



## Inferences from variety of implementations in learner centered approach<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** From person to society there are many different layers of the meaning of education. Nevertheless, none of them is unnecessary and superficial. This meaning intensiveness is one of the main problems of education. For many years education in different regions served for variety of functions. Sometimes it become an agent for economic productivity, sometimes a tool for hustings and indoctrination. Educational discourse in Turkey have been turned to “putting learner first” in the education system for last decade. As a result, in 2007 a constructivist curriculum began to implement for the sake of learner-centered education. This inference lead researchers goes deeper to investigate what can be the implications for the learner-centered education. To this attempt a fieldtrip was organized to gather data from different alternative schools in the U.S. that main orientation is learner centered education. In these schools, interviews and unstructured observations were conducted to gain wider perspective on milieu. This study seeks to provide inferences from variety of schools in order to apply the learner-centered education.

**Keywords:** Learner-centered approach, alternative schools, qualitative study.

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### INTRODUCTION

Learner-centered approach emphasizes students’ needs and interests (affective aspect of learning) as well as cognitive aspect of learning. The learner-centered curriculum is rooted in the philosophy of J.J. Rousseau in that students should be left their own device and the creativity and freedom were two main issues for students’ growth. McCombs (1997; as cited in Brown, 2003; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008) explained that the focus in a learner-centered approach is on individual learners’ heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities and needs. One of the major assumptions underlying the learner centered philosophy is that, given the constraints that exist in most learning contexts, it is impossible to teach learners everything they need to know in class (Nunan, 1988). Learner needs and characteristics take precedence over knowledge of facts and skills; the emphasis is on engaging learners in learning for understanding and thinking, to help them build their own interpretations. Although students are active learners, the teacher’s expertise is still a powerful part of the learning equation (Brown, 2003).

The purpose of learner-centered curriculum is to make learning maximally effective-not for the average student, but for each student. Thus, a curriculum is learner-centered to the extent that it provides for individual differences in learning. A course of study, for example, that does not provide for individual differences in learning rates is not maximally effective; it bores fast learners, frustrates low learners, and results in negative learning experiences for both groups. Learner-centered reform in the curriculum is a question of finding ways to maximize learning for each student. And that is not as difficult or as expensive as it sounds (Cross, 1975). Moreover, progressive education movement provided impetus to learner-centered approach and its proponents claimed that if the students’ interest and needs were incorporated into curriculum, intrinsic motivation resulted. Thus, advocated believe that the students’ needs and interest should be taken into account in developing curriculum. The key difference between

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learner centered and traditional curriculum development is that, in the former, the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught (Nunan, 1988).

Moreover Cross's identification of four major dimensions, curriculum literature (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Ornstein & Levin, 1993), classified learner centered design into four categories. Those are; (1) Child-Centered Designs, (2) Experience Centered Designs, (3) Romantic (radical) Designs and (4) Humanistic Designs.

### **Child centered designs**

In 1762, J.J. Rousseau published *Emile* in which he maintained that the purpose of education is to teach the people to live (Rousseau, 1941). By the turn of the next century, the Swiss educator Johann Pestalozzi stressed human emotions and kindness in teaching young children. Further, Friedrich Froebel introduced the kindergarten in Germany in 1837. These issues gave impetus to child-centered curriculum. Child-centered curriculum adopted by schools stressed the needs and interest of the students. Some stressed individualization while others grouped the students by ability or interests. Many child-centered programs today are carried on in free schools or alternative schools. One of these schools is Summerhill, founded by A.S. Neill in 1921. The school has been trying to replace authority with freedom.

Advocates of the child centered or learner-centered design believed that if we are to optimized learning then the student must be active in his or her environment. Learning should not be separated from the ongoing lives of students, as is often the case with the subject-centered designs. Indeed, it should be based on student's lives, their needs and interests (Ornstein & Hunkins,1998; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008).

The meaning of the principle that the curriculum should be appropriate to the needs and interests of learners has been among the most misunderstood issues of education, both by those who have supported it and those who have opposed to it. In the early days of this approach vague definitions of the term "need" created many controversies. First, the supporters of the "needs" criterion used it as the main basis for selecting and organizing both the content and learning experiences to the exclusion of all other criteria, at least in a theory. The criterion was also considered equally applicable to the selection of content and learning experiences on all levels (Taba, 1962).

It seems that the principle of meeting the demands of essential, significant subject matter and that of adapting education to the needs and interests of the students are not necessarily in conflict. As one differentiates the levels of choice, it is possible to fix the essential things to be learned and allow the details through which to learn them to be determined by student interest, thus providing both (Taba, 1962). The shifting of emphasis from the tradition of subject matter to the needs and interests of children was part of Rousseau's educational philosophy. Rousseau believed that children should be taught in context with their natural environment, drawing on their needs and interests in creating an educational program. Also they required guidance from the teacher. But the manner in which the teacher stimulated the student's curiosity had to be appropriate for the particular developmental level of the child. In a very real sense, Rousseau was the first to advocate a developmental approach to teaching and learning (Rousseau, 1941; Ornstein and Hunkins,1998; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008).

Child centered designs celebrate students' interests. Students along with teachers negotiate what interests will be addressed with what content. Teachers and students participate in planning the unit, its purposes, the content focuses, the activities, and even the materials to be employed. Having students negotiate the curriculum enables them to gain ownership of their knowledge. It empowers them. Students so involved also fit into the current stress of constructivism. If we accept that constructivism is a way of coming to know one's world, then it makes sense to tune into students' needs and interests and give them opportunities to construct their own curricula and learning (Rousseau, 1941; Ornstein & Hunkins,1998; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008).

## **Experience Centered Designs**

Experience centered curriculum designs closely resembled the child centered designs in that they used the concerns of children as the basis for organizing the children's school world. They differed from child centered designs in their view that the interests and needs of children cannot be anticipated and, therefore, a curriculum framework cannot be planned for all children (O' Neil, 1983; Ornstein & Hunkins,1998; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008).

Those favoring the child-centered of experience centered curriculum placed heavy emphasis on the learner's interests. Dewey noted that the spontaneous power of the child, his demand for self-expression, cannot by any possibility be suppressed. For Dewey, interest was purposeful; it had to be taken into consideration. Experience was essentially the starting point for all further learning. He noted that the child exists in a personal world of experiences. His or her interests are those of personal concern, rather than relating to the total body of knowledge with its myriad facts, concepts, generalizations, and theories. While Dewey believed that experience was a starting point of for further learning he has never advocate that making the child's interest actually the curriculum or placing the child in the role of curriculum decision maker (O' Neil, 1983; Ornstein & Hunkins,1998; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008).

## **Romantic (Radical) Design**

Advocates of this curriculum claimed that there actually can be no curriculum development before the students arrive in the classroom and their needs and interest are accessed. They proposed to center all experiences in the school on the children's present needs. The school would provide opportunities to learn and possible content to be considered. The children would pick what they need and decide what they need. An underlying assumption of the radicals appears to be that the current society is corrupt, repressive, and unable to cure itself. Schools have used their curricula to control and to indoctrinate individuals into a particular cultural view rather than to educate and emancipate them. The curriculum is organized so that students develop intolerance for difference. Paulo Freire noted that the purpose of education is to enlighten the masses about their present state of being denied their rights, to design situations in which they recognize their state of being and feel dissatisfied with it, and finally to gain those skills and competencies requisite for correcting the identified inequities (Ornstein & Hunkins,1998; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008). Emancipation is the goal of education. This emancipation refers to individuals gaining those awareness, competencies, and attitudes to enable them to take control of their lives. No longer are they under the control of others; no longer must they follow social conventions without any thought of reflection. Learning is reflective; it is not externally imposed by a person in power. Education leads to freedom and emancipation. In the radical curriculum design, knowledge is not a finished product that sits in a unit plan or course syllabus. Learning is something that results from the interaction between and among people. It comes by challenging content and permitting different views about the content, as well as from critiquing the purposes of the information presented in the curriculum (O' Neil, 1983; Ornstein & Hunkins,1998; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008).

## **Humanistic Design**

Third force psychology is closely related to the humanistic curriculum. To third force psychologist, behaviorism is mechanistic and behaviorists view the learner as a detached intellect and ignoring affective respond. Maslow was a key figure in the development of third force psychologist. He saw self-actualization as a life achievement, a momentary state and the normal process of growth when a person's deficiency motives are satisfied. He taught that

people could learn more about themselves by examining responses to peak experiences – those experiences which give rise to love, hate, anxiety, depression and joy. To him, the peak experiences of awe, mystery, and wonder are both the end and the beginning of learning. Hence, the humanistic curriculum, should value and attempt to provide for such experiences as a moment in which cognitive and personal growth take place simultaneously. Maslow emphasized that an individual did not become self-actualized early in life but has to start the process as a student (Ornstein & Hunkins,1998; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008).

Carl Roger's work has been another major force. He assumes that people can enhance self-directed learning by drawing on their own resources to improve self-understanding, to learn self-concepts and basic attitudes, and to guide their own behavior. The educator's task is to set the educational environment such that these personal resources can be tapped. Such an environment encourages genuineness of behavior, empathy, and respect for self and others (O'Neil, 1983; Ornstein & Hunkins,1998; Ellis,2004; Schiro, 2008).

## METHOD

This study designed as a phenomenological qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews and naturalistic observation methods were used to gather data. The purpose of this research is to provide inferences from variety of schools in order to apply the learner-centered education. Results of this question have significance to provide alternative pathways for schools that willing to implement learner-centered education. Schools were selected based on representing different implementations of learner-centered education. These schools are selected from the U.S. because of the obligations of national curriculum; schools in Turkey cannot use many of strategies related with learner-centered education. Interviews and observations gave researcher a great chance to feel the environment of all this unique schools and the philosophy.

### Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

For semi-structured interviews, an interview schedule was prepared in English and the interviews were also carried out in English. Participants' talkativeness and willingness to participate in the study facilitate to carry out interviews. Interviews mostly done in the participants own school to involve learning environment and investigate the school context in detail. In this point observation also captures the whole social setting in which people function, by recording the context in which they work. Mulhall (2002) used the analogy of a jigsaw for this situation. She stated that "Interviews with individuals provide the pieces of the jigsaw and these pieces are then fitted into the 'picture on the box' which is gained through observation" (p.308). Observation is also an ongoing dynamic activity that is more likely than interviews to provide evidence for process.

Often the primary reason for using observational methods is to check whether what people say they do is the same as what they actually do. But in this study unstructured observations used to gather data on physical and social environment of each school. Patton (2002) stated observational data "permits the evaluator to understand a program setting to an extent not entirely possible using only the insights of others obtained through interviews" (p.12). Researcher's notes and photos are used to keep data from these schools. As Frankel and Wallen (2000) mentions the researcher-conducted interviews with teachers and administrators in the school, visit classes, spent time in school environment but not attempt to participate in the activities. This intension carried out for to do a *naturalistic observation*. Naturalistic observation is observation carried out in real-world settings: it is an attempt to observe things 'as they are', without any intervention or manipulation of the situation itself by the researcher. This has been described as a 'pure' or 'direct' observation (Punch, 2009; p.154).

Naturalistic observation is a broad category of methods that can take a range of forms of recording and for this study researcher used note taking and took photos to keep clues on learning environment. Frankel and Wallen (2000) state there are two kinds of field notes descriptive and reflective. In this study researcher followed descriptive field note technique

because intension was to describe the setting. Researcher attempted to describe the infrastructure and design of schools. Last but not least observations used to understand curriculum implications and school milieu of related school rather than as conclusive findings according to one particular situation.

For recording data of observations field note technique was used and photos were taken to facilitate recall of observed setting. Mulhall (2002) mentioned that most researchers would agree that it is important to record field notes as closely as possible in time to when events were observed. For this reason researcher took notes in the meantime or soon after observation. Recording events as they happen or shortly afterwards ensures that details, and indeed the entire event, are not lost to memory. Sometimes mental notes were put on paper immediately after the observation and certain things remain to add after the observation. Researcher always wanted to make observation first to take notes according to setting and then conducted interviews. This procedure also helped researcher to ask details that she captured during observations. Duration of each observation is different from each other because of duration of time. Moreover when there is time limited for observation before interview researcher asked to go back to field (school).

### Data Source and Participants

Maximum variation sampling procedure was followed for participant selection for interviews. First of all, curriculum theory literature was reviewed and represented schools to 'learner centered education' find out (Schiro, 2008; Ellis, 2004). Researcher prepared a list of learner-centered schools in East Coast region of the U.S. and sent e-mail that explains purpose of the research. After that respondents classified by school type and region and made appointments for interviews and observations. To find out the data interviews conducted with 6 teachers, 3 education coordinators, 4 principals and 4 academic advisors (N=17). These educators are from 10 different schools that reflect main characteristics of learner-centered education.

**Table 1.** List of interviewees

Institution Name	Teacher	Coordinator	Principal	Academic Advisor	TOTAL
Hudson Valley Sudbury School	INT1**				1
St. John's Episcopal Reggio Emilia Preschool	INT2*	INT3*	INT4*		3
Waldorf School of Princeton	INT5**	INT6*			2
Green Meadow Waldorf School		INT7*		INT8*	2
Renzulli Academy			INT9*	INT10*,INT11**,INT12*	4
Nueva School	INT13**				1
Commonwealth School			INT14**		1
Alternative Education Research Organization			INT15**		1
Hugo School in Manhattan	INT16*				1
Sierra Academy	INT17*				1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>17</b>

\*Female

\*\*Male

Observations also conducted to validate results and gain idea on social and physical setting of each unique school. Fieldtrip observations gave researcher a chance to observe physical and social environment in first hand and ask additional questions to interviewees.

It was highly important to make these observations in the related schools that also interviewees attained study because of understanding participants' perspective in real environment. Table (2) is depicting the list of observed schools.

**Table 2.** *List of observations*

School Name	Pre-school	Primary School	Middle School	High School	TOTAL
Hudson Valley Sudbury School	OBS1	OBS2	OBS3	OBS4	4
St. John's Episcopal Preschool	OBS5				1
Waldorf School of Princeton	OBS6	OBS7	OBS8	OBS9	4
Green Meadow Waldorf School	OBS10	OBS11	OBS12	OBS13	4
Renzulli Academy			OBS14	OBS15	2
Nueva School		OBS16	OBS17	OBS18	3
Commonwealth School			OBS19	OBS20	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>20</b>

### Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed through content analysis. Content analysis involves conceptualizing data, and then organizing them according to those concepts and determining themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Analysis procedure for this study was basically characterized as an inductive approach (post-defined).

### Trustworthiness

Guba (1981) stated that qualitative researchers should to take into consideration the four criteria for trust worthiness of the research. These are: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability. In this study, the procedures followed by the researcher were Prolonged Engagement, Persistent Observation, Peer debriefing, Triangulation of methods (observation and interviews) for the credibility of this study. Transferability of the study was supported by following Thick description and describing researchers' roles in the study. In order to address the dependability, study processes were reported in detail and inquiry audit procedure was followed. Last but not least, for the sake of confirmability, peer review process was used.

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

According to results of these interviews there were two main themes: (1) Values and (2) Strategies for Schools of the future. In the first theme participants mentioned about the dispositions and expectations of parents in their schools and are in general. Moreover participants suggested some strategies that they follow and can be helpful to make schools of the future more learner centered. These are (2.1) Respect to diversity of learners, (2.2) Deregulation of the curriculum, (2.3) Strengthening community- school partnerships, and (2.4) Rethink of school organization. These results were enlightened the different applications and perspectives on schools of the future. These interviews were also supported by the data of observations in each school to feel the real atmosphere of implementations.

### Values

Results of the interviews indicated that there is a huge difference between values of the families whose child is attending an alternative school than other families. Values are core to society but by their nature are rigorous to measure. The school is one of the most important places where each generation acquires social norms and beliefs and a base of personal values for life. Nearly

all participants mentioned about the challenges that are waiting for children in present and the near future. None of the participants foresee a brighter or easier tomorrow to children. Participants mostly argued that everyday expectations from children are getting higher and the hardness to meet the demand of families and economy for them. The discrepancy between families especially shows itself in terms of economic aspect of education. This means families who highly focus on 'children should work hard' are more solicitous about economic return of education. Parallel with interview results, in most OECD countries the proportion of populations who believe that hard work is an important quality in children has gone up since the early 1980s. Whether because we live in more competitive, achievement-oriented times or because there is greater belief in the meritocratic promise that talent plus hard work will translate into improved prospects, it seems that hard work in children is now valued more than in the early 1980s (OECD, 2010).

On the other hand participants mentioned that parents of their schools are prizing creativity and imagination instead of academic education. Although alternative education schools are not against to academic education they criticize the way traditional schools treat learners. Their difference is not 'what to teach' the difference is based on 'how to teach'. Furthermore nearly all participants mentioned alternative education is totally against that one size fits all approach that kills children's creativity.

In addition to above mentioned results OECD (2010) report indicates that imagination in children is also valued more than 20-30 years ago. In all the countries for which data is available, with the sole exception of Spain, the percentage of people who see imagination as important went up between 1981 and 2005, though 1990 was the peak year in some countries. As with hard work, the variation between countries is very large – from over 40% in Australia to just over 10% in Hungary. How far promotion of both hard work and imagination are compatible with one another is a matter for debate. It fits, however, with a more general pattern emerging from the World Values Survey findings: that we have rising expectations for children in general, finding more and more qualities important for them. The findings reported here may thus be part of the changing context and meaning of childhood in 21st century OECD societies, reinforced by smaller families with greater material resources for each child (OECD, 2010).

Finally this can be said that when one take a glance at bigger picture of society there seem to be shifts in what we think are important qualities in our children, illustrated here by the valuing of hard work and imagination. For education, a further question concerns how far this task should be viewed as primarily their responsibility or whether it is accepted that others, as well as schools, have an important role to play.

## **Strategies**

Results of interviews indicated that by providing a supportive and flexible environment that focuses on the changing needs of students, schools can be places of both stability and challenge for students. To attain these ends interviewees pointed four strategies: (1) Respect to diversity of learners, (2) Deregulation of the curriculum, (3) Strengthening community- school partnerships, and (4) Rethink of school organization.

### ***Respect to Diversity of Learners***

No one would ever say that all students are the same. Certainly every teacher confirms this idea. On the other hand regular schools treat students as if they were same. Students differ as learners in terms of background experience, culture, language, gender, interests, readiness to learn, modes of learning, speed of learning, support systems for learning, self-awareness as a learner, confidence as a learner, independence as a learner, and a host of other ways. Moreover, differences profoundly impact how students learn and the nature of scaffolding they will need at various points in the learning process (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). One participant stated (INT6, Female): *all students have areas of strength. All students have areas that need to be strengthened and the main assumption is all students can learn. But, each student's brain is as unique as a fingerprint and students' learn in different ways at different times.*

In this sense this can be said that there is variety of facets for mentioning diversity of

learners. In the scope of Fieldtrip interview results, researcher just focus on learning style, intelligence and cultural issues.

Learning style indicates a preferred contextual approach to learning. Learning styles include working alone or with a partner, in a quiet place or with music playing, in a bright room or a darkened environment, while sitting still or moving around (Dunn & Dunn, 1992; Gregorc, 1979). All participants mentioned the importance of knowing learning styles for effective instruction. They said that the main difference between 'learner centered schools' and others is starting from respect to diversity of learners in terms of their learning styles. Especially participants from Renzulli Academy (INT9, INT10, INT11, INT12), Nueva (INT13) and Commonwealth School (INT14) strongly emphasized the importance of learning styles for their instructional design. Second common mentioned subtheme for diversity of learners is intelligence. Diversity of intelligence can categorize under two aspects. Learners can be different in terms of their intelligence preference for example, verbal- linguistic, logical-mathematical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical- rhythmic, spatial, analytical, practical, creative (Gardner, 2001; Sternberg, 1985). On the other hand they can be different in terms of their intelligence level. Participants from Renzulli (INT9, INT10, INT11, INT12) and Sierra Academy (INT17), and Nueva (INT13), Hugo (INT16), Commonwealth Schools (INT14) mentioned that they are collecting data of intelligence preference and level for differentiation of instruction.

They stated that these data is helping them to use of flexible grouping (balancing like-readiness grouping, mixed-readiness grouping, grouping by interest, random grouping, whole class instruction, and individual/independent work) and a variety of instructional strategies (learning contracts, compacting, group investigation, complex instruction, interest centers, learning centers, tiered lessons, tiered products, graduated rubrics) that invite varying students to learn in a variety of ways. These sorts of classrooms are likely to be positive both for normal and gifted learners because they accept who these learners are, reflect an awareness of the specific achievement level of the learner at any given time, and provide learning opportunities that match the child's own achievement level and interests.

Finally, culture subtheme refers to learning that may be strongly shaped by the context in which an individual lives and by the unique ways in which people in that context make sense of and live their lives (Tomlinson and Imbeau, 2010). Participants from Sierra Academy (INT17) and Hugo School (INT16) mentioned the endeavor of teachers to understand diverse cultures of the students they teach so they can achieve a more multidimensional understanding of the relationship between culture and learning of students. The common point of these schools is their location in low-income neighborhoods. Most of the student are came from different minority groups (immigrants, Afro-Americans and Latinos).

Last but not least this can be said that 'putting learner first' is not newly invented, but requires a more conscious effort to analyze available data and make decisions about what is working and what needs to be adjusted. More conscious consideration and a larger repertoire of techniques can help educators to follow learner-centered education. Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) suggested teachers to ask some questions for criticize themselves, as they are sensitive enough to diversity of learners. (1) How do I contribute to my students' awareness of their core similarities and their individuality? (2) How do I seek diverse perspectives on issues and topics in our class? (3) How do I help students learn to seek and value multiple perspectives on issues and topics? (4) How well do I understand my own culture and how it shapes my perspectives and practices as a person and as a teacher? (5) How do I ensure that all students' backgrounds, cultures, languages, patterns of communication, preferred ways of learning, and traditions are represented in our classroom's operation, curriculum, and materials? (6) How do I ensure that each student has equity of access to the highest quality learning opportunities? (7) How do I create group work that draws on the particular strengths of the group's members? (8) How do I ensure that every student has a significant intellectual contribution to make to the work of the class? These questions can help educators to figure out their position in the light of driven theme -respect to diversity of learners.



## ***Deregulation of Curriculum***

The curriculum of schools represents a powerful policy instrument affecting cultural formation, social cohesion and economic improvement. The main function of general curriculum of a country has always been to make out a skilled workforce committed to the nation (Kennedy, 2001). In Hudson Valley Sudbury School (INT1) and St. Johns Episcopal Reggio Emilia Preschool there is no predetermined curriculum for learners. Learners decide their own paths in education. On the other hand, participants from Waldorf Schools (INT5, INT6, INT7, INT8) stated that they have common curriculum framework for Waldorf Schools in the worldwide (Mattke, 1994; Nicol, 2010; Nicol & Taplin 2012). In addition to that participants from other schools mentioned they are designing their own curricula by considering state standards. Finally almost all participants stated that standard curricula would not meet the demand of learners in the future. For this reason they suggested new approaches for traditional schools that are considering needs of learners.

Two-third of participants mentioned that in traditional schools curriculum has become a prescribed set of academic standards and instructional pacing has become a race against a clock to cover the standards. For the reason of overvaluing high stakes tests the aim of teaching has been reduced to raising student test scores on a single test. Academic advisors of Renzulli Academy (INT10, INT11, INT12) stated that

*...What is the impact of standards-based teaching on the quality of education in general?... Do the standards reflect the knowledge, understandings, and skills valued most by experts in the disciplines that they represent?... Does our current focus on standards enliven classrooms, or does it eliminate joy, creativity, and inquiry?... Do standards make learning more or less relevant to students?... If we are satisfied with positive answers, we can look at how to make adaptations to address the needs of academically diverse learners.*

Finally Principal/ Director of Alternative Education Research Organization (INT15, Male) stated that

*Teachers [in traditional schools] are confuse about opposing directions: They are admonished to attend to student differences, but they must ensure that every student becomes competent in the same subject matter and can demonstrate the competencies on an assessment that is differentiated neither in form nor in time constraints. For this reason in the future schools we need to deregulate curriculum to meet demand of diverse learners.*

Results of interviews indicated that suggestions for deregulation of curriculum are classified under two subthemes (1) Differentiation and (2) Romantic/ Radical Design. Differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction. Teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile: (1) content--what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information; (2) process-- activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content; (3) products--culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit; and (4) learning environment--the way the classroom works and feels (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Differentiation has no contradiction between standards-based instruction and differentiation. One participant from Renzulli Academy (INT9, Female) stated that

*Curriculum tells us what to teach: Differentiation tells us how. Thus, if we elect to teach a standards-based curriculum, differentiation simply suggests ways in which we can make that curriculum work best for varied learners. In other words, differentiation can show us how to teach the same standard to a range of learners by employing a variety of teaching and learning modes. Choose any standard. Differentiation suggests that you can challenge all learners by providing materials and tasks on the standard at varied levels of difficulty,*

*with varying degrees of scaffolding, through multiple instructional groups, and with time variations. Further, differentiation suggests that teachers can craft lessons in ways that tap into multiple student interests to promote heightened learner interest in the standard.*

On the other hand Romantic (Radical) Design indicates learners setting their own objectives without considering any external standards. In addition to that half of the participants remind the school and classroom should not be the only environment for learning. There should be an easy movement in and out of school and learning acknowledged wherever it takes place. In this point there is a consistency between observation results with participants statements because such as in Sudbury Schools (OBS1, OBS2, OBS3, OBS4), Reggio Emilia inspired Schools (OBS5) and Waldorf Schools (OBS6, OBS7, OBS8, OBS9, OBS10, OBS11, OBS12, OBS13) out of school environment are as valuable as indoors. There is a variety of ways or purposes that they use out door environments. For instance Sudbury Schools giving permission to their students to take credits from other institutions and students also allowed spending time out of class. In addition to that project-based learning is core in Reggio Emilia inspired Schools and school is supporting learners to observe, collect data and interact with out of school environment. Finally, nature has a unique importance in Waldorf pedagogy and educators support learners out of school learning (Mattke, 1994, Nicol, 2010; Nicol& Taplin 2012).

Another thing one participant, from Sudbury School (INT1, Male), suggested that students should not be tied to age/grade placement. They should be able to accumulate credit in relation to defined outcomes at times and in ways that suit their own particular contexts. Observations indicated that this freedom is available in Sudbury Schools because they haven't got regular classrooms and age/grade separation. Sudbury school educators believe in the power of social learning and interaction among learners.

Additionally, nearly two-third of the participants also mentioned that students can be flexible on graduation. Furthermore learners need flexible learning arrangements that build independence, decision-making skills, creativity, and a commitment to learning itself. On the other hand, such an approach calls for more rather than less monitoring of student outcomes. Kennedy (2001) argues that progress against expectations and goals would need to be assessed on a regular basis. Implication of this suggestion is highly complex because if you consider then system as a chain this involve whole. One education institution cannot decide to graduate learners earlier by itself. There must be consistency among institutions to facilitate access to higher education institutions. Last but not least, a deregulated curriculum does not surrender responsibility: instead, it enables students to make choices and requires schools to know their students in more profound and meaningful ways.

### ***Strengthening Community- School Partnership***

Interview results indicated that if the school curriculum were to be deregulated, schools would need better and more extensive relationships with their communities. If students are to spend more time in the community, undertaking vocational studies and community projects and service, then close links need to be developed between the school and its immediate environment. Some participants (INT1, INT15, INT10, INT11) advocated that schools cannot continue to be like isolated institutions– the self-proclaimed learning centers of the industrial age. They must welcome community members onto their sites and open themselves up to genuine local involvement. In Sudbury Schools community connections seeks to bring the school and the community at large together to talk about how to help each other. Some schools post their partners and area of interests they connected on their web sites. Reggio Emilia inspired schools have also keen connection with community to conduct their projects. There are numerous examples of successful practice that can show what is possible, and the literature on schools as sites for the delivery of integrated community services is growing.

### ***Rethink of School Organization***

Results indicated that despite the many changes that have taken place in schools over recent decades, the concern remains that too little has changed about the place called school in its basic

organizational and structural characteristics in general. Under this theme *Social- Physical Environment*, and *Teacher-Student Roles* of related schools will briefly discuss in the light of findings.

***Social and Physical Environment:*** As Brown (2003) states culture of the learning context is as important to learning as the content and methods used. The appearance, organization, and structure of a classroom can invite learning with appealing colors, effective displays of student work, spaces for both solitary and collaborative work, easy access to materials and supplies, furniture arrangements that focus attention on peer input rather than largely or solely on the teacher, and visible cues to support quality work (Tomlinson and Imbeau, 2010). Conversely, a classroom's physical environment can diminish learning by being barren, drab, cramped, teacher-focused, distracting, or limiting (with seating arrangements that isolate students from one another). More significant than this physical climate, however, is the classroom's more intangible emotional climate. Students learn best when they feel safe, respected, involved, challenged, and supported (Tomlinson and Imbeau, 2010).

There are some schools that prominent in certain respects. For instance, Hudson Valley Sudbury Schools' social environment can characterize in to two main features. In this school they are giving a great importance to social learning and all structure of school designed to facilitate social interaction. For this reason instead of classrooms schools consist of many multipurpose rooms to connect all students and create communicative environment. As mentioned before school was abolished age based levels of education and students in all age levels are learning together. As Vygotsky argued social interaction is core learning strategy in this school. Teacher of this school mentioned during observation that many students at the school have learned to read as a side effect of social activities and they learn to read without even being aware that they are doing so.

In addition to that weekly school meetings manage school and every student and staff member has a vote. In School Meetings members creates all of the school's rules, makes decisions about school purchases, establishes committees to oversee the school's day-to-day operation, and *hires and fires staff members*. Interviewee (INT1, Male) mentioned that five-year-olds at the school have the same vote as do older students and adult staff members. In learning environment students are free, all day, every day, to do what they wish at the school, as long as they don't violate any of the school's rules that made by the School Meeting. None of the school's rules are related with how to learn or what to learn and school is not grading or evaluating students' progress. There is no regular curriculum everything is based on learners' choice. Many students at the school never join a course, and the school is not forcing them to attain. Interviewee indicated that learning at Sudbury Valley (INT1, Male) is incidental and it occurs as a side effect of students' self-directed play and exploration. Observations also supported that the school provides space and time for place to play and explore. Because it equipped with computers, a fully furnished kitchen, a woodworking room, an art room, playground equipment, toys and games of various sorts, and a library with many books.

St. John's Episcopal Reggio Emilia Preschool (OBS5) insists that children learn from their environment. For this reason interviewee from St. John's Episcopal Reggio Emilia Preschool (INT5, Female) indicated that they use the entire environment as a teacher and look for additional opportunities to integrate it. For example, they plan new spaces and remodel old ones and include integration of each classroom with the rest of the school. During observation the first thing draw attention was documentation. There were three kind of documents all around the entrance hall. First was children document (writings, photographs, drawings) these are proofs of their progress and exhibition of their projects. This process of expressing what was learned enables teachers to reevaluate the process of teaching, parents to understand what their child is learning, and children to reinforce material. Second type of documentation is 'classroom journals' that includes qualitative narratives, photos and journey of all learning process happened in in and out of classroom. Principal of the school (INT4, Female) mentioned that there are two teachers in the classroom and one (anyone at one time) is responsible to keep journals to evaluate and represent classroom activity. The third type of documentation is to present school activities such as announcements from principal to inform parents about school

policy, curriculum, development, planning and evaluation. Furthermore teaching children is viewed as a collective responsibility of parents, teachers and community; therefore everyone is encouraged to learn the Reggio Approach with documentation around the school.

It is observed that structure of the classrooms is different from a regular pre-school classroom. Indoor classrooms are filled with plants and natural light and every classroom have an independent but interconnected arts studio. In addition to that a corner for communication is a conspicuous region in classrooms. Principal of the school (INT4, Female) indicated that for a child interpersonal relationship with other children is very important and communication is an integral part of this process. Every student has a special stamp to sign and put notes to each other's mail box when they need. As mentioned before projects are the hearth of the Reggio Emilia curriculum and cameras, microscopes and outdoor stuff are always available to document life and bringing outside findings into the classroom. Interviewee teacher of the school indicated that Children should have some control over the direction of their learning. Children should be able to learn through experiences of touching, moving, listening, seeing, and hearing.

Finally, Waldorf School of Princeton and Green Meadow Waldorf School's environments will be discussed based on the data gathered from observations (OBS6, OBS7, OBS8, OBS9, OBS10, OBS11, OBS12, OBS13). Waldorf schools are based on Steiner's ideas on education, and Waldorf school buildings are inspired by Steiner's ideas as an architect. Waldorf education sees the child as a whole being, made up of body, soul, and spirit; and attempts to nurture the whole child, helping him or her to rise to their fullest potential. Waldorf schools provide a warm, simple learning environment that feels much like a home. In early childhood, it is furnished with open-ended toys and activities that allow children to use their own creativity and imagination. The most typical features of pre-school classrooms are wooden toys, roundish spaces and exhibition of artifacts. In Waldorf classrooms students only play with some specific toys (wooden toys, knitted animals, puppets, clothes horses, fabric dolls, natural materials etc.) (Mattke, 1994; Nicol, 2010; Nicol & Taplin 2012). The interviewee teacher (INT5, Male) of the Waldorf School says that this is the reason of not limiting students' imagination. He told that;

*If you give a regular doll to a student this doll is formed in some way like white-blonde girl but in fabric dolls player can imagine it any form s/he want. It can be a ginger hair boy, a mum or a black girl. We don't want to toys limit the imagination of our students, we want them to challenge their imagination with uncertainties.*

In addition to that fairy tales and seasonal celebrations are very important in the curriculum in early ages and in every classroom, there is an artifact represents this themes. Another interesting thing about these schools is their wall paintings. For example, the walls of the preschool classrooms are colored in rosy pink as main color theme and first-grade classrooms painted in warmer, reddish colors and feature images from fairy tales. By contrast, the walls of the sixth-grade rooms were painted in cooler, bluish colors and feature images of the individual human being, especially a human being in nature. Classroom murals, wall pictures, and colors should also change through the grades. Furthermore, more rounded, and more unified in the preschool and early elementary years will gradually become firmer, more articulated, and more angular as students advance through their schooling. There are also some spaces in this schools that is not exist in other schools such as eurhythmy and sculpture Waldorf curriculum is highly emphasize arts education and spaces for music, eurhythmy, painting, and sculpture, are located in observed two Waldorf school (Mattke, 1994; Nicol, 2010; Nicol & Taplin 2012).

In the light of these results this can speculate physical arrangements should be flexible and support student access to a variety of learning options. In addition to that a range of resources should be available and support student access to content.

**Teacher-Student Roles:** In addition to that all interviewees mentioned that teachers in these schools will continue to nurture students but they should not be the only facilitators of student learning. There should be greater reliance placed on community resources to provide teaching and learning experiences for students. The teaching profession needs to broaden its base to admit others to play ancillary but important roles. For instance in Sudbury Schools there

are no regular classes and teachers mostly help students to find some courses they want to specialize out of school. Other schools are using very rich resources for learning in communities – other professionals, artists, gardeners, business owners and so forth – all of whom have the potential to help prepare young people for the future. In the Hudson Valley Sudbury school the staff members at the school do not consider themselves to be teachers. They are, instead, adult members of the community who provide a wide variety of services, including some teaching. Most of their teaching is of the same variety as can be found in any human setting; it involves answering sincere questions and presenting ideas in the context of real conversations. Moreover, in St. John's Episcopal Reggio Emilia Preschool teachers are co-learners/researchers and should be active and offer mutual participation in the activity to help ensure that the child is clearly understand. Interviewees indicated that the role of the Waldorf teacher changes to meet the developmental needs of the child. In the early years, he or she nurtures the children as they adjust for the first time to school life. In early childhood, when children learn a great deal by imitation, the teacher acts as a role model in the classroom. Soon, as children grow older and seek an authority to learn from, the teacher's role shifts slightly. In the ideal situation, the same teacher will stay with a group of students throughout the eight years of elementary and middle school. This gives the teacher a unique ability to get to know the individual children and how best to teach them, and allows for a deep level of collaboration with parents, as the teacher becomes almost like another member of the child's family.

Renzulli Academy, Nueva and Commonwealth Schools' have more academic orientation than above-mentioned ones. In these schools Teachers are required to understand the nature of each of their students, in addition to the nature of the content they teach. Interviewees indicated that teachers should continually ask, what does this student need at this moment in order to be able to progress with this key content, and what do I need to do to make that happen? One of the academic advisors of Renzulli Academy (INT10, Female) stated that

*Teaching is hard. Confronted by too many students, intensive demands from stakeholders and no wonder we become habitual and standardized in our practices. Not only do we have no time to question why we do what we do, but we also experience the discomfort of change when we do ask the knotty questions. Nonetheless, our profession cannot progress and our increasingly diverse students cannot succeed if we do less.*

In the light of above mentioned results this can be said that teachers have been faced with more change than ever before in education. Many factors influence the constantly changing classroom: Standard-based classrooms, knowledge of the intelligence, High expectations for all students and rapid societal and technological change. Briefly researcher anticipates schools in Turkey will be structured in such a way as to facilitate this broad community participation. At the same time, teachers will have a fundamental role in ensuring the much-needed stability and this part is critical in curriculum construction and the monitoring of student learning. They will guide learners into different experiences that meet their needs and aspirations. Finally, Table 3 is representing the summary of the results for put the variety of implementations between schools in terms of learner-centered education.

**Table 3. Summary of results for RQ1**

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Instruction</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>School Design</b>
<b>Hudson Valley Sudbury School</b>	5-17	Free to take out of school credits. Daily meetings to choice	Social and informal learning, freedom of choice	Non-grading	Democratic Administration of School	There is no regular classroom setting
<b>St. Johns Episcopal Preschool</b>	3-6	Inquiry based, project based curriculum Daily meetings	Two classroom teachers in each class.	Only Qualitative assessment	Traditional school administration	Arts studio and interest centers in every class
<b>Waldorf School of Princeton</b>	5-17	Moral values, learning through arts. Holistic education (mind, body, soul)	Artistic way of teaching, classroom teachers teaches until 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Qualitative and quantitative assessment	Traditional school administration	Unique Waldorf design
<b>Green Meadow Waldorf School</b>	5-17	Moral values, learning through arts. Holistic education (mind, body, soul)	Artistic way of teaching, classroom teachers teaches until 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Qualitative and quantitative assessment	Traditional school administration	Unique Waldorf design
<b>Renzulli Academy</b>	9-17	Enrichment clusters, Curriculum compacting	Differentiated instruction	Qualitative and quantitative assessment	Traditional school administration	Learning studios
<b>Nueva School</b>	7-17	Enrichment clusters, Curriculum compacting	Differentiated instruction	Qualitative and quantitative assessment	Traditional school administration	Classrooms and different learning studios
<b>Commonwelth School</b>	9-17	Enrichment clusters, Curriculum compacting	Differentiated instruction	Qualitative and quantitative assessment	Traditional school administration	Classrooms and different learning studios

## CONCLUSION

Discourse on the “putting learners first” will not happen very rapidly because the paradigm of industrial age is long embedded in the very fabric of our lives. Adopting a learner centered view means thinking differently, behaving differently, and acting differently. ‘Putting learners first’ means catering for a much higher degree of diversity, and has wide implications for the education system. Phrases like ‘learner achievement’ replace ‘learner productivity’, a feature of the industrial age model. The industrial age model is recognizable in phrases that imply uniformity, such as ‘we must have a shared vision’. This very phraseology will be not valid anymore. The vision of education must work for everyone, whatever their starting point’. A paradigm shift makes all people as learners. This change affects all of us, and will render many existing skills absolute. Many of people will need to learn different ways of thinking, and think about different ways of learning. People will explore important concepts like self-direction and personalization in relation to learning opportunities in an increasingly connected and digital world and thoughts about appropriate learning spaces.

In sum results indicated that a truly effective learning environment is one that adapts to the ever-evolving needs of community members. Such an environment must focus on learner - centred instructional models that encourage students to realize their full potential. Moreover, the learning environment must limit the dependency on time and place for learning opportunities to occur and must demonstrate relevance for students. The environment should be independent of changes in faculty and administrative personnel. Moreover, the school’s physical setting must be conducive to the continuous and changing needs of the learning community. The technical infrastructure must support current and future mobile and fixed technical equipment. Learning spaces must provide the necessary elements that allow for learning and instruction, and must be adaptable to different learning and teaching activities. Lastly, all participants strongly believe that regular schools do need to be reconfigured so that the life chances of the young will be enhanced. To achieve this represents a considerable challenge for policy-makers as the extent of the changes being suggested is considerable. Schools were originally created in their current form to serve an industrial society and must inevitably change to meet the new challenges and directions pursued by governments themselves. Little purpose is served by pretending that the curriculum, school structures and personnel, and teaching methods that served the industrial state will well serve the knowledge society.

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