind noticed the power of thinking, and "thinking" was for the first time systematically investigated in ancient times. Thinking is a function of the brain. Thinking is the definition of using the brain, and thinking is expressed with the principle of "I am thinking, therefore I exist" in Descartes' philosophy. While Descartes said he was thinking, he also suspected his thinking. Descartes said, "I doubt, so I think; if I know what I think it is, it is an expression of my existence. Then I am." The Turkish Language Institution defined the concept of thinking as "mind's own state and independency that is separate from sensation, observation, and designs" in its current Turkish dictionary. Dewey (1933) described thinking as finding out cause and effect relations in a stable and balanced way.

In the historical process, there have been multiple goals of educating kids for families and schools. In today's world, one of the foundational purposes of education, without a doubt, is raising individuals that have skills in thinking, questioning, and problem solving. The knowledge that mankind has acquired over many centuries, can be obtained in many more areas, within a few years through today's technology. This richness of information that is all around us has made the method of directly transferring the knowledge to newer generations invalid. As a result, the modern educational approach is focused on improving learners' thinking and reasoning skills.

There is not much space for improving students' thinking and problem solving skills in traditional learning activities and assessment processes. Students need to decide where, when, and how to use the knowledge that they have acquired. Knowledge that students are not able to decide how to use will be meaningless for students. Teaching methods that use direct transfer of knowledge is abandoned in todays' schools. Direct transfer of knowledge is replaced with teaching foundational values and skills. Thinking skills (creative thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, reflective thinking, etc.) is one of the important sets of skills, among other skills.

Without a doubt, it is very crucial for students to gain a variety of thinking skills for education systems. There are several subjects in education systems that enable students to gain such a variety of thinking skills. For example, mathematics certainly improves children's thinking skills. Mathematics enable students to develop systematic and correct approaches to events and to solve problems quickly. Fine Arts is also a critical subject for students to develop holistic thinking. Language and thought are intertwined. Language is the embodiment of thought. On the other hand, Social Studies as a subject area have an important mission: preparing students for social life and helping them to gain skills necessary for their society. Raising effective citizens is the ultimate goal of education systems. Social Studies is the first course that comes to mind which serves this goal. Because citizenship issues are the main cause for Social Studies to exist and develop.

The goal of Social Studies as a subject is raising students as citizens who adopt democratic values and equipping students with skills to adapt to their society, creating opportunities for students to practice their knowledge. Social Studies as a discipline strives to create a democratic society and enable members of such a society to gain basic knowledge, skills, and values. Having individuals gain reflective thinking skills can be seen as a basic requirement for effective citizenship so that a democratic life and culture will be protected and advanced. Individuals face many problems in their daily lives. In order to overcome these problems, people need to have skills that are required for reflective thinking because people who can think reflectively can ask questions, think critically and creatively, have a high level of problem solving skills, can make

evaluations and analyses, and think and find alternatives. All of these skills are fundamental skills for individuals in a democratic society. In this respect, reflective thinking and democracy are becoming two areas that feed into each other. Educational institutions should provide the qualifications necessary for all students to participate adequately in democratic processes. Democracy education should be able to demonstrate not only democratic principles and practices but also individuals with democracy who can tolerate criticism and criticism at the same time (Karatekin, Kuş and Sönmez, 2010).

A democratic society is a required environment for reflective thinking. For democracy to live, the members of the society need to think reflectively. Individuals who have reflective thinking skills are aware of the importance of protecting a democratic life culture and protecting it. They also notice and criticize anti-democratic applications that are revealed in social life. They offer rational and peaceful solutions for problems. Members of the societies that are insensitive and passive, and who accept similar thoughts without questioning, will not support the development of the democracy. Sooner or later, these people will destroy the democracy and create a uniform type of thought with time. Social Studies courses strive for students to gain democratic values and skills in the form of behavior rather than through theoretical information in everyday life. This point is very important in supporting the improvement of reflective thinking. The main goal of the Social Studies curriculum in Turkey, which is to form citizens who are democratic, active and respectful of human rights, is visibly promoted in the Social Studies curriculum (Kuş, 2014).

In Turkey, constructivist learning theory has been the foundational base for a Social Studies curriculum that was implemented in 2004. Curricula were updated in 2017 and this update did not abandon the constructivist approach. In constructivist learning theory, it is important for students to analyze and think on the knowledge rather than memorizing it as is. This approach enables learners to construct, create, interpret, and improve their knowledge. The foundational principles in constructivism are:

- Research, interpret, and analyze knowledge
- Improve knowledge and thought processes
- Combine past experiences with new ones

Constructivism is not gathering and memorizing the knowledge, but thinking about and analyzing knowledge. This kind of educational process will steer learners toward constant thinking and questioning, which are the skills of reflective thinkers because the goal of reflective learning is raising individuals who can take responsibility for their own learning, assess themselves, question, think creatively and reflectively, make correct decisions, solve problems,

and adapt to social relationships. This understanding was not eliminated in the latest update of Social Studies teaching programs in 2017. Enabling students to think reflectively when facing social problems was stressed in Social Studies teaching programs.

What is Reflective Thinking?

The word "reflective" is produced from the word "reflection" in English and "reflecto" in Latin. The roots of reflective thinking go back to Socrates. However, the systematic method of reflective thinking was created by John Dewey. Understandings of reflective thinking have evolved to the current state through Schon's (1983) and Kolb's (1984) work, which was application based. Dewey explained the philosophical foundation of reflective thought in his book, *How We Think*. According to Dewey, thinking is finding out relationships between cause and effect in a stable and balanced way. On the other hand, Dewey defined reflective thinking as consciously looking for foundations of a belief, and analyzing the appropriateness of the foundations to support the belief. Reflective thinking starts with a doubt or a problem and ends with a solution. A reflective thinker compares different ideas, ask questions, questions himself/herself and events, can think critically, solve problems, and make decisions independently. For Dewey, reflective thinking is actively, permanently, and carefully supporting beliefs or facts that are based on empirical information. Learning alone is not enough for reflective learning; students also need to practice the knowledge in their lives.

Dewey explains the meaning of reflective thinking in four dimensions (Dewey, 1933):

I. In reflective thinking, opinions are not sorted in just a simple way; there is a sequence based on meaningful associations between opinions. An opinion is based on the previous opinion, and it decides the suitability of the following opinion.

II. Reflective thinking is focused on phenomenon and beliefs about ideas and events. Reflective thinking aims to bring emotions to a positive state and improve them.

III. Reflective thinking bases beliefs on logical foundations. Perceived and thought out situations are either accepted or rejected based on whether or not they are logically eligible.

IV. Reflective thinking requires conscious research on the nature, conditions, and foundations of a belief.

Dewey indicated the difficulty, complexity, and time-consuming disadvantages of applying reflective thinking, but he also indicated that reflective thinking will result in high quality learning.

According to Wilson and Jan (1993), reflective thinkers question themselves; critical thinkers can investigate, explain, organize, find causes, analyze, generalize, develop hypotheses, predict, assess, and synthesize; creative thinkers generate new ideas, find alternatives, adapt, explore choices, and make assumptions; metacognitive thinkers can make decisions, select suitable strategies, assess themselves, create their own goals (make plans), and activate their own goals.

In the tradition of reflective inquiry, content is based on the development of children's decision making, unlike the content traditionally found in textbooks. Students use knowledge when solving problems and making decisions, but the important skill is not just learning the knowledge. The important skill is making decisions based on scientific reasoning and problem solving (Doganay, 2002: 21).

Opinions of different researchers about the reflective thinking process are categorized in the following sections (Lee, 2005: 701).

Table 1 the process of reflective thinking

Proponent	Theme	Process
Dewey (1933)	Reflective thinking process	An experience Spontaneous interpretation of the experience Naming the problem(s) or the question(s) that arises out of the experience Generating possible explanations for the problem(s) or question(s) posed Ramifying the explanations into full-blown hypotheses Experimenting or testing the selected hypotheses
Schön (1983)	Reflective thinking approach	Reflection-in-action Problematic situation Frame/reframe the problem Experimentation Review consequences/implementation

Pugach and Johnson (1990)	A peer collaboration framework	Reframing through clarifying questions Problem summarization Generation and prediction Evaluation and reconsideration
Gagatsis ve Patronis (1990)	Progression of reflective thinking	Initial thoughts Reflecting on the subject and trying to understand Discovery and (partial) understanding Introspection Full awareness
Eby & Kujawa (1994)	A model of reflective thinking	Observing Reflecting Gathering data Considering moral principles Making a judgement Considering strategies Action
Lee (2000)	Reflective thinking process	Problem context/episode Problem definition/reframing Seeking possible solution Experimentation Evaluation Acceptance/rejection
Rodgers (2002)	Reorganized Dewey's phases	Presence to experience Description of experience Analysis of experience Intelligent action/experimentation

Research on reflective thinking has shown that the effective usage of experiencing and identifying problems, creating hypotheses, testing hypotheses, questioning, testing, problem solving, assessing, and noticing things are all required thinking skills.

Even though Dewey (1933) created the philosophical foundations of reflective thinking, Schon's (1987) work has been most helpful in the aspect of applying it. Schon (1983) claimed that practitioners should construct their knowledge with their own reflective applications and explained reflective thinking, defining the what and why of an action, as a dialectical examination between theory and practice. Schon (1987) described reflection in two ways: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action is focused on solving the occupational problems that arise when the action is taken momentarily and managing actions by questioning them. On the other hand, reflection-on-action is deeply assessing and going back, employing intentional and systematic thinking about an action after it is conducted. Schon (1933) indicated that reflection includes the need for practitioners to question their own actions, asking questions like: Did it work? Why did it work? Why did it not work? What else can be done? Help practitioners to rethink their activities, and it will guide their future applications.

Philosophy of Revised 2017 Social Studies Teaching Program and Reflective Thinking

Reflective education programs are based on the progressivism philosophy which is also a base for reflective thinking. Pragmatism and progressivism are starting points for reflective thinking. Students should be taught through research and learning methods that will help to meet their needs and solve their problems. As long as information is useful for action, it is true.

The principles of progressivism include:

- A student-centered education for the child
- Education in a democratic environment
- Education that provides learning by doing
- Education that encourages groupwork
- Education that uses problem solving methods

Reflective thinking supports students taking responsibility for their learning, identifying their goals, assessing themselves, and participating in the learning process.

Reconstructivism or structuralism that is an advanced form of progressivism are the foundational base for reflective education. Reflective education programs focus on concepts, and it embraces deductive reasoning method. Students are responsible for their own learning and they are active. In general, elementary level programs include the features of reflectively thinking teachers and a reflective teaching environment. However, such a program does not adequately mention the concept of reflection and its applications. Moreover, such a program does not sufficiently include activities for improving reflective thinking. Elementary

school programs that aim to raise individuals and societies who can effectively solve problems should include reflective learning skills because these prioritize problem solving skills (Doğan Dolapçıoğlu, 2007).

In Turkey, the progressivism philosophy has been the foundational base for Social Studies curricula which were implemented in 2004. Curricula were updated in 2017 and this update did not abandon the progressivist philosophy. Progressivism guides today's education programs because it centers students' interests and needs, and focuses on thinking skills. Progressivism is student-centered and students are active in this learning philosophy. Teachers' roles are in mentoring, and teachers plan activities with students. This approach suggests content be related to students' daily lives, and that the direct transfer of theoretical knowledge should be avoided in progressivism. Problem solving methods should be the foundational method for learning. It is very important to have students gain problem solving and scientific research methods and skills, as well as construct learning with collaboration. Daily life issues should be brought up in the classroom to be assessed with critical thinking. It is necessary to have a democratic school climate in order to apply the above mentioned activities. Constructivism, a learning theory that explains how people learn, and was developed from progressivism, is a foundational base for reflective education programs. In constructivism, students are active and they are responsible for their own learning. This approach focuses on students' thinking skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and developing different points of view. These kinds of skills are also foundational skills for reflective learning, but reflective learning is not limited to these skills. Reflective thinking is not a topic or a standard that we can teach in several class hours. Therefore, it should be included throughout a teaching program with consideration for students' readiness levels.

Curricula are evolved with the program development process and this process is composed of four phases: goals, content, teaching-learning conditions, and assessment.

1. Goals

The process of identifying goals is the most important phase of the program developing process because goals affect all of the other phases. Goals of education and teaching programs clearly state the levels of students after the teaching and learning process. Goals should be stated so as to reflect students' behaviors, not the teachers. Therefore, goals should help students to solve social, political, and personal problems they face in their daily lives. Dewey points out the importance of students' active participation when creating goals. If students are to think reflectively on goals, they first need to embrace them. If students believe in the goals and willingly embrace the goals, they will reflect on their personal level, and identify and fill the gaps in their skills and knowledge to reach the goals (Demiralp, 2010).

Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) revealed three traditions related to Social Studies. As they are known, they include:

- Social Studies as transferring citizenship
- Social Studies as social science
- Social Studies as reflective thinking

In Turkey, these traditions were used as a foundational base and they were related via standards in the current version of Social Studies curricula. This approach was kept in the 2017 update, and the importance was given to 'Social Studies as Social Science' and 'Social Studies as Reflective Thinking'. The following expressions were used in the third article in a section that explains cautions when applying the teaching program:

> *"The importance should be given to 'Social Studies as Social Science' and 'Social Studies as Reflective Thinking'. Students should be aware of the scientific methods used by social scientists (Geographer, Historian, etc...). Using events both inside and outside of the school, students should often have to be faced with real life problems and contradictory situations, and reflect on social problems they face."*

This explanation shows that a great deal of consideration has been given to reflective thinking in the revised version of the Social Studies curricula in 2017. The above article points out the importance of encouraging students to think reflectively on social problems they face in their lives. Even though the reflective thinking term was not used in the standards, it asks teachers to relate social problems to standards in order to encourage students to think reflectively. One of the most important revisions in the current program is that it provides this flexibility.

The following expressions were used in the second article in a section that explains cautions when applying the teaching program:

> *"Social Studies' foundational teaching principles, such as 'locality, actuality, interdisciplinary, reflective inquiry, connections between past, present, and the future, and time, continuity, and flexibility' must be taken into consideration. In terms of these emphasized principles, teaching times can be changed when necessary."*

This statement also emphasized "reflective inquiry" and that necessary changes can be made if needed.

Within the general objectives of the Social Studies curriculum, there are many objectives that serve reflective thinking. These are as follows:

- *Have critical thinking skills to know how to reach accurate and reliable information,*
- *Use the information and communication technologies consciously by understanding the development process of science and technology, and their effects on social life,*
- *Use scientific thinking and science ethic as bases in accessing and using knowledge, and producing within the*
- *Be able to use basic communication skills and Social Studies' foundational concepts and methods to organize social relationships and solve the problems students face,*
- *Believe the importance of participation and produce opinions to solve personal and social problems,*
- *Be aware of the fact that students are a part of humanity and be sensitive to the issues that concern their own country and the world.*

These general goals include the ability to think critically, think analytically, solve problems, and collaborate, which are essential skills for reflective thinking. Therefore, the individuals reaching these goals can also reach reflective thinking skills.

2. Content

Content is the second basic element of curriculum development (subject, unit, scope, curriculum, content). Content is a basic tool for reaching objectives. The content should not be distant from the social and daily life of individuals. In our age, with the accumulation of new knowledge, rapid developments in science and technology are not reflected in the content and integrated into the content in a timely manner. This situation creates a distance between the content of students' responsibilities in school life and the contents of their education (Çıtak, 2016). Thus, curricula developed based on reflective thinking principles not only include constant subject information, but given the constant change of information, it is necessary to have students gain the ability to achieve reliable information. Students should be able to bring daily topics and information to the classroom, and teachers should use those daily issues to have students gain necessary skills for reflective thinking.

According to reflective thinking approaches, the content is quite different from content traditionally found in textbooks. Content is used as a tool for improving students' decision making processes. Students use knowledge while solving problems or making decisions, but the point is not the knowledge, but the thinking and decision making skills which are based on problem solving and scientific reasoning (Doganay, 2002:21).

Primary and secondary school teachers use textbooks that are reviewed and approved by the Turkish History Institution (TTK). Teachers keep themselves responsible for teaching all of the subjects in the books. However, teachers who aim to teach reflective thinking skills do not have to follow textbooks because not all of the books have the same high quality. At this point, teachers can make necessary changes, staying within the curriculum, to have students gain reflective thinking skills. Additionally, the content of a reflective teaching program should be related to the real life of the students involved. The student will be able to think reflectively if they can use the information that is learned in the school in their daily lives.

Many skills, such as research, digital literacy, critical thinking, collaboration, proof using, decision making, media literacy, and problem solving, in Social Studies teaching programs are directly related to reflective thinking skills.

Looking at the general structure of a Social Studies curriculum, it is possible to say that teachers can relate almost all of the standards in the curriculum through reflective thinking, and have students reach these standards. Table 1 presents sample standards from all relevant grade levels (4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grades) that can be related with reflective thinking.

Table 2: Sample standards that are related with reflective thinking in Social Studies Curricula

4th Grade	
Learning Subject	**Standards**
Science, Technology, and Society	*Develop ideas for designing unique products by taking surrounding conditions as a starting point*
Production, Distribution, and Consumption	*Use surrounding resources without wasting them*
5th Grade	
Individual and Society	*Explain multidimensionality of an event by taking a surrounding sample as a starting point*
People, Places, and Environment	*Question the causes of environmental disasters and problems that occur in the environment*
Science, Technology, and Society	*Question the accuracy and reliability of information obtained in the virtual environment*
Production, Distribution, and Consumption	*Develop new ideas for production, distribution, and consumption through collaboration*
Global Connections	*Suggest innovative ideas for societies by researching interests, wishes, and needs*
6th Grade	

Individual and Society	*Question prejudices against different gender, socioeconomic, and cultural groups in order to live in harmony in society*
Science, Technology, and Society	*Propose ideas about the effects of scientific and technological developments on future life*
	Research by following scientific research phases
Production, Distribution, and Consumption	*Analyze the effects of the unconscious consumption of resources on living organisms*
	Create investment and marketing project proposals by taking Turkey's geographical conditions into consideration
Global Connections	*Question the influence of international popular culture on our culture*
7th Grade	
Individual and Society	*Discuss the role of the media in social change and interaction*
People, Places, and Environment	*Discuss causes and consequences of migration through sample examinations*
Science, Technology, and Society	*Assess the contribution of freedom of thought to scientific developments*
Production, Distribution, and Consumption	*Analyze the changes that digital technologies bring to production, distribution, and consumption networks*
Production, Distribution, and Consumption	*Analyze the problems encountered during the implementation process of democracy*
Global Connections	*Develop ideas with peers to solve global problems*

As seen in Table 2, all of the sample standards are directly related to reflective thinking because these standards include skills like asking questions, critical and creative thinking, problem solving, assessment, analysis, and approaching events with different points of view to develop alternatives. For example, the 5th grade Science, Technology, and Society learning subject standard, *"Question about the accuracy and reliability of the information obtained in the virtual environment"* is directly related to critical thinking and problem solving skills. Teachers can have students gain reflective thinking skills through this and similar standards.

3. Learning and Teaching Conditions

The third phase of the curriculum development process is teaching-learning conditions. In the process of reflection-based learning-teaching, an answer is sought as to how to teach. The learning-teaching environment in which the reflective learning approach is adopted must be student-centered. Students learn new information by doing, with consideration for readiness and prior knowledge levels since these are required for reflective thinking. In the learning process, it is necessary to give reinforcement to support high level thinking, provide feedback to make corrections, and conduct assessment. Students should be given chances, from start to end, to express and assess themselves.

To improve reflective thinking, educators can use techniques such as autobiographical writing, metaphors and imagination, group work, cultural writings, appropriate control mechanisms, and curriculum analysis (Copeland, et al. 1993).

The principles of reflective thinking based learning-teaching practices are (Gür, 2008: 195):

- Reflective practice requires mutual agreement.
- Reflective practice is obtained with experiences.
- Reflective practice includes reflective tendency and transformation.
- Reflective practice is about the process of self-learning.
- Reflective practice is the process moving from organizing to research.
- Reflective practice is creating curiosity in the process of knowledge construction.
- Reflective practice is identifying individuals who think critically and form creative ideas.
- Reflective practice is a way of creating symbolic views of class and school.
- Reflective practice is a bridge between theory and practice.
- Reflective practice is the postmodern way of knowing.

4. Assessment

The last phase of curriculum development is assessment. In this phase, one checks to see if students have reached the objectives through content and learning-teaching conditions. One also checks how many goals have been reached. In the assessment phase, all aspects of curriculum development such as students' progress, content-objectives relationships, and the quality of learning activities are reviewed comprehensively.

In reflective-thinking based assessment, students' psychical, social, emotional, and cognitive developmental levels should be determined to see if students are ready to achieve objectives. Thus, students can question their achievement level in comparison to objectives. Students' verbal and behavioral feedback during the learning processes is critically important for reflective teaching. These points of feedback will serve as clues about teaching practices for teachers to not repeat the same mistakes (Inonu, 2006:45).

The Social Studies curriculum adopts traditional assessment and evaluation tools as well as reflective thinking and inquiry assessment approaches. Curriculum stresses not only assessing the product, but also the learning process. Moreover, the curriculum emphasizes assessing student performance, self-assessment, and group assessment (Ata, 2009: 43). This measurement evaluation approach is the measurement-evaluation process that is required for reflective thinking.

Results

Without a doubt, it is very important for today's education systems to teach different thinking skills. The Turkish education system is also making necessary changes and updates for this purpose. The Social Studies curriculum was revised in 2017 and it did not abandon this approach. In the constructivist learning theory, it is important for students to analyze and question knowledge rather than memorizing it. This kind of education system would encourage the thinking and constant questioning that are skills of reflective thinking individuals. The revised Social Studies curriculum gives special importance to "Social Studies as Social Science" and "Social Studies as Reflective Thinking" approaches. Curriculum development phases, objectives, content, learning-teaching conditions, and assessment are prepared in accordance with reflective thinking principles and these phases can be related with reflective thinking. Additionally, the revised curriculum has given necessary flexibility to teachers so that they can teach reflective thinking skills to students.

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