

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

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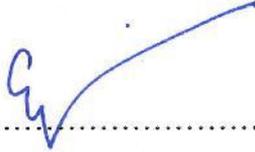
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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand how young children participate in a preschool classroom and what the teachers' role is in promoting children's participation. The study also looks at teachers' image of the child and childhood, how the school is governed and how the administration positions itself in terms of children's rights. The study has the goal of including children and their voices in the research process and in doing so, children's agency and competence are aimed to be underlined. The study is conducted as an ethnographic case study in a private preschool classroom in Istanbul. Fifteen children who are five or six years old, four teachers and one school principal took part in this research. The classroom observations, interviews with teachers and children and reflection notes are used as the data of the study. The data is analyzed through thematic content analysis. The analysis has led to the development of a participation model. The model proposes that there are many factors that interact with each other and determine the participation of children in this preschool classroom.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma okul öncesi bir sınıfta çocuk katılımının nasıl gerçekleştiğini ve çocuk katılımını artırmada öğretmenlerin rolünü anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda öğretmenlerin çocuk ve çocukluk algısına, okulun nasıl yönetildiğine ve çocuk hakları konusunda okulun kendini nasıl konumlandığına da bakmaktadır. Çalışma çocukları ve seslerini araştırma sürecine dâhil etmeyi ve böylece onların yetkinliklerini ve aktörlüklerini vurgulamayı hedefler. Bu araştırma etnografik bir örnek olay incelemesi olarak tasarlanmış, İstanbul'da özel bir okul öncesi kurumunda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmada beş altı yaşları arasında on beş çocuk, dört öğretmen ve bir okul yöneticisi yer almıştır. Çalışmanın verilerini sınıf gözlemleri, öğretmen, yönetici ve çocuk mülakatları ve aynı zamanda araştırmacı günlüğü notları oluşturmaktadır. Bu veriler tematik içerik analizi aracılığıyla incelenmiştir ve bu analiz bir katılım modeli öngörmüştür. Bu model, okul öncesi bir sınıfta çocuk katılımını belirleyen birçok etmen olduğunu ve bu etmenlerin birbiriyle etkileşim içinde olduğunu önerir.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 A personal narrative

Before the study, in the field, playing with children, talking to teachers, writing up the analysis, I have asked myself several times why I have chosen particularly the topic of children's participation to study but not another one. I have found answers in my own childhood experience. I did not have a chance to go to a preschool as there was only one in the town but far away. I was also needed at home to help my mother with my younger siblings. When I started primary school, I remember that I felt extremely happy because I was valued at school. So, I got very eager to read, write and learn. A door opened into a whole different world for me. As I was a hardworking child, I always received appreciation from my teachers. Starting from the second year in primary school, the teachers always chose me as the class representative to value my efforts, this was what I thought. All they asked me to do was to do a small part of their job; making all the children silent until the teacher comes, writing down the names of children who speak 'too much' on the board during the day and reporting it to the teacher, sitting at the desk of the teacher when they weren't present and even reading the book for my friends to make them take notes. I was very young but I started to feel uncomfortable about it because my friends were reacting not the way I expected. They did not respect me and they were getting angry with me. Obviously, the teachers were using me to control other children and to make their power and authority more effective.

I went to a different school for secondary school and acted more carefully so that I was not chosen by the teacher. I wanted my classmates to know me first, to trust me and then to nominate me if they want. Through all these years, I always had ideas on how to make the school a better place, how to change some lessons, what went wrong at school from the perspectives of a student. There were very limited channels to express my ideas about these. In the last year of the secondary school, a voluntary environmental organization came to give a presentation at the school. They explained us their activities and invited us to join the new child club of their organization. A few days later, our principal called me telling that nobody volunteered to join the organization and the teachers chose me as a representative of our school. I used to go to the small office of the organization at the weekends. There I met children from other schools and the adult volunteers of the organization. They used to gather us around a table, explained the agenda and asked for our ideas. I remember that they were genuinely happy about our presence there and listened to our suggestions carefully. We were trying to organize a day on environmental awareness in the city and in time, we offered so many innovative ideas. However, at the end of the day, it wasn't children who made the last decisions. A few of our ideas were chosen and applied. We represented the organization on the festival and our photos were published in a local newspaper. Mission was accomplished; children were included in the volunteer activities in the city. I remember my feelings of happiness and tension at the same time. I knew that it was an opportunity for me to learn about activism, social rights and environment but I also understood that we, children, were guests there, not the equal actors of the organization.

Then, I started high school and turned into a very social young person. I joined different clubs, wrote in the school newspaper. In most of the student clubs that I

attended, there had to be a teacher responsible of students. It was usually the teachers who set the agenda, who gave roles to students and coordinated the activities. One teacher that I met changed my whole perspective. He was an experienced literature teacher who loved poetry and theater. He was responsible for the literature club but in the first meeting, he just introduced himself and stepped back, saying that the club was ours and we would decide how we wanted to run it. It was an exciting moment for me and my friends in the club. We had hours of discussion, decided on a term-plan, met almost every day for the club, worked on our ideas. The teacher sometimes joined our meetings and offered ideas if he was asked. We used to go to him when we needed help about organization or did not know how to get out of a demanding situation. I was feeling that I was getting stronger, reading more about what I liked and could speak my mind better. We prepared and presented a play at the end of the semester ourselves. We published a new literature journal of our school and we sent it to all the other teachers' high schools of the country twice a year during all these four years. We knew that the club was ours, we had the responsibility and right to run it as a group and we could get support when we needed it.

I do not want to continue writing about my life story in a lot of details but lastly, I need to say that I kept my volunteer work at university. I joined student clubs, worked voluntarily in their coordination and more importantly, I volunteered in the student representative committee of the department and faculty. I and my friends managed to change many things about the functioning of the department, passed the suggestions of other students to the faculty members. However, I can say that in any of these works, I did not feel that I could contribute to the organization as much as I did in high school. After starting graduate program, I took courses on sociology of childhood, children's wellbeing and learned about changing perspectives on children

and childhood. I became more aware of the fact that children are big group of silenced members of the society and this is especially true in the context I live in. These led me to read about children's participation in the society and at schools. Looking from now, I understand that my feelings, experience in participation as a child has brought me to the studies of children's participation.

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

The study is being conducted with several goals. The study will analyze how children's participation is realized in a preschool classroom; in what ways children participate; how teachers enhance, promote children's participation. Another purpose is to see what challenges children's participation and to list all the factors teachers describe. Children's participation is very much related to the concept of children's rights in general. So, it is aimed to understand where teachers and the preschool in the study position themselves in children's rights; with a focus on participation right.

One of the main aims of the study is to comprehend whether teachers' view of the child determines the level of their support for children's participation. It is aimed to grasp whether teachers and the program of the school see childhood as a period of preparation for future or they focus on here and now moments of children. Lastly, the study stands behind the idea that children are active in social construction of their childhood and lives and even the lives of other people around them. So, at the end of the study, I hope to see and clarify how children shape the school, the classroom, the activities, the decisions and the ideas of their teachers and how they demonstrate their agency in the classroom.

There are secondary aims of the study. This study aims to contribute to child education literature by presenting studies on construction and reconstruction of childhood and children's participation. Furthermore, relating the topics of participation of children and changing view on childhoods will be another contribution. The study aims to understand how teachers define childhood and to shed light on their perspectives on childhood and children. By exploring it, the study's goal is to see whether they describe children as being or becoming. Through the methods that will be used, I want to see whether teachers regard children as active, competent beings or passive objects of the social structures and institutions.

### 1.3 Significance of the study

The study is important as it is one of the very few studies carried out on young children's participation in Turkey. In addition, most studies on children's participation have looked at involvement of older children because research with younger children has seemed something risky and complicated. Another significance of the study can be its methodology. Almost all the papers and thesis studies on children's participation and democracy in schools in Turkey have made use of quantitative methods and either gathered teachers' or older students' perceptions on participation and democracy. Surely, it is important to collect large scale data and analyze how the participation concept is framed. As a different contribution from quantitative type of studies, this research is using qualitative measures; being in a specific school and classroom for a long period of time, collecting observational data on the children-adult interactions, carrying out interviews both with teachers and the administrator of the preschool and finally making use of alternative techniques to include children's voices in the research process.

The study is also important because there many contributions of participation on children's. These positive impacts of child participation that can be listed here. Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen and Ojala (2014) advocate that children's abilities and self-esteem can be fostered through participation; they become better decision-makers. Children's participation is a way to uphold their rights. As suggested by Davies, Williams, Yamashita and Man-Hing (2006), children learn better, get motivated more; school atmosphere gets more positive and safer with the help of child participation projects.

#### 1.4 Research questions

The main questions that the research is aimed to look for answers can be listed as in the following:

- How do young children participate in a preschool classroom?
- In what ways do children participate?
- What challenges children's participation in a preschool classroom?
- How do young children view their own childhood and participation in this classroom?
- How do teachers enhance children's participation?
- How is teacher's view of child and childhood?
- How is it related to their level of support for children's participation?
- What are the roles of teachers, classroom atmosphere, school culture, program in defining, realizing and promoting children's participation?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Definitions of children and childhood

Who we call a child, how we define children and childhood have long been discussed. There have been many different definitions, roles, expectations and knowledge about children produced by parents, teachers, and policy makers, researchers in different time periods, cultures, institutions, and scientific studies. There are discussions on whether childhood is something universal and whether all children pass through the same stages. It is asked whether parents all over the world provide the same care and expect the same things from their children. Questions like these and more have been asked by all to understand the nature of childhood and children, to define it for various purposes. As we know, children have taken different roles in their families and society and these assigned roles have been influenced by the adults' definitions of childhood. How children are viewed have influenced children's lives, experience, how they are educated, how they are treated in the society, how they are referred to in law, etc. Childhood as a period and children's lives have become a subject of research in different fields. The situation of children has been an interest of legal documents and policy documents. All these conceptualizations of children and childhood have not stayed the same but changed in a drastic manner.

In this section, I will try to present these changing definitions of children and childhood. When one looks at the history of childhood studies, it is seen that Philippe Aries's work, *Centuries of Childhood*, is a well-known one. Aries is an important historian who contributed to the idea of construction of childhood. Aries argued that

childhood is not a biological state but a social concept and it didn't exist as a separate group in social life in the past. He proposed that it was only after fifteen century that childhood was seen as a different part of life, a human condition in Western countries. He claimed that childhood as an idea was not present before then; but children were not behaved badly, either. There was not a common knowledge on the distinct nature of childhood (Aries, 1962, p.128).

The ideas of Aries were built on his analysis of medieval European art; in which children were portrayed as small versions of adults with their body features and clothing. Aries put forward that children were started to be painted as how they were starting from sixteenth century, looking at the clothing, literature and toys for children that were drawn. Aries argued that children used to live more like adults in the past and the care provided to them was limited. He added that children were slowly accepted as a separate group in the society and became the center of families in the late nineteenth century. These changes brought about the perception that children were vulnerable and not ready for life (Aries, 1962, p.317).

Montgomery (2009, p.51) acknowledges the contribution of Aries to the area of childhood studies and accepts that many sociologists have depended on his ideas while working on the construction of childhood. However, Montgomery criticized him by pointing out that the analysis of Aries was mostly built on the content of paintings. Montgomery (2009, p.52) underlines the fact that it is not really possible to comprehend all aspects of children's lives in a period by only looking at portraits which were ordered by upper class members of the society. What is more, there was no presence of children from poor families in such portraits. Gittins (2009, p.39) criticizes the arguments of Aries by proposing that his interpretations only depend on children's portraits in art and it is not enough base to conclude about the real

situation of children in these periods. She claims that children in these paintings are confined to certain social classes and families; so this doesn't represent all children at that time.

What Aries focused was the situation of children in Western culture. To fully understand the changing view towards childhood, one needs to look at differences across cultures. As there are differences between cultures, there are differences between how childhood is conceptualized. In many cultures, children have mostly been regarded as passive beings who needed to be controlled by adults to maintain social order. It was also this underlying idea that today's children only represent future adults that pictured childhood as a passive transformation process (James & Prout, 1997). Children have generally been expected to stay silent, behave well, help their family and fulfill what is required by them.

Despite this passive image of childhood in some societies, children have been accepted as competent members of family in other cultures. James and James (2004, p.25) draws attention to different responsibilities and roles children took on in different parts of the world. They show that very small children in some countries have always had a breadwinning role whereas in mostly Western cultures, even older children are not included in decisions related to their daily lives and family matters.

## 2.2 Learning more about children: the development of childhood studies

The above roles and definitions of children are diverse, not stable and changing depending on the context. Indeed, defining childhood can be considered as a step to understand the nature of children. To be able to understand the nature of childhood, one depends mostly on scientific studies on children. It can be said that what is

known about children and childhood has been shaped with the arguments and contributions of scientific studies; mostly in the last two centuries.

Studying childhood was a need and responsibility for the society and science for several reasons. Woodhead (2009, p.18) proposes that the industrialized and urbanized nature of the Western societies made it possible to produce more knowledge on childhood. With the help of social and economic developments of the era, children became less engaged in labor and risky diseases. New expertise areas on children grew in this era like nurses for children, schools, pediatricians, teachers, etc. The scientific developments and social atmosphere of the time made it possible to study and care for children. Soon, developmental psychology emerged as an important paradigm by providing information on the care and education of children (Woodhead, 2009, p.18). Kehily (2009, p.8) touches upon the importance of developmental psychology in shaping childhood studies. Developmental psychology separates childhood development into stages and views childhood as a transition period into adulthood through which children develop rationality and maturity.

Montgomery (2009, p.1) argues that twentieth century witnessed many developments on children's welfare and rights as subjects of interest both in political arena and academy. Childhood studies could be dated back to nineteenth century and from then on, it became a field of interdisciplinary research benefiting from sociology, psychology, social policy, anthropology studies. There have been several effects of developmental studies on children on the image of childhood in the society.

Woodhead (2009, p.21) proposes that categorizing children by their ages is such an influence of developmental studies and it is reflected in everyday interactions of all of us. He exemplifies this by saying that most people ask children their ages when they meet children; schools are organized according to children's ages. Woodhead

argues that adults wonder about children's age to be able to form their expectations about how competent children are.

Classifying children by their ages, focusing on developmental stages, evaluating their competence led to description of a certain childhood. Woodhead (2009, p.22) puts forward that most of the childhood studies have originated in Western countries and this fact influences how children and childhood are defined in limited terms. James and Prout (1997) underline that terms like dependence are markers of biological immaturity and they are put forward by developmental studies. It needs to be recognized that these studies have brought out numerous and precise empirical findings on the stages of child development. However, it is also these child development studies which created a standard, universal childhood image. This hid the fact that childhood is not only biological but it is also a social concept. The universal childhood definition ignores the different practices and experiences of children across other countries and cultures.

As James and James (2004, p.26) point out, developmental psychology was mostly interested in how infants and children develop over time; so, biology of childhood was the topic of interest. Children were analyzed through their social relationships with their parents or siblings but how they individually form active social engagement was not given much importance. In sociological studies of childhood, children were firstly included in studies on family and their individualities were ignored. The developmental studies focused on children's wellbeing and needs and proposed that these needs are universal, leaving the discussions on cultural differences in childhood aside (James & James, 2004, p.27).

### 2.3 Childhood as a social construction: sociological studies of childhood

Along the contributions of developmental studies of children, there have also been their drawbacks; describing a standardized, universal child; passing through developmental stages; isolated from social interactions and culture; passive receiver of knowledge. However, the accounts of childhood in different parts of the world were telling us a different story. To be able to understand these accounts, developmental studies as a tool was not enough; sociological studies of childhood came at this point.

While describing sociological approaches to childhood, Kehily (2009, p.7) argues that the reflexive nature of twentieth century academic work has contributed to the construction of new questions on childhood and children in research. She summarizes the studies by saying that researchers have started to acknowledge the diverse types of childhoods and accepted that there cannot be a single universal definition of childhood. Sociological approaches to childhood realize culture's role in influencing childhood across time and place.

Once the influence of culture was understood, the role of culture on building the image of childhood was realized. Woodhead (2009, p.19) acknowledges that the socially constructed child is a proposal of contemporary childhood studies. These recent studies disagree with the idea that childhood is solely biological and claim that both children and adults play a role in the construction of childhood. Woodhead summarizes the approaches which view childhood as a social phenomenon, as a socially constructed institution, as a personal period of life. He then underlines that in these novel studies, the relationship between the researcher and children constitutes the base of the field of childhood studies.

It is important to look at the contributions of Alison James, Adrian James and Alan Prout in proposing a new paradigm, which is usually called the new social studies of childhood. James and James (2004, p.26) suggest that what is new about childhood studies now is how they view children and include them in research. They argue that a new paradigm started when childhood was started to be recognized as a social and cultural construction rather than a universal fact and a pure biological phase in human life. This new paradigm proposes that children's experiences are diverse and individual, influenced a lot by the expectations in their societies, differences in legal definitions. When studies focused on how childhood is constructed, children's own role became the topic of interest in research. As James and James (2004, p.29) remind, the new paradigm on childhood studies acknowledge children's agency in shaping their social lives and their own childhood. James and James put forward that the acknowledgment of children's agency has accelerated the demand for children's rights and advocacy.

James and Prout (1997, p. 8) summarize the important points in the new paradigm as such; childhood is socially constructed. This social construction is a tool to understand how the early years of human life are. Apart from the biological immaturity, childhood is not something universal as it varies depending on the culture or society. Without regarding gender, class, race; it is not possible to analyze childhood on its own. There are several different childhoods across the cultures. It is not the adult approach but the very own nature of children's culture and how they socially relate with others are worth studying. Children actively decide on and construct their own social lives, along with the lives of people who relate to them and even the society they live in. Children do not passively absorb social structures. Ethnography as a methodology can help to make children 'heard' more directly

compared to other studies. When the researchers claim that there is a paradigm shift in childhood studies, they also become a part of reconstructing childhood.

The new social studies on childhood are mostly ethnographic, observational studies in the fields of anthropology and sociology. Therefore, Montgomery (2009, p.2) underlines the contributions of anthropology in acknowledging how differences in cultures affect the image of child and childhood. An important number of anthropological studies have been carried out to demonstrate children's role in the society and their families. According to Montgomery (2009, p.5) researchers' interest in children grew mostly in the last decades although children have been a subject of study for long years. The recent studies claim that children's representation in anthropological and ethnographic research was not enough. This is why more and more studies aim to look at how children form meaning of their own lives. Montgomery (2009, p.6) calls these approaches as child centered or child focused studies.

#### 2.4 Children in policy and child rights

The new social studies of childhood which are described above have contributed to the image of childhood in many fields. One of these domains is policy related to children. In this section, the role and functions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child will be described and analyzed shortly as it is the most effective policy document for all children in the world.

It is proposed in Montgomery's work (2009) that new approaches to childhood were supported by the declaration and signing of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Penn (2008, p.133) acknowledges the role of the UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child in supporting childhood studies as the Convention depicted a child with rights and it was signed and legalized by most countries in the world. The UN Convention proposes three main domains of children's rights; provision rights, protection rights and participation rights. Provision rights deal with children's wellbeing, care, physical, mental, social development whereas protection rights include the rights that aim to avoid and protect children from violence, abuse, maltreatment, exploitation and discrimination. Participation rights are important for the scope of this study. Participation rights focus on children's right to a name, identity, nationality; participate in the cultural events in the society; being respected for the child's ethnic or religious identity. The UN Convention denotes children's right to express their opinions freely in all the issues influencing the child; therefore, children's ideas need to be listened and valued and appropriate representative bodies should be developed to be able to hear children directly (Penn, 2008, p.134). In this convention, Article 2 entitles children to participate in decisions that affect them. Landsdown and Karkara (2006) underline a very important point; when looked at the theoretical perspectives behind United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, one can see a view of the child as a subject, not an object. What is introduced by UN Convention is that children have the right to be listened and to be taken seriously about issues that are of their interest. The UN Convention puts forward that this right of children should function as the basis so that all other rights are guaranteed and valued.

Penn (2008, p.135) summarizes the discussion on children's rights in the UN Convention by saying that they are listing children's critical needs and they aim to portray a living condition in which children's best interests are met. Being denoted rights, children are accepted as valuable members and citizens of the society.

However, most people in the society tend to see these rights as depicting a selfish child who does not care about his or her responsibilities.

Besides the positive influence of the UN Convention, there are also limitations which are discussed and criticized by many in the field of childhood studies. To start with, James and James (2004) underline the difference between the universal child with equal rights proposed by United Nations Convention and how these rights are implemented in daily lives of children in diverse cultures. James tries to show that not all children are considered as right-bearing individuals and in some cultures, adults do not believe in children having rights. In addition to James and James, Montgomery presents his criticism to the UN Convention. On one hand, Montgomery (2009, p.6) acknowledges the contribution of the UN Convention; on the other hand, she criticizes the image of childhood proposed there. The Convention places children at home or schools and values education over work; ignoring the different experience of children who live and work under difficult conditions in many parts of the world. The child is depicted in the UN Convention as autonomous and individual people but this description but this led to problems when it was interpreted in other cultures where children were expected to be submissive, dependent and passive. Montgomery (2009, p.8) reminds that many anthropologists working in the field of childhood studies criticized the UN Convention by claiming that cultural relativity was not given any place in describing childhood. What is more, children's lives and realities differ from the ideals proposed by the UN Convention. Although the UN Convention was signed by a substantial number of countries all over the world, not many of them applied the ideals in practice and accepted children as autonomous individuals with rights, apart from Western nations.

## 2.5 Teachers' image of the child

The properties attributed to children and childhood, from passive, immature beings into independent, active agents, also shape the image of the child for educators.

Woodhead (2006, p.64) propose that conceptualizations of childhood determine expectations and limits of children. To be able to construct a learning environment in which children can fully participate, teachers should be aware of children's rights, should accept them as capable participants of the classroom community who have ideas and waiting to be listened.

Griehaber and Cannella (2001, p.4) claim that if teachers have traditional views of children as lacking adult skills, in need of protection and support, incapable of making decisions, they will not open space for them to actively involve. However, if they perceive how children interact in a complex manner in their care, teachers will accept children as beings with rights, personal ideas and with power to affect decisions. Moss (2011) proposes that children should be seen as competent citizens by teachers. Children should be depicted as individuals who have opinions that are worth listening and have the right and competence to participate. How teachers view children influences how they establish rules in the classroom; how they design the activities; whether they consult children in planning or not. Teachers' image of the child directly influences level of child participation in the classroom.

## 2.6 Children's participation

There are several different definitions of children's participation. Each reflects the theoretical discussions on child, childhood, learning, and involving in life. When child participation research is examined, children get to make their own decisions on

the issues related to their lives through supporting participation. This decision making can be in groups or individually (Hill, Davis, Prout, Tisdall, 2004).

Children's thinking, talking and deciding are included in their participation; also, how adults react and make use of their ideas are a part of it (Alderson, 2008, p.278).

Another perspective views children's participation as a process of meaning making about the world with the support of adults whom children know by listening to them, valuing them and showing genuine interest in what matters for children. Participation is described as realizing one's right to enjoy his or her responsibilities and make himself or herself stronger while growing up (Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen & Ojala, 2014).

When children are accepted to participate, it means that children are competent agents (Luff & Webster, 2014); it is argued that children have the ability and expertise to build their own lives (O'Kane, 2008, p.126). Children's participation does not occur by itself. What is needed for participation is a secure environment in which children know that their needs are considered important (Venninen and Leinonen, 2013).

Shier (2001) argues that when the term children's participation is used, one should not immediately think of educational institutions; it must be in children's houses, family, in the community, all the places and institutions which are directly or indirectly related to children's lives. Shier suggest that, for full participation of children, they need to be listened to. Children need to be supported in expressing their views. Children's views should be considered. Children should be involved in decision-making. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.

There are problems and barriers in front of creating true participation chances for children. Therefore some cases are called as having limited participation. Limited child participation is defined when children are not directly involved in decision-making (Hill et al., 2004, Thomas, 2007). Shier (2001) proposes in his work that, for true participation of children, adults share the power and get children involved in decision-making processes. There is a link between making choices and children's feeling of control. To be able to have democratic processes, children need to be given choices to accomplish what they choose and feel that they have control over their decisions (Theobald, Ailwood and Danby, 2011). Going after what children initiate, reacting to children, getting their perspectives are all correlated to participation (Bae, 2009).

## 2.7 Children's participation at school

This study frames children's participation in educational institutions; more specifically in preschools. There are several reasons of discussing the concept of participation in a preschool context. To start with, Luff and Webster (2014) argue that it is the preschool setting where most children feel belonged to an institution for the first time. If children become a part of educational institutions which are participatory, built on respect for each other, in which members decide together; they learn these skills; however, if they experience hierarchical schools which are accountable a lot but there is low level of mutual trust between members, almost no participation; then our children understand different things about the aims of education. This might as well be a barrier in front of their development and learning.

Early childhood context is important in the lives and development of children for many ways. Creating a rich, engaging learning environment benefits child in several ways. However, the how of this learning environment is equally important because children do not only learn things but they also learn the ways we do these things. Children practice many skills in early childhood classrooms; giving their ideas and making decisions are among these skills. Theobald, Ailwood and Danby (2011) claim that although children spend a good deal of time in the classroom, early childhood education still lacks the opportunities to provide children chances to get involved in everyday activities. Through their lives, children experience many kinds of contexts and in these contexts, their roles differ. Participation as a term is used to define these roles. Even though it might not be true to say that schools gone a long way of moving and committing for having participatory chances for children, in terms of the required changes and how it is practiced in daily life, the process is still slow. Nyland (2008) argues that to be able to understand the foundations of child participation, it is utmost important to get a sense of daily-based activities of children with others and with the teacher in the classroom and in the playground. There should be focus on the daily routines and plans. Child participation studies claim that they do view the children as competent beings; however, without looking at their social interactions, it is not possible to conceive how they participate (Theobald, Ailwood & Danby, 2011).

Here it is important to elaborate on what hinders children's participation in educational institutions. The first barrier against children's participation might be that they do not really own a status in their lives. Besides, rules and procedures in early education settings might hinder children's freedom, be a barrier in front of their becoming autonomous individuals (Bae, 2009). Another barrier could be what we

expect from teachers. Accepting early education teachers as experts of child development wrongly implies that they know what is needed to know about children. Instead, it would be much better if they expertise in working together with children (McNaughton, 2003).

Power issues and the balance of power in education are among the problems to be discussed to clearly understand why children's participation cannot be fully reached. How the school is organized, what the routines are, what the content and activities of the lessons are not really decided by children in early education settings (Samuelsson, 2010). Among many criticisms of limited participatory practices at school, one is that adults regulate and control children's lives at school, instead of fostering participation (Theobald et al., 2011). Additionally, it is important to note the differences between school and home environments. One study suggests that children's time is not controlled at home as in their school settings (Cobb, Danby & Farrell, 2005). Looking at the causes of this phenomenon, it might be necessary to look at the expectations and functions attributed to formal schooling. When adults, including parents and teachers both, think it is the job of schools to make plans for, control and regulate children, for the utmost benefit of children, then it will be schools where children will feel being controlled more whereas family settings will more likely be spaces for free time activities.

It is essential to look at the factors that determine the quality and effectiveness of children's participation in schools. We know that there are schools which claim to include children's rights but give little priority to children's right to participate. Several studies list the reasons of this. According to Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen and Ojala (2014), what children say are not listened in a serious manner by educators; teachers are not really keen on involving children in decision making

process. Teachers' ideas about children are shaped by the children's ages and they believe that competency is not developed enough in children (Morrow & Richards, 1996).

Another barrier against child participation is that adults, including teachers perceive children as small people who need help, who are incapable. Corsaro (1997, p.42) claims that this perception is the reason why adults believe that children should not be able to decide on their own. They need protection by adults. Protection idea brings out excessive control with itself. This control is applied by teachers at a great amount. When looked at research studying control and child participation, it is seen that teachers' control is a factor that restricts children's participation. Furthermore, teachers who practice control over children find fewer chances to listen to what these children are saying (Emilson and Folkesson, 2006).

Duncan (2009) argues that the number of children in a preschool classroom seems to affect how teachers react to these children. If the number is high, teachers are inclined to focus on routine practices more and control them more. This, in turn, affects the teacher-student interaction quality in a negative way. In early childhood centers, teachers are given the responsibility of caring for very young children, which leaves them almost no time to come together with other professionals and discuss issues like participation, ending up with the feeling of rush. Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen and Ojala (2014) list these as challenges to child participation; the ratio of adult-child, absence of professional skills, managing work, work practices and special needs. Teachers believe that there are not many factors that they can affect to change this negative situation.

In preschools, circle time is a widely practiced daily routine where children and teacher ought to start the day by mutually sharing their ideas. However, even in these circle times, it is the teacher who has profound influence on whether the children are involved or whether they affect the decisions (Emilson and Folkesson, 2006).

It is not clear how to evaluate the level of participation in schools or classrooms as many factors go together. Sandberg and Erikson (2010) claim that quality of the early childhood centers is thought to be one of these factors as in such places, teachers' capability to listen to children are supposed to be higher. However, it is argued that for high quality early childhood education, democratic teachers who are capable of grasping children's viewpoints are not sufficient; these teachers should also be very skilled. Teachers' skills of putting children's ideas in action, creating activities which will foster participation of each student and getting them involved in decision-making processes are among these. Whether the teacher is available to children if they want to share their views is another issue of discussion in participation. In one study, it is suggested that availability is an important aspect of participation.

## 2.8 How to support children's participation at school

So far, the definition, historical development of the concept of participation, its place among other children's rights and what it means in a school context have all been discussed. So, it is now necessary to focus on suggestions to foster children's participation. Understanding what it really means can be one of the first steps.

Rethinking about the conceptualizations of child, childhood and evaluating our own practices in the classrooms would be another step. The studies on how to support children's participation put forward a lot of ideas. Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen

and Ojala (2014) argued that supporting participation should be a comprehensive process, including teacher groups and higher level planning by educational managers, policy makers. It should deal with both top down issues and also everyday practices of teaching.

Shier (2001) suggests that these steps are listed as ways to increase child participation; children should be listened by teachers; teachers should encourage children to communicate their ideas; teachers should take these ideas seriously; teachers and children need to decide together on issues that matter them; the power of making-decisions should be shared between adults and teachers. Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen and Ojala (2014) add that changes should include developing practices that are reflective and will help teachers' daily routines; teachers can create new ways of participatory teaching methods so that teachers can focus on the ideas of children. Daily routines are connected to what teachers believe about children's needs. Children's needs at school are built by teachers on how they view a child so teachers should go over their images of child and childhood.

Teachers should be supported to enhance their skills of hearing children's voices, even in very young ages. Teachers need opportunities, time and place to get together with other educators so that they can be able to discuss child participation and develop common practices (Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen and Ojala, 2014).

## 2.9 Democracy and children's participation

Democracy aims to establish channels so that all the individuals in the community can participate. Participation can be in many forms ranging from making your wishes heard to acting when you can do something. In a true democratic community,

differences of people are greeted and used as ways to strengthen people, especially children in our context. People working for and with children seek methods of getting children more active in their communities.

How children develop friendships and how they learn to respect others' ideas are among the things to examine in the construction of an equal democratic classroom community. Luff and Webster (2014) put forward that if only we grasp a meaning of culture of children's lives through carefully observing their ideas, how they reflect and participate, we can build our approach that conceives what children need, are interested in to be able to build democratic communities. It is also a way of practicing a basic children's right; to express opinions about issues that influence them.

Participatory democracy is defined as a form of living together. It means maximizing opportunities for sharing, exchanging and negotiating perspectives and opinions. It can also be defined as a way of collective decision making for the common ground (Moss, 2011). If democracy is about participation, education is the way that makes individuals experience participation. If the adults in the preschool are successful in learning a child's perspective and get the children involved, then the children will regard themselves to be understood as worthwhile participants (Pramling Samuelsson, Sheridan, 2003).

As Huddleston puts forward (2007), education for democratic citizenship has the underlying assumption that children cannot learn values of democracy through formal teaching; these values and skills require practice. To be able to define an educational setting as democratic, it needs to include all children regardless of their different capabilities and backgrounds. Children are included because all are valued

as individuals. Furthermore, it is not only their individuality but their differences are welcomed and supported. Having a democratic and participatory early childhood education means that we value children's ability to decide on things in their own lives and we have confidence in them. There are numerous contributions of an inclusive democratic education. Through democratic and participatory early childhood education, children learn that they can make their own decisions and their trust in themselves increases. They also learn how to trust other people. They accept their responsibilities when they act. They learn that other people's ideas are valuable and theirs is, too. They become competent and independent. They see that differences should be valued. They build respect for themselves and other people.

Ways of establishing democratic early childhood classrooms are not so different than ways of fostering children's participation. They overlap on many issues. One of the ways is that children can be permitted to give their own decisions on the issues that the whole class is interested in. An example of this can be teachers' asking 'what can we do instead of going to the park?' If children are faced with real problems, they will develop problem solving skills. Children can be shown how both differences and similarities can be appreciated. Teachers can create chances for children to take on responsibility in minor and major daily activities. Children can be given opportunities to implement their rights to decide on how they can spend their free time. Teachers can help children to be more independent. Children should learn about the rights of others, too.

The view of the child is also what is agreed on in democracy education and in participatory early school education. In a democratic early childhood institution, children are regarded as important, capable and competent members of the school community in which each child's right to have a voice is respected.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 The design of the study

The research, its design research questions and interpretation of the findings of this thesis study depend on interpretivist paradigm. As the founders of this paradigm assert, it is inside the minds of the knowers where the world and ideas are interpreted. Social scientists must look at how participants in their study make a sense of a phenomenon, how they interpret participants' behaviors and how they interpret their own reflections (Glesne, 2011, p.4). The world, culture, and meaning that will be explored within interpretivist paradigm do not exist out there. It is the complicated social construction that creates the meaning and reality which is never stable (Glesne, 2011, p.4). Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the comprehension of social actors in the context and give place to their perspectives.

The qualitative interpretivist paradigm has contributed in several ways to the research tradition. Through this paradigm, researchers can realize the fact that their participants and their world can be interpreted through seeing, hearing, reading, listening; through several voices. The long-ignored, silenced participants' voices can be listened and even this listening is a radical action. Once you realize the different perspectives, you start questioning and transforming yourself both as a researcher and a person. This transformation and your contribution will reveal multiple truths to the readers of one's research (Glesne, 2011, p.8).

As the researcher of this study, I set out the research with the idea that there will be an exploration of perspectives and there will be multiple realities apprehended and

constructed by the participants. Therefore, the study is designed as a qualitative case study. In qualitative methodology, a case study requires intensive work on a case; for this study, the case is a preschool classroom in a specific school. Case studies are carried out through long-term observations, in-depth interviews that aim to gather participants' perspectives and creating analysis of them (Glesne, 2011, p.22). A single setting, participant or an event can be analyzed in a detailed manner in case studies (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p.59). In this study, the preschool classroom is the single setting the researcher is focusing on to understand children's participation.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.60) assert that researchers start with general explanations of the case when they start their studies. It is a process of questioning where to carry out the study, who the participants will be, what the possibilities are for the research topic. Then, it is the case itself that gives out clues to the researcher to continue, revisit his or her ideas and selections, and start the process of collecting data, carrying out interviews and observations. During the process, there is always a chance to make changes on the research questions, design, techniques to be used in the study.

The altering nature of the process of case studies describes how this study is designed as a case study. I have started with complex ideas and complicated research questions in mind. Then, options to carry out the study have been analyzed. The analysis has led to a specific preschool and a classroom in this school. During the pilot study of the research, the research questions and the design of the study have become clearer and the idea of carrying out an observational case study has revealed itself.

In ethnographic case studies, participant observation can be listed as the primary data-collection technique. However, interviews and document analysis can enhance it (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p.66). A specific classroom is focused in this study. The participants of the classroom are fifteen children, four different teachers and the administrator of the school. A pilot study is carried out for almost a month in the school so that I could understand the informal structure of the school as Bogdan and Biklen suggest (2007, p.84). The case is restricted to a single classroom in this preschool for several reasons. First, I could spend more time in one classroom and I could focus on the communication and interactions among the participants; formal and informal structures in this environment. In addition, as the children and teachers in the classroom saw me more often, it has become much easier to develop a relationship based on mutual trust and respect. As there are already four different teachers of this classroom, I could observe and carry out an analysis of four different approaches towards children's rights and participation.

In total, at least twenty different individuals are studied by selecting a single classroom as a case, this is not a too large sample that will produce substantial amounts of data to handle or too small sample to distract how participants behave naturally as Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.66) warn against. The case study is defined as a bounded system; the research does not focus on one or two variables. Rather, multi-layered, complex system is studied in its original setting. The context of events and actions are important while carrying out analysis. In case studies, what the researcher does is not to control or manipulate the variables; but to closely examine what is taking place in this specific case, asking questions and trying to find answers over and over throughout the research process. In doing so, I could take things as they were and describe the case (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p.60).

Through this ethnographic case study, I aimed to reach a description that is holistic and that explains the complex nature of the classroom environment that may foster or hinder children's participation. At the end of the data collection period, a thick description of the behaviors and perspectives of participants have been gathered.

### 3.2 Data collection tools

In this study, data is collected through several instruments; field notes, semi-formal interviews with teachers, group and individual interviews with children; and the research journal. I have spent nearly a month in the preschool selected for the case study and taken field notes for pilot study; met with the administrator, teachers, staff of the school and children in the big-age group. I have spent two full days every week for five months during the spring semester in the preschool as a participant observer in the classroom.

I kept a journal throughout the study and wrote down my reflections as a participant observer. I took observation and field notes about teacher-children interactions, child-child interactions, daily routines, and activities, what happens during each observation day in the selected preschool classroom. I conducted one-to-one interviews with four different teachers of the classroom and the administrator of the preschool. In semi-formal interviews, I have asked teachers and the administrator questions on how they view children's participation right, what they do to promote it in the school, how they foster children's expressing themselves, the challenges and importance of children's participation, etc.

I developed interview questions based on literature and related studies, then revised them upon the time spent in the classroom during pilot study. The interviews are

semi-formal as the nature of the relationship between teachers and the researcher promote it to be so. Sample questions for teacher interviews can be seen in Appendix A. The study aimed to learn the perspectives of the participants; how they experience the classroom atmosphere and relations around them, so it is important that they do not feel obliged or under stress, thinking that some correct responds are expected from them (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p.103). The interviews included some small talk questions at the beginning and some open-ended questions so that the interviewee could go on to detailed explanations and data to reveal their multiple understandings could be produced.

The last data collection tool was interviews with children. I carried out two group interviews with children and several individual interviews. The group interviews were conducted like circle time discussions that children are familiar with. Glesne (2011, p.189) suggested keeping analytical memos to researchers to be able to reflect on your own practices, beliefs, memories, and assumptions. I did not call it analytical memo but I kept reflection notes from the beginning of the study. In these reflective notes, I looked at my own presence in the research setting critically. I also wrote down my immediate interpretations, innovative ideas that come to me and these all helped me to be open to a new perspective in analyzing the data. I wrote field notes and journal reflections every day that I spent in the preschool; however, the schedule of the interviews with teachers and draw-write interviews with children were decided based on the program of the preschool.

### 3.3 Description of the research setting and sampling strategy

#### 3.3.1 Sampling strategy

While selecting the participants and the setting, I made use of literature which led the research to participation in an early childhood setting, a topic which wasn't studied much in Turkey. I went through the policy documents regarding child education but I was not able to find policy decisions which consulted children. This lack presents itself in the practice as well. Before choosing the research setting, I visited both state and private preschool classrooms which were very close to each other in terms of location. However, I realized numerous difficulties which would hinder children's participation in the state preschool classroom. Even the short observation period made it clear that the children were not supported to express their ideas and not included in the decision-making process.

Through the guidance of the thesis advisor and other experienced researchers in the department, I visited a private preschool and selected the research setting purposefully. By conducting pre-interviews with the school administration and the class teacher, I understood that the school would be an information-rich case so it could be studied in detail. In addition, this research accepts children as competent, equal, social actors who have a natural right to express themselves and be consulted in the issues that influence their lives. The program and activities of the school tended to be supporting this view of children. This specific school was selected as the research setting would expand the theory and analysis that would develop out of this research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.82).

### 3.3.2 About the school and the classroom

The study was conducted in an established, small private preschool in İstanbul. The school offers preschool education to children aged between three and six. Three-year-old children are in the play group and come to the school only for a few hours in the afternoon. Four-year-old children are in the middle group. Five or six year old's are in the big age group. The school has a bilingual full day program; in the mornings children have two English teachers in the classroom. They all carry out the activities in English. Children do not know that these two teachers speak Turkish and are of Turkish origin. In the afternoons, children have two Turkish teachers who carry out the curriculum in Turkish. The morning and afternoon curriculum are interwoven, one does not repeat the other fully; but it is a continuum of the other.

The school is in a very large garden protected with high walls and a security person at the entrance. It has two floors and the garden is at the back of the building. It is a cozy, colorful, comfortable building. Everything seems to be arranged for children; the posters on the walls, the chairs and desks, the carpets on the grounds, the toilet. Children start coming to school around nine o'clock in the morning. When they come, they walk into the classroom by themselves. Teachers welcome them and they have a free play session for at least half an hour. Then, they continue with the daily routines, activities of the day, garden break, lunch and the similar order in the afternoon in Turkish time.

The school follows its own curriculum; however, the administrator accepts that is very close to Early Years Program of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program, which is an international preschool education program. There are projects and themes children follow throughout the year and at the end of each semester, children have individual presentations, collective project exhibitions and parent-

presentations. The class I observe consists of fifteen children. They are around five and a half years old so it the large group in the school. Most of the children have been a student of the school since they were three; so, they have been with the same Turkish teachers for a long time. They are quite familiar with the school procedures, building, staff and regulations. The main teacher who introduced me to the school is T1. She is around forty, has a lot of experience of working with young children and has been working in this school for more than twenty years. I have met her in a presentation she gave a few years ago in our preschool education undergraduate program. I was influenced by how she talked about children, how she loved her job and how she had a positive, humanistic approach towards children. She talked about how she and her partners create a democratic learning environment where children feel acknowledged, welcomed and happy and how they support them in terms of expressing themselves. I have never forgotten her presentation and kept the name of the lady and the school in my mind. When I contacted T1 about my study, she welcomed the idea positively, helped me to present it to the administrator and they have accepted me to carry out my ethnographic case study for my thesis in their preschool classroom. The administrator also pointed out how happy she was to have a researcher in the school and that she was very open and willing to discuss the findings of the study with me and with the other teachers in the school. Detailed information about teachers and their background is given in the section on teacher interviews. It is important to note here that two Turkish teachers are referred as T1 and T2; and the two English Teachers are referred as E1 and E2. The numbers in these nicknames are random. It is also important to add that children's names are replaced with pseudo names to protect participant identity.

### 3.3.3 A day in the classroom

The school runs from eight in the morning till five in the afternoon. Teachers come to school; have breakfast together and do their preparations. Children start coming to school at nine. Some of them come with a service bus and some are given a ride by their parents. There is a middle-aged, friendly security guard outside the school garden and he welcomes children. Children get inside the building by themselves; find their lockers, put their bags and coats in and go into the classroom. Teachers wait for children inside while working on their materials, etc.

In the mornings, it is English time so there are two English teachers present in the classroom. When children come inside, they usually greet the teachers. Teachers hug them, ask them how they feel or what they did over the weekend. After this, children go play with the toys, do drawing, chat with their friends. It is free play time.

Children start the day with free play time; then gather on the carpet for the morning routine. In the routine, one child is chosen as the class assistant by the teachers and he or she checks the calendar and the weather with the class. On some days, the morning routine is followed by homework checking. Homework is usually like telling about a story book they read, telling about a question the teacher asked children to research about, drawing a picture about the theme of the week, etc.

Children either present their homework to their friends or the teacher just collects them. Then, circle time begins. In the circle time, teachers gather children on the carpet. They discuss things, work on their projects, create a story, etc., all in English.

Here, I would like to elaborate more on the activity types as they clearly reflect what has been going on in the classroom. The data shows me that I, as the researcher, start seeing the classroom with morning preparations where there are two English teachers in the classroom and children start coming one by one. When most children gather,

free play time starts. Children have almost half an hour uninterrupted, uncontrolled play time. Free play time is followed by circle time in which teacher calls everybody around a circle on the carpet. There is a morning routine followed every day to start the session. In this morning routine, teachers chat with children for a brief time, share the day's plan with them and chose a class assistant. With the facilitation of the class assistant, children check the weather and update the calendar. Circle time activity changes upon the theme of the month, and the flow of the week. These are the most common ones; checking homework, story creating, presentation, class game, yoga session, video watching, book reading.

A special notice should be given here to what presentation is. There are two types of presentations children do on a regular basis; one is 'my box' and 'show and tell box' presentations. In the English sessions, children do 'show and tell box' presentation. Each day, one of them gets an empty small box, takes it home and puts an interesting object in it. When he or she brings it to the classroom, children try to guess what is in the box by asking questions and clues. Circle time is followed by an activity time which usually is in the form of a hands-on activity. Children work on a drawing activity or a project together. An important amount time is allocated to one-to-one teacher-child drawing feedback. A child finishes his or her work and takes it to one of the teachers. The teacher asks the child to tell what is in the drawing. The child starts telling and the teacher supports the child with her questions.

When the activity time is over, children get ready for garden time. They put on their clothes, get in a line and go to the garden all together. Children have almost half an hour free time in the garden. Teachers walk around and chat but not interfere with children's play. After coming back to the class, children line up for lunch. They take their plates, tell the teacher what and how much they would like to eat, then go sit

with their friends in groups. Lunch Time could also be named as chat time because it is when children chat freely with each other about anything. Lunch time is followed by another short garden break; then one of the Turkish teachers, T1 or T2 takes over the classroom. The teacher starts the afternoon session with the second circle time. It starts with short informal chat with children, then a group discussion on the theme of the month follows. In this second circle time, I have observed that these are the most common activities; group discussion, book reading, presentation. After the discussion, children have snack time when they are served with some healthy snacks at the tables.

Snack time is followed usually by an activity time. In the second activity, children share their drawings or work with the teacher and the teacher takes notes, too. The last thing is another presentation. Each week on a certain day, one child does my box presentation. He or she brings objects, photos, clothes from their babyhood. They also have their parents as a guest. Children talk about how it was being a baby and what they remember. When the presentation is over, children go to the garden or wait for their parents. On some days, the class routine is not followed as there are special days or occasions to be celebrated. In the last month, for example, they get ready for the end of the year show and they have dance practice both in the morning and in the afternoon. As a part of the children's day, children have a costume party, a movie time. There is also a sports day activity in which children and teachers all day play games and have competitions in the garden. Occasionally, parents are invited to speak about their jobs and it is called parent presentation.

### 3.4 Consideration of possible ethical issues

As the study involves working with very young children, several attempts were made to respond to possible ethical issues. To start with, the school administration was provided with a summary of what was going to be studied, how long I planned to stay in the field, which techniques would be used, the aims of the research, how the observations and interviews would be carried out. I presented an official document signed by the thesis advisor, summarizing all these points and asking for the official approval of the school. The school provided approval. A sample consent form is provided in Appendix B.

I applied to the Ethics Committee of Boğaziçi University and provided a short report of the research. Consent forms for parents of each child and teachers were prepared and presented to the Ethics Committee. The draft version of possible questions of child interviews were prepared and presented to the Ethics Committee. Official approval of the Ethics Committee was taken before the field work started. The official report of the Ethics Committee can be seen in Appendix C. In each of these consent forms and approval documents, the participants of the research and the parents were informed about the topic and method of the research. They were informed that they could get more information about the research if they wanted, they could hold back whenever they wanted without any statement of excuse. The parents and the school were informed that no video recording or pictures of children would be taken. The interviews with the teachers were recorded but these records were deleted right after they were transcribed.

All the field notes, documents related to the study were kept in a locked folder in a private data storage device of the researcher. Throughout the research process, these field notes were only and partially shared with the thesis advisor. The name of the

school, children and teachers were kept confidential through all processes of the research. Either pseudo names or numbers were used to refer to the participants. The interview questions were shared with the thesis advisor, two experienced researchers at the Department of Primary Education at Boğaziçi University and a group of preschool teachers who were currently working with other children. The revisions were made upon their suggestions.

Glesne (2011, p.162) summarizes the ethical discussion in ethnographic studies saying that what is considered ethical in an experimental study may not be accepted as ethical in a qualitative one as the objective stand of the researcher might be a barrier to understand the context and the participants. The ethicality in qualitative studies depend on the nature of research questions and design, how much research participants are involved in the negotiation of research process and outcomes. Both at the beginning and during this study, the research aims were discussed with the participants and shaped according to their suggestions. To give an example, I was planning to observe a class of younger children; age three and four as the studies in this age group are more limited in number. The school suggested me to be in the age-five classroom as the teachers and children in this classroom were more familiar with having an outsider in their classroom. The days and hours of the field work were also determined by the school. Where I stood in the classroom, how much I could be involved in the classroom activities were determined by teachers and children and I always followed their lead before starting something.

As Glesne (2011, p.166) suggested, the Ethics Committee and the preschool required a written consent from only the parents of children. The consent of children wasn't expected or required. However, I informed children about the study and got their oral consent at the beginning of the research and also each time I talked to them in

individual and group interviews. The written and oral consent of the teachers were also taken but what was more important is that I gained the respect and trust of teachers in time so I could carry out the study in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

As defined by Glesne (2011, p.150), reflexivity in research means that the researcher is constantly criticizing and thinking about his or her own role, the interactions between the research participants and a researcher influence the study. Starting from planning the research until the last day of the field work, I was always careful about being reflexive about my own presence in the school and classroom. I kept a separate folder for my reflection notes and continuously written about how I felt in the classroom. I wrote the interview questions and analyzed them again by thinking of my personal influence and perspectives on them. I constructed the format of the group interview with children, chose questions to ask them; and then thought about how the interview would be different if it wasn't me asking the questions. I was critical about how my relations with teachers influenced my presence and observations in the classroom. I am very much aware that I have a subjective role on the study as it is something I have constructed from the beginning with my own personal story, decisions, interpretations and perspective. As supported by Glesne (2011, p.150), subjectivity is an undeniable aspect of qualitative research shaping all steps of the research process from choosing the research topic to decide on how to analyze. I did not try to eliminate the effect of my own presence in the research; I rather learned what to do with it. I know that my gender, age, social class, personality, years of teaching experience, my philosophy in education and possibly my childhood experience all had influences on why I chose to study this topic and how I carried out the research in the field.

As I started being in the classroom more and more, I realized how much I was learning as the context, the interactions I witnessed were so rich. I was welcomed in the classroom; children and teachers shared all their resources and time with me. So, I started to feel guilty because I was receiving very much and giving very little in return as Glesne suggests (2011, p.167). This is probably why I started to show my gratefulness by bringing little gifts for the class like healthy snacks, fruits or helping out the teachers more with small chores. I believe that how I behaved in the classroom was ethical because carried out the interviews by showing my respect and dignity. I paid a lot of attention to listening to all the participants of the story carefully and helped to increase their voice.

To be able to construct trustworthiness of the study, I asked several questions during the process. Firstly, I tried to look at what I noticed in the data and more importantly, as suggested by Glesne (2011, p.210), what I did not notice and what was missing in my notes or in the interactions in the classroom. I searched for negative cases and tried to capture whether I couldn't see any different point of view. In addition, I questioned my approach on noticing as well. I asked myself why I was thinking and analyzing some points more than the others and I wrote about them in my reflection notes. I tried to differentiate between what I saw, what I was planning to see and what the research participants aimed to show me. I spent long enough time in the field so that what I observed was less influenced by my presence in the classroom. I also made use of member checking in the entire process to be able to provide trustworthiness. I informed the teachers about the research process even after data collection part, asked them questions to clarify my initial interpretations and talked to them a few times before I finished writing up the analysis and interpretations. I also planned to send them the last version of the research to get their opinions about it.

I shared the emerging codes, categories and patterns with a few young researchers in the graduate program I was in and two professors who were advising me from the beginning of the research. I presented the study plan before I started and after the field work to faculty members; then continued by adapting upon their feedback and suggestions. My advisor provided constant feedback from the beginning of constructing the research idea until the very end of presenting the findings. Including views of multiple subjects was applied to strengthen trustworthiness. I included the views of four different teachers, the school principal and all the children of the classroom as much as possible. As a last step to ensure trustworthiness, I depended on theoretical triangulation for which I looked at the data from different theoretical approaches, as suggested by Glesne (2011, p. 212). I constructed the literature and analyzed the data through different approaches like new social studies of childhood, children's rights studies and participation studies.

### 3.5 Theoretical background of the methodology

The theoretical background of the methodology in this study comes from the new studies of childhood. As Clark (2005) suggests, along with the paradigm shift in studies of childhood, what children prioritize, what they are interested in, what they are concerned for and how they perceive their own lives have been wondered and explored. Traditional methods of research with children sometimes depend on the view that children need to be protected by adults. There are times research can regard children as objects whose ideas can be referred as results of the study. However, there have been some changes in this assumption and children have recently been viewed as contributing actively to the research process (Penn, 2008, p.23).

Before starting the research, ethics should be considered as an important subject, especially if the research is conducted with children. In research where adults are participants, they are almost always informed about the topic, what is expected from them, what will be done with the data. The same rules might be applied in research with children. They should be given information and also made aware of the right to stop participating in the research if they do not want to at some point (Penn, 2008, p.24).

Traditional methods of collecting and analyzing data in research on children can be listed as surveys of parents and teachers to get their views; standard test, involving them in laboratory tests. However, through time, newer techniques have been developed. The researchers can learn about the views of children through observations; they can design studies in which researchers and children play and talk; children can be asked to take pictures, create diaries or maps about their everyday lives (Penn, 2008, p.25). Whichever technique is chosen, researchers need to make sure that the study gives place to the views, perspectives of children themselves, too. This is in line with United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12 which states that children who can form their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity.

The way interviews are designed decide what kind of answers are going to be elicited. Interviewing the participants should be done in such a way that questions are open-ended enough to let participants talk about their individual experiences.

Interviews with children should be done so, too. We are responsible of constructing research techniques that will help children connect and talk about the realities of their lives. Therefore, this study is designed in a way children also participate. It includes

observation, getting ideas of children during play times and talking to them; interviewing children and creating new techniques of learning what they think about the research topic.

Children are living in the present time, here and now as much as all people are doing; experiencing the daily activities' effects not as future effect but right now. Therefore, in this thesis; a classroom environment was chosen as a case study to see children's participation in preschool education. It is the classroom preschool children spend most of their time during weekdays and it is a place where we can observe and become a part of their everyday activities. The methodologies that give importance in raising the voice of less powerful groups have become influential on childhood studies. One of them is The Mosaic Approach developed by Alison Clark (2005).

The Mosaic Approach is based on some fundamental principles in which children are listened through various methods; children are behaved as the experts and agents of their own lives; reflection on meaning is not accomplished without children, practitioners and parents; the primary focus is on what children live through, not what they know. The Mosaic approach aims to gather together what children experience both individually and collectively and tries to do this by finding out methods to include their voices (Clark, 2005). In line with this approach, in this thesis, observation as a data collection technique was used and I aimed to observe children as individuals, in play groups, as a class. In addition, I carried out play-like activities with children throughout which children were regarded as experts in their lives and they had the ability and resources to reflect on what they experience in this preschool environment. In the observation technique, I paid attention to how children were listened to by their teachers, by the staff in the school, and how they listened to each other. Children were observed closely in their free play time, in

garden time and throughout all the activities so that how they make use of inner voice was understood. Clark (2005) describes the use of inner voice by stating that through their inner voice, children make a meaning of their social world, reflect upon their everyday experiences. Children discover what is new for them in their environment; connect the meaning of them to each other through self-reflection and inner voice. Using inner voice does not mean silencing children. Rather, it clarifies the fact that chances are given to children to express their view on what they have experienced, rather than abstract notions. In addition, they feel comfortable while responding on the ideas or questions knowing that no right answer is expected from them (Clark, 2005). Depending on this explanation, I avoided asking information questions to the children, observed their interactions as they behaved naturally, and more importantly, tried to see whether teachers created chances for them to express their views and how they responded back to children in such cases.

I tried to understand how children perceived the world in the preschool; which communication tools they used; how they made meaning of what is going on around them by participating and observing in their plays, small talks, presentations, garden tours, etc. I also looked at how the teachers of this classroom were aware of children's need and right of communicating themselves through class observations and teacher interviews. Clark (2005) points out a very important fact; if the study only depends on interviewing the children, it is not possible to capture what it really means to be in this preschool center for the child; the child wouldn't be visible. Only his or her capability to verbally answer the questions would be. Therefore, the study does not so much depend on interviewing children in a formal, adult-like way. Rather, it used circle time discussions and small chats to provide children ways different than verbal expression.

Clark (2005) explains another form of listening; multiple listening. It means that all partners listen to each other; practitioners, parents, children. It is not one-way exchange of information between an individual child and a practitioner. It is called as a complex web of interactions, which is always changing and moving. I tried to note the web of interactions and paid attention to multiple ways of exchange of information among all participants of the study and seen whether there were any patterns. Clark (2005) suggests that multiple ways of listening should be in the nature of the childhood institution and it should be passed on as a culture too all involved. Knowing the relation between listening and participation, I tried to see whether the institution valued diverse forms of listening to children and its practitioners.

I listened to people at all levels in the preschool institution, without paying attention to the hierarchy in their positions, or years of teaching. There are power and status differences in the communication of adults and children. I questioned whether children truly gave out their ideas or adults extracted information from children. It should be accepted that communicating with children is certainly influenced by what adults expect from them. As suggested by Clark (2005), if teachers or other adults see children as having little power and weak, they will not be expecting much from them in terms of expressing themselves.

For all these reasons, I was very careful about positioning myself in the preschool from the very beginning. To be able to overcome the power and status difference of an adult, I paid utmost attention to stand somewhere between an adult and a child in the classroom. I spent time playing with children on their invitation and acceptance, talked about things that I understood to be important for the children like tattoos they were happily making, and sometimes asked very funny questions to create a bond of humor with children. I clearly identified myself to the teachers as someone who

came to their classroom to learn and understand. I usually asked questions, helped the teachers when there was an urgency, expressed that I valued their ideas. In addition, I observed teacher-child interactions and also asked questions in the interview to find out what teachers expect from them, whether the power dynamics existed in the classroom, how they were referred to and how these all influence children's participations.

Reversing roles is important as it gives children opportunities to feel the responsibility and joy of expressing opinions on issues that matter for them. Doing so is also creating place for unexpected information (Clark, 2005). Therefore, I sometimes pretended as if I did not know how to do stuff that children knew very well, like building a house with legos or counting back from twenty, how to prepare lemonade. Doing so, I reversed my own role of knowing more and gave children chances to reflect on in unexpected ways.

Sandberg and Eriksson (2010) underline that if children in a preschool feel that they are included and their teachers get their perspective, they ultimately have the sense of being understood. Also, the teachers get to see the real meaning of children's perceptions. Children know that adults around them hear their voices and take them seriously. Knowing that children's participation is being understood and listened, I based my observations on this approach and tried to see whether children felt understood, or whether there were cases they imply that they were not understood; whether teachers cared about looking from the children's perspectives.

It is the environments, diverse types of activities and situations that create diverse experiences for children. While studying participation, one must look at the concept of availability. Sandberg and Eriksson (2010) point out to the highly important

concept of availability in children's participation. This research explored the presence of availability in terms of teachers' care, time, and the availability of resources. The next goal was to understand how they were related to children's participation in the preschool classroom. Therefore, I was present in the school the whole day; from the morning, before the children came, in all of the activities and break times, until each child left the school in the late afternoon. I tried to see how the teachers made use of time, how much time was allotted for them to make their preparations, how available they were to respond to children during the day. As suggested by Sandberg and Eriksson (2010), when a child shows the ability to make choices and decisions for himself or herself, it means that he or she participates. If children have an influence and have a say in decision-making, they are participating. Like this, if children are joining activities, they are participating actively. Therefore, I made use of data coming from the interviews with teachers and manager of the school which have questions on how decision making is carried out in the school, how teachers and the school program aim to develop children's ability to make choices. The same aspect was examined closely during the observation days.

Sandberg and Eriksson (2010) suggest that an environment which is safe is also an important necessity for participation as children will feel supported by their teacher there and are sure about which activities and routines will take place. Routines, the safety of the environment, how familiar children are with the environment are among the features observed throughout the field study in this thesis.

In Sandberg and Eriksson's study (2010), it is found that the number and attitude of the preschool staff, the age of children, the routines of the preschool, how parents raise their children are all listed as what hinders children's participation. In addition, teachers in that study believe that how the school is organized can be a challenge in

front of participation. I both tried to observe the obstacles in front of children's participation and asked what teachers think about them in the interviews. Interaction is an essential element of participation. When a child starts interacting with his or her environment, he or she starts to experience participation. Whether the children have access to interaction with both adults and other children, whether they can feel belonging to the group of children are all indicators of the presence of participation and they were analyzed in this research.

Bae (2009) suggests that practitioners need to pay attention to the several methods children express themselves with, make sure that they listen to children; they are attentive to their body language and other gestures rather than focusing only on verbal ability. Granting children their right to freedom of expression and finding ways of ensuring it reveal an understanding of an active, agency child as a social actor. This is the reason why I focused on questioning and finding observational data on both how children expressed their ideas and wishes and how teachers enhanced their ability of expression.

In Bae's (2009) study, how teachers view children is studied and three major categories have been found. Teachers see children as a fellow being, or teachers claim that it is always adults who know better, or they have a picture of an irrational child in their minds. This thesis has a stand that teachers' view of the child is closely related to how they support children's participation in the preschool. I have developed interview questions on understanding the image of the child for each teacher because as Bae (2009) puts forward, how children are viewed by teachers is influential on their chances to participate in everyday interaction. To be able to realize participation, teachers should be aware of numerous ways of children's communication ways and children should be granted their freedom of expression.

For true participation of children, there is a need for responsive teachers who monitor carefully how competent children are, who support children in developing their capabilities.

It is possible to finish with underlining the fact that if adults want to regard children as active subjects, they also need to be observing their own behaviors and how their communication might make the others, especially children, feel under pressure.

Children recognize whether adults are genuine when showing interest so they position themselves accordingly (Bae, 2009). Children also understand very quickly whether you, as a researcher or a regular adult, have a goal of controlling them or just being there and trying to understand them. So, in this thesis study, the aim of the research was explained very simply but carefully to the children and repeated when children asked again during everyday interactions.

### 3.6 Pilot study

I conducted four weeks of pilot study in the first semester in the preschool to get to know the school, the children, the teachers, the routines, the staff, the parents and the approach and program of the school. I decided to continue my work there in this school as I myself witnessed that it is a place where children have a say, they are listened, respected and supported. I made many observational notes during my pilot study. Along with these notes and the previous literature review I prepared, I decided on my research questions and the methods to be used. After spending time in the classroom for the pilot study, I decided to pay more attention on how children spoke during lesson time and lunch time chats. I realized that I needed to be more around children and listen to them closely while they are playing. I decided to look at the

differences between participation of all children and participation of an individual child. I noticed that the bilingual nature of this classroom might have an influence on how participation is realized. I saw more clearly that all four teachers were very different from each other so I needed to look at their approaches individually and compare them. I saw that there were different dimensions of children's participation even in a single classroom so I noted that a model would be developed after the field work.

Carrying out a pilot study helped me to work on the interview questions, too. It is important to note that the interview questions were formed and shaped with regards to the literature review and observation notes. Before carrying out actual the interviews for my research, a pilot study was done with a preschool teacher and administrator who work at an early childhood center at a university campus. The school chosen for the pilot study was found appropriate by the academic advisors of the researcher as the profiles of parents, teachers and the program are like the preschool that the research is originally done. The preschool teacher who gave feedback on the interview questions in the pilot study is a young, female practitioner who was teaching for only a few years. She is currently working with four-year-old children. She also continues her graduate education in preschool education. The administrator in the pilot study is also a young, female practitioner who has longer years of experience in working with young children. She is about to complete her graduate degree and currently teaching courses for undergraduate students. Her role in the school is to create and evaluate educational program.

Both participants gave valuable feedback on the interview questions. Through their directions, I reduced the number of questions, simplified some of the concepts, focused on the early childhood context in some questions. In addition, the pilot study

participants recommended me to start with some discussion-opening topics which would help the interview participants feel more comfortable and relate to their lives easily. In addition to this, questions were rearranged under groups according to their relatedness. One of the feedbacks was on discarding the questions about in-class teaching out of the questions for the administrator. Questions focusing more on school management and participatory school concept were kept upon the feedback in the pilot study.

### 3.7 Research process

Before going on to the analysis and interpretation of data, I want to include a part on the research process. I consider myself as one of the tools of the research because it was my presence in the classroom that made it possible to observe, listen and participate in what was going on. Therefore, I focused on my role on the research, on the communication I had with teachers and children. As I explained in detailed before, I kept a reflection journal and wrote about how I felt in the classroom, what I talked with the classroom members. Apart from the observational data, I made a separate analysis of these notes and put them under the theme of research process. Under this theme, three major categories emerged; the role of the researcher, researcher-child interactions and researcher-teacher interactions.

#### 3.7.1 The role of the researcher

There are several separate roles that I, as the researcher, took on in this preschool classroom. These roles were not decided before the study by me; they are the outcomes of the mutual relationship between me and the classroom members. To start with, a genuine listener was my major role as it is the role of any participant

observer or researcher. Children realized this from the beginning and told me lots of different stories about their experience, holiday visits, families, etc. I was also a trustworthy friend for them as I did not share any of what they told me to anyone. Being a play friend was my other role as children expected me to play with them almost every day. I joined their games with their invitation and permission and I have to confess that I had great fun playing with them.

I acted as a helper in the classroom when there is a need. I helped children with tidying up the classroom and I helped teachers distributing lunch. I took photos in some of the activities. As it was a bilingual classroom, there were times when a teacher or a child needed translation so I acted as a translator in both languages. The following anecdote shows one of many times I supported the class by doing translations of a few words:

“E1: Who has the show and tell box?

Halit comes with the box and he sits in front of all children.

E2 (to children): Halit’s object is really interesting. You will love it.

Children: Shake the box. Shake the box.

Halit: No!

Children: Why?

Kerem: It may break.

E2: Good guess!

Şebnem: Is it.....? (She hesitates. She cannot find the right English word).

E2: Say it in Turkish. Fetiye can help you in English.

Şebnem (to me): What is ‘rüzgar’?

Fetiye: It is wind.

Şebnem: Ok, thank you. Is it wind, Halit?”

Most of the time, I was regarded as one of the class members so I was included in most of the activities. Someone observing us from outside would easily see me asking questions or giving clues in the child presentations, answering children's questions during picture drawing times, chatting with children during lunch time, playing hide and seek in the garden, accompanying children and calming them down in conflict situations, bringing small gifts like fruits or flowers to the classroom, etc. Here is an example from my reflection notes, describing my role of helping in the classroom:

“It is snack time in the afternoon. I almost always try to help teachers. I have taken the role of giving children milk. I really enjoy learning about the preferences of each child and interacting with them while distributing their milk. Some children are surprised when they see that I remember their preferences:

Kerem: Fetiye, give me very little milk. Very little.

Fetiye: No way. You always drink a full glass and then another one!

Kerem: Yes, that's true. How do you know?

Fetiye: I have learned it. And Aylin drinks very very little. She drinks almost no milk.

Aylin: Give me one sip. Ok, maybe two!

Kerem: Me, full! Me, full!”

### 3.7.2 Researcher-child interactions

To start the section about researcher-child interaction, I must state that without children's great love and acceptance towards my presence in the classroom, none of such roles would have existed. From the first day on in the classroom, children welcomed me very warmly, included me in their games and showed interest in the study. The data about my relationship with children do not come from observational notes but from the reflection notes that I took every day after my field visit. In these

reflective notes, I tried to write everything that happened between me and children during that day and criticized my own role in the classroom.

Children welcomed me happily and hugged me very warmly every morning that I stepped into the classroom. They asked me about the problem when there were times I couldn't come. The analysis of reflective notes demonstrates that children were always interested in my study. They were willing to speak with me to tell about their plans for the weekend, plans for tonight with their best friends. They talked about their family, their pets, their new born baby brother. They shared their concerns about their illness; they shared their happiness of getting new shoes or seeing a fun movie. They trusted me and told their secrets. Here is a note from my reflections on my own role:

“I think my role in the classroom is changing for the better. I am becoming more and more of a local. Both E1 and E2 welcome me very happily. It decreases my stress and anxiety. There are some children who get happy when they see me. As soon as I go into the classroom, they start sharing things about their lives, depending on what is their interest on that day. Sometimes is a gum-tattoo they have just made; sometimes expecting their father to pick them up from school or a new hair-cut would be their topic to chat with me. Teachers have started to share more about their lives and careers. One of the teachers has told me where she worked before and why she changed jobs. I feel that I have so much to learn from the teachers”.

As it might be seen from the personal note above, it is important to have positive interactions with both children and teachers for a researcher to feel more comfortable in the classroom. Although not all of them, children always included me in their games, gave me roles and instructions, enjoyed controlling me in the games and sometimes asked me to create games for them. Children told me about their families and friends but they also asked me about my family, where I lived, where I worked and my close friends. They were curious what I was doing on the days I didn't come

to their classroom. Here is an example dialogue between me and Kerem about my absence:

“While we were talking, Kerem came to me and asked:

Kerem: You haven’t come for days. Why?

Fetiye: I had to teach a class.

Kerem: How many days did you teach?

Fetiye: Till today.

Kerem: So you don’t come because you are at school.

Fetiye: Yes, dear. I have students like you

E1 intervenes: Kerem, she has bigger students, bigger than you.

Kerem: Ok. Come”.

Most children also showed interest in the research process as well. As mentioned before, I explained who I was, what I would do in the classroom and gave information about the research process. Even though children did not ask much about it and accepted me directly at the beginning, it took their attention when I started to sit at the back of the classroom and took notes. They often came and wanted to sit with me while I was taking notes and asked what I was doing. Some children asked me to read my notes so I did and they enjoyed seeing that their actions and sentences were all written down. Below is an example when a child got happy reading my observation notes and another child joined us to tell about his plans:

“I was watching the class discussion at the back and writing in my notebook. Lale came and tried to read what I wrote there. She is the only child in the classroom who can read very well. She enjoyed seeing that I took note of what happened in the classroom. Then, Ercüment came next to us:

Ercüment: What is the day today, Fetiye?

Fetiye: It is Wednesday, Ercüment.

Ercüment: Do you know I am going to aikido lessons on Wednesday.

Fetiye: Oh, really? Do you like it?

Ercüment: I love it. Some of my friends from here come, too.

Fetiye: So, you have so much fun!

Ercüment: No, it is serious. You should come, too. Come, next week.

Fetiye: Thank you so much!”

The notebook itself became a medium of interaction between children and me. First, they wanted to write on it so I allowed it. Then, it turned into a game where they would write some letters because they only knew how to write certain letters and asked me to guess the rest of the word. They asked me to create a more challenging game so I taught them how to play hangman and they enjoyed the idea. Almost every day that I was in the field, one or two children ran to me and my notebook to play hangman in their free play time. Here is a reflection note of myself on such a moment:

“The class is back from dance practice. There is some more time for the group to start an activity. I am sitting at a table and watching the children. Lale came to me and asked me to play hangman on my notebook. Normally I ask children a word in this game and they try to guess it by saying some letters. This time Lale wanted to write the word herself. I found it challenging because she needed to count how many letters there were in the word she chose and put the lines for these letters on the paper correctly. She looked very happy and proud. I did my best not to guess the word quickly and she enjoyed seeing me having trouble with finding the word. She gave me some tips to find the word. Then I guessed the word correctly; book. Lale hugged me, drew a heart on my notebook and left for the group discussion. The best part of this research is having fun with children”.

Children drew hundreds of pictures on the pages of my notebook and started telling stories depending on these pictures. They drew things related to what they learned in the school or the pictures of their pets. Some children taught how to draw a dinosaur picture to another child on my notebook while others just ran from group discussion, drew a very small picture, made me smile and went back to the discussion. For me,

these drawings were signs saying that children were willing to communicate with me and their ways of communication were very colorful and diverse. When we got closer with children, I wanted to take this moment of close interaction and turn it into a medium of getting their ideas related to my research topic. So, I changed the design of my interviews, kept group interviews less and focused on one-to-one interview-like chats with children who willingly came to talk to me. Surely, it wasn't all children who were willing to interact with me. There were a few children who constantly avoided talking to me. They wanted to speak Turkish with me all the time even if it was English session and they stopped talking to me for days if I replied in English. Sometimes children ignored my questions during one-to-one interviews and kept talking about what they wanted to, which I used as data as well.

### 3.7.3 Researcher-teacher interactions

Not only children, but also teachers of this preschool classroom made it easier for me to adapt and be a part of the community. Teachers always welcomed me very positively. Teachers included me in the group discussions by asking also me some questions. They supported me to play games with children. They asked me to take part in school activities. When I lost an observation day due to work, teachers sent me text messages and told me the whole class missed me. They showed interest in my life, family, workplace; they asked me questions about my studies. They asked for help from me when they really needed it and they showed profound respect towards me, calling me a colleague of them:

“My relationship with both E1 and E2 are getting really well. I started to feel more comfortable around them. I am trying to help the teachers as much as possible. I avoid intervening. I usually acknowledge how hard their job is. These teachers are very positive people and I feel lucky to be here”.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

As Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.160) put it forward, data analysis and interpretation can be defined as having a close look at the findings, connecting them to the concepts and frameworks in the literature. To be able to make the analysis, the researcher needs to break down the findings into smaller units, categorize them, find out possible codes, connecting them again and try to see whether any patterns emerge out of these codes. Researcher also interprets the data by explaining what is seen relating it to the literature, by writing out what is new and important and helps the reader to understand the data and the findings.

As this study is qualitative in nature, the data is in forms of field notes, interview transcripts, and reflection notes. The field notes include description of events that have occurred in the preschool classroom, the dialogues among children and adults, activities, rules and how they are applied in the classroom, description of teachers' behaviors, quotations from children and teachers, comments of the researcher on interactions among classroom participants. The notes are both descriptive and analytical in nature as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.118).

#### 4.1 Thematic analysis

There are various qualitative data analysis types to be chosen depending on the nature of the study. For this study, thematic analysis was applied to data. In thematic analysis, the data is coded and divided into various parts for further analysis and description as explained by Glesne (2011, p.184). This type of analysis is chosen because it fits the theoretical orientation, the research questions and the data collection tools that are used in the study. With this analysis, it is aimed to understand and analyze what I witnessed, seen, heard and noted as a researcher in the field. As I worked with the data, I was able to see the differences between themes, find connections, compare and contrast practices and make explanations.

As noted before, patterns and themes were looked for in the data. The data was read several times and coded. Constant case comparison was applied for very extreme cases like differences in approaches of four different teachers, specific interactions. Through thematic analysis, the patterns that unify and the patterns that stand out were reached. As pointed out by Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.162), the complexities that are underlying the relations in the preschool classroom were reached. The notes were organized as separate analytical files like interviews, observation notes with dates, reflection notes with dates, answers of children in each circle-time discussion session. Then, as the data got larger, coding continued and new, analytic files emerged into themes, categories, and finally parts of the thesis. This is why I can say that keeping analytical files helped me to identify the categories in the data.

At the beginning of data analysis, I tried a few different coding schemes on the whole data and chose the one that fits the best for most of the data. There were many codes that overlapped and it is natural as the interactions occur in many ways; as there are several different actors and their agency and power in the same classroom.

To be able to keep my focus on certain issues appearing from the data, I established boundaries for my research as suggested by Glesne (2011, p.192) and worked on the interpretations in a better way.

To be able to systematize the coding procedure and reflect upon what was observed, I prepared and sent regular reports on field notes and presented it to the thesis advisor and fellow researchers to get their suggestions or reflections on how to go on with the study.

#### 4.2 Making Connections

At the beginning of thematic analysis, I started by coding the data and looking for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011, p.187). When I found some codes, I tried to understand what each code meant and applied them into all pages of the notes. I tried to see if the same codes worked in other cases across events or times. When looking for patterns, it was possible to see the unifying patterns of the classroom culture, teacher practices, teacher-child interactions, etc. As I read the notes I took about each observation day again and again, the whole story of the classroom began to make sense. By doing the initial data analysis with the codes I determined, I could see the connections between the stories as it was foreseen by Glesne (2011, p.187). I classified and categorized the data several times in the coding process to find out parts that will be example for the same theoretical idea. While I was applying the codes on the data, I searched for and noted down the same words or phrases used by participants in certain contexts and made use of them as 'in vivo' codes. I used different codes on the same pages, tried out other coding categories, combined some codes and deleted some others. Finally, I could create a code book which I used for final coding. During the whole coding process, I knew that coding was a crucial step

of data analysis but not the whole of it. As suggested by Glesne (2011, p. 196), as the researcher, I was the one who would make an interpretation of the data through my perspective and choices.

#### 4.3 Transforming the data

After organizing data, it is essential to move into meaning to transform the data.

Glesne (2011, p. 208) suggests three steps in this transformation; describing the data, making analysis of the data and finally interpreting the data. In the first phase, I closely looked at observational notes besides interview data and tried to comprehend what was going on in the classroom. I directed my focus on the parts that were meaningful to answer my research questions. I made notes about the things I noticed by describing what I saw in the data. In the second step which is analysis, I aimed to determine the key elements and tried to show the connections between them. While writing it up, I went beyond description and implied a systematic and critical approach on the data. In the last phase of interpretation, I could extend the analysis by depending on relevant theories from the field and by connecting the analysis with my personal experience, as recommended by Glesne (2011, p.209).

As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 173), the researcher realizes some words, sentences, and patterns while reading through the data. This became the first step of coding for me. I started a coding system by noting down certain phrases that I came across; looked at how regular they are and how representative they were for the research topic. The coding categories evolved so.

While deciding on how to code the data, I took help from the recommendations of Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.174) looking at their explanations on general kinds or families of codes used by researchers.

I made use of setting codes to describe the school, the classroom, the research participants and the setting of the study. Situation codes were the second kind of codes that were utilized to demonstrate how research participants; teachers, children and administrator view the main concepts in my study; school, childhood, participatory classroom, authority, etc. Under situation codes, common perspectives of research participants were presented along with individual and differing perspectives. The codes on how teachers view children or how children view the adults around them might be examples for this kind. The next kind of codes was activity codes to refer to activities that occur in a regular pattern. It was the most common code type emerging out of the data of my study. Some examples to the activity codes could be given as children presenting, teacher asking questions, children joking, watching films. I used event codes in describing winter break show, child exhibition, end of year show, and march for the environment.

I applied strategy codes to find out the strategies employed by research participants like teacher skills, reactions, attitudes. To be able to show how people behave each other on a regular pattern, relationship and social structure codes were constructed in this research. Examples of these can be listed as teacher-teacher interactions, teacher-child interactions, and child-child interactions. I used methods codes to examine data to find the observational and reflection notes on the research process. There were a few codes that I used under this coding family such as researcher-child interaction, role of the researcher, researcher-teacher interaction.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERPRETATION

#### 5.1 A model of children's participation

The analysis of the data took me to a model of participation. What I observed and realized in this preschool classroom is that children's participation can best be understood looking at many several factors that interact with each other. There might be other factors at work in other preschool classrooms but the most dominant ones that influence the level of children's participation in this specific classroom is listed here; children's agenda, needs, agency; classroom rules, values, atmosphere; decision making, listening to children, teacher support, questions, control and power.

It is obvious that there are overlaps in some of these categories. Several different maps and diagrams are tried out to be able to show the interactions between these categories. A basic model that explains the core idea of the whole data is chosen and explained here. In this model, the main themes are decided as; classroom rules, classroom values, agenda, classroom interactions, decision-making, agency and control.

The model proposes that children's agenda, needs and interests are in the core of the participation model, which is represented by the letter C in Figure 1 below. These themes are the domains which are in constant interaction with each other. The inner circle shows the area where children practice their agency fully and express their interests and needs in their agenda. This is accepted as the area where full participation of children happens.

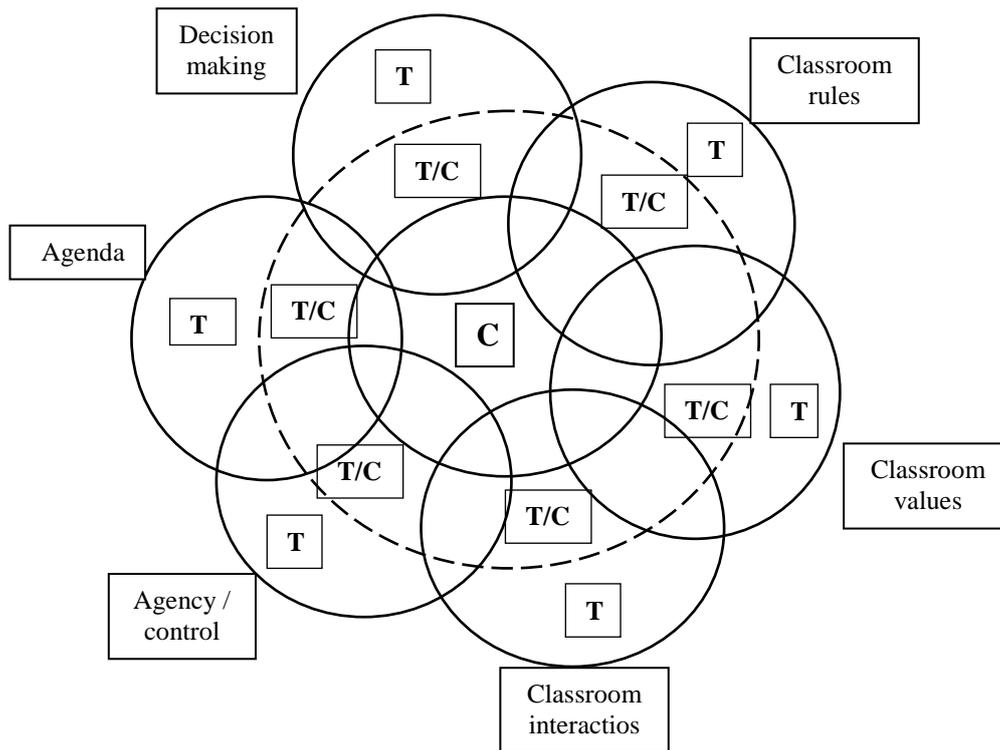


Fig. 1 A model of children's participation

The outer circle in each domain represents the teacher-directed or teacher-controlled field. In the figure, they are represented with the letter T. In the teacher controlled area of any domain, it is the teacher who starts the discussion, who decides, who proposes his or her own agenda for discussion or who decides on the classroom rules. There is almost no involvement of children in the decisions.

The intersection area between each inner and outer circle describes the negotiation area between teacher and children in all the domains, whether exhibited in the figure or not. This area is represented with the letters T/C, emphasizing the dual nature of the interaction. The model proposes that there is a constant negotiation of power going on in the classroom between teachers and children. In this negotiation area,

both teachers and children show their influence and shape the agenda of the discussion, the rules in practice or the decision-making process of an activity through their power and agency. The level and direction of influence change depending on who the teacher is at that moment, the type of the activity, the interest of children or the subject that is discussed, etc.

What happens in the classroom is always organized around an agenda. Teachers have their own agenda, both personal and institutional, in the form of curriculum, week plan, day plan, objectives, etc. They build the activities around this formal agenda. They decide on timing, format, language, materials depending on it. However, children come to the classroom with their own agendas which is a changing mixture of their interests, needs, family related issues, friendship issues, etc. When the teacher tries to complete what is in the formal agenda without touching the needs and interests of children, I support that participation takes place in the outer circle; teacher-directed, limited participation of children. Children may not show interest in discussing the topic, they prefer keeping silent or they act to replace it. There are several different reactions children can give.

In the middle circle, what I call a negotiation area, children are participating in the discussion, in the drawing activity, in the morning routine and their voice is present but it is not because their interests are on the table. It is because the activity format asks for it, the teacher asks for it, the classroom rules require it. In the inner circle, most things take place through children's initiation, decisions taken by or with them; their agency is visible and voice is present most of the time. They are equal participants of the classroom. As there are four different teachers in our classroom, this model cannot exactly show each of them. The same is true for children.

However, this model does not depend on individual relationship between a teacher

and each single child. This is a combination of what generally happens in this classroom and accepts children and teachers as two units of categories. Each teacher can fall to different areas in this model in various times as all these domains interact with each other and as the teacher attitude and reactions are not the same every minute. This model does not suggest a perfect and full explanation of children's participation. It rather exemplifies what is observed in a single classroom about participation of children over a six-month period. According to this model, the ideal participation takes place the closer it gets to the inner circle. However, it is not always as suggested in a classroom because all the factors of participation interact with each other at various levels.

## 5.2 Children's agenda

When classroom observation notes and children interviews are coded, it is seen that children's agenda is a very dominant category among others. As the researcher, I could realize and had the chance to understand it better by interacting with children all the time during free play sessions, lunch times, and garden times; by playing with them, by interviewing them and sometimes by even being interviewed by children. The data shows that children's agenda has eight main subcategories; friendship, family members, social activities, aging and death, babyhood, societal issues, school vs. home and lastly the nature. It is obvious that children talk and think about more issues than these; however, these are the ones that are generally repeated and got my attention in the classroom.

### 5.2.1 Friendship

Children care about friendship and their friends a lot. It is one of the most common topics in their agenda. When an activity on the needs of children is done, the teacher asks children what they need in life and they list their friends after their families. These children give importance to being with friends in the classroom and out of school. They make lots of plans together and they are willing to tell me about their plans. When their friends have not come to school for some reason, they wonder about them and tell that they miss them:

“E2 is taking attendance. There are a lot of absent kids today. So she asks if children know about their missing friends.

E2: What happened to Orhan? And to Hamdi, Nihal, Şebnem?

Children give different answers:

Ercüment: She is sick

Lale: He is stomachache

Kerem: I miss Nihal. I no saw Nihal for two days.

Lale: He has runny nose, teacher”.

Each of them has a few close friends in the classroom and prefer sitting with them in the lunch time, play with them in the free time and visit each other after school. Being close friends is a crucial factor of friendship for children and they want to be assured and told this out loud by their friends. Children talk about what they value in friendship and who their close friends are during free play times and lunch breaks mostly:

“Halit and Kerem were talking during free play time. I just happened to be there and heard their conversation.

Halit: You know, Kerem, you cannot love everyone equally. I like Yıldırım and I have missed him. I want to show this and I want to make him happy.

Kerem: You like Yıldırım, you like Kayra. Do you like me?

Halit: I like you, too. But I like Yıldırım that much (opening his arms) and I like you this much (showing with his hands).

Kerem: But, I like you more. You should like me too!

Halit: You do not have to whine about it”.

Some children start this school when they are around three years old so they have been in this school and they know each other for three years. Some of them have joined in the last year. So, there are time differences in their friendship. When they first got to know each other, and became friends is another prominent issue they discuss with each other. The earlier they became friends, it means the closer they are and more loyal the relationship is:

“Children are back from garden. I think, they had an argument while they were playing so they looked angrily at each other.

Orhan (to Kayra): Do not talk to Ercüment ever again.

Ercüment: No. Kayra and I became friends first.

Orhan: He hit me face like this!

Kayra: No, Orhan. We are friends because we became friends first”.

Children compete for gaining friendship of certain children, especially in play times.

They want to be liked and accepted by their friends and they try hard to get it:

“When I entered the classroom, it was free play time. Kayra, Ercüment and Kerem were playing with beyblades. Kayra was leading the game and everyone was asking him what to do or they were trying to show him some good moves with beyblades. Both Ercüment and Kerem was trying to get Kayra’s attention. Ercüment and Kerem were acting like ‘rivals’ in the competition of being good friends with Kayra.

Kayra: Look what I have done for you! (He gives Kerem a beyblade that he made)

Kerem: This is very good. This is special for me, right?

Ercüment looked sad. Kerem showed his beyblade to me and to Ercüment, proudly. After some time, Kayra gave another, a stronger beyblade to Ercüment.

Ercüment (to Kerem): Hahaha, he likes me more. We are best friends, right, Kayra?

Kerem: We are best friends, are not we Kayra?

Kayra (after a few minutes of silence): I like Ercüment more.

Ercüment: Let's play a match with our beyblades".

It is important for these children to see each other and meet outside the school. They invite their best friends' home or they go to a common social activity over the weekend. Some of the parents know this and tries to get their child together with his or her best friends. Some parents call all children home after school. Children are happy to share with me their plans with their friends or what they did together the day before. I enjoyed listening to them because it shows that they trust me in opening up their private memories and I got to learn about what they care:

“Nil: Fetiye, you know what, all girls will come to my house today.

Fetiye: Really? What are you all going to do?

Elif: We'll eat ice cream!

Nil: Sure, and we can play by the pool.

Yıldırım heard this conversation and he joined by saying;

Yıldırım: So what? Halit is coming to my house today, right?"

### 5.2.2 Family members

When children come to the classroom in the morning, they do not only bring their bags from home but they bring what they been living at home. When a teacher asks them how they are today, they immediately start telling about their parents, their

siblings or their pets. Talking about their family; how they spend time together, their problems with siblings are all principal issues in children's agendas. How the teacher listens to the child when he or she starts telling about family is influential for them. When children realize that the teacher is genuinely interested in what they are telling, they get happy and excited:

“T1 takes over the classroom now. Children are in free play and teacher reminds them how much time is left. She reminds this by singing a song. She is not stressed at all, she looks very happy and energetic. When she comes in, children welcome her happily. T1 asks children how they feel. She is interested in them individually and she asks questions about their parents and brothers, sisters”.

Children want to bring on their agenda on their families in circle time discussions, especially at the beginnings:

“Right after free play time, children gather for circle time. Teacher is waiting for everyone to get ready.

Bahar: You know what, my father had a backache last night.

E3: Oh really? Is it contagious?

Bahar: What is contagious?

E3: It could spread. Like an illness goes from Lale to Yıldırım.

Bahar: Yeah, like Aylin had before. My dad is lying at home now but he will be better”.

Sometimes children relate the topic to what they experience at home or to their family members in the middle of circle time discussions:

“T1: Yıldırım, Hamdi did you do your research?

Halit: I cannot do my research because I always forget things. Forgetting has become my habit.

T1: You can break your habits if you really want.

Halit: I'm trying.

Kayra: My mom was smoking last night. I went to the balcony where she smoked and I told her not to smoke. She stopped smoking.

T1: Bravo, dear Kayra. I congratulate your effort. It is also nice that your mother listened to you”.

Children also enjoy talking to the researcher about their family. I tried to pay utmost attention to develop a trusting relationship with children all the time and I have tried to stay open to listen to them whenever they want. The fact that they share their excitement and memories about their families makes me happy and learn about their lives in more depth. This is a part of our developing relationship with children:

“As soon as I enter the classroom, Elif runs to me with some photos. She shows me pictures of her brother who has come to the classroom once and showed children how to dance. Elif is so excited to talk about him. This is, I guess, the fourth time she mentions that to me.”

As I learn about their families, children start showing interest to my life and family. They ask me questions on where I live, who I live with and what my family does. I have tried to answer those questions as openly as possible:

“It is activity time and children are drawing about scientists. I am sitting with some children at a table and watching what they are drawing. They get bored and start a chat with me.

Nil: I cannot think of anything. I cannot find anything to draw. What can I draw here?

Ayşe: I feel so sleepy.

Fetiye: Me, too.

Ayşe: Do you live alone?

Fetiye: Yes, I do.

Ercüment: Where is your family?

Fetiye: They live in another city. I came here for university and I am living alone now.

Ayşe: Do not you miss your mom?

Fetiye: Of course, I do. I often call her!”

### 5.2.3 Social activities

Another critical issue in children's agenda is social activities. Children try to find time to talk about what they did over the weekend, their plans for after school, which activities they participated during winter holiday:

“Şebnem is talking about her winter holiday.

Şebnem: I had photos with my sister Defne and friend Kayra in Dubai. We swam in the pool and we took photos of dolphins. We went to a desert, we climbed a mountain and lastly, we rode camels!

T2: What is this, in this photo, Şebnem?

Şebnem: It is me holding a bird!

Children gathered around the computer screen to see the photos clearly”.

It is understood in such examples that children are interested in each other's lives and experience. Teachers start the weeks by asking such questions, too. Teachers also share what they have done with their families at the weekend or which concerts they went to. They bring tickets or brochures of such events and encourage children to do that. It is seen that attending social and cultural activities is supported by teachers and enjoyed by most children in this classroom:

“T2 starts the afternoon sessions. She sits on the carpet and waits for children to come around her.

T2: I'm waiting for you. Hello everyone. How are you? Did you have a nice weekend?

Ayşe: I went to İzmir and stayed there for nine hours.

T2: Why?

Ayşe: I went to my house there.

Halit: On the first day of the weekend, I went to our house in the island.

T2: It is perfect time to be in an island.

Kerem: And I went to my grandfather's house!

T2: I went to the seaside at the weekend but it was all green and our topic for today is nature and environmental pollution”.

As seen from the example above, the teacher asks for and welcomes the children’s contribution of their own agenda; their weekend activities but she also does it with a purpose in mind. She speaks about her own weekend and then she aims to link her experience to the topic she would like to introduce, to the real agenda of the lesson.

Sometimes, what children share is totally unrelated to the topic of the discussion. In this example, the teacher listens to the child in a very positive manner but keeps the conversation short to be able to start the group discussion:

“T2 is starting the Turkish session.

T2: Let’s start everyone.

Halit: You know what, in my holiday time, two men jumped off the parachute!

T2: How was it? How many were they?

Halit: They were two people and I watched them closely.

T2: Great! I wouldn’t have had the courage to try it. Come on, let’s continue with our question from yesterday. Why is air important for living things?”

As the researcher, I learn about children’s social activities as they just drop by and tell me about their plans or activities with their friends or families:

“While the whole class was practicing for the dance show, Ercüment decided to come and sit with me. He told me about a birthday party he went at the weekend.

Orhan: Fetiye, I went to Lale’s birthday party on Sunday.

Fetiye: Did you? Where was it?

Orhan: It was in Zorlu. I went with my friend and brother. Our old friends were there, too.

Fetiye: How was the party?

Orhan: Good. We ate cake and I played with balloons. Our teachers were there.

At this moment, another child joined the conversation.

Ercüment: I did not come to that birthday party because there were all girls.

Orhan: No, not only girls, there were boys, me, Kayra, and Cem.

Ercüment (sad to hear this, I guess): I went to a place for breakfast with my family. I played with my brother and we made new friends there”.

#### 5.2.4 Aging and death

Although not dominant a lot, I have encountered a few times that children were talking about aging and death between themselves and with the teachers. I can see that they are primarily concerned about aging and death of their family members. They relate aging and illnesses to an immediate death. They want to understand what life is and how aging works. They also fear losing their beloved pets. Children relate discussion topics to their concerns and bring it on the agenda of the classroom:

“Aylin: What happened to dinosaurs when they died? Who buried them?

Ercüment: A meteorite hit them. This is why they died.

Halit: My grandfather died.

T1: May God rest his soul.

While the class continued the discussion on dinosaurs, two children, Kayra and Halit, started to speak about death. Then one of them turned a question to the teacher;

Halit: Why do people die?

T1: People cannot live forever. What is important is to have a happy, quality life”.

It is important to note here how teachers react to children when they bring on their concerns and worries about death:

“The class was having a discussion on the differences between living and non-living things. This afternoon, they were learning how recycling worked and which materials could be recycled:

T2: What could we do with the waste at home? How could we recycle them?

Kerem: We looked it up on the Internet and we learned that it would take 400, 800 or even 1.000 years for plastic to disappear.

T2: What does 800 years mean?

Kayra: Until we die

Kerem: We will have our grand grandson by then

Halit: If it is one thousand years, my father and mother would be dead.

Kayra: I wish God knew the immortality

Halit: We can sleep and die

T2: No, there is a reason for death like illness or accident.

Yıldırım: So everyone who gets ill dies. Is it true?

T2: No way!”.

Children directed their questions on aging and death to me, as well. Kerem was one of these children. While Kerem and I were making the decorations, he started a chat with me about my mother. He wanted to know whether she is alive and she is old. I heard children asking the same type of questions over and over in their small chats. Obviously, they are questioning aging and death and they are worried about losing their parents. I have noticed this in time and shaped the interview questions accordingly and included growing up and aging in the interview questions.

Apparently children are curious and even concerned about dying and death of their loved ones. Teachers could have spent some time to talk together on these subjects or integrate them into class activities, discussions.

### 5.2.5 Talking about babyhood

When I first started to observe this classroom, I noticed that children were arguing from time to time, mostly boys, about being a baby. When they got angry with each other or when they wanted to make fun of a friend, they called each other baby. I got curious about it and paid closer attention to this topic. In time, I realized that it was more common among children's discussions than I thought. Later, I decided to ask them questions about it and integrated babyhood into the topics of my interview questions with children. The interview will be analyzed later in another section but here I would like to give the main points children focus on being a baby and give some examples from their classroom discussion.

Looking at the observational data, I can say that children use being a baby as an insulting word for each other and they refer to being unable, incapable of doing someone's own tasks. They are at the same time willing to grow up soon; get bigger. Getting bigger means becoming stronger for them. When they mock a child by naming him or her a baby, they know that this child will feel sad and they use this as a revenge strategy. Although it looks like they often prefer being bigger to being a baby, it can certainly be seen that they are also curious about babyhood as a period.

In the classroom, there is a special day for a presentation called 'my box' and in this presentation, each child brings clothes, photos, toys from their babyhood and talk about what they remember. Children are interested in these materials and they ask a lot of questions to their presenting friend about what he or she could and couldn't do as a baby. In addition, children talk happily about their babyhood memories and their baby brothers or sisters. This is an example of children mocking their friends by calling them a baby:

“Kerem is at the table drawing something and working on his own. Boys start to run around the classroom. They call Kerem some names. Kerem gets angry and starts to run after them. Ercüment, Orhan and Kayra run and say: Baby Kerem! Baby Kerem! He is doing a baby’s job.

Kerem looks extremely sad. The teacher notices this and intervenes.

T2: Do not disturb Kerem. He is drawing. What were you playing with? Go, tidy up your beyblades”.

Most of the time, children do this without being noticed. This time, teacher realizes it as they run in the classroom. However, there have been other times when teachers hear about the argument that being a baby is bad and never carry it into class discussions. Here is an example in which children boast about being bigger:

“It is lunch time and I am sitting with some of the boys. They started to talk about their ages:

Hamdi: I am bigger than you. I’m seven.

Halit: But there is very little time for me to become seven.

Ercüment: Next year, we will all be seven.

Halit: My birthday is in July.

Hamdi: Come on baby Kerem, let’s read your book. Kerem’s birthday is coming up so we can no longer call him a baby”.

I noticed that although most children are using the baby word, some do not agree with their friends and think being a baby is something nice and they still carry on some of their habits:

“Nil and I were chatting during free play time. She asked me a question out of nowhere:

Nil: Can you drink water from baby bottle?

Fetiye: Why not? I can do it.

Nil: Can you do it at your age?

Fetiye: Sure, what about you?

Nil: I have a baby bottle in my house. I use it in the mornings to drink tea and in the evenings to drink water. I love it so much.

Fetiye: If you like, you can drink, of course. Is not it nice being a baby?

Nil: Yes, it is. You always play games at home. You stay with your daddy and mommy. You are in their arms. You drink from baby bottle and sleep.

While we were speaking, another child jumped in with her comment:

Elif: It is great. You are happy and you both drink milk”.

#### 5.2.6 Societal issues

During the period that I visited this classroom for my study, Turkey wasn't living its best days as a country. The terror attacks had just started in the main centers of the city, Istanbul, which is the biggest city of the country. The terrorist bombings, talks on war and conflicts, what the military forces were doing; these were always on the news on television and on the Internet. Although such topics weren't even slightly touched in the classroom, it was inevitable that they surrounded children's lives. Not only being surrounded, like other inhabitants of the city, children and teachers were affected by the events.

A few times, children had to leave the school one or two hours earlier because the security forces sent an alarm expecting a major terrorist attack and recommended to avoid the most populated areas. Children were given other explanations as the reason of change of plans. Here is an example what happened on such a day in the classroom:

“Children are sent home earlier today for security reasons. There is an important football event and the police is waiting for an attack in the area. The service buses will take them around two p.m. Most children want to know why they are going home earlier.

Teachers try not to use words that will scare children. Instead, they have been telling children ‘it is just for security reasons. It is for your safety’. Children do not find it enough and keep asking. T1 makes a more detailed explanation:

T1: You know that the match between Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe couldn't be played before for security reasons.

Orhan: I know why they couldn't. I know.

T1: Well, today they will play the match and some main roads will be closed”.

Upon this example, I noticed that, without any explanation coming from the school or adults, children already know what is going on as they witness the news and the stress on adults around them. It became clear when I heard a boy speaking about criminal issues:

“It was early in the morning and two boys, Orhan and Ercüment, were playing run and chase.

Orhan: My uncle is a police officer. I can put you all in jail.

Then, he came to me and started to talk.

Orhan: There was a bomb explosion in Ankara, is that right? My mom heard it. There was a bomb in the car and then ambulances came”.

What happens in the country is in the lives of children. No matter how their classrooms or living spaces are protected, they talk about societal and political issues. What is in the political agenda can take place in children's individual agenda as well. Whether teachers are aware of it and whether such issues should at least be touched on shortly as a group in the classroom are all points worth discussing.

### 5.2.7 School vs. home

As the two subcategories are closely linked to each other, I have decided to present them under one section. As explained before, children stay in the school all day; almost nine hours in a day, and five days in the week. They come to school early, play, learn, eat, change clothes, drink in the school with the same teachers and friends during a year. Although the school is a child oriented one in terms of its teaching philosophy and the teachers are all experienced and creative people, coming

to school every day challenges some children at certain times. I notice that they lose interest during group discussions or they come into the room looking very sleepy and unhappy on some days. I have observed children speaking to each other how bored they got in school that day or how much they wished to be at home. From time to time, they brought this topic up when they had small chats with me in lunch time or while we were playing. I tried to listen to them very carefully, acknowledge their feelings and made a note of what they were saying.

Children were talking about the requirement of coming to school every day, the duration of school hours, the content and format of the activities and their wishes to play more games and spend more time in the garden. While some children told me that they preferred being at home instead of school and spent time with their families; some other children stated that they had nothing to do at home and they were happy to be in the classroom with their friends:

“In the lunch time, I sat next to Nil and we were chatting about a celebration day they had in the school that week.

Fetiye: How did Children’s Day go, my dear?

Nil: It was nice. We played games. We had ice-cream. We had a competition, it was real fun.

Fetiye: Do you like being at school?

Nil: Well, I wish I could stay at home. I have a dog in my house and I always play with her. I will get another one if she dies.

Fetiye: What kind of dog?

Nil: A smarter one, and it should be brown. I wish I could take my dog to school. In fact, last year, I brought it a few times and I enjoyed it a lot. I wish my mom and dad would be here with me. What about you?

Fetiye: I would like to have my bed here!

Nil laughed a lot”.

This was a moment to understand what the child cares about, thinks about and misses at school. It was a step to understand the child's individual interests and needs.

Sometimes, I did not have to start a conversation, but children came directly to me and started telling about their feelings:

“It is free play time. Children are mostly playing with play dough. Halit starts talking to me:

Halit: You know what, I did not want to come to school this morning because I realized that I got bored of school.

Fetiye: Well, why do you feel so?

Halit: I think we should not be asking it.

As he does not know me much, I do not want to lose his trust by crossing a line. So I do not ask further questions here. Fifteen minutes later, he comes back and starts talking about the same topic again:

Halit: I am bored of playing games. I have been playing this game for minutes. Now, I will go and watch some cartoon. I think I have lost my focus”.

It is interesting how the child is aware of his feelings and needs but I ask here why the child cannot share it with his teachers. I will give a counter example here from a child who does not want to go home from school:

“Today, Elif had to go home earlier than her friends as it was the only time her father could pick her up due to a meeting. Her father came in and he waited for almost ten minutes so that Elif could get ready. Elif did not want to stop the activity and go. She resisted, lied on the ground, cried and cried. I was sitting at her table at that moment so I tried to calm her down by talking to her. Here is what she said to me:

Elif: I'm so much bored at home. I have my friends here. Besides, I will miss the garden time!”

There are some children whom I have been observing closely for a while like Nihal.

She does not talk much in the classroom and she is rarely energetic. On the contrary,

Lale comes to school early and always on time. She enjoys sharing her ideas.

In one case, I had the chance to talk to two of them about being at school and at home:

“We were playing with Lale during free play time. She took my notebook and asked me some questions like an interview and pretended to write down my answers. This part is about coming to school.

Lale: Do you like school?

Fetiye (I was going to say ‘yes’, then I decided to give an unexpected answer and see her reaction): Sometimes I do but sometimes I do not.

Nihal was also listening to us while coloring her drawing. She looked surprised when I gave this answer. I saw her face and understood that she felt the same way so I kept complaining.

Fetiye: Some mornings I want to stay in bed at home, relax.

Nihal jumped in with her answer: Yes, me too! I do not like school sometimes. I want to watch cartoons at home.

Fetiye: And sleep...

Nihal: Yes! (She smiled!)

Lale: You should never miss school. School is a serious job”.

When I ask questions even during play, I may still sound or seem like a teacher looking for the right answer. Although I try my best not to, some children might be feeling so. I realized this and changed my actual answer about being at school so that children could feel more comfortable and tell me their real feelings.

### 5.2.8 Nature

Among several interests and concerns of children, nature is also in the agenda of children quite often. They have been learning about many natural events in the classroom and discussing them in the class; however, apart from these teacher-led discussions, I have come across with situations when children started a chat with their friends on how some natural events occur and asked very interesting questions.

In this section, I will try to give examples from such child to child discussions on nature. The first example comes from the lunch time chat of two boys, Orhan and Ercüment:

“It has been raining heavily this day. I have been eating lunch with Orhan and Ercüment and I have noticed that these two boys are talking about how rain is formed and how people know the weather forecast.

Ercüment: God decides on rain. It occurs as God says it so.

Orhan: No, only God knows.

Ercüment: Then, who makes the decision?

Orhan: Smart phones and televisions.

Ercüment: No, I’m right”.

It is obvious that children are genuinely interested in the formation of natural events and they share information with each other to form knowledge. This short talk is an exchange of ideas growing out of real interest and curiosity but it is not very possible to be aware of what children have been interested in if you are not sitting with them in an informal context and paying close attention to what they are chatting about. Children share what intrigues them with their friends in their small chats. In this example, the class was doing an art activity and learning about the famous artist Jackson Pollock. They used his painting style and created a big colorful piece of work. The teacher, E1, commented on children’s effort to encourage them:

“E1: Bravo. It is a good job. This looks like a galaxy. It is a good mix of some colors.

In the meantime, children were waiting for their turn to try the painting sprays and they were having an interesting chat:

Orhan: Do you know there is light only in certain months in the poles?

Kerem (looking very surprised): What about in the morning?

Orhan: Even in the mornings, it is night!”

Children's curiosity about nature and animals are reflected in their interactions with me. Right after I had my first group interview with children, we were sitting and playing with Lale. She took my notebook and started asking me questions acting like an interviewer. Here is an example from the questions she asked related to nature:

“Lale opened a blank page on my notebook and wrote my name on the paper like I usually do with them. She started asking her questions:

Lale: Do you like playing Fetiye?

Fetiye: Of course, I like playing games a lot.

Lale (pretending to write the answer): Do you like drawing pictures?

Fetiye: I do not really. I'm not good at drawing.

Lale: Hımm, let me think. Do you like flowers?

Fetiye: I love flowers.

Lale: Have you ever seen a butterfly?

Fetiye: Sure, I have! It was a green one, I guess.

Şebnem was listening to us and she jumped in.

Şebnem: I saw a brown one

Lale: I saw a pink one! That's cool. We all love butterflies and flowers”.

I give importance to what is on children's agenda because it is one of the most effective ways of relating learning and class activities to their lives. Besides, knowing about each other helps build a stronger relationship. When a teacher is knowledgeable about children's interests, it will help him or her design the learning environment accordingly, engage children and support their participation by touching their individual and group interests. Here is such an example:

“This week, the class is covering living and non-living things. When I entered the class, I saw a small aquarium and fish which does not move in it. Children gathered around it. They were trying to guess what happened to the fish:

Bahar: Maybe it is sleeping.

Nihal: Maybe it is dead.

Aylin: No, probably it is tired.

Later, I asked it to E1 and she told me that Nil's mother sent it from home. The fish was living but very sick a day ago. So she thought that it would be a chance to talk about non-living things and children's feelings. Nil cried a little bit when she saw the fish dad but then she got used to the idea when E1 talked to her during the day. She decided to take it back home, bury it in the garden and never forget her beloved fish".

These children wouldn't have been so interested in learning about what happens to living things when they die but the teacher knew that Nil is fond of animals and especially her pets so she turned this unfortunate event into a learning experience.

### 5.3 Children's needs

Children's needs is a broad field of expertise ranging from physical to psychological needs or from social to individual needs. What I will try to do in this chapter is to focus on what I have observed in this specific classroom as the needs of children to support their full participation. When I arranged the data looking at the parts coded as needs, I have realized that there are three different categorizations; their needs according to children, physical needs, psychological needs, social needs, self-expression and agency needs, learning needs, and teachers' attitudes towards children's needs.

#### 5.3.1 Their needs according to children

Starting with their needs according to children, it can be said that they are more diverse than we, as adults can think of. I had the chance to learn about children's opinions on this issue as it was a part of discussion topics of the classroom. Teachers introduced the topic of what living things need to survive and the class has discussed and worked on this issue almost a week.

One day, the class was discussing what humans need and the teacher asked children the question of what they need as children. The teacher asked children to draw about their needs. Children drew pictures very happily while chatting with each other. Then they took their drawings to the teacher and she asked them questions, noted down their ideas. Here is a brief list of children's answers; toilet, water, food, babysitter, mom, dad, school, shoes, banana, bread, chewing gum, bag, wallet, school garden, running in the garden, smelling trees, toys, travelling, brother, sister, family, music, jokes. It is not difficult to guess some of them but the expressions 'smelling trees' and 'running in the garden' have influenced me a lot:

“While children were drawing, I sat next to Şebnem. She was drawing a picture of the school garden but it was bigger, it had more toys in it. I got curious and decided to ask her a question:

Fetiye: Dear Şebnem, why are you drawing a garden? Why do you need it?

Şebnem: We run outside. We cannot run inside. It is exercise and because it is football. We play football in the garden. We smell the trees”.

Hearing the child's answer, I got so happy to ask her this question. She helped me realize that garden is seen as a free place by children and they openly express that they need to spend enough time in the garden. Some of children's needs are different than what adults would think. Paying closer attention about what children are telling would help schools and teachers reconsidering their perceptions on children's needs. Children can and should be consulted while designing the curriculum and activities rather than basing them on decisions made by adults on children's needs.

The same class discussion on needs is continued in the afternoon, Turkish session. The teacher got English teachers' notes and started circle time by asking children why they need these things. Some parts of the discussion are taken here as they demonstrate how children give explanations and how the teacher, T1, supported

children in declaring their opinions. Besides, this circle time discussion is a good example of an activity in which teachers ask children to form categories with their answers:

“T1: Yes, what do we need for living? We are discussing this.

Yıldırım: Water, toilet, bread and shoes.

T1: Why do you need shoes Yıldırım?

Yıldırım: If we walk with our socks, they will get dirty and we would use up so many socks.

T1: Ok, Yıldırım said toilet. What could be its category? And what kind of a category should we start for toys? Let’s think together. How do you feel while you are playing?

Şebnem: Entertainment category!

Lale: Travelling!

T1: Let’s look at Bahar’s needs. She says that she needs her mom, her brother and sister.

Hamdi: How are we going to write this?

T1: What kind of needs do these people provide?

Hamdi: Moms provide our need of ‘being born’.

Ercüment: They take us somewhere to travel”.

As seen here, the teacher is interested in children’s ideas about their needs and gives them chances to explain their reasons. These conversations are valuable as they open us, the adults and researchers, new doors to understand children’s views of their own lives. The class discussion goes on with children’s need of a family and my aim is to underline the teacher’s responses and attitude in her interaction with children:

“T1: Do we need our parents only when we are little?

Nil: Yes, so that they can help us until we grow up.

Kayra: No, we will always need our family because they can help us if we need.

Halit: Because we are still a little bit young

T1 (Smiling at Halit's answer): But, I'm not little. I have my house, car and job. It is normal to need our family when we are young but what about in the future? Are we going to leave each other?

Hamdi: Some people do. Then they miss each other.

Lale: Some children leave their parents.

Ayşe: If I do not see my father, I will miss him but if I do not see my mother, I will miss her too.

T1: So, this is not only a need. Our parents love us and we love them.

T1: You said 'friend' Kayra, can you explain this a little bit?

Kayra: When I do not have a friend, I just have to play by myself.

T1: And how does it make you feel?

Kayra: Bad! When I play alone, I cannot decide what to do. If we are two people, I can. And I get happy when I have a friend".

In this part of the discussion, the teacher tries to support children question their needs relating the topic directly to their lives and also giving examples from her own life. What I would like to point out is that when children are listened to about their needs, they can describe what they need and how they need clearly.

### 5.3.2 Physical needs

Starting with physical needs, children are in the school all day so they start the day; have breaks, have lunch and snacks in the school. It is a place where they also meet their needs during the day. Children can go to toilet before the circle time starts or after the circle time; before and after lunch and before and after the activities in the afternoon session. Teachers remind children to meet their toilet and water needs during these break times. If there are many children willing to go to toilet, one of the teachers accompany them but if it is one or two children, they can go alone.

In the entrance of the classroom, right next to the door, there is a small table where there is always some water with clean glasses for children. Children are encouraged to get their own water; however, they can use this area again in the break times, but during the discussion or activity times. For lunch time, a helping lady comes and prepares the tables. Children come back from garden, prepare their plates and spoons; get in a line to tell the teacher which food they want. There is a certain amount that each child must eat from each type of food. While some children are eager to take the second plate, some others do not even want to touch their food on the table. So, teachers try to support them in trying a little bit from everything.

There are many problems when children try to follow these rules or order to meet their needs; however, a few conflicts occur when children's agency and needs are not in accordance with the classroom rules. These break times are all set by teachers and they probably aim to help the group to stay focused during the activities; however, an individual child might need these breaks at different periods than the group. Among the physical needs of children, I am willing to include physical activity, relaxing and sitting comfortably while listening as these are the ones I have commonly observed as what children requested for over and over.

During a day, children sit on the carpet for the morning routine, for group discussions, for presentations. They are sitting at the tables in hands-on activity times. They are up and moving mostly in garden time, for a very brief time in breaks and in free play time. So, there are two important physical needs appear in the classroom; they want to sit more comfortably while listening and they want to move more. It is important to look at how children express these needs.

Firstly, if they have been sitting for more than ten minutes, some of them start moving in their places. Some just lie on the carpet whereas some stand up and move around. There are diverse ways teachers approach this depending on who the teacher is, which part of the activity it occurs and how many children show such needs.

During the morning sessions, I have observed that E1 gives importance to including physical activities as much as possible. When she realizes that children are losing concentration or moving in their place, she stops the activity and opens some dance music. Children immediately stand up and start doing ‘crazy’ dance in which they improvise dance movements. E1 and E2 join children in this dance happily. At certain days in a week, E1 invites children to do stretching movements and practice some yoga positions. Almost all children enjoy such activities:

“Everyone is sitting on the carpet. They are going over the topic they covered yesterday.

E1: Let’s go over sickness and medicine. What did the early humans do when they got sick?

Most children seem uninterested remain silent.

Kayra: They died.

E2: Yes, you are right but not all of them.

Kayra lies down on the ground like a sick person. E2 realizes his move and acts like a healer. She touches Kayra’s stomach and pretends to be praying something. Kayra laughs a lot.

E1 (to all the children): Let’s do a healing dance! Let’s dance around.

E1 and children dance around Kayra and the healer. They act as if they are having a healing ceremony. Some children improvise healing movements and others follow them. Everyone seems to have a lot of fun”.

In this example, we see that teachers realize children’s need to move and they just turn the quiet activity into an energetic one. It engages the children and the same thing is learned through music and fun. After this healing dance, the class turns back

to discussion time and I have seen that they are more interested in sharing their ideas. It is not always the teacher who realizes children's need for some physical activity but it is also children themselves who express their wish strongly. So many times, I have witnessed that children start shouting 'dance, dance' in the middle of a discussion. When one child starts saying 'dance' very quietly, others hear and join him or her. How the teacher responds to children's will is important here. When it is English teachers' session, E1 and E2 tend to accept their wish quite often and give some break to what they have been doing. If there is not enough time, they just tell children that they can do it later during the day:

"It is English time and children listening to their friend, Aylin, presenting her object in 'Show and Tell Box. After some questions, they find the object and the teacher asks the presenter to talk about it.

E1: Ok everyone, now Aylin is going to tell us a few things about the sharks. She is so excited.

Everyone waits but Aylin cannot start talking. E1 helps her by asking a few questions.

E1: Where did you buy them? Are they your toys? Does your sister play with them?

Aylin just nods but still does not speak.

E2: Ok, thank you Aylin. Before you go and sit, maybe you can show us your homework.

In the meantime, children start to stand up and say 'dance, dance' first quietly and then very strongly all together. Teachers see this and smile.

E2: Oh, you want to stand up and listen to the shark song. Ok. Let's move and dance. Let's get energy.

Everybody, including the teachers, dances crazily for almost a minute. Then T2 stops the song and they go back to Aylin's homework presentation".

Through individual presentations, teachers try to give children chances to express themselves, practice their English and also speaking in front of other friends.

However, it is a skill that can be built over time. Sometimes some children might

prefer remaining silent lacking necessary language ability, motivation or just interest. On one hand, it is this specific child's need to be waited, encouraged, supported and listened. On the other hand, it is other children's right to get bored and need to move and do something interesting. Children notice these silent times and use them as an opportunity to shape the lesson through their agency. They act all together in expressing what they want and need. The teacher's positive attitude in respecting children's will and accepting their needs contribute to the participation of children and positive classroom atmosphere all together. Sitting comfortably during circle time discussions has been another important need and demand of children that I have noticed in this classroom. While some children enjoy sitting on the carpet and feel more comfortable taking their shoes off, some other may want to take a chair and join the discussion on their chair:

“It is book reading time. E1 is holding the book and waiting for children to start. Teacher is in the middle and children are sitting around the teacher on the carpet. Orhan keeps moving while listening. E1 realizes him.

E1: Are you comfortable Orhan? Do you want to get a chair?

Orhan: Yes

E1: Ok, go get one.

Everybody says ‘me, too!’

E1: Ok, I am counting up to five. Run, get one chair and come back.

Most children take a chair.

E1: This was a good idea, guys. Now you can see the book better”.

Although the teacher is occupied with the reading activity, she notices the child's need and offers an option. Then, all children show their needs to sit more comfortably while listening to the book. The teacher adapts the sitting design of the activity according to the needs of children by the will of children.

### 5.3.3 Psychological needs

As it is very close to children's physical needs, I have planned to integrate their psychological needs here. Surely, a small part spared in this study cannot claim to cover children's all psychological needs and I do not aim to do so. As mentioned over and over, these are the most emerging needs in the observational data.

Throughout the observations, I have realized and felt assured that children need to feel comfortable, need to feel relaxed, they need to be able to manage stress; they need to calm down if they are feeling emotionally unstable; they need to feel good and have fun; they need time and silence to concentrate, to think of their answers and to focus. There are times they feel bored, uninterested, uneasy and uncomfortable. Here is an example about an individual child losing interest and the teacher's reaction to this situation:

“Aylin is not very attentive in the morning routine activity. E1 notices this and invites her to sit with herself in front of the class. E1 puts an extra chair near her chair. She lets Aylin take the attendance on the class notebook. Aylin seems very happy doing it. Then, other children want to do it as well. E1 takes the class list and calls the next person from the list. It is Kayra and he gets really excited in taking the attendance. After that, the class goes back to routine”.

From this anecdote, we can see that the teacher realizes children are bored of the way attendance is taken each morning. There is especially one child who has little interest in joining the activity. The teacher changes her strategy and uses physical contact; shares control with this student and she happily fulfills this job. It is obvious that other children in the classroom are interested in doing more in the classroom; but not the things they are told to do. They may want to do some of adult tasks, more responsibility-requiring things. Observing and understanding children's needs should go in line with offering options to satisfy these needs.

#### 5.3.4 Social needs

Besides physical and psychological needs, children have social needs as this classroom is a community where they close friends and teachers to share their lives with. It is my observation that children speak about their lives and interests with each other and with adults around them. They need to talk about their holiday, weekend or their families. They need to complain about their illness or the noise their baby brother makes at home. They need to have close groups of friends and they need time to chat to each other freely. I underline the word freely because although this classroom gives importance to children's expressing themselves, it is most of the time in a control and structured manner. Children need uncontrolled, unstructured free chat. Such talks start out of need, interest, curiosity and children share lots of things with each other knowing that there is not a correct answer expectation in the dialogue. I will be sharing an example that impressed me a lot here. To be able to learn more about children and build a stronger communication with them, I have often sat and eaten with them at lunch times. I have always been influenced by the richness of their interests about the topics they discussed:

“The class has been learning about famous historical Turkish scientists that week. I was sitting with Hamdi and Orhan in the lunch time and overheard their conversation on one of these scientists:

Hamdi: What is your biggest dream in life?

Orhan: My dream is flying.

Hamdi: You can fly in a plane.

Orhan: No, I mean real flying.

Hamdi: How?

Orhan: With wings

Hamdi: You know you can do it when you get bigger. Remember Hezarfen Çelebi. He flew like a bird.

Orhan: Did he?

At this point, the teacher, E2, interrupted and asked everyone to finish their lunch quietly.

E2: Everybody, it is not chit chat time. It is lunch time. Let's play zip game. If you win the zip game, I will give you a chocolate.

Everybody stopped chatting but Hamdi and Orhan kept. It seemed that they were really into their own discussion.

Hamdi: Yes, Hezarfen found this idea long before planes.

Orhan: Then, I will do it, too.

Hamdi: You know his time was long ago. Planes are in our time now.

Orhan: See, there is a plane going up! (Pointing to the window)

These two boys rushed to the window to see the plane. The teachers announced the winners of the zip game and the boys weren't among them".

These two boys, Hamdi and Orhan, are asked to stop as they were having a genuine, natural conversation. Probably the teacher was not aware of what they were speaking about but this is not the discussion topic. Speaking to your friend about an interesting topic in the meal time is a right and need of children. Maybe we should be questioning why there is the need to be silent during lunch time. This anecdote I have encountered in the classroom made me think about issues beyond children's social needs. We, as educators work so hard on preparing intriguing materials and activities for children, to ask for their opinions, to support their idea development and creativity but when children speak out of genuine interest, we make them stop talking. We want them to speak when we ask for it but this is not sincere and sustainable. On one hand, it might be creating tension in the classroom. On the other hand, it ignores children's competency and agency.

### 5.3.5 Self expression and agency needs

The example above brings us to the issue of children's self-expression and agency needs. What was happening in the classroom throughout the observation period showed me that children need opportunities and appropriate formats in the classroom so that they can express their feelings, fears, experience, interests freely. They feel the need to talk about their lives with their friends or ask and answer questions to each other. Besides self-expression, children have agency needs, by which I mean that children need to be listened to, approved, appreciated and recognized.

Teachers provide answers to self-expression and agency needs of children through designing discussions, group activities and integrating many presentation formats in which children can speak both as a group and individually. Another method that teachers use is taking notes of children's ideas during circle time discussions and after children work on their drawings, projects, etc. I have realized that children are happy to be listened by their teachers and being taken seriously. I have shared the group discussion in which the teacher asks children their needs and they discuss it together. In this activity, the teacher also takes notes of children's ideas on the posters they prepare. I would like to share my comments right after the observation to relate the example on how the teacher supports children's self-expression and practice of agency:

“Teacher asks each child what he or she needs; the child lists it; then teacher asks further, follow up questions on these needs to the same child. She gives them a chance to express themselves. She does not only ask for noting down the idea. She means the question and children feel and realize it. It also supports children's thinking. Teacher does not comment on any answer personally or does not interrupt children's explanations. She supports children to explain why they give this answer and then she gets their help to categorize all these different ideas. She welcomes all ideas but shows that they need make connections between them and to group them according to their contents. When one child is speaking, other children are also involved by listening and helping to find a suitable group or title for the idea”.

### 5.3.6 Teachers' attitudes towards children's needs

As children and teachers are inseparable members of the classroom community, it is inevitable to talk about one without the other. Children's needs are discussed with regards to their participation here and teachers have roles and responsibilities to increase this participation as much as possible. In this classroom, I have tried to note down how teachers act in managing children's needs and the classroom activities at the same time. To start with, it should be remembered that there are four different teachers of this classroom so how they respond to children's needs differ at some points.

As far as I have witnessed, teachers of this classroom have had the role of realizing children's needs and supporting children in meeting their needs. Teachers acted to adapt the lesson according to children's needs. Teachers have been helping children to focus when they lose interest; supported them in dealing with stress. Teachers had the responsibility of allocating enough time for physical needs of children. From time to time, teachers have asked children about their needs and made a note of them. They have acknowledged children's need to play and integrated games and game-like activities. They gave children chances to sit and relax or to move and dance when they needed. However, it should be noted here that teachers also had the authority and decision making power in determining children's needs while designing the learning objectives, the school program and the classroom atmosphere. The anecdote below shows how the teachers closely observed and paid attention to some children realizing that they weren't participating:

“It is English session and the class starts circle time. The day before, children learned about space and planets and today, they will be focusing on how astronauts live in space. To see what children remember from yesterday, E1 asks questions about planets.

E1: Hi everyone. Do you remember what we did yesterday? We learned about planets, right?

Yıldırım: Yes, Mars, Jupiter

Hamdi: And stars

E1 notices that some children do not say anything during the discussion, probably they were missing the day before. So, she starts to draw the planets and the Sun.

E1: Here we have our huge and beautiful Sun and here, our nine planets in the solar system.

Nil: May I draw?

E1: Sure, go ahead.

She lets Nil draw and keeps asking questions to children.

E1: Which one is planet 9? Which is 8?

Nil draws some circles around the planets.

E1: What is the thing you have just done Nil?

Nil: It is meteorite.

E1: Oh, I see. What about the other one?

Nil: It is car.

E1: And what is it doing there?

Nil: It goes and goes and the air is bad

E1: I understand! The car pollutes the Earth, right?

Aylin stands up and draws another meteorite”.

Here, there are two needs the teacher supports. The first one is realizing that some children may not know the content of the discussion. So E1 provides the basics of necessary information. She acknowledges children’s need to take an active part in the discussion. She lets these girls draw on the board and keeps having the discussion with children. She acknowledges children’s wish to have more control. She is not disturbed by it; but uses it as a learning opportunity for all. She shows that there are many ways of children’s participation and tools for teachers to support them.

## 5.4 Classroom rules

Classroom rules have been another major theme that came out of observation data. From the first day on, I have noted down each single rule that I noticed in the classroom. I have tried to cover the formal rules underlined by teachers and children's own rules in their play and interactions. As I started visiting the classroom at the end of the first semester, I did not have the chance to observe how classroom rules are formed, decided or shared with children in the classroom. When I asked about it, teachers informed me by saying that classroom rules are determined all together with children at the beginning of the year. When data is coded and analyzed, two types of classroom rules have emerged; teacher's rules and children's own rules. When teacher's rules have implications on each member of the classroom, children's own rules apply only to children. Teacher's rules also fall into two subcategories; permanent rules and temporary rules. These categories and subcategories will be analyzed with examples and quotations.

### 5.4.1 Permanent rules

This subcategory includes rules that were commonly observed throughout the whole observation period. I noticed these rules as they were reminded, expressed loudly, discussed in the classroom. As mentioned before, there are four different teachers in the classroom so there are changes in the application and discussion of the rules. I have tried to note down these changes and how they affect the classroom atmosphere as well. Most of the rules are concerned with children's safety and health, the order of the classroom, using a shared space and carrying on group discussions. There are fifteen different children in the classroom and most activities are based on group discussion so what teachers mostly reminded were related to giving each child a

chance to speak and the others to listen, respect and wait their friends. The most underlined rules can be listed as listening to each other, waiting for your turn in a group discussion, raising hands if you want to share your opinion, starting the activities on time, being ready at the start of the activity, listening to the teacher if she is speaking.

These rules were also expected from children, not hurting anyone, being nice to each other, not mocking each other, asking for permission if you want to go out of the classroom, tidying up the classroom after using toys, materials, etc.; trying at least a certain amount of food served in lunch, making a line to go to the garden, using resources wisely, speaking English in the morning sessions and Turkish in the afternoon sessions, joining the discussions, putting on and taking off your own clothes before and after garden time, sharing the classroom materials, sitting one boy-one girl in the circle time. Here, a few anecdotes from observation notes will be presented to demonstrate how classroom rules are reminded and applied:

“It is Turkish session and the teacher is checking children’s homework. She asks each of them questions about their drawing.

T1: Let’s look at Nil’s homework. Oh, it is red and yellow. Nil, did you choose these colors on purpose?

Hamdi: I brought my homework, too!

T1: Dear Hamdi, I am now concentrating on Nil’s homework. I understand your excitement but I ask you to wait for your turn patiently”.

This example shows us how ‘waiting for your turn’ is reminded by T1 in a very positive manner. The teacher expresses her understanding towards the child’s excitement but she also focuses the other child’s right to speak and the reason of the rule. Another example comes from the rule to organize the classroom after using the classroom materials and equipment.

“Before going out to the garden, children line up in front of the door. Teachers check whether everything is put back to their place in the classroom. They notice a chair standing in the middle of the carpet.

E1: Elif, is it yours?

Elif: I put mine back.

E1: Elif, put back your chair please.

Elif starts crying. E1 talks to E2 and E2 says that it is Elif’s chair, she saw it too. All the children wait for Elif. E1 comes, holds her hand and they go together to put the chair back.

Elif: I forget.

E1: It is ok dear. We all forget. Let’s go to the garden now”.

The rule to leave the classroom organized and tidying up the classroom materials are among classroom rules that are reminded to students almost every day by saying that it is a shared space. It is both a rule and a responsibility for class members. There might be times where children forget to complete such responsibilities as they are concentrated on other things like going to the garden earlier or forming their play groups. In this anecdote, the child is warned in front of her friends and this probably puts her under more stress to accept that she has forgotten to put her chair back. How the teacher approaches the child is valuable to show us how rules are handled in this preschool classroom.

#### 5.4.2 Temporary rules

Besides permanent rules, I have observed that there are temporary rules that are put into practice in the classroom. I have called them temporary because they are not followed by all four teachers and more importantly, they are formed or decided upon a situation. Among the temporary rules, the most common ones are keeping silent while drawing, sitting on the carpet during circle time, sitting properly during

discussion time, watching videos or movies silently, not chatting during lunch. As can be understood, these rules require children to keep focused and they are mostly the times when teachers need rather than children. The analysis of this section will be done in more detail when discussing children's will and resistance to the classroom rules.

#### 5.4.3 Children's own rules

An important category, as stated before, is children's own rules by which I mean the rules children create and follow during their play. I have realized them when I observed or joined children in their play times or lunch time chats. To note a few basic ones, making the rules of the play is worth a lot for children. The one who starts the game is mostly accepted as the leader of the game and he or she decides on the rules, who will be accepted into the game, which toys will be used, etc. If a child wants to join the game of a group, he or she needs to ask permission of the leader. Children remind each other to follow the rules they create while playing:

“It is free play time.

Ercüment: Can I play in your game?

Ayşe: Şebnem started the game. Ask her.

Ercüment: Can I play with you, too, Şebnem?

Şebnem: Yes, but on one condition, if you get to become the father.

Ercüment (to Kerem): I'm the dad in this game, ok?”

In the anecdote above, we see children reminding each other rules of their own in the play. These rules that children create themselves probably organize their behaviors and also aim to solve the conflicts in their games. Children's play is also a space for them to exercise their agency as it is their place and time that they can control,

change, make their own rules and feel freer. There is very limited teacher interruption during children's free play time. When it happens, children do show reactions to the teachers showing that it is their area. The example below shows us many things; how children decide on very new rules as a group in their play; what happens if there are arguments in spaces bordered by children; and how children react to adults' intervention:

“After observing T1 for a while, I go to the area where children played. There is a group who is playing ‘house’. One of them is the mom, the other is the dad and one child is the dog. Another child joins them becoming the big sister. The dad is cooking for the family. The others are helping him with the materials. They put chairs around their play area indicating it as the border of the house. They do not let other children to cross this border. Some other children from other groups come and ask for their toys. They have an argument on it and then suddenly, two boys are fighting over a doll. They try to find a way to share it but they cannot. They start fighting again.

The school principal shows up at the door.

Principal: Friends, I can hear your voice even in my room. Please try to be calmer.

Nearly ten-minutes pass but the voice goes up. T2 comes into the classroom.

T2: Hey friends, your voice has raised a lot. Even our principal came, I heard. Besides, I have noticed that you are arguing over sharing toys. You are six now.

Orhan: I am five.

T2: Five or six, it does not matter. You are at an age in which you can solve this by talking. Can I ask you what you are playing and which toys you are using? Halit, what is your group playing with?

Halit: We are playing with a doll. You do not have to like it.

T2: The problem is not whether I like it or not. The problem is that you cannot share the toys. Please play in the area you started the game, everyone”.

As seen above, children's argument and voice have crossed their space and disturbed adults. Children are reminded two times about what not to do. So there are rules that sometimes need be applied during children's play and in this example, it is when children cannot resolve a conflict among themselves. In addition, how the individual

child reacts to the teacher's questions that he probably finds 'too controlling' is worth noting. He underlines the fact that what they play with is their own choice and the teacher does not have a right to comment on it.

#### 5.4.4 Teachers' position about rules

Teacher's position in applying and reminding rules fall into two subcategories as stated before; giving standard reaction and giving a different reaction. I have decided to divide this section into two because while observing the classroom, I have noticed that there are common reactions that all four teachers give; but there are also other ways of reactions in a positive and negative way that these teachers differ in. I can start with explaining the standard reaction teachers give most of the time. When a classroom rule is not followed, a teacher usually reminds the rule in this classroom shortly. She sometimes may explain the rule and the reason behind the rule. At other times, the teacher might show the child the outcomes of his or her behaviors.

Teachers in this classroom warn children and get more serious if the conflict is getting bigger. Teachers usually must remind time left for free play or garden as I believe these are the periods when children concentrate a lot on playing and having fun so they are not really interested in keeping the time. When the different reaction of teachers is analyzed, it is seen dealing with rules and classroom atmosphere are closely interlinked. I have put some reactions of teachers into this subcategory for two reasons; either reaction of teachers contributed positively or negatively to the classroom atmosphere. To put it in different words, how teacher deals with the rules increased or decreased the tension in the classroom. It should be reminded here that not all four teachers have had these attitudes all the time. These are uncommon reactions that I have observed.

Firstly, it should be good to mention positive reactions. When ‘finishing activities on time’ rule is not practiced by children, teachers, mostly T1, remind it by singing a song, a chant or by joking. The rule is reminded in a playful manner or by counting back to zero. If it is in the middle of a joke, teachers allow children to laugh for a while and join the fun themselves. The child is not reminded when a rule is broken but he or she is appreciated when a rule is followed. If the rule is ignored for a reason, like there is a lack of coloring materials, the teacher provides more of them. Teachers assure children that it is normal to forget rules and calm them down in such cases. Here are some anecdotes to exemplify such teacher reactions:

“T1 takes over the classroom. After free play time, her session begins. She reminds children that they need to tidy up by singing a chant. At the same time, she is preparing her own materials for the discussion and she behaves very naturally with no stress.

Children keep playing:

T1: Hello! We have got ten minutes left. Please play very quickly.

T1: It is three minutes.

T1: Ladies and gentlemen, my dear boys and girls! I am counting back from twenty. I am sure you will make the classroom very clean. I have full trust in you.

Children run to tidy up their toys, helping each other and they make it on time!”

In this example, we see that the teacher shows it is children's responsibility to tidy up their toys after free play time and she reminds how much time is left. She reminds these rules in a firm but positive, playful manner. Children get happy when they accomplish their responsibilities on time. Another anecdote demonstrates how one of the teachers joins children in breaking the rules willingly:

“E2: It is tidy up time.

Children say: Please more time

E1: You want to say: ‘Can you give us some more time, right?’

Children: Yes!

E1: Ms. E2, can you give us some more play time? I need it, too.

E2 (smiling): Ok, well, only five more minutes.

We all laugh as teachers also behave like children asking for more time to play. This extra time passes. Most children are still playing.

E2: Come on, everyone. We are late so we will lose from our garden time.

Everyone starts collecting toys. Halit is still playing with a doll.

E1: What is everyone doing, dear Halit? What are you doing?

E2: Thank you girls for even cleaning the bottom of the tables”.

The anecdote above demonstrates many things; how teachers contribute to the playful and positive classroom atmosphere even when reminding the rules several times. They use encouragements instead of warning and they explain the results of their actions to children. They try to make children realize what they are supposed to do but not doing. Such examples make me question whether children are willing to have more control on their play time and whether ‘not stopping play time’ is a way children show their will. The reactions that increase the tension include warning children very seriously, asking children to do things they do not really want and insisting on their being quiet:

“It is lunch time. Nil, Elif, Aylin and Nihal are sitting at the same table. They start chatting before food is served.

E2: Nil, change your place. Let’s move to that table.

Nil: No

E2: Do not say no when I say something. I sit here at your place because Aylin does not eat

Nil, unwillingly, changes her place. She goes and sits with Halit and Yıldırım.

E2 (to me): Not a very attractive table for her, I guess”.

Normally, children can sit where they want if there are enough seats during lunch. There is no rule of not sitting with your best friends. So, I take it under the temporary rules section. This new rule of the teacher intervenes with child's right and will to choose where and with whom to eat lunch. As it is against the will of the child and as the children are having fun together before the teacher asks for a change, it naturally creates a tension between the teacher and them. The child shows her reaction by opposing to change her places but the teacher forces her to move. So, it can be easily said that child's right and agency are all ignored.

#### 5.4.5 How children break the rules

It is essential to look at children's relations with the rules and how they break the rules. As rules are related to many domains of children's lives and relationships in the classroom, children's reactions differ. As mentioned before, there are rules regarding the safety of children. Sometimes children do things that will harm each other. Let me share the most common examples I have noted; hurting friends, hurting the teacher, pushing each other in the line, mocking each other, calling each other slang words, hitting each other and fighting over classroom materials or toys. In such cases, the behavior is not tolerated and teachers involve immediately to stop the action.

What I want to focus more closely is the other form of breaking the rules. As mentioned before, the class activities are organized around group discussions and presentations. Through such activities, children are encouraged to express themselves, share their ideas. However, when I have looked at the piling notes of myself, I have realized that children are mostly reminded of rules when they try to share their ideas. To make it clear, let's have a look at the situations when children

are warned mostly in the classroom; when children speak among themselves, when they are willing to speak without waiting, when they shout out the answer in a discussion, when they joke at the beginning of the activity, when they speak without raising hands, when they interrupt friends while speaking, when they speak at the same time, when they speak with each other during someone's presentation:

“T2 is reading aloud a story. She reads it by changing her tone of voice and by asking very engaging questions. She stops the book and involves children's ideas into the discussion.

T2: Now, just lie down and close your eyes. Dream yourself in a lighthouse.

Ercüment (in a second): I did! I did!

T2: Ok, keep it in your mind. I will ask you in a while.

Ercüment: I will probably forget it by then.

Orhan: I will definitely forget.

T2 waits for a while and then asks children what they dream about. Halit gets to tell the first. He tells his story very slowly and it takes a long time. The teacher waits for Halit. When Halit is speaking, Orhan and Ercüment start talking between themselves and tell their dreams to each other.

T2 stops them: Orhan, Ercüment, we should be listening to our friends”.

In this anecdote, there is something I need to underline. Although what Orhan and Burak do seem like breaking the rule of listening to a friend when he or she is speaking, it is on the other hand a natural response to follow their curiosity and share their dreams with each other. The teacher has engaged children to dream about an interesting place and relate it to the story. We should be acknowledging these boys' will to speak to each other along with Halit's right to be listened.

The rules regarding group discussion are designed so that each child gets a turn to share his or her idea and there is one teacher who will or who needs to listen to each child in turn. However, there are times when children do not wait for each other and

start telling their ideas immediately. Changing the direction and format of such activities may solve such situations. Instead of one teacher listening to everybody, children can listen to each other in pairs or in small groups. The reasons behind the classroom rules should be shared with children but they should also be open to changes according to the needs of children. The teachers should be realizing why some rules do not work or are not followed. If there is a reason behind a rule, there is also another reason why it is not followed:

“The class is discussing what is polluting the environment and the sea. Teacher has asked the question and now she is taking children’s ideas and noting them down on a mind map.

Ercüment: Bottle caps of cokes

T2: The plastic cups? Let’s write it down too.

Şebnem: Plastic water bottle

Halit: Soda bottle.

Then everyone starts telling their ideas at the same time.

Aylin: Ice tea caps.

Kerem: Metals.

Children start shouting ‘I’m going to tell! I’m going to tell!’ T2 pretends not listening to any of them.

Nil: Food.

Orhan: Paper pieces.

Halit: Soda bottle.

T2: Then, I’m forming a title in our mind map; I’m calling it paper-related things.

Halit: But I have said ‘soda bottle’ before.

T2: This is not a competition. You just share your idea”.

In this discussion, children ignore the rules of listening to each other and speaking in turns as they are very excited to share what they have found. There might be a possibility that they think of this activity as a competition and they aim to have their ideas written down by the teacher. Being noted down might be equal to being appreciated by children. As seen in Halit's insistence, some children share their ideas and want to be recognized by the teacher while some others do not give much importance to it.

#### 5.4.6 Children's will and resistance

The explanations and examples above show what the general classroom rules are; how they are implied; how teachers meet and differ in their reactions on children's breaking the rules. Looking closely at classroom rules has shown me beyond the rules. When the rules interfere with children's wills and their agenda, children either oppose the rules or ignore them. There are cases in which children oppose to the rules, question the rules or keep doing what they want despite the reminders. Even when teachers ask them to stop, some of them keep chatting during the activities and lunch time. They speak about the movie while watching. They take a chair while everyone is 'supposed' to sit on the carpet or they lie on the carpet when everyone is sitting. There is a rule of sitting one boy and one girl during discussion time but sometimes children keep sitting with their close friends ignoring this rule.

While expressing themselves might be a way to break the rule, keeping silent can be another way to resist. Some children prefer not to join the discussions or one of them prefers playing alone while everyone is doing an activity. Speaking Turkish among themselves even in the English sessions can be noted as another behavior that breaks

the rule of speaking English in the mornings. Such rules are ignored or do not work as they intersect with children's needs, interests or agenda. Children might be creating their own space or make it bigger through opposing to the rules, making up their own rules or ignoring the reminders:

“It is circle time and the class is discussing the soil and nature.

Nihal: Soil, flowers and honey.

Halit: We cannot hear you, Nihal.

Hamdi: How is soil related to honey?

T1: Soil, flower, bees and honey. It is like a chain.

Kayra: I'm going to say something! I'm going to say something.

Ayşe: If there wasn't soil, we wouldn't step on it.

T1: Where would we live?

Ayşe: On the air, in the water.

Kayra: I'll say something.

T1: Kayra, I am not going to listen to you until I finish my own word. When you speak, I listen to you. Show me the same respect, too.

Hamdi has left the group and he is playing by himself in the corner.

T1: Hamdi, what is going on with you? What about your promise to me?

Hamdi comes back but after a short while, he goes back to the corner to play.

T1: Hamdi, I understand you. Your time is up but I cannot let this happen. Go out the classroom for five minutes. Go chat with our T3.

Hamdi: No.

T1: We will start play time in a minute. Go get some fresh air.

When I observe this, and see Hamdi's hesitation, I decide to go out to the hall with Hamdi. He wants to go to wash his face. Then he starts telling me about his skiing vacation. Then, he starts to talk about why he does not join the discussion.

Hamdi: I'm so much bored. It is always the teacher who talks!”

In the example above, I learned the reason of Hamdi's losing interest by talking to him. If I hadn't talked to the child, I would have assumed that the child would be uninterested with the discussion topic. However, he complained about the teacher talk time. This child consistently breaks many classroom rules; joining classroom discussions, sitting at the circle, raising hand to speak, listening to each other. To change this behavior and to support this specific child's participation, the reason behind it should be understood. Although claimed to be so, as the researcher, I have not observed any case in which classroom rules are decided, changed or gone over with children. It seems to me that children have very little influence on the formation of classroom rules. Rules can be both a barrier against participation or and encouragement of it through protecting each child's right to speak and express himself or herself.

### 5.5 Classroom values

The preschool classroom is also a community in which all members of it live and learn together during the day for an entire year. To live together, the community needs to depend on certain values which support the community and facilitates their well-being. They are important to foster participation as children feel belonged to this community and their wellbeing is valued. Since my first day in this classroom, I realized several values that teachers underlined, reminded, and applied so that they can be long lasting. If we can, this can be a list of most emphasized values in this preschool classroom; responsibility, helping each other, cooperation, fairness, keeping promises, respect and care, kindness and honesty. As it can be guessed, some values are closely linked with each other and certain aspects of them overlap. Indeed, classroom values and rules are interacting with each other as well.

### 5.5.1 Responsibility

In this preschool classroom, there are certain actions or behaviors which are expected from children as their responsibilities. The ones that I have noted most are these; tidying up toys, tidying up the classroom, putting books back after reading time, turning off the lights before leaving, completing homework, bringing homework on time, preparing presentations, being the line leader or class assistant. Children are reminded their responsibilities if they forget and expected to hope their responsibility in mistakes. Here is an example of how a teacher reminds children their responsibilities:

“T1 takes over the classroom. She is holding a book. Children are on the carpet and T1 is sitting in the middle.

T1: Come on everyone; put your own story books back to their places. Then, let’s start our ‘Ant’ book. Can you turn the lights on? Please move your chairs back so that everyone can see”.

Another anecdote from my observation notes how the teacher encourages children taking responsibility:

“When I come in, it is tidy up time. Most girls collect their toys and help each other; but not boys. Halit does not do much. I realize that he almost never tidies up even though he plays with the toys. He just wonders around. I’m not sure whether teachers have noticed it before.

E2: Ercüment, you are the only boy tidying up. Thank you!

Doing homework and bringing it on time is another responsibility but checking it is not always easy due to language difficulties:

It is morning session. Everybody is on the carpet and T2 is checking weekend homework:

E2: Ok, let’s collect your homework. I’m writing your names down.

Children go and take their bags from their lockers.

E2: Dear Hamdi, can you show me your ORT homework? Did you bring it?

Hamdi: No

E2: Why not?

Hamdi: No answer (Probably he does not understand much English)

Aylin translates teacher's question into Turkish for Hamdi.

E2 (to Aylin): Did he say he did the homework?

Aylin: No, he did not say anything".

Related to responsibilities as a class, children are given individual responsibilities like being a class assistant. Every day, teachers choose a class assistant. This child checks the calendar, updates it, and checks the weather by asking question to his or her friends. The child is responsible all day from little chores like being the first child in the line and leading his or her friends when they are going to the garden. Here is a section from my observation notes:

"This morning, class assistant is chosen as Lale. Halit asks the first question to her.

Halit: What are you doing?

Lale: I'm taking my star and putting it next to my other stars.

Then, all the other children ask by shouting out:

Ercüment: How many stars do you have?

Aylin: Can you update the calendar?

Kerem: Today is February 29, 2016.

E2: And tomorrow, it will be March".

Giving responsibilities to children is a way of sharing power in the classroom. It encourages children to have more control on what it is going on in the classroom and on their own actions. In this regard, it contributes to the participation of children as well. However, why these responsibilities are given should also be explained to children and they should even choose how they want to contribute.

### 5.5.2 Helping each other

Helping and asking for help are emphasized by teachers a lot in the classroom and I involved it under the classroom values category because I believe that they also help in building the classroom community and taking care of each other. In this preschool classroom, I observed several times that children help each other, they help the teacher, and teachers also help children and each other. Let's look the ways of it and how it is reminded by the teachers:

“It is morning session and children are back from weekend. English teachers ask them what they have done over the weekend. Halit raises his hand and teacher gives him the word:

Halit: Zorlu

E1: Did you go to Zorlu?

Halit: No

E1: Where did you go to?

Halit: .... (no answer)

E1: Why do I push? I'm just talking to myself.

Halit: Daddy

E1: Oh, you went with daddy, ok. Where?

Halit: .....

E1: Ok, say it in Turkish to your friends. They can translate it for me into English.

Kerem translates what Halit tells for the teacher.

E1: Oh, you went to Barcelona, Halit. Now throw the ball to someone else. Thank you Kerem for your help”.

In this example, we see what is generally happening in the classroom. As it is a bilingual classroom, it is half day English and children learn English by doing everything in English. However, their language learning pace and level are not always the same so some children may need support. In such cases, English teachers

usually ask for other children who are better in using the foreign language to assist their friends and it works very well. The individual child's participation is realized through other children's help. In another anecdote, we can see how children help their teacher:

“It is activity time in the afternoon session. The teacher is trying to prepare an experiment set up in the classroom. She brings a big plastic cover and lays it on the floor. She wants to put some soil on it. Children immediately hold the plastic cover from all sides to make it stay still. Then, the teacher puts some wooden blocks and toys on it to represent houses and trees. She wants to show what an earthquake does. Children stand up and hold the plastic cover. They all shake it together and the soil falls into the ground with toys and wooden blocks”.

We can see here that children immediately understand what the teacher is trying to do and help her to complete the activity.

### 5.5.3 Cooperation

Cooperation as a value is given importance and encouraged in this classroom.

Teachers create chances for children to work together in pairs and groups. Children are encouraged to work on problems and find solutions for them together. Group decision making is underlined at times. Even without teacher intervention or encouragement, children themselves support their friends in activities or discussions.

The below example demonstrates how two children work together;

“It is activity time in the afternoon. Şebnem is finished with her activity book and realizes Hamdi needs help. Hamdi needs to find words starting with certain letters and draw these objects. He can find two but he is having difficulty in finding the rest. Şebnem supports him a lot. She does not tell the words directly but rather she gives clues to Hamdi. Hamdi finishes in time! It looks like a great cooperation.

T1: Oley, oley! Hamdi is the champion!

Children join the song and cheer. Hamdi looks happier than ever before”.

It is worth noting from this anecdote how Şebnem is careful in observing his friend and provides support when she realizes he is falling behind. Most importantly, she is the one who is taking the initiative. In another anecdote, the teacher introduces a group activity and asks children to work together on a problem. Teacher chooses four children as group leaders. Teacher asks four children to choose group members. These children choose their group members. Teacher presents a problem and asks children to work together to find a solution.

As the researcher, I tried to focus on one group and I saw that one child is willing to start the discussion. Teacher gives clues to the group. Child introduces his idea to his group but another child shares a different idea. Children plan together and share duties. During the activity, children negotiate ideas and ask for help from each other. Teacher encourages children to collaborate and have group decision-making. In this activity, children discuss ideas with each other. When time is up, teacher asks group leaders to present their solutions. A short part of the activity is shared here:

“T1: There might be more than one solution. But you should be deciding as a group, not alone.

Halit: My idea is injection.

Hamdi: Let's draw taking blood with injection.

Halit: Blood is red. I'll draw the injection equipment.

Hamdi: Then, I should be drawing the rabbit.

Kayra: We have made our plan. Draw the injection very thick and we put soldiers in it.

Aylin: I have already drawn the injection. Let's move Kayra, we will draw the microbes now.

Ayşe: I will help you with it.

Halit: I have an idea, Ms T1.

T1: There is nothing like 'I' here. Have you consulted Hamdi (group leader)? Have you got his idea?

Halit: Of course, I have. I have another idea. Should I tell it to you?

T1: Sure, you tell it but not to me, to Hamdi. You are making a shared decision”.

As seen above, teacher aims to have children practice group work and collaboration in this activity. Working together, sharing ideas with their group members and deciding together are challenges for children. In this activity, children make their own plans; negotiate ideas and come to an agreement by listening to each other. Teacher support is very limited and when teacher is consulted, she directs children to get help from their group friends.

#### 5.5.4 Fairness

As far as I witnessed, teachers try to be fair in all their attitudes towards children. They also want to emphasize it in children’s relationship with each other. To give an example, children are served some healthy snacks and milk in the afternoon. The snacks are distributed equally and when some children want to have more, teachers explain them it is not fair for the others. An anecdote from the observation data can exemplify this:

“It is snack time. This afternoon, children have homemade cookies. It is obvious that some children enjoy eating them a lot.

Kerem: Can I have more cookies?

T2: Everyone got two. You cannot have more.

Kerem: But why?

T2: It’s not fair.

Hamdi: But why not everyone three?

T2: Two is fine but more is bad for your health”.

Children care about being fair especially in the games. Here is an example from children's play in which they argue over what is not fair:

“Nil, Elif, Aylin and Nihal are playing with play dough and chatting. I am sitting next to them just to listen and observe. I notice that Elif gets to become somehow the leader of this group. Everyone is trying to follow her lead, do what she wants and please her. She cooperates nicely with Aylin and shares play materials with her. Normally she is close to Nil but today she does not really talk to her. Ayşe joins them.

Ayşe: I will play with you.

Elif: You should ask me. I started the game.

Ayşe: Then, I will collect play dough for you (trying to get Elif's attention and approval).

Nil: For only Elif?

Ayşe: Yes

Nil: It is not fair

Ayşe: Then, for everyone”.

In this anecdote from children's play, it is understood that they question each other's behavior and some ask for fairness for the whole group. Children also question fairness of teachers' behaviors. The example below describes an activity in which the teacher asks children to prepare logos for a non-profit organization. Children work on their own drawings for a while:

“T2: If everyone is finished, let's vote. We will determine the shared decision of the group. I could have decided but we will do it democratically. This is not a competition so do not get upset if you are not chosen. Vote for the one you really think is beautiful.

Kerem: So, from our heart.

Then, children start voting. Some children vote for their close friends and some others just copy what their friends choose. At the end, one child gets more votes.

Aylin: But only Lale's work is chosen. So, all the others, we have drawn our logos for nothing!”

This example shows that children expect fairness and ask for appreciation when they work on an idea for some time. The teacher is trying to show here how voting system works and how it is related to democracy but children value their own work along with their friends'. Teaching how to vote for the best is a promising idea but their own work may be the best for each child. The ones which are not chosen might be exhibited in the classroom so other children can feel appreciated too. Children remind each other being fair while sharing the classroom materials, too:

“It is activity time now. Children work at tables in groups. Teachers put a bunch of color pencils in the middle of the table for everyone to share. Kerem is constantly pulling some of them in front of himself.

Nil (to Kerem): We cannot reach them. It is not fair. It should stay in the middle”.

#### 5.5.5 Keeping promises

Making and keeping promises are valued a lot in the classroom by both teachers and children. It is a sign of mutual trust and responsibility as well. Teachers try to keep their own promises; ask children to promise them if they ask for more chances.

Teachers also remind children when they forget but children do it same too. Teachers usually make promises on playing games if the class finishes a discussion or an activity on time. In this example below, we will see how a teacher makes a promise to the child about a conflict he is in:

“It is the first meeting after winter break. Teachers welcome children very happily. Some do not talk much. They obviously need time to get back to the school routine.

E1 and E2 notice that some children forget classroom rules. They tend to remind them if needed.

Kerem comes and complains about a friend.

Kerem: Orhan throws the truck to the ground.

E1: It is ok. Maybe he forgot that we do not throw things in the classroom. Can you remind him that?

Kerem: I said. Again and again he do it.

E1: I will talk to him about it. I promise.

Then E1 goes and talks about why he should not play with the truck like that.

Kerem smiles at the teacher when she comes back”.

The child values the teacher’s promise and trusts her. Encouraging children and keeping your own promises are ways of building trust in the classroom; which directly contributes to creating a positive atmosphere and more sincere teacher-child interaction. In another example shared before, the teacher is trying to involve a child who constantly walks away from the group and play alone in the circle discussion time. The teacher talked with the child about his behavior and asked him to make a promise on staying in the group during the activity:

“The class is discussing the soil and its benefits to the nature. Children share their ideas and the teacher, E1, asks them further questions. Hamdi goes to the corner and starts playing with legos. Teacher calls him back.

T1: Dear Hamdi, why do you behave so? What about your promise to me?

Hamdi comes but after a short time, he leaves again”.

In a further chat with this child, I have learned that he is bored of teacher’s talking all the time. So, here keeping promises is a value but child’s interest is another factor that should be regarded.

#### 5.5.6 Respect and care

In this classroom, children are encouraged to show respect and care to all classroom members. Teachers also try to show this through their own actions. Although not all of them and not always, teachers try to listen to each child carefully. They make

explanations if they cannot pay attention to what a child says. Most of the time, they remind children to be respectful to each other and especially to different ideas.

Teachers almost always behave respectfully to each other and the school personnel.

During my observations, children showed me many times through their actions that they care about each other and they miss each other. In the anecdote below, it can be seen how a teacher respects a child's choices:

“It is Hamdi's turn for doing ‘Show and Tell Box’ presentation. The teacher gives him the box to take home and bring with an object. Hamdi refuses to take the box.

E1: It is ok if you do not want it.

She calls the children to the circle and chooses another child by singing ‘Innie Minnie’ song”.

Respecting children's choices is also respecting their individuality. When the child is not forced to do what he does not want, he chooses not to participate. This is a right as legitimate as the right to participate. In this classroom, there are two separate free play periods. Each of them is half an hour. However, sometimes the activity before this period cannot be finished on time and free play time is shortened:

“T1 comes to the classroom at the end of the free play time.

T1: My dears, we have ten minutes left till the end of free play. Can you get ready to tidy up your toys in five minutes?

Time is up but children keep playing. When speaking with the other teacher, T1 realizes that children have started free play late today.

T1: I have told you to tidy up but I see that you need to play some more. I can understand that. Let's have ten more minutes, ok?”

Teacher's view of the child is related to how she behaves them. This teacher obviously thinks that children's play is their own private time and it is highly important. So, she acknowledges and respects their need and wish to play, gives them adequate time to finish and adapt to the next activity. As in everything, there

are negative examples in how teacher's relation with children in terms of respecting ideas. In an example, the teacher is asking children how they would like to decorate the classroom for Children's Day celebrations. I want to underline how she responds to children's ideas:

T2: We are now going to decorate the classroom for April 23 (Children's Day). What do you want to do for Ataturk corner?

Hamdi: Let's write 'Happy April 23'

Ercüment: Soldiers and flags!

Kayra: Race cars!

T2: Make it relevant to children's day. It is going to be a notice board about Atatürk.

Kayra: Tank!

T2: Might be. Would you like to draw a child? It is your festival. Let's draw flowers.

Orhan: Let's make a warplane! They have not fought for nothing".

At this point, I question the aim of making children draw something they have not chosen. The teacher might be trying to support children in coming up with some ideas but children already have ideas. Surely, the teacher can suggest new or different ones but appreciating children's ideas should have been the first things to be done. This specific example brings us to the issue of agenda, as well. If making nice decorations that will seem child-focused is the aim, the teacher will certainly lead children into her own agenda about the activity. If the aim is to make the activity as participatory as possible and to get children form their own opinions and decide on how they want to decorate, than the teacher will listen to and appreciate their ideas and help them to turn the classroom into what they are dreaming for Children's Day. So here we claim that respecting children's ideas might be closely related to whose agenda is on the table and what the teacher's view of children and their ideas.

### 5.5.7 Kindness

Being kind to each other is valued and encouraged in this classroom. Teachers support children to behave nicely to all members of the school. They appreciate children if they apologize from each other or thank kindly. Children's kind behaviors are appreciated and emphasized. As part of kindness, teachers and children bring small gifts to the classroom after holidays or travels. How the teacher asks children to wait in the line provides a good example of teacher kindness:

“Children are back from garden time. Lunch is about to be served so children are supposed to get in a line and take a plate so that one of the teachers can help them with the food. E2 reminds it:

E2: I do not see a line here. Sweeties, when we come back from garden, we go back in the line. Could you do that? We do not want accidents here, right?”

She speaks to children in a kind and respectful manner explaining why there is such an expectation as well. Teachers hope for the same when children ask for something:

“It is circle time but children start shouting the name of a game they really like: Duck, duck, goose! Duck, duck, goose!

E1: But you did not ask me. If I had said no, you could have screamed but you did not even ask.

Kerem: Duck, duck, goose, please.

E1: It is not a question.

Kerem: Can we play Duck, duck, goose, please?

E1: Excellent question. Now, I am thinking”.

To show love and kindness, both teachers and children bring small gifts to the classroom members and share them with everyone:

“Nihal has been on holiday abroad with her family. When she came back, she brings chocolate to the classroom.

E1: Thank you so much Nihal. It is so kind of you! Can you give your friends a small piece each? Everyone, do not forget to thank your friend, please”.

As a part of the classroom, I received the little gifts that children and teachers have brought so I felt that I needed to do the same. I brought some little and interesting gifts for the class; fresh fruits, healthy snacks, and flowers in a pot. Children got very happy about receiving gifts from me and teachers found a way of turning these small treats into a teaching material. Here is a note from my research journal:

“As the class was learning about living and non-living things for a while, I wanted to take something to the classroom as a gift. I brought some flowers in the pot. Teachers enjoyed the idea and made children responsible of watering it. Both teachers and children thanked me. I felt extremely happy and connected to the class and I enjoyed learning about all the nature and environmental subjects. I felt excited to be in the classroom and to get the chance to observe”.

E1 and E2 let children to touch and smell these flowers and have a small discussion on them connecting it to the monthly theme of living and non-living things.

#### 5.5.8 Honesty

Both teachers and children expect honesty from each other. When children tend to avoid or forget their responsibilities, some of them may lie about them but the teachers emphasize that it is normal to make mistakes and accept them honestly instead of lying about them. When I have witnessed children’s small chats, I have also noticed that they clearly value honesty in their friendship. When a close friend does not tell the truth, children stop speaking to each other or wait for an explanation.

No matter how all these values are expected, encouraged and appreciated in this classroom, there are times when members of the classroom have conflicts over them. Sometimes children make fun of each other, call each other bad words and make their friends feel really sorry. There are cases when children blame other children for their own mistakes or mock them for their inabilities. Although not practiced by

many, fair share is violated on some days as a few children persistently ask for more food or snacks. There are values of the classroom as a community but there are also values of families. Not all families share the classroom values. Let me give an example on a conflict between a family and what the classroom members valued.

The classroom members have common appreciations; they aim to be open to different values and celebrate international days. Sometimes the families' own values conflict with the classroom values. One day, the class was talking about different countries and their festivals. One of the teachers told me about a child's family. In the previous year, the class learned about Easter, colored eggs and children took their eggs home as gifts to their parents. One parent came to school the next day telling that she was shocked and felt humiliated as the festival wasn't a part of her own religion. Child's family clearly stated that they do not appreciate celebrating international days and do not improve teaching other religions.

It needs to be question what can be or should be done in such cases. The teacher who told me about this incident followed saying that there are students and teachers from diverse cultures in this classroom so everyone has the right to celebrate their own important day and learn about others'. So, the teachers kept their stand even a parent complained.

## 5.6 Decision making

As the definition of participation includes taking part in decisions, I have paid utmost attention to the decision-making processes in the classroom. I did not want to look at only classroom rules. Instead, I wanted to focus on every decision that is related to children's lives so it almost covers everything in a preschool classroom; curriculum, activities, rules, plan of the day, food, games, story books, presentation topics, etc.

From the first day on, I tried to note down all the decisions I could observe. In time, I noticed that there are certain things that children can decide on; some other things only teachers decide; and there is an area of mutual decision and negotiation. The data and codes lead to four categories under the theme of decision making; children's decisions, teachers' decisions, teacher's reactions to children's decisions, children's reactions to decisions.

### 5.6.1 Children's decisions

In this preschool classroom, children can mostly decide what to play; their roles in the play, which toys to play with; which videos to watch in the classroom. They can sometimes choose which story book to be read by the teacher; how much food to eat; decide on what to speak about in presentations, what to bring to presentations, whom to ask questions in presentations, which questions to ask to the presenter and teachers. They can most of the time decide on where to sit in the classroom and whom to sit with. If there is a discussion, they can choose their sides. If it is an activity on elections, they can choose whom to vote for. Although not always, they can decide on what to do in classroom activities. This example demonstrates how a child feels when she can decide whom to speak:

“It is show and tell box activity. Elif is the presenter. She looks very happy and proud, holding her box.

E2: Ok, now, put your hands up if you want to ask questions. Elif, you pick whom to ask questions.

Elif is very excited and looks happy to be making the decision. She looks at her friends, thinks and chooses one child each time. Here are some questions:

Kayra: Are your objects soft?

Ercüment: Are they big and small?

Elif does not help her friends much and she enjoys giving them little clues. She obviously enjoys being in control of the whole activity”.

Here is another anecdote that exemplifies how children decide on their own roles in plays:

“It is free play time. I am sitting next to children and watching them play. They immediately include me in the game, too. Ercüment and Orhan are playing ‘cooking’ in the kitchen corner.

Ercüment: I am the cook

Orhan: No, I am the cook.

Ercüment (to me): You become the customer. I’m the cook and you are the chef, Orhan, ok?

Orhan accepts it happily and one of them gets my order while the other is preparing me some food. I try to order some interesting food and but they just bring me what they want and enjoy seeing my reactions of not liking the food. They just laugh at me a lot”.

Obviously, for children, free play time is a space which is not controlled and free enough to practice their agency and make their own decisions on their roles, on the process of the game, basically on everything.

### 5.6.2 Teachers’ decisions

Compared to children, teachers have more control over decisions. To start with, they can choose class assistants and decide what he or she will do; they can determine the timing, pacing and content of classroom activities. Teachers create the program and they design the plan of each day. They usually chose what to watch and read in the classroom. In the group discussions and circle time activities, they choose which children will speak, ask and answer questions. Teachers have a saying on class exhibitions, what to prepare for them, how to decorate the classroom for exhibitions. They choose when the end of year show will be, which songs will be used, which

dance movements will be practiced. Teachers sometimes decide which games children should be playing and which toys should be preferred. Most of the time, it is the teachers who choose leaders in group activities. The subject and format of child presentations are also decided by teachers. It is my observation that, most of the class rules are also set or suggested by the teachers.

To give examples from the data, I would like to start with how teachers choose class assistants. Every day a child is chosen as the class assistant and has small responsibilities to follow during the day. Teachers try to give equal chances for all to be a class assistant so each child gets to be the assistant one day in a month. The class assistant contributes to the morning routine by checking the calendar; helping the teacher with the attendance and leading some group activities. So many children are enthusiastic about being chosen. However, I have not witnessed any case in which children can influence or get involved in deciding whom to be the class assistant. It is always the teachers who choose the child every day. They sometimes give reasons why some children are chosen and why some are not:

“Morning routines has just finished. Children are gathering around the teacher on the carpet.

E1: Ok, what will we do now?

Kerem: Class assistant!

E1: Yes, we will choose a class assistant. Today’s class assistant (spelling the word) is a g-i-r-l. Is that a boy or a girl?

Yıldırım: It is a boy!

E1: No, it is a girl. Today’s class assistant couldn’t be a boy because boys all fought today. And Yıldırım couldn’t give us a nice activity time because he all spoke!”

As seen here, the decision on the class assistant is used as a reward for those who behave nicely enough. Children can be involved in choosing or volunteering to be the class assistant, instead. This would support their autonomy; accepting responsibilities and initiation. Decisions by the teachers can be given in the initial days of the school but in time, children can get used to nominating themselves or a friend to be the assistant by giving relevant reasons. In this way, children get a chance to practice group decision making and backing up for their opinions. In another example, I will be relating decision making and children's participation in the activities, especially in presentations. As explained before, there are two types of presentations in the classroom; show and tell box and my box presentation. In the Show and Tell Box, children volunteer to take the box home and they bring what they want as an object as long as it is related to the theme of the week. However, in My Box presentation, the theme 'speaking about your babyhood' is decided at the beginning of the semester by the teachers. Every child does the presentation on the same topic. This is an anecdote that I noted during My Box presentation of a child:

“During Kayra's presentation, many children lost interest. Kayra spoke very slowly. Besides, his friends made jokes and interrupted his speech. Some children lied on the carpet; some turned their backs to the presenter and had a chat. When the presentation was over and Kayra left with his family, T2 talked to children and told them how she was disappointed with their behavior.

However, as someone observing everything from one step back, I have felt that children's losing interest and not participating were all reactions to the presentation topic and format. Kayra's presentation was one of the last ones in the semester so children were used to listening to related stories, looking at similar babyhood pictures and clothes. They were more interested in talking to each other rather than asking the presenter questions”.

I believe that deciding on the subject and format of the presentations and keeping them the same limit children's participation in the discussions as well. There should be questions on why the subject of the presentations stays the same for everyone and

who decides on it; about why children lose interest; what the differences are between listening to something you do not know about vs. listening to something you already have an idea.

### 5.6.3 Teachers' reactions to children's decisions

Teachers have two major ways in approaching the decision-making processes in the classroom. They either make the decisions themselves so keep children out of the process or they try several things to involve children in the decisions. However, it is not a line with two ends; it is rather like a continuum. In the intersection part of two approaches; there is an area of negotiation in which teachers sometimes include children but to a limited extent. In the first place, it is worth describing what teachers do that hinders children's participation in decisions.

There are cases when teachers criticize, question their choices or make negative comments on them when children have decided on something. Teachers sometimes show their disapproval of their ideas clearly. I believe that such attitudes may make children think that their ideas and decisions are not valued and equally accepted. It may hinder their participation; it may cause them to lose interest in sharing their ideas or be a part of decisions. At this point, I would like to share an anecdote from a drawing activity. Children are told to choose what they want but not appreciated if they do so:

“Children will be using surf boards for their dance performance. Today, they are designing their surf boards and coloring them.

T2: You can draw any shape you like. But make them big and think so that you can color inside the shapes and it can be seen from far.

Children spend a lot of time on their boards. Some start immediately; some wait and think. The ones who have finished bring and show it to the teacher.

Teacher comments on the drawing. The teacher, T2, shows her dissatisfaction with some works through her tone of voice and her words very clearly:

T2: We told you to draw big and thick shapes. This is not like it. How are you going to color it?

Hamdi: I want to keep this one. Why wouldn't I draw this?"

Apart from teacher's disapproval, it is worth noting here how the child stands for his own choices. What teachers in this preschool classroom do to foster children's participation in decisions needs to be questioned. The analysis of data shows that there are many cases in which teachers encourage children to decide freely. They appreciate children's decisions; ask children what they want to play or watch.

Accepting children's will is another way of respecting their decisions. There are times when teachers ask children which books to read in the classroom. A good example is that in some activities, teachers support children to practice group decision making. Giving an example would be appropriate at this point. T1 is an experienced teacher who tries to support children to take initiation and make choices as much as possible. One day, I have noted how she spoke with children while informing about an activity:

"T1 comes into the classroom while T2 is leading the discussion. She asks two-three children to come with her quietly and explains them what to do:

T1: You missed what we did yesterday as you couldn't come but I want to give you another chance today to do the project because I think you will enjoy it. You will design an air craft individually. Your friends came up with ideas like a plane, balloon, flying cars. We expect you to design 3-d crafts. We have several different papers that you can use. You can choose whatever material you want freely. Take your time, think and plan, ok?"

The example demonstrates how a teacher can encourage children to decide on how to plan and carry out their projects on their own. T1 asked children to think, plan and create freely. Besides including children in decision making, her positive attitude and

encouragement of free thinking and creativity have influences on children and on the classroom atmosphere. Another anecdote comes from book reading time:

“It is story time after lunch. Teacher asks children to sit around her.

E2: Ok everyone. What should we read today? I’m going to read a book that you choose!

All the class starts shouting: No, David! No, David! David!

E2: Again? You love this book so much! Ok, let me grab the book.

E2 (to me): This is their favorite book.

E2 is reading aloud the book. There are very funny pictures and scenes in the book and the character, a boy, is doing the opposite of what is told to him. This might be why children like this book so much.

E2 exaggerates and does a lot of funny voices while reading aloud. Children repeat the funny sentences and laugh a lot!”

This anecdote that I remember very clearly can give an insight on participation and decision making. When children are asked about their preferences and more involved in decisions, the whole activity turns into an already engaging one. So, children become automatically involved as they are a part of this choice.

We need to see what lies in the intersection of these two approaches. The classroom observations show that the attitude in this part is more common. Teachers tend to offer children choices; but at the end, it is their decision. Teachers make explanations on their own decisions or inform children about the reason behind these decisions.

This shows that teachers at least think that children deserve an explanation on decisions they are not involved. Teachers share the plan of the day or sometimes the week with children; sometimes they all discuss the plan; however there is very limited child influence on the plans. It is not asked for or welcomed. There are cases when classroom teachers give two activities and ask children to choose between them. Teachers ask children how they want to sit, listen or join the discussion at

times. They inform children about special days and celebrations; they even ask for their ideas on how to decorate the classroom however the examples from data show that these ideas are asked for but not accepted or made use of. When a few children do not show interest in an activity or game, a teacher may offer them options on what to do or to stay out.

#### 5.6.4 Children's reactions to decisions

As none of the interactions in the classroom is one way, children have their own reactions to decisions as well. They question both teachers' decisions and group decisions. They sometimes refuse teachers' decisions and defend the choices they have made. If there are changes in fixed activities or plans all the class members have decided together, children want to know why there are such changes. They want to know the reasons of teachers' decisions; they ask about the plan of the day, they ask about the lesson content. Even if teachers do not ask for their ideas or comments on the day plan, they react to it. They make certain decisions by reacting all together; they shout the names of the games they want to play loudly and make it happen. They do the same for the songs or videos they would like to watch. Here is a note from the observations in which children get involved in a decision about finishing or not finishing free play time:

“It was almost the end of free play time so the teachers, E1 and E2, asked children to start tidying up. It was obvious that children did not want to stop playing. A few of them collected their play corner but some others did not. One or two children started telling the name of a game loudly and all the other children stopped what they were doing and joined them:

Children: Cookie Bar! Cookie Bar!

E1: Oh, you want to play the Cookie Bar game.

Children: Cookie Bar!

E2: Ok, we can play it if you tidy up very quickly.

Children got happy, ran to collect their toys and helped each other. They were ready in a minute. They played the game with E1 and then started the activity time”.

It seems that speaking out together has been a way of influencing decisions and even participating in them in this classroom. It is worth noting how both teachers respect their will and arranged the game accordingly. There are cases in which children oppose to teacher’s decision by claiming they are prohibitions, not decisions. In certain activities, especially in drawing, children ask the teacher if it is possible to change the decision she makes. Children sometimes show their reactions to the decisions made by teachers by showing an open refusal; they refuse to take part in dance movements; some children refuse to take part in group games. More interestingly, there are so many times that I have witnessed children doing what they decided instead of following teachers’ decisions or suggestions. This is the example I wanted to include about an individual child’s reaction to teacher’s decision:

“Free play time started but at the end of it, T1 told children to play mental games. Children went to mental games corner, formed their groups and started playing in groups. Halit and Yıldırım were playing with dolls. T1 noticed this.

T1: Everybody, we are playing mental games, not with other things, right?

Güney: All these prohibitions. I do not know how you find them.

T1: It is not a prohibition dear, it is encouragement. Teachers who are smart and careful observe children and tell what they need. You always play with board games here. Do you play mental games at home?

Güney: I can play whatever I want at home”.

Normally, children can play with anything they want in the free play sessions.

Teachers barely get involved or intervene in their games. For children, it is probably a time period they enjoy the most and they feel the freest. So this child reacts to

teacher's decision on controlling their game even though he is given an explanation. Another anecdote comes from the dance practice sessions. The whole class is expected to prepare for the end of year show and it is the first day children are informed about what will be done:

“E1: Now we are going to learn a song for the end of year.

E1 shows the dance movements of the song first. Then she plays the song and explains the lyrics to children. It sounds like a difficult song to understand. It is not a children's song but it has very positive and hopeful messages for the world. Some children just watch their friends and look confused. They try to repeat the lyrics but cannot. Yıldırım does not dance at all and he looks very unhappy. Even though the teacher invites him to dance, he refuses to take part.

E1: It is ok Yıldırım. If you do not want to be in the show, you have the option. Let me tell you a story. You know Ms. Martha, our middle group teacher. When she was a kid, she was so afraid of being on the stage and she used to cry in school shows. It is normal if you do not want”.

In this example, we see that the child is reacting against a decision made by teachers. It is important that the teacher does not force him and gives him the opportunity to stay out. However, deciding on something first and then presenting an option either to be or not to be a part of it are not real options. Children did not choose the song and the dance movements. It is decided by the teachers. This child might be feeling that the song is not good or he might find the dance movements not well. Here, children's only option is not to participate. Instead of this, children could have been given the chance to design the show themselves or it could have been decided together with the teachers. Children and teachers could have discussed different songs and movements and chosen one that they liked the most. If the children are not asked for their opinions on what to do for the dance show, it makes me who is the end of year show for. Excluding children from the decision-making process may be leading to their non-participation in some activities.

It seems to me that the reactions of children towards decisions, especially the ones which are imposed, demonstrate children's agency. Children do shape what is going on in the classroom by insisting on their will; asking the reasons for teachers' decisions; opposing to the teacher-made decisions; and by offering their own choices.

## 5.7 Listening to children

How a teacher listens to a child or children is very influential on children's participation. The teacher shows her genuine interest, trust, value, importance through the ways she listens to children. During the period I was in this classroom, I observed several different methods and activities that teachers build to listen to children. However, not all listening is the same and not all teachers listen in the same way. The data leads us to the theme of listening to children through the categories activities for listening and teachers' role in listening, children speaking.

### 5.7.1 Activities for listening

The school and this classroom give a key role in having children speak and express themselves. Therefore, most of the classroom activities are centered on discussions. To name them all; the class has morning routines, circle time activities, group discussions, activity time, presentations, and feedback times. These are the structured, designed sessions to provide a chance for children to speak and for teachers to listen. Besides these, children have free play time sessions and lunch times that they have their own chats without teachers' design or intervention.

### 5.7.2 Teachers' role in listening

There are certain times and cases in which teachers listen to children very carefully. They ask questions to get children speak. They note children's ideas especially during mind map activities and drawing times. Teachers most of the time respond to children's ideas; they give feedback on their ideas. They react positively when children speak their minds. Teachers ask engaging questions, listen to children and then ask follow up questions. Teachers most of the time do not intervene children while they are speaking. Teachers listen to children in a group or one to one. There are many cases in which children show interest to children's answers and there are other cases teachers are not happy with the answer child gives so they ask for more. It is not always children's opinions that teachers listen to. They very rarely have to listen to children's complaints about each other. They also listen to children's explanations, excuses, and problems. When many children want to speak at the same time, teachers try to organize the order so they ask children to raise their hands and tell children to wait for their turn to be listened by the teachers. When teachers listen to children, they mostly give them enough time to think and speak. There are times when a teacher listens to a child genuinely but there are also times when a teacher is waiting to hear a certain answer. It is necessary here to share some anecdotes how teachers listen to children and how their attitudes differ. The first example demonstrates a teacher taking notes of children's ideas while listening:

“After T2's session, free play time starts. T1 has taken the classroom. When children are playing, T1 calls them one by one to the table. She has a white big paper on which she notes down children's answers.

T1 asks children's ideas for each part. Some examples from her feedback to children:

T1: Orhan, these are awesome ideas. I am proud of you. Let's see what Kerem will tell.

T1 listens to children carefully, notes down their answers and gives them very encouraging feedback. These all will support children in sharing their ideas and help them feel appreciated and valued”.

Another example comes from a circle time discussion in which the class meets after winter break:

“T2 is asking children about their winter holiday while starting the discussion.

T2: It is back from holiday and I know you have so much to tell. Let’s talk a little bit all together. What did you do on holiday?

Ercüment: I went to a movie; ‘A good dinosaur’.

Orhan: I ate kebab. Oh, the dinosaur lost his father, right?

Ercüment: Yes, in the ocean.

T2: You have forgotten the rules.

Orhan: Yes, we have. It has been fifteen days.

T2: We are not talking among ourselves. So, I will ask everyone in a turn. What did you do Elif?

Elif: I went to the cinema, playground and to my grandmother’s house.

E2: Halit?

Halit: I went to so many places but I forgot some of them. I went to my grandmother’s house. They bought me toys. They sometimes feel they have to buy me toys as they see me very rarely.

T2: Did you go only there?

Halit: There are so many...

T2: Then tell me some you have in mind (in an angry tone of voice)

Halit: (Not answering)

T2: Ok, Nil, where did you go?”

This anecdote shows us many things. On the surface, the format of the activity seems like one that facilitates active listening and speaking. The teacher opens up the discussion acknowledging children’s need to speak about their holiday and offers to talk about it all together. Hearing this, children genuinely share their holiday

experience; maybe what has influenced them the most among the places they visited. When the first child tells about the movie he has watched, another child gets interested and asks him a question and they share a moment of common genuine interest. This is the natural flow of communication. However, the teacher changes her role of a listener into a facilitator at this point and reminds children the rule to speak in an order.

In a group of fifteen children, speaking in an order is surely needed as a rule. However, it may hinder children's attempt to speak and comment about each other's experience and ideas. In the dialogue, another child starts telling where he has gone over the holiday. He specifically mentions one place, his grandmother's house and tells what happens when they go there. He is obviously influenced by his grandparents' behavior of buying him toys for compensating the times they miss. So, the child talks about it. However, the teacher intervenes again by asking whether it is the only place he has visited. When the teacher insists on asking for more places and changes her tone of voice, the child stops speaking.

All these are closely related to teachers' way of listening. It is my observation and opinion that listening to children is at the core of promoting children's participation and it is highly related to what the teacher is listening for. In such examples, it can be understood that the teacher has designed this speaking activity as an activity and she does not really aim to have a natural conversation but she claims to be doing so at the beginning of the discussion. Her aim might be having children to talk about their holiday experience, making the transition from holiday to school routine easy and taking note of their answers so that they can be presented. This might be why she insists on getting names of several places instead of paying attention to what the child is really saying. Another example will come from a group discussion session:

“The class has been learning about recycling. The teachers have brought recycling bins and practice how to use them with children. In this part of the group discussion, the teacher is trying to help children figure out where the used materials go.

E1: What happens to old cars?

Yıldırım: They die.

Aylin: No, they are non-living.

E1: Where do they go?

Orhan: In the liquid

E1: Think, Orhan.

E1 draws a map of the school and some waste containers. And she asks the question again?

E1: Where does our cleaning lady take our trash?

Şebnem: To the garden.

E1: Do you see any trash in the garden?

Şebnem: No.

Aylin: Another big trash. Outside.

E1: Who takes our trash outside, to the big one?

Yıldırım: Men!

Halit: Superman!

Children all start laughing. E1 talks to E2 saying that she can get any answer from children. E2 questions whether children know the answer.

E1: Ok, last time, it is a vehicle.

Nihal: Garbage car.

E1: It is a truck.

Kerem: Garbage truck!

E1: Yes, exactly”.

This short part from the discussion should be interpreted from both perspectives; children and the teacher. The teacher has asked a question related to the topic of the day but she sees that children are having trouble finding the answer. So, she does

everything to support them, giving more clues, giving examples from their lives. The teacher listens to children, seems to understand their need for support and provides more clues. Looking from the perspective of children, the teacher is asking something they do not know. They are just throwing out some answers and their major aim is to guess the certain answer the teacher is expecting. Although the effort of the teacher is worth mentioning here, some questions should also be asked; how much of this group discussion promoted children's participation and how much was devoted on finding a certain answer? Teacher has a definite answer in her mind; she is trying to get 'garbage' truck answer from the children but they might have never seen it before. It might not be related to their lives. It might also be because of the foreign language. Sometimes the children do not answer and it is not because they do not know the answer; it is because the question is not clear enough. It hinders their active participation.

### 5.7.3 Children speaking

The content of children's speaking is discussed in a detailed manner under the theme of children's agenda so it will not be repeated here. However, it is also not possible to separate listening to children from what children are saying. Therefore, I feel the need to include what the common things children speak about and for which reasons. It is obvious that children enjoy sharing their ideas a lot so they try to express themselves in every possible situation. They speak for a long time about the things they are interested more; which is in the center of their agenda. Children are invited to join the group discussions to give their ideas. When children join the discussions and give their opinions, it is not always they are interested in the topic or they are involved in the activity. They most of the time try to answer the teacher's questions

and find what the teacher is asking for. So, they share their ideas for the activity.

When children are really engaged, they shout out the answer or their idea. They do not want to wait for their turns or raise hands. Children get excited when talking about things they are interested in; they have experienced. They enjoy talking about their drawings. It is obvious that they are developing the ability to listen to each other and comment on their friends' ideas. Children have several different opportunities to speak as mentioned above. They speak in presentations; they speak about their homework, research or books in the circle time.

When there is less structure in the activities or when they lose interest, children mostly speak between themselves; speak about their play. They speak with each other while drawing. They enjoy speaking about their plans or weekend activities. They sometimes speak about the agenda of the country, too. This anecdote comes from children's lunch time chat when they can freely talk about anything they want:

“Children chat in Turkish while having lunch. I am trying to listen to their conversations as much as possible without taking notes and disturbing them. Some real interesting topics show up very often!

Kerem: Do you think there are still numbers after infinity?

Kayra: Do numbers end?

Hamdi: If the numbers were infinite, they would still be making them in a factory but they are not.

Kerem (saying loudly to the teacher): Search it on the internet; write ‘Do numbers have an end or are they infinite?’

In the meantime, Halit and Nil are talking about something else.

Nil: Look, I got a lucky wristband.

Halit: I brought a toy car in the morning to the class but they called it a ‘fruit’. So funny!”.

As seen from the example, the diversity of topics children discuss over lunch time is so rich! Children want to speak about something that is meaningful for them at that moment. They listen to each other more carefully and they are engaged in a real dialogue.

### 5.8 Positive classroom atmosphere

When the data is coded and analyzed to see the emerging patterns, positive classroom atmosphere has shown itself many times. It is related to how all class members feel in this classroom; how they contribute to well-being of each other. In this specific classroom, the observation notes show me that I have mostly focused on how teachers helped to create a positive atmosphere so I have looked at the ways teachers made children feel comfortable, relaxed, engaged and turned the classroom activities into fun and engaging ones. There are so many things that teachers do that help to build a positive classroom atmosphere along with a small number of reactions that change the mood of the classroom into negative. I will be starting with the positive ones.

Among all, integrating games into the lesson or turning activities into games can be listed as the number one as creates so many positive changes; children have more fun, children spend a lot of energy, children learn while having fun and they concentrate on the next activities better. Teachers sometimes notice that children are losing interest in the middle of a group discussion so they stop it and give a break to play a game. Children almost always ask teachers to make promises of playing more games. So, keeping these promises is another contribution to positive classroom atmosphere. These teachers turn routine attendance sessions into a game or even create a 'what not to do' game when they notice children are getting bored. It is

worth noting here that teachers carefully observe children and realize some of them are losing interest on the discussion or the activity; this is why they tend to create games in such moments.

A second important but less obvious thing is the informal chat that a teacher has with children. In the mornings while children arrive one by one to the school, English teachers welcome them and ask how they feel, etc. On some days, a teacher and a few children sit at a table together, work on something or play with something and chat freely. In the afternoon sessions, the same informal chats take place during snack time or activity time. Teacher tells things about her life; children tell her so many things they are interested in or experiencing. Observing most of these informal chats, I can say that it definitely makes both children and teacher happy, creates a closer bond between them.

Joking should come at the top of the list if the topic is positive classroom atmosphere. Although not applied by all teachers, most teachers in this classroom joke almost every part of the day; listen to the child, tell a story, read a book, give instructions, play games. Making jokes while speaking to children, allowing children's jokes and laughing at their jokes are all contributors of the positive atmosphere. Teachers also joke at each other. By joking or using drama skills, some teachers make children laugh a lot and it turns into a very enjoyable lesson for children. When children are laughing about something or having fun while playing, talking, they get really happy if the teacher joins their fun. Teachers also make fun of themselves very often and they are comfortable with pointing out at their own mistakes.

Having a happy mood and spreading happiness are other essential elements of this positive classroom. Some teachers start the session by singing, remind the rules with a riddle. Most of them enter the classroom happily, hug children and smile at them most of the time. If children make mistakes, they remind the rules very positively. These teachers stay calm even during a conflict moment. There are times when the same question is asked several times but teachers answer children's questions very patiently each time. When there is a need to remind time left or to remind the instructions, teachers do it in a playful manner. Children enjoy music and movement so much that they always ask for more of them. So, teachers try to include more physical activities and games into the lesson time. There are teachers who show yoga movements to children, practice yoga with them and let them spend their energy by focusing on their bodies. Teachers play very active dance music, encourage children to practice crazy dance movements. Teachers support children to be as silly as possible while dancing so that they can have fun. At other times, teachers play very soft and good music at the background, giving some information about the musician as well.

If we have a look at other factors which help to construct the positive classroom atmosphere, we can see that teachers' showing interest in children's lives plays an important role. Some teachers show individual interest to each child. They ask children about their family and what is going on at home. Teachers also ask children about their weekends or holiday. When children start telling them about something they are interested in, they listen to children very carefully and share their ideas. Teachers remember children's birthday and pay attention to celebrating each child with a song on their birthday. Teachers also open their lives to children; they talk about their own families and share life experience with children. This individual

interest sometimes continues during the activities. Children bring their drawings to the teacher and the teacher talks to children about their drawings one by one. Lastly, encouraging children is another crucial factor in the construction of positive classroom atmosphere. To provide this, teachers thank children for their ideas, appreciate their efforts, encourage children to speak and to give better answers, give positive feedback on their work.

Besides the contributions of teachers to the positive atmosphere of the classroom, there are some cases in which teachers turn the atmosphere into a negative one.

There are times when a teacher stops children's jokes, asks them to be more serious and does not join their laughter and fun. Here is an example about how a teacher integrates movements and yoga into the lesson to help children concentrate and feel happier:

“E1 is showing yoga positions to children and they follow her.

E1: Try to focus. Look at something. No talking please. If you cannot do the movement, start over.

They do the baby position now. E1 rubs their back.

E1: Now, you are babies, in your mummy's belly. You're so happy. Everything is fine. Let's count back, 10-9-8...

I see that Nil cannot concentrate but she is having fun; she sees me and smiles at me.

E1: Let's do the dog position.

One kid does the position, another one crawls through her legs, and becomes a dog, so the whole class crawls and freezes as a dog. Children enjoy it so much.

E1: Yes, that's it. Have fun, get crazy!

Children do it twice.

E1: Ok, now lotus position please. Just sit and listen to the sounds of the garden.

The teacher helps children to spend energy and to calm down in the middle of the day. She sees that some of them are having fun and she joins this”.

Another example demonstrates the warm relation between the teacher and children:

“T1 has come to the classroom. She looked at children and sat next to Kerem who is working by himself at the table. The teacher started to have a casual chat with him.

T1: My dear Kerem, have you started late? Why are so behind your friends? How was your weekend?

Kerem smiled, nodded his head and continued working on his paper. He looked happy to have the teacher at his table. Aylin realized T1 was in the classroom, she ran to her and hugged her.

Aylin: I went to İzmir at the weekend.

T1: Did you? What did you do there, my dear?

Aylin: I ate berries and travelled around.

T1: My beautiful girl!”.

T1 usually has these small chats with children when she comes into the classroom. She is interested in their lives and she makes it obvious through her reactions, comments, etc. The teacher in this example pays individual attention to children and she carried a natural conversation. She also shows care and love towards children. Such attitude contributes to the positive classroom atmosphere because children feel closer to the teacher, happier and more comfortable being there. Another short example demonstrates how the teacher joins fun when children are laughing about her:

“It is show and tell box time. Hamdi has the box. Children start asking questions but they just shout out their guesses:

Halit: Is it a toy?

E1: Hey, everyone, raise a finger please.

They raise fingers and Hamdi, proudly, chooses whom to ask a question.

Halit (in a funny voice): Is it Ms. E1-toy?

Everyone laughs at this joke. E1 laughs too. She even pretends to be a robot toy. She walks like a robot in the classroom. She goes and hugs Halit with robot arms”.

By reacting like this, E1 gives a message to the class saying that they are close enough to make jokes about each other. There is nothing wrong with joking and she even enjoys it. As mentioned above, adapting the lesson according to children’s needs and integrating games are the contributions teachers make to the positive atmosphere of the classroom. The anecdote below comes from a day during which the class has been learning the opposite adjectives through many activities. However children are having hard time in understanding the subject as it is new to most of them:

“At the end of the activities on the opposite adjectives, children asked for a surprise game. Teachers immediately created one: opposite game. Teachers tell children to do something and children are supposed to do the opposite. Here are some examples from these instructions:

E1: Do not eat your soup!

E2: Do not get in a line

E1: Do not stand up and wait.

E2: Do not clean your hands.

Children enjoyed this game so much that they were burst into laughter while doing the opposite of what the teachers said”.

It is worth noting here the teachers’ ability to create a quick new game out of the theme of the day both to support learning and have fun together. Children might be bored of doing what is told by the adults around them so this small opposite game might give them some fun and maybe a little area for resistance to the authority. It has been discussed above that having small chats with children plays an important role in the construction of positive classroom atmosphere. In the below example, you will be reading how a teacher combined this with her interest on music:

“It is activity time in the afternoon. Children are working at the tables. T1 plays some soft music at the background. She goes and sits at a table and starts talking about the composer and singers of this music.

T1: Now we are listening to Dilek Türkkan. At the weekend, I went to a concert. It was a tribute to Müzeyyen Senar from Dilek Türkkan. It was beautiful. This is why I am playing this song while you are working.

Lale: I went to Sıla’s concert.

T1: Really? I love Sıla’s music, too.

Lale: It was Valentine’s Day concert.

Aylin: I went to the cinema yesterday. At the exit, there was a young couple dancing!

T1: Is not it beautiful? I went by Istiklal Street and there were three young people sitting on the street. They were holding a sign ‘I do not have a boyfriend or girlfriend’.

Everyone laughs at the teacher’s funny story and her comments”.

This teacher likes sharing her daily experience with children. She integrates music into the activity and gives information about the composer. She relates it to her own life and children start telling what they have experienced over the weekend. The involvement of real life topics and the natural flow of conversation engage children a lot. Children do most of the activities in the classroom apart from their games in the garden time. In the anecdote below, teachers design a coloring activity in the big hall outside the classroom. Going out of the routine and playing with the coloring materials make children feel better:

“E1 and E2 have put a huge canvas on the floor of the entrance hall, outside the classroom. There are some paints and brushes. Teachers remind children the artist they have been learning about then ask them to splash the paint like in the method the artist used. Children do it in an order and enjoy splashing! After this coloring activity, there is some paint left. E1 has some extra paints in her hands. So she goes to everyone, touches their noses and puts a small color on their noses.

E1: You are stars now; like in our drawing!

Everybody laughs and runs to the teacher to get another star on their face”.

With a small touch, the teacher turns the end of the activity into a funny game for children. Children are happy to take place in this activity. In contrast to these examples, there are cases in which a teacher interrupts with a child's joke; asking children to be more serious and try to focus on the class discussion. One just anecdote comes from an afternoon circle time discussion:

“The class has been discussing living and non-living things. Today, they are concentrating on the categories of living things; the groups of animals, etc.

Orhan: If there weren't soil, there wouldn't be trees and fresh air. There wouldn't be animals.

T2: Which group are we in?

Kerem: We are in animals and humans.

Aylin: But cow is an animal, right? He has meat and people eat it.

Hamdi – Orhan: Mad cow! Mad cow! (Referring to the name of the illness)

Children start laughing but the teacher interrupts.

T2: Hamdi, can you listen? Can you stop it? Ok, let's go. What else is the soil useful for?”

Here, when the children hear the word cow, they relate it to the illness mad cow, which sounds funny for them. Instead of joining this joke for a second or just letting it go, teacher prefers to stop it and focus on the discussion topic. Another anecdote demonstrates a very similar situation with the same child and the same teacher:

“The afternoon session is started by T2. She waits until everyone gathers around her.

T2: Today, we are starting another theme. Our main idea is this: ‘All the living things in the world need clean and sufficient water, soil and air’

Hamdi: And a baby

T2: What does it mean?

Hamdi: For living

T2: Please focus on our discussion. What does ‘sufficient’ mean?”

As seen from the anecdote, the child, Hamdi is trying to joke with his usual ‘baby’ jokes but the teacher stops his joke and asks everybody to concentrate on the discussion.

### 5.9 Teacher support

Teachers have many roles in this classroom. Working with young children increase the number of roles they have. Teachers act as facilitators, organizers, leaders, helpers, soothers, supporters, etc. Teachers provide support to children in many ways. They invite children to share their ideas in group discussions and help them to express themselves if they hesitate or feel shy. Children give many presentations during the semester. They sometimes have trouble in starting the presentation so teacher support is at hand. Teachers encourage children to ask questions, offer help to find the answers if they are difficult. When children speak but their friends do not understand it well, teachers help the speakers to clarify their answers. Teachers almost always check for understanding during a discussion.

For teachers to support children, good observational skills are needed. In this preschool classroom, teachers most of the time realize what children need, acknowledge their needs and adapt the format of the activities accordingly. Children’s needs are sometimes emotional; teachers help them by calming them down in emotional crisis or by acknowledging their emotions. At other times, children’s needs are about having fun and playing so teachers create games, integrate games or everyday topics into the lesson, energize children through dance and movement, and promote questioning and curiosity. In addition, teachers provide enough time for children to speak and they wait while children are thinking before an answer or explanation. At the beginning of the sessions, teachers help children to

remember what they have learned before and give clues so that children can remember easily. They help children with language, with instructions as English sessions are difficult for some children to understand fully. During presentations, some children feel shy to speak in front of others so teachers sit with the presenter to help him or her to start. If the presenter is not comfortable to start, teachers ask him or her very easy questions so that an introduction can be made.

Children take on responsibilities as class assistant everyday so teachers support them in completing their duties. Teachers also calm children down when they feel nervous, worried, stressed or sad. When children have arguments with each other, teachers first encourage them to solve the problem among themselves and provide help if that is not enough. It is not always teachers who support children as it is not a one way interaction. Children support sometimes support teachers to prepare the activity materials, to make the classroom ready for the day, to organize the classroom, to find some music or videos on the Internet, etc.

Teachers support each other all the time, too. They help each other with getting ready for their session, by giving clues to each other during discussions, by taking over each other's responsibilities if one is too tired, etc. These examples all show that the members of this classroom care about each other and help each other. Teachers try to underline the importance of it by applying it into the practice all the time. Here is an example of how a teacher helps two children who are angry at each other over an argument:

“Kerem and Şebnem have been fighting in a game. Kerem hits Şebnem and she cries. E1 speaks to both of them. It seems that Şebnem feels hurt and scared so she keeps crying. E1 tries to calm her down.

E1: Do you want to say anything to Kerem?

Şebnem: Noo, he hit!

E1: If you are angry, just say I am angry, my dear. Maybe you misunderstood each other.

Then, E1 hugs the child, sits and talks to her for a bit longer. She calms her down and then the child goes back to the play corner”.

In the above example, the teacher has offered support when children cannot manage to solve their conflict. In such cases, the teachers in this classroom wait one step behind children and wait until they are needed. A second anecdote is about the support of the teacher to a child who is presenting:

“It is Şebnem’s show and tell box turn. She has brought her box and children have guessed that there are toy sharks in the box. Now, the class is waiting Şebnem to talk about these toys:

E1: Ok everyone. Now Aylin is going to tell us a few things about the sharks. She is so excited.

Aylin cannot start telling. She just waits and keeps silent. E1 starts to help her by asking the first questions:

E1: Let’s talk about your toys. Where did you buy them? Are they your toys? Does your sister play with them?

Then the child starts giving some short answers and tells about her toys

E2: Thank you, dear Aylin”.

The example shows us how both teachers understand the child’s feelings and hesitation to start the presentation. It may be difficult for some children to speak in front of the whole class and to speak in a foreign language. The teachers realize this and provide their support to the child and help her to say a few sentences before sitting down.

## 5.10 Teachers' questions

Teachers ask many questions in the classroom; to the group of children, to individual children; during discussions and one-to-one interactions with children, during presentations and activity times. The way questions asked, the function and purpose of questions all have their impacts on children's participation. Firstly, the kind of questions teachers ask will be analyzed shortly. Teachers ask children what they think about the topic, what they know about the theme of the discussion, what they have done over the weekend, the rest of a book, video or a story, etc.

Teachers make use of questions in many ways. The functions of the questions vary here in this classroom. Teachers usually open the discussions with questions. They support children's expressions and lead the discussions with follow up questions. When children are giving answers, teachers may ask for a new answer or a better one. Teachers usually expect new ideas from children so they ask challenging questions to foster their thinking. There are times when teachers ask interesting, detail, or how questions with the same purposes. Here is an example from a whole class discussion in which the teacher encourages children to explain their ideas better through her questions:

“The class is discussing what air is and how it supports life in the earth:

T1: Halit, we have atmosphere before space starts. Hamdi, listen very well and find the common and different points in these answers. Aylin said that we cannot step on air and we cannot see its color. Kerem said that is blue and white. There is a conflict between Aylin and Kerem's ideas.

Kerem: I say that we can see it. Let's discuss!

T1: First, let's here this group over there.

Aylin: You cannot see a reaction in the air.

Kerem: Maybe there are blue and white colors above the clouds.

T1: Ayşe, what is air? What do you think? How do you define it? (To other children: She was absent yesterday so I thought that I should take her opinion).

Ayşe: We cannot touch the air.

T1: If we could go up, would we be able to touch? Or would we fall down? What would we feel? Is it soft? Orhan, what do you think?

Orhan: We can touch the air.

T1: See, there is a conflict here. Hamdi, what about you?

Hamdi: Air is dirty.

T1: What do you think about your friend's idea?

Hamdi: We cannot touch it.

T1: Do you want to think a little bit before you answer?

Hamdi: We cannot touch the air.

Kayra: We cannot touch like Hamdi said. If we do, clouds get apart.

T1: Nil said something similar too. Şebnem said that we cannot feel the air. Elif said it is soft. How did you understand that it is soft?

Elif: (No answer)

T1: How did you boys decide that the air would look blue and white?

Kerem: There is no cloud now and it looks blue.

T1: So you based it on your observation”.

The discussion goes on like this until each child says his or her idea and supports it with explanations. As can be seen above, the teacher's questions help children to see the differences between answers and support them to think of ways to explain their stand. The teacher contributes to critical thinking and discussion by carefully choosing her questions and building them on children's answers. While doing this, the teacher always keeps her positive and encouraging attitude towards children so that they can feel comfortable giving very different and free answers.

When some children seem confused, teachers repeat the question or change it until children fully get it. There are also many cases in which teachers ask genuinely about the opinions of children, listen to them carefully, make comments and ask follow up questions.

#### 5.10.1 Encouraging children to ask questions

Teachers do not only ask questions themselves but they also encourage children to practice it. There are several formats in the classroom designed to reach this aim. Children ask questions to class assistant during morning routine. They also ask the presenting child many questions about his or her surprise object or babyhood clothes. There are small group discussions in which children ask questions to each other. Teachers encourage children to ask challenging questions. Some teachers also help children to question the source of information. The example below highlights a moment in which a teacher encourages children to ask questions to the source of knowledge:

“Children are presenting their homework. They have prepared a drawing about a story they read at home. It is Aylin’s turn now.

Aylin: This is Aladdin’s Gin! (She is pointing at the drawing she made)

Children ask her questions while she is showing the picture.

E1: Do you think there are real gins?

Aylin: My mommy says there is.

E1: Do you believe in everything your mom says?

Aylin: Yes.

E1: Next time, ask her ‘how do you know?’”.

Here in this small example, we can see that the teacher tries to show the children that adults may not know everything and their authority should be questioned.

### 5.10.2 Leading through questions

The questions teachers ask do not always support children's participation for many reasons. It may be due to the format of the question, agenda of the teacher, aim of the question, attitude of the teacher, interest of the child, etc. The observational data shows that some problems are experienced about how questions are asked. There are times when teachers do not accept children's answers as correct or sufficient. There are times some teachers do not appreciate a child's response. Teachers sometimes ask questions that there is a certain answer they expect and what children do is trying to guess it; the questions can be very leading. There are also questions which are on topics children are not really knowledgeable about. Very rarely, teachers do not wait for the child to think but they give the answer themselves. Teachers also ask information-based questions rather than discussion-opening ones. The below example demonstrates another discussion in which teacher seems to carry out a discussion but when you analyze the questions more, it is seen that the teacher is looking for the right answer. She does not focus on how children develop ideas during the discussion; rather she leads them into a question she has in mind:

“T2: Can everyone sit nicely? Does anybody have a different idea? Nil wants to speak. She hasn't spoken at all today. Kerem, you are waiting. You just cannot start speaking. Ercüment you tell me. Hamdi, think. What else pollutes air?”

Hamdi: I thought about three reasons.

Ercüment: Exhaust pipes!

T2: What is exhaust?

Ercüment: It is the smoke that comes out of trains.

T2: What else?

Ercüment: Smoke coming out of chimneys.

T2: Did not we say it already? (in a negative tone of voice)

Ercüment: Can it be smoke coming out of ferries?

T2: It should be polluting the air, not the sea. Come on! Nothing new comes from you!

Hamdi: Sometimes the air gets so polluted that people cannot see each other.

Ercüment: When it is foggy.

T2: Do you think it is air pollution?"

As can be seen from the example, the teacher does not build on children's ideas. She makes it clear that these are not the ideas she is waiting for through her negative feedback and tone of voice. The ideas might not seem new to the teacher but they may be new to children. The discussion is supposed to be a learning process for children but it seems like a process of guessing what is in teacher's mind. So we can say that on the surface, children seem to be participation when looked from outside; however, children have learned to try hard to find the wanted answer to please the teacher.

### 5.11 Control and power

Teachers in this classroom have control due to their power of status, power of being an adult, etc. Although some teachers try to share the control with children at times, it is mostly the teachers themselves who control what is going on in the classroom. Teachers practice their control in several diverse ways; making decisions, giving instructions, planning the format and content of the activities, etc. During observations, I have tried to note down the ones which took my attention the most and the ones to which children resisted the most.

Teachers' control is the most visible when they tell children what to draw, how to use the paper, how and where to sit in circle time, when to make jokes, when to have

an activity and when to give breaks. There are times when teachers have changed a child's place when children talk 'too much' during lunch. When children are engaged in a small chat with each other, teachers mostly ask them to stop as the lunch time rules say so. Teacher's power is used more strongly when a child takes the control of the activity through jokes, distractions, etc.

The following example is noted during a day when the teacher has asked children how they would like to decorate the classroom for Children's Day. The first part of the example is shared before; but to remind it in short, the teacher asks for children's opinions on decoration, not appreciating their suggestions but insisting on her own ideas. In the rest of the same dialogue, the teacher starts a drawing activity related to the same celebration:

"T2 calls children to the tables. She gives each child a paper and tells them to draw pictures of themselves. She tells that these drawings will be used to decorate the classroom for Children's Day. Not everybody wants to draw their own pictures but T2 reminds that she wants it. I am sitting next to some children and listening to their reactions.

Kerem: But, T2, we can draw what we want if we do not want to draw ourselves, right?

T2: No, you will draw pictures of yourself.

Kerem seems unhappy. Kayra is drawing but he is holding the paper upside down.

T2: Kayra, keep the paper vertical, not upside down.

Kayra: But I'm not drawing a human picture.

T2: But I want you to draw a human, yourselves.

While working on their drawings, children start to have chats with their friends at the same table.

T2: Do not talk, let's finish your work. Do it with whatever coloring pen you have".

The dialogue shows us that children are given a task they do not volunteer for. Some of them want to refuse doing it but the teacher makes every child draw what she has in mind by using her power of being a teacher and making the decisions. She decides on the format and content of the activity; she does not ask children for their opinions and she asks them to finish the activity quickly without speaking with each other. So it can be easily said that the teacher controls the whole activity. Teachers tend to give short, direct instructions, change their tone of voice and act decisively when they want to make their power more obvious. However, they do not always control children directly. There are teachers who always have their eyes on children but they do it without imposing too much restriction on children. The next example describes a morning in the classroom. It is chosen to show how teachers keep an eye on children but not make it so obvious:

“It was half past nine when I entered the classroom. Fifteen minutes were left to finish free play time. Some children were playing on the carpet with legos, puzzles and dolls. Three girls were sitting at the desk. E2 was sitting with them; they were cutting objects from scrap papers and making collages. E2 was both chatting with them in a very comforting and supporting manner. She was also discussing the plan of the day with E1. E1 was sitting very close to them but she was also watching out the children who were playing on the carpet.

Ercüment, Kayra and Kerem ran out of the classroom as the door was open. They started to play ‘fight’ outside in the hall. E1 noticed that and slowly went to the door looking at children. Children saw their teacher, came back to the classroom in a minute.

E1: Oh, thank you for not playing there. You did the right thing”.

The example demonstrates that teachers have control but not physically dominant on the children. They are checking whether children are ok, in need of help or hurting each other but they do not interfere with their play. The teacher, E1, helps children to realize that she is anxious about their being outside and come back. So, having control does not always mean dominating children’s behaviors.

Sharing power is another strategy that teachers of this preschool classroom make use of. When an activity is complicated, teachers try to ask for help from children so that they can also have an influence on the activity. During presentation times, the presenting child is given the most control; he or she can choose whom to ask questions, what to present on, etc. Sharing the day plan with children and accepting the changes they have offered is another way of sharing power with children. When some children lose interest, and do not participate in the discussion, teachers try to share their power of controlling the activity with these children, make them their assistants and try to get them involved back in the discussion. They let such children take attendance with them or choose the questions to be asked. Children react to being controlled in different ways. It depends on who the teacher is, how the instruction is given, the type of the activity, their interest, the classroom atmosphere, etc. Being in the classroom shows me that children sometimes feel too much controlled and get angry upon being restricted. There are cases in which children oppose to teachers' control by opposing to the school or classroom rules and decisions. They also oppose by not changing their place or by keeping their jokes even when the teacher asks them to stop.

Apart from children's direct reactions against being controlled, they try to share the power even if it is not offered to them. For example, they demand to be giving the instructions in activities; they want to be the one showing the movements in yoga and dance sessions. They have more power over what they are doing in free play time, the class assistant session and during presentations. Children obviously enjoy this sense of control as they try to protect it from teachers, not letting them interfere with rules. The following example illustrates how children want to be in control and give instructions during yoga and music session:

“E1 has been practicing making sentences in past simple tense with children and it takes for a while. She has noticed that some children have lost interest and started to move in their chairs.

E1: Maybe we should stop this game. Maybe we should not play. Maybe you are bored. Are you bored?

All children shout: Yees!

Yıldırım is pulling his chair and moving around a lot.

E1: Somebody has a warm blood here. So much energy. Yıldırım, come here and sit with me. You will be my class assistant for five minutes, ok? You will choose whom to pick and they will tell the sentences.

Yıldırım enjoys the idea but he changes the order of choosing children.

E1 (laughing): No, you cannot change it. I am the teacher, here.

E1 then gets children to do some physical activities with music. Children seem to enjoy them.

E1: Touch your knee, now. Touch your feet!

Teacher has given many ideas on how to move with music. She asks children when she is out of ideas.

E1: What do we do now?

Aylin: Lie down!

They all lie down including the teacher.

Elif shouts out an idea: Touch your toes!

Everybody laughs and tries this position.

Şebnem: Let's stand up. Knees up! Shake yourself. Do moonwalk in space.

Everybody is having so much fun!”

The anecdote shows us that children enjoy giving directions and being in control of the activity. They enjoy it probably because they can shape the activity and they have more fun. In the first part of the example, it is seen that the teacher tries to get one child involved through sharing power with him and letting him choose the child to speak next. However, as the reaction of the teacher clearly shows, when the child actually makes his own preferences and changes the order, the teacher gets back the

control again. Researcher-child interaction will be analyzed in more detail in another section; however, it is necessary to note here that children also want to have more control over the research process. They enjoy asking questions to me, the researcher like they are interviewing me; they include me in their games and give all the instructions on what I should do:

“It is free play time in the morning and I am sitting at the table alone, watching children play. Kerem comes to my table and tells me that he wants to play with me. Then he brings some paper and explains me how to make paper decorations. He gives me instructions and a piece of paper. I am trying to do exactly what he tells me. His instructions are as following:

Kerem: Fold it, Fetiye. Now, make it straight. Now, draw this. Ok, cut it.

These instructions are almost the same with how E1 shows children to do paper decorations in the morning.

When we finish paper-decorations, Kerem asks me to stick them on my bag. He looks so happy when I do it”.

The child, Kerem enjoys spending time with me, the researcher here. He has learned how to make these decorations from his teachers. Now, he teaches it to me. The child acts like a teacher while teaching it to me. He practices his power and agency while showing it to me and he enjoys controlling the whole activity.

#### 5.12 Conflict situations

There are fifteen different children in this preschool classroom so arguments become inevitable at times. What kind of issues cause conflicts in the classroom and how teachers respond to them will be analyzed in this section. The way teachers approach to resolving conflicts demonstrate many things about children’s participation; whether children are involved in the resolution, whether all parties are listened equally, whether children are supported to solve the conflicts by themselves. The conflict situations do not only exist between two children; there are sometimes

conflicts between a teacher and a child. Looking at conflict situations, we can see how children express themselves when they are stressed, how they deal with problems and whether their agency is respected in resolving the conflict.

It is necessary to start with understanding the conflict situations in this preschool classroom. There are times children hit each other especially during free play sessions. Certain children disturb each other with facial expressions during circle time discussions. A group of children consistently makes fun of one child, calling him some nicknames he wouldn't like. When teachers are busy with preparations, some children notice this and start fighting in the classroom although it is underlined in the classroom rules that no one can hurt any other child. Before the sessions start, children argue over where to sit on the carpet. During lunch time, children argue over whom to sit with. There is a specific child sometimes playing with the food and forks. During free play time, children argue over toys. Before going out to the garden, some children run and push each other to become the first person in the line. Children do not only mock each other but they sometimes laugh at a teacher and call her some names. Most children get really upset when they are called 'a baby' so most of the arguments start about this word.

#### 5.12.1 Resolution by children

Before describing what teachers do to help solve the arguments, it is worth noting how children react to each other and what they try to solve their own conflicts. When a child is hit by a friend, he or she asks the friend not to do it again. Children tell each other that they will be doing the same if their friends hit or hurt them. It should be noted here that children's fighting looks also like a game. They start playing with each other and then suddenly it turns into pushing and hitting and one child starts to

cry. Most of the time, children separate from each other and then start playing together in a few minutes as if they weren't fighting at all. At other times, children cannot deal with the problem and complain to the teacher, ask for help. There are many cases in which a single child is mocked, kept silent, felt sad, then stopped playing and talking to his friends.

#### 5.12.2 Resolution by teachers

When children start arguing, teachers firstly explain or remind the rule of not hurting each other. They try to calm children, offer help, talk to children and help them find a solution. Teachers try to make children understand how their friends are feeling.

When the argument gets longer, teachers take children outside the classroom, supervised by a third teacher, give them time to think on their action. As opposed to taking children out, keeping them inside the classroom is also used as a method.

When some children do not stop fighting even when they are warned, teachers ask them to keep inside the classroom when all the others are going to the garden.

If children are arguing over toys or games, teachers tell them to separate and play apart. When an argument influences many children in the classroom, teachers tend to stop the ongoing activity, make an explanation to solve the problem or talk about the problem with the whole class. Teachers offer options to arguing children, listen to them and support children to come to an agreement and shake hands at the end.

When children have conflicts, teachers remind their values of being kind and nice to each other and the classroom rules as well.

There are also conflicts arising because of language problems so teachers tend to ask for help from other children when they notice the need. The following example demonstrates an argument between two children and what the teacher proposes:

“It is activity time in the morning. Children are learning about seeds and soil. Yıldırım and Hamdi start arguing over who will do it first. Yıldırım looks very sad. E1 sees him and goes to talk to him.

E1: Are you feeling sad? Or angry? Or mixed?

Yıldırım nods his head, agreeing with the last answer.

E1: I understand. Just go, sit and relax. Think about it. I think you are not ready to play there with Hamdi”.

In this anecdote, it is seen that the teacher calms down the child by talking about and acknowledging his feelings. The teacher does not directly solve the conflict between the children but hinders it from getting bigger. Another example is taken from a conflict situation in which children are warned once but keep arguing later again:

“It is the beginning of yoga time. E1 leads the activity.

E1: Take out your shoes, please.

Orhan and Kerem are hitting each other.

E1 (two these boys): I think you cannot do yoga.

Orhan-Kerem: Why?

E1: Because you are fighting. Yoga is calm. Maybe you need yoga.

Then E1 starts yoga session; she shows the positions and children follow her. Most of the children giggle and have so much fun. Yoga session ends. E1 calls everybody to the circle. Kerem and Ercüment argue over something else this time.

E1: If you have fun here in yoga circle, stay. If you do not, please go out and spend time with T3 in the hall. Deal?

Children shake their heads, saying yes.

E1: Then, let's shake hands”.

The above example demonstrates us that the teacher is offering children choices and letting children decide on what to do as a way of conflict resolution. So, children's participation is supported in solving conflicts, too.

### 5.13 Children's participation in activities

The whole study focuses on children's participation in this preschool classroom. So all the components of data analysis are part of data analysis including classroom rules, teachers' questions, decision making process, classroom atmosphere, listening to children, children's agency and interest, etc. However, while taking notes in the classroom and interviewing teachers and children, I have noticed myself noting down exceptional cases as closely related to participation. These notes focusing specifically on participation in activities consist an important part of the whole data. This is why I have decided to open a separate part for them under the name of children's participation in activities. Under this theme, four different categories have emerged; ways of participation, how teachers support participation, barriers to participation, and the right not to participate.

#### 5.13.1 Ways of participation

From the first day on in the classroom, I have tried to understand how children express themselves, how they are included in the decision-making process, what their rights are, how they practice their agency and how they shape what is going on in the classroom. Although I try to have a child focused perspective, I am very much aware of the fact that no relationship in a classroom has one direction.

All the above processes are designed, shaped, changed, questioned, repeated, and dominated by both teachers and children. The degree of this influence determines the level of children's participation.

There are a lot of things which are shaped by children but so many decisions are made by teachers even before the children become members of this classroom. One of such decisions is the format of the activities. By activities, I do not only mean the activities constructed only for teaching certain objectives. In this section, it covers ways that let, encourage, support children to speak their minds, to express themselves as the members of the classroom, to join the decisions, to have more control than usual.

This specific preschool classroom and this private preschool are chosen as the field of this study for some reasons. The administration, teachers and the history and philosophy of the school all claim that the school is organized around the idea of putting children into focus so everything is shaped accordingly. Therefore, most of teaching and learning are aimed to take place during discussions in which children have chances to speak, too. The observational data supports this claim. Here are different formats of activities or ways of participation that foster children's active involvement; doing presentations, presenting homework, group discussions, two group debates, class games, doing experiments, class assistant sessions, story creating sessions, art activities, free play sessions, lunch time chats.

### 5.13.2 How teachers support participation

Teachers play an important role to give children chances to participate. First of all, teachers in this preschool classroom observe all children very closely and notice who are actively contributing to the discussion and who has already lost interest. Teachers turn most activities into group discussion format and invite all children to share their ideas. Teachers support children's discussions through questions. Although group discussions are more common, this preschool classroom sometimes has two group debates and help children to defend their sides.

When there are children who are not willing to participate, teachers do many things to get their attention back and to make them a part of the discussion. These methods include sitting with the child, asking him or her to assist the teacher, dancing with the child, etc. Most of the time teachers ask children what they want to play. Teachers prefer group games in which children speak and have the control. In free play time, teachers tend to avoid intervening with children's play. Teachers pay attention to individual children as well. They try both to carry out the class activity and to understand the child's needs. Teachers, most of the time, make it clear that they value children's opinions. They note down children's ideas, they listen to children carefully and they give feedback on children's ideas.

Apart from these, teachers try to relate the activities to children's lives; they create spontaneous and interesting games, let children experience new things. Some teachers of this preschool classroom try to integrate children's interests into the activities. They share responsibilities with children. Although it is not often, they try to share power with children too.

### 5.13.3 Barriers to participation

After listing many contributions that teachers make to children's participation, it is necessary to note down what they do that creates a barrier against children's participation. It is also important here to state that it is not only the teachers that build these barriers; it is also the children or the context as well. There are times teachers ask children to be totally silent while drawing or lunch time chats. In some activities or discussions, it is the teacher who decides on the topic and asks children to give their ideas; but the teacher does not ask children what they want to talk about or whether they want to participate. Such situations create a barrier to children's participation because when the topic is something that children do not want or are not interested in, they want to stay out of the discussion but they are thought as 'non-participating' children.

It is valuable to note again that children's participation becomes very limited in decisions that do not include children. There are cases in which teachers present a new topic which is unfamiliar to children and ask them to speak about it. Although most activities are organized around class discussions, it is usually the teachers who set the topics of these discussions as well. This is why there are almost some children who lose interest during the discussions. When teachers ask children to discuss certain things, to play certain games, or to draw certain pictures, children's participation automatically decreases. The same thing happens when teachers share the plan of the day with children but not accepts their ideas on the plan. As noted before, it is also the children who influence participation of their friends in this classroom. Some children try to speak all the time, shout out their ideas, or disturb their friends during the discussions and present a barrier against their friends' expression of themselves.

#### 5.13.4 The right not to participate

As it is the right of children to participate, express their ideas, be equal members of the classroom; it is also their right not to participate when they are not interested.

There are decisions made without children; like the song and movements of dance show and there are a few children who are unhappy about these decisions. When time is left at the end of the day, the class plays games together but there are times in which some children decide not to play the group's game. On certain days or activities, some children prefer staying outside the group and observing the class behind.

#### 5.14 Children's agency

Children in this preschool classroom show that they have interests; they have their own agenda and will through diverse ways. There are decisions in which children oppose to the teacher and defend their own decisions or ideas. If children are not willing to take part in an activity, they decide to stay out of it. They show their unhappiness with teacher or class decisions through their words and body language.

Play time is children's favorite time of the day. They almost always ask for more play time altogether. When children feel that some rules are unfair, they speak about them. There are things children want to decide themselves like where to sit at lunch time or what to talk about in their small chats. When a teacher intervenes and makes changes, they refuse to this intervention.

Children want to see that most tasks and responsibilities are assigned equally to everyone. So they want to know how the teachers decide on the class assistant; they question the practice of choosing. When the day plan is shared with them without being included in the process of deciding on it, children comment negatively on the

plan or they just refuse the plan. They are mostly willing to know about the changes in the plan if there is one. There are times when children oppose to the classroom rules. When teachers tell them to stop talking, they keep talking even when the teacher changes their place. When a teacher tells them to stop joking, some of them keep joking and laughing.

Children decide on their own roles and make their own rules during free play time. They create their own games; add rules to their games in free play sessions. When they want to play a game in the classroom or dance in the middle of an activity, they ask for it by shouting all together. This strategy usually works for them. Children show they are interested in the activity or discussion, they show it. There are things that children show their willingness, too. To shortly list them, it can be said that they are willing to know about the activity; they are willing to share their ideas and experience; they are willing to tell an anecdote about their lives and families and they are willing to experience new things.

#### 5.15 Interview with children

##### 5.15.1 Interview process with children

I had been waiting to conduct an interview with children for almost two months since I started doing observations in the classroom. I waited for some time so that I could understand the nature of the classroom, the structure and flow of the day and more importantly, I wanted to get to know each child individually. It was also necessary to give some time to teachers to be familiar with me and comfortable when I am around. When I observed the classroom, I realized that the activities are usually built on dialogue, talking, discussing as a group. Morning sessions and afternoon sessions

mostly start with circle time dialogues where children gather on the carpet, sit in a circle, each on certain spots and get ready to learn the daily plan and discuss a topic. I saw that they usually look comfortable while speaking to their teachers and friends. In fact, most of them enjoy speaking so much that they want to continue forever! So, I accepted this as an opportunity and shaped my idea of interviewing children around circle time activity. I asked Turkish teachers if they could spare some time for my interview in coming days and they were very collaborative. They shared it with children, reminded the day a few times beforehand so children got prepared mentally. I preferred doing the interview in Turkish session in the afternoon on purpose because I believed that children would be able to express themselves more comfortably in their native language.

When their daily activities finished, the class had a break and then teachers invited me to lead the circle time. When I began, I was feeling more nervous than the children. It was something very normal for them. They knew me and were playing, talking, spending time with me for some time. I wanted to start the interview by asking about myself and my role for two reasons. First, I thought that it would be a transition and connection to remember why I am in the classroom and why I am conducting an interview with them. I wanted to emphasize that it wasn't a lesson. Secondly, I wanted to understand how they saw my role in the classroom. I am happy to have asked this question because the children gave me so many different answers each describing what I do with them in the classroom. Their answers are analyzed in the 'Researcher's Role' part in detail.

The transition from my being in the classroom into my topic of research worked as a promising idea because I reminded children that I was there to learn about their lives and ideas and right now, I wanted to understand what they think about being a child.

I tried to cut the introduction part as short as possible and tried to make it interesting by asking them questions and letting them question my presence in the classroom.

Before I started taking their ideas, I felt the need to remind children that I would like them to raise a finger if they wanted to talk and listen to each other. There were more than fifteen children and it would be very difficult if they all wanted to speak together.

Elif asked me why I wanted this and it seemed that she did not really like to be reminded of this rule; it may be because this rule resembled a more structured activity and she expected to be more free or comfortable in our group discussion. Her agency to show her dislike and question the format made me rethink of my interview design. I started the interview by asking who a child is and what they think about it. Before the interview, I was thinking whether it would be imposing my own agenda by asking children about childhood, a topic that is not connected to what they have been doing in the classroom. However, children's strong excitement upon hearing my question made me felt relieved. It was obvious that they all had something to say and they wanted to say it right now. They gave me great answers, great because it was all their ideas.

I tried my best to thank each child and appreciate their idea after each answer. Here you can see some of my reactions:

“Fetiye: Who is a child? Let's think a little bit.... Ok, thank you so much. Whose hand is up in the air? Is it Lale? .....Thank you very much Elif, it is a great idea. Now Kerem and then Ercüment, ok?.... Alright, it is Ercüment's turn now. Thanks a lot Kerem...”.

When children saw me smiling and thanking them, they smiled back and looked very proud! Sometimes I had to repeat their answers to make sure it is what they mean or for clarification. In such moments, another child helped his/her friend or explained the idea:

“Kerem: A child is big.

Fetiye: Big. Ok, so what do you mean by big?

Şebnem: Sometimes there are bigger children, you know. This is what he says.

Kayra: Like the ones who go to university”.

The interview did not go in a format where I asked a question to a child and only he or she answered. Children wanted to add, make a comment or reflect on their friends’ answer, too. From outside, it looked like there wasn’t enough ‘control’ of me on the discussion but from my perspective, it was more than what I wanted because it showed me that children are genuinely involved in the discussion, wanted to be a part of it with their ideas and they were truly listening to their friends. However, at some point, when two children spoke in a row, another child complained about the voice and I had to remind the listening and speaking one by one rule again:

“Elif: A child is a baby.

Nil: A fat baby.

Fetiye: And you enjoy saying it this way, right? (Laughing) Ok, now another question is coming...

Kayra: I cannot hear when they talk at the same time. I cannot understand.

Fetiye: Right, Kayra. I will wait a little bit before my next question, then. Let’s move on girls and boys...”

After getting children’s ideas on who a child is, I wanted to learn what they think of being an adult or a grown up. In Turkish, I used the wording ‘Büyük kimdir?’, a word resembling the English word ‘grown up’ more and adult has a slightly different

connotation but children used both in their responses. Children's perspective on being a grown-up will be analyzed in a different section in detail; but I can state that it turned out to be a really good question to ask because each child gave me a different point of view. They mostly compared adults with children in terms of capabilities, responsibilities and physical appearance. At one point, they started to have the control of the interview with their jokes:

“Kayra: Grown ups marry.

Aylin: They have a moustache.

Kayra: Adults make movies.

Aylin: And they have a moustache

(Everybody laughs, including me)

Fetiye: You told me that before. Nice joke!

Elif: Nannies are big! They have a moustache, too, then!

(Everybody laughs again)”.

I enjoyed the interruption of the interview with jokes because it showed me that children want to be more in control and make fun out of it! I tried to share the fun with them and reacted positively to the jokes. As children were sitting in a circle, it was easy for me to see who wants to speak and contribute and I let each child give me his or her idea once but I did not think that some would want to speak one more time on the same issue. When I thought that I was finished with one question, a child said no:

“Şebnem: Big children can teach smaller siblings.

Fetiye: That's true. Now, our question is changing....

Kayra: But I was gonna speak about it!

Fetiye: Oh, of course, say it Kayra.

Kayra: Grown-ups make movies!”

I tried my best not to position myself like one of the teachers during the observations and especially during the interview. I have decided to realize the first interview as a group interview rather than one-to-one because being alone with the researcher would create some stress and pressure on the individual child especially if it is at the beginning of the research. In addition, in group interview, children would feel comfortable and familiar with the surrounding and their friends by their side so they might explain their ideas better. However, I must admit that the first group interview was harder than I expected. Children were all energetic and most of them were interested in what we would do together and they had been explained several times before about what would be done as part of my research. It was difficult but fruitful at the same time and researchers willing to work with young children might find insights and ideas for their future work here.

There were more than fifteen children in the group and before the interview, I was concerned that children might not want to speak or share their ideas, find the topic boring. It turned out that children wanted to speak a lot about my questions but all at the same time! So, as a researcher and facilitator of the group interview, I had to listen to every idea so I had to give word to one child while the others were waiting. I tried my best to make it fair, give adequate time to each child, react positively upon their ideas but at the same time I had to deal with recording the interview, saving the recorder from being broken into pieces as some children wanted to play with it, asking the child who is climbing on top of me to get down nicely, thinking of children's answers and how to make the move into the further questions.

These are far beyond one single researcher can do by himself or herself. It would be a good idea to get some support from a fellow researcher or from the teachers if no one is there. It would be another wise idea to split the group into two and conduct the

same interview with two separate groups. Reducing the number of children in each group would give each child more time to think and speak; more chances to the researcher to pay attention more closely what children are telling. Another issue is about timing of the interview. I had four or five questions in total and I thought that they would not take more than twenty-five minutes. The teachers of the afternoon session told me to feel comfortable about timing that they can be flexible and catch up with their pacing the next day. When we came to the end of the interview, I noticed that almost an hour had passed. Through the end of the interview, some children got disengaged, started playing with each other, lying down while some kept speaking willingly! As I felt the need to listen to the ones who wanted to share their opinions, I had to ignore the children who got bored. It would be a good idea to organize the group interviews around at most two-three questions and get extra help from teachers or other researchers to care about children who do not want to be there. There were times that I had to reorganize the children, call on their names and invite them to listen to the group more carefully:

“Fetiye: Elif, honey, could you just go back to where you were? Ercüment, Kerem, you can stay there. I will make sure you hear my questions. Nil, Hamdi, are you with me? The first question is coming...”

Fetiye: Great idea. I could listen and understand if everyone went just one step back”.

I knew that there were some children who would be interested in other things from the first moment on depending on the observations I had in the classroom. Hamdi was one of such children. So, I wanted to get his ideas first; “Can we start with you first, my dear Hamdi?”. Hamdi felt happy to be given the first word and spoke very enthusiastically. When ten minutes passed in the interview, some children stood up, wanted to move around and jump. It was what they needed, I know. I wished that I

had designed some techniques that would use jumping or dancing but I was short of them at that moment. And some other children were sitting and waiting to speak so I had to ask those standing up to get back to their position:

“Fetiye: Now, I am passing into the next question but if everyone sits back. No questions for the ones who jump!

Kerem: No question for you!

Fetiye: Ok, no questions for me (smiling)”.

Here the power of researcher is used when asking children to sit back and continue the interview but a child reacted with a joke by implying his unwillingness.

Sometimes I had to remind the children that I couldn't listen to all of them at the same time as they were all enthusiastic to talk without waiting for each other. Some children felt uneasy when interrupted by the voice and they had to be assured by me:

“Elif: When you are a kid, they... Ohh! So much voice!

Fetiye: No problem dear, I am listening to you!”.

As the voice level got to a level where we cannot hear each other, I had to stop as it was obvious that children weren't able to concentrate or they were interested in other things. So, I used a small game for transition:

“Fetiye: Let me check what everyone is doing, oh everyone is at their spots on the carpet, right? Thank you. Now, can you all make me a very sad face? Wonderful! Now a disappointed face, someone with a broken heart!

All children start laughing and they look at faces of each other. Their attention is back on the interview.

Fetiye: Great sad face, Kayra! Why did I do that? Because my next question is about something sad. What are the bad sides of being a child? Aylin, you want to go first? Ok”.

Till the end of the interview, I had to ask the support of teachers to be able to continue the interview. T1 and T2 were present from the beginning but they were

doing their daily preparations as I felt that they did not want to influence or interrupt the interview. When they realized that I needed help, one of them T2 immediately came:

“T2: Can we help?”

Fetiye: That would be great. I’m just trying to take their ideas but some are on another page.

T2: Dear all, Fetiye is doing a great job here. T1 and I really liked here. But this does not become fun when some children do not participate. Can I see everyone sitting nicely? Dear Hamdi, can you sit nicely? Look, T1 is looking at you over there. Fetiye told you that you need to raise a finger to have a word but I see no child raising a finger. All I see is that children both raise fingers and speak at the same time. But raising a finger means ‘I want to speak’ and waiting in silence. When can you speak? Yes, when your friend finishes his/her word. Now, let’s see if you can achieve this!

Elif: What if we cannot achieve?

T2: I believe you can”.

Teacher’s intervention here is important because this is how I became able to continue; however, some children’s disinterest showed clearly that there were problems with timing and design of the interview. Children in that group had the right to ‘get uninvolved’ because the whole interview was basically my agenda for them. However, as mentioned before there were children who really wanted to speak so at that moment, I had to continue the interview. T1 helped me by explaining the value they gave to my study and helped children by reminding how to take turns in speaking. She did this in a supporting, motivating manner. Still, there was a child who thought that it is a challenging task to accomplish and stated her concerns about it.

I designed the interview questions both relating to my research topic and also relating to my observations of children’s agenda in the classroom. There was something that I observed almost every day; children mocking each other by calling ‘a baby’. I will be

analyzing this situation deeply in other sections but here, I want to show how I incorporated a topic of observation into interview questions. I started the research with certain questions in my mind to ask children in the interview. However, the design of the research allowed and even supported me to make changes in the questions. From the first moment that I heard, I kept questioning what it would mean for a child to call someone a baby or how a child would feel when he/she is called a baby. I tried to understand it when it was happening but those were times of crisis or disputes among children so I couldn't ask it to children. The interview gave me an opportunity to carry out an issue on children's agenda into my research agenda. Here is how I started asking about this topic:

Fetiye: Now, can everyone have a thinking face? Look, I have one. We will need to think a lot. I am not sure if I should ask this question.

Elif: Why?

Fetiye: Because it is about a joke but I want a serious answer, not a joke. Can you do that? Are you sure? Are you sure no one will be hurt?

Children: Yes, please ask, ask Fetiye.

Fetiye: Alright! I'll ask like a journalist!

Aylin: What? Are you selling newspaper?

Fetiye: Funny! Ok, I have been here for two months. I look around, I note down what you talk, you know this. I noticed something. I do not know if it is good or bad. Some friends call other friends 'a baby' while making a joke. Is this true?

Aylin: For example, Kerem called me a baby during free play time

Halit: Sometimes you call me a baby, though.

Research: Right, I'm talking exactly about this. What is the meaning of this joke? Why do we call each other a baby? What is funny about being a baby?"

As it might be noticed, I was extremely careful about the wording of the question and how to link it to the interview because some children still might be feeling hurt if the joke is repeated here. So, personal disputes tried to be avoided or intervened here.

This dialogue continues for a while and everybody is really interested, giving me reasons, explanations, even telling me how to react on being called a baby. What their answers showed me was totally different from what I conceptualized so far. It was a good decision to check it with children, to find a way to ask about a 'hot issue' to children. There is a constructed meaning built on the word 'baby'; I got help from theory and my observation notes to understand it but children's own expressions helped me to better understand this construction or show me another perspective of the construction. There are dynamics, a complex web of relations among children in the classroom and only interpreting them through the help of children will help us, researchers to reach multi-facet realities.

#### 5.15.2 The role of the researcher

In the first group interview that I carried out with children, I started by asking why I was in their classroom. I had been in the school for almost two months and explained why I would be there. I asked this question as I wanted to understand what children think or feel about my presence in the classroom; how they perceive me. Children gave several different answers; to play with them, to help them, to take notes of what they say, to take good examples for my own class, to take their signatures, to have fun with them, to help them with English, to make a book, referring to my thesis.

Their answers are all describing what I have been doing with them in the classroom from the very beginning. My relationship with children is built on what is done together rather than what is in my mind. It is rather a concrete relationship. I do not have to own or practice one single role. I call this many roles of researcher in the classroom and children openly tell me what they were doing with me; both individually and as a group.

### 5.15.3 Children's definition of a child

I asked children the question 'who is a child?' in the first group interview for several reasons. My presence in the classroom has an aim; to understand children's lives and how they participate in the classroom better. I aim to look at children's participation by analyzing how teachers perceive children and I want to see how children conceptualize children and childhood. As this is an important part of the research, I wanted to ask this question at the beginning to remind children that I am curious about their lives and ideas.

Children gave me many different definitions of children. The most common answers are listed here; a human like a baby, son of a bigger person, small children or big children, sweet people, a baby, a fat baby. It is seen that children here describe or define a child mostly through physical features that differ them from adults or bigger people. They attribute positive features to children like sweet, cute, etc. Some define children as a younger or smaller form of a human. It is seen that some children see being a child not like a single category but instead accept two categories; they divide it into two; small children and big children.

### 5.15.4 Children's definition of an adult

I also asked children who an adult is. The aim was to see how they describe adults, which features they prefer to use. Here are the common answers I got from children; moms and dads, people who got married, people who have a moustache, parents, people who work, people who save money to buy toys for their children, grown cats, older sisters and brothers, adults, people who we must respect, people who make movies, grandmothers. It is seen that children in this group interview tend to define

adults by referring to the adults who are close to them like their family members. They generalize adults by depending on the roles or responsibilities their own parents hold like the necessity to work or save money. In addition, they tend to point to the physical differences of adults like their having a moustache. It is important to notice that one child emphasized that adults need to be respected. This may show the hierarchical power relations between adults and children and how children conceive what being an adult is. In Turkish, the word for adult means different things including adult, grown-up, big. The interview is carried out in Turkish and this specific word is used. Some children included their big brothers or sisters into adult category, probably with the influence of the vocabulary chosen.

#### 5.15.5 What is good about being a child?

After getting children's definitions on being a child and being an adult; I asked them what is good and bad about being a child. Through these questions, I aimed to discover how they feel about being a child, what parts of it they enjoy and whether there are situations they are not happy about. I did not have any prepared answers in my mind. I just wanted to see how they speak about childhood. I firstly asked good sides of being a child, then negative sides because I did not want to impose negative feelings from the beginning. Children gave very interesting and surprising answers. Here are the most common ones; not doing any work, not getting too tired, being able to play, doing easy jobs, not going to work, staying at home, going out, having a pet, sleeping early, going to school and doing fun stuff, having a party at home, feeding animals, having toys.

Children in this group interview mostly focus on not working and doing small and easy tasks as what they see as positive sides of being a child. They are aware that difficult tasks are not assigned to them as they are young but this changes in time:

“Halit: Children do not get too tired because they are not given much difficult jobs. They take easy jobs. But older children work on harder jobs in primary school”.

When giving their opinions on being a child, children automatically compare their lives with that of adults, mainly their parents:

“Aylin: When we are a kid, we sleep early so we get enough sleep. We have to go to school. Adults do not have to go to school as they are old enough. They can sleep however they want. They can sleep late. They can eat chocolate in the evenings”.

These emphasize the differences between rules for adults and children and it is clearly seen that some children are not happy about these differences. I do not ask the children the negative sides of childhood yet, but still children talk about them. When some children talk about school as a requirement, some count it as a chance;

“Ercüment: If we are kids, we can go to school and do very nice things at school”.

There can be as many different viewpoints as children; their individual experience and choices are reflected apparently in their answers. Last point to mention here is that children mention their love for animals and the importance of play in their lives all the time:

“Kerem: When we are a child, we do not go to work. We stay at home and play with our sister. We can have animals, cats and dogs at home. We can care for them. We can feed them. They love us a lot”.

It is obvious that every child talks about their own individual experience and life as a child. They describe childhood as a mostly happy and positive concept.

#### 5.15.6 What is not good about being a child?

Children are asked about whether there is any bad side of being a child. Their common answers are listed as such; not being able to drive, having to go to bed early, not being able to wear adult shoes, not being able to read when they want to, having to go to school, not being able to go far places, not being able to buy what they want, not having a car. It is seen that children here usually emphasize what they cannot do or their inabilities. These inabilities are caused by the rules that surround them, their physical differences, or the limitations around them. It can be said that children want to have more agency and control over their lives. When it is not recognized, it gets them upset:

“Kayra: Sometimes we want something and it does not happen. We get sad. Sometimes we go to bed when we do not want to”.

When talking about what makes them sad or the negative sides of being a child, they compare themselves with adults from the very beginning. However, at one point, some children want to emphasize the things which they can do but adults cannot:

“Kayra: Grown-ups cannot go boxing!”

“Ercüment: I can go boxing!”

Talking about the requirements they feel, children list ‘school’ as one. Children mentioned that in the good sides of being a child and also there are some children who feel it is not fair that only children have to go to school.

“Aylin: Kids have to go to school. Adults do not have to”.

But, then, again another child interrupts and reminds his friends a requirement that adults have in their lives:

“Halit: But they go to work!”

They might be said or feeling that school is children's responsibility and work is adults'. The fact that children in our study start comparing children with adults when asked to give their opinions about good and bad sides of being a child might result from the way the question is asked to them. My question is inherently categorizing children as a different group. If I had asked them to tell me the good sides of being 5 years old, being a boy or a girl, being a child in their family, they might have given different answers or might have looked from another perspective.

#### 5.15.7 The baby joke

The next question in the interview is about a joke children make for each other in the classroom. Since the first days of my observation, I've noticed that children call each other a baby. Some children do it all the time for certain kids; some children join this group at times; some children get called a baby and use it back for their same friends when they get angry. I notice that teachers use the term baby at certain points and for some purposes but they do not seem to be aware of this joke going around or they are aware of it but just ignore it. So, there is an issue going around being baby and this made me curious. I wanted to see the patterns of its use in the classroom, its functions. I also wanted to understand how children perceive being a baby, whether it has any relations with their conceptualization of being a child. One more thing that I looked is how teachers perceive and communicate their thoughts of being a baby in their daily uses in the classroom. For these reasons, I integrated the question about the baby joke into the first group interview. I started the question with an explanation because I wanted to let the children know why I was asking this question and In addition, I wanted to make sure that the same joke wouldn't dominate the interview:

“Fetiye: I have a question but I’m not sure if I ask it. I’m a little worried that it can start a big joke here. It’s actually about a joke. Are you sure you’re not gonna hurt anyone while answering? Can you do that?”

Children: Go ahead Fetiye, ask.

Fetiye: I’ve been here for two months and I look around, I note down your conversations. I’ve noticed a joke. I cannot decide if it is a good one or a bad one but you tell me. You call your friends ‘a baby’ sometimes in your jokes. Is that true?”

Upon hearing my introduction, children immediately recalled their experiences with the joke, but I had to ask my other question to let everyone speak about it:

“Aylin: For example, Kayra said Kerem ‘you are a baby’ in the play time today.

Kerem: But sometimes you call me a baby, too, Aylin”.

I interrupted there and asked the whole class what the joke means, why they call each other a baby and why it is funny to be a baby. From the answers children give, different codes emerge and the pattern shows me that the joke has a general function in the classroom; to hurt the feelings of a classmate; children emphasize that they mainly use it for kids who behave them not so well or who make them angry:

“Fetiye: What is the meaning of this joke? Why do we call each other a baby?”

Halit: Because they do us very bad stuff.

Aylin: They start first and then we say it back.

Lale: When someone calls a friend baby, the one saying it likes it but the friend does not.

I went on and asked a further question what they really mean by ‘a baby’.

Aylin: It is someone with moustache”.

This explanation showed me that they generally make jokes to make their friends angry by calling on physical features children do not have like adult body features or are not willing to have, like features or abilities of a baby. So being called a baby upsets someone because being a baby has negative connotations in their minds and they do not consider themselves a baby, but a child who is bigger than a baby. This was my first impression. However, at the time of the interview, I wanted to make sure of it and let children explain me clearly what they think of babies. At this point, something surprising happened because children started to give me positive descriptions about babies and how it is good to be a baby:

“Fetiye: Ok, I understand the joke now. But is it bad to be a baby?”

Aylin: Being a baby is great because we do not do anything. We do not go to school. Everyone takes care of us. We do not even have to go to toilet!

Halit: I think it is good because other people do our things for us and we just sit and relax.

Ercüment: Nobody can beat us and we enjoy sitting, doing nothing.

Aylin: No one gets angry at us. We do not know how to fight. They carry us around.

Kayra: Babies are cute; they are in somebody’s arms all the time”.

From such answers, it is seen that not all children have negative feelings about babies and being a baby. Indeed, they seem to miss some privileges they had as a baby like being cared for and being loved all the time. However, it is obvious that they want other children or adults to acknowledge the fact that they are growing; they have passed the stage of being a baby; they are bigger kids now. Although there are some drawbacks or difficulties of being a child, they are happy to grow up. It is important for them and being called a baby makes them angry because they want to show everyone that it is a step behind.

#### 5.15.8 Growing up

When I decided to shape the interview questions in the light of my observations of children's conversations in the classroom, I wanted to add a question about growing up and ask them whether they want to grow up and become bigger. I added this question because all I was hearing in the classroom were about being babies, what they can do when they grow up, and they were discussing what it means to die and who dies. So, these were all related to the concept of human development, stages of childhood. I wanted to understand how children perceive growing up and whether it is in any way related to their conceptualizations of being a child. I first asked children whether they want to grow up and give me their reasons. Fourteen children answered my questions and twelve of them started by saying that they do not want to grow up. Their reasons vary. Three of them gave 'not wanting to get old and die' as a reason:

Kayra: I do not want to grow up because when we get big, our life finishes and we get closer to death.

Şebnem: I want to stay alive a little bit more so I want to stay as a child.

Yıldırım: If I grow up and die, I will have to live under the soil. I do not want it".

Some kids gave the increasing responsibilities as an answer;

Halit: I do not want to get big because I have to be a father and do all the work.

Ercüment: If I grow up, I have to take care of my own duties. Now everyone does it for me".

Other children referred to the things they liked right now as a child and showed that as a reason:

“Lale: I cannot go to school if I grow up. I do not want that.

Ayşe: We can play games when we are little. I can stay home and play now. We do not really play when we get bigger”.

Only one child stated that she wants to grow up and gave ‘what she cannot do now’ as an explanation:

“Nihal: I want to grow up because where someone has a party, adults are invited but children cannot go”.

When children’s answers are analyzed, it is seen that they associate increasing roles and responsibilities with growing up. They refer to the small or big tasks their parents or adults around them do and they clearly state that they enjoy being ‘free’ of these tasks. There is one critical point I would like to make here. As stated earlier, children in this classroom are from families with very good financial and social resources. Nearly all mothers and fathers are working parents and nearly all children have a babysitter or a paid person to take care of them at home. Depending on the conversations that I had with children in free play times, I can see that these families have also other people working full-time for them in the house; for cleaning, for cooking, for driving or shopping. So, this extra help might give children the freedom of not having any responsibility at home and not doing tiring, hard tasks.

If children from different socio-economic backgrounds are interviewed, we might have seen them carrying out tasks and having minor or very important responsibilities in their family. As context and childhood lived change, the conceptualizations of children change, too.

#### 5.15.9 Can we listen, please?

The last question asked to the children is about listening. I decided to include it in the first group interview as the literature emphasizes the role and ways of active listening in realizing children's participation. Firstly, I asked each child what listening means and they gave me very different answers; thinking of something else, listening to teachers, listening to TV or radio, not making someone angry, sitting nicely, listening to the teachers, listening to our friends and learning something.

It can be seen from these answers that children refer to the rules about listening in the classroom. There are times when teachers warn the children by asking them to listen more carefully either to themselves or to their friends speaking. It is obviously a tool used by teachers for classroom management. Children remember this while answering:

“Kerem: Listening is thinking of something while speaking.

Kayra: Listening means not speaking and not pissing of a friend.

Nil:It means sitting nicely and quietly.

Lale: When someone speaks here, we need to listen to him or her very quietly”.

There are several functions and purposes of listening for children. Ercüment's answer represents this very well:

“Ercüment: We listen to the TV or radio. We listen to something. We listen to our teacher. It means not raising your hand until someone finishes speaking”.

It is usually the teachers children listen to at school and sometimes their friends. At home, they listen to their parents, mainly mothers.

“Nil: We need to listen to our teacher at school”.

Learning is a result or reason for listening as stated by children:

“Ayşe: If you listen to something, it means you are learning stuff”.

When asked about where and when children listen, they gave me these answers; circle times at school, when important things happen, when a friend talks, when teachers talk. It is understood from these answers that listening is a skill or rule that is encouraged in the classroom; it is mainly used for the purposes of classroom management, focusing children’s attention and teaching them to value each other’s ideas.

#### 5.15.10 Who wants to ask questions?

Listening question is followed by a related one; asking questions. It is included in the children’s interview as I wanted to see whether children feel comfortable about asking questions, how and when they ask questions. Asking questions is a way of participating in the classroom, getting involved in the flow of the lesson. When children are asked what asking a question means, they mostly referred to the classroom rules again:

“Ercüment: We can ask questions by raising a finger and without interrupting anyone’s word”.

Kayra: It means listening to somebody when they are speaking and then saying your word”.

Curiosity is a reason children pointed out:

“Lale: When we wonder something, we can ask it to our mothers and teachers.

Ercüment: People ask questions because they are curious.

Nil: We can ask things when we want to learn; the things we do not know yet. We can think, listen and ask those things”.

At this point, children want to make the distinction between speaking at home and speaking in the classroom:

“Kayra: At home, we just speak but at school, we speak by raising hands”.

Some children oppose to this:

“Kerem: But I sometimes have to raise my hand when my mom speaks”.

From their statements, it can obviously be seen that children attribute different meanings that are somehow related to asking questions. They refer to it as a part of one of the rules they should follow in the classroom. It is the classroom where they actually ask questions to each other and to the teacher. Many times, the questions come from the teachers. So, asking questions and listening are two related skills that are practiced in the classroom and there are certain rules about them children refer to. Children’s answers are mostly school-based. It can be understood as they spend most of their times at school, practice these skills in the classroom. Also, it can be the setting of the interview that influences children. The interview is carried out in the classroom so children might think that I expect school-related answers.

#### 5.15.11 The second group interview

The second group interview with children is held in the last weeks of the school year as the program was very busy before that and teachers could only find one afternoon available. In the last days of the school, children were having their routines shorter in the classroom and then started practicing for their end-of-year show in the garden.

When I came on that day, it was late afternoon and they had finished practicing for their sing and dance performance. The class was watching a movie in another classroom downstairs when I came in. I watched the rest of the movie with them. It was not a very structured day, as it seemed. Children were in the mood of play and chat. Teachers sent the kids with me to upstairs, their own classroom. I wasn't expecting this and children weren't informed much about the interview. When we came into the classroom, some children started running. Some others gathered around me and hugged me. It was clear that they needed some free time and play with me so I tried to give them some time to relax. However, it wasn't possible to start the interview even in ten minutes. So I decided to get help and call T2 to the classroom.

It was a promising idea for T2 to come because she knew how to calm children down and focus. She asked everyone to gather around her, hold hand in hand and make a circle. She gave them information about what I would do and which activities would follow the interview:

“T2: Yes, we are ready now. Can everyone stand up? Great. Fetiye will do an interview with you like she did before. We should use our time carefully because we have free time and activity time following this. Now, let's sit back and listen silently”.

I was feeling a little bit uncomfortable as the teacher was using her authority to get children in a listening mode but she was very clear, and gentle doing that and children were familiar with their own teachers and classroom rules. From this start, I've taken many lessons with me as a novice researcher. First, no matter how you plan, it is the children who define the rules. It is not possible to separate how they spend the day, their mood from the activity you offer them. Besides, they have the right to know what is waiting for them and I should make it sure that they are given

sufficient information. The day of the interview was discussed and decided with the teachers beforehand and they were familiar with the format but there were also the flow of the school day. The class had to do the get ready for end of year performance so they had to practice. Then the children got tired and wanted to watch a movie to rest. The problem was that as a researcher, I did not know that they were out of their routine plan. Whatever the situation is, the researcher should be ready to changes and have some energizing or calming games to use in urgent situations. It was a good decision to get the help of the teachers as they were experienced in using physical activity and routines to help children get ready for a group activity and focus.

I changed the format of the group interview in some ways. In the first interview, I asked the same set of questions to all the children and I noticed that it had some drawbacks as well as advantages for the researcher. Some children got bored while waiting for their turn to speak and some others tended to give similar answers with the previous children. So, this time, I decided to ask a different question to each child. I also put numbers at the back of their papers so children would speak according to their numbers. We did not have to follow the order in the circle. Also, I tried to make sure that each child could speak at least once.

For the last weeks, the class was working on recognizing letters and putting them together. I observed that they were mostly excited about finding the words that the letters represent and they enjoyed these sessions. So, I tried to integrate their interests and what they have been excited doing in the classroom to the interview. I prepared different words for each child; wrote them on small papers and folded them. When I gave them to the children, they had to find out what these letters represented. As I guessed, children enjoyed trying to read the words. I could hear their excitements:

“Nihal: Sc-hoo-l! I found it!

Kerem: It says f-r-fri-end. Friend!

Şebnem: I’ve already found it! I’ve read it!”

However, there were two or three children who were a little bit slow in putting the letters together. They were feeling sorry but I immediately offered help. T2 noticed it, came closer and helped. A better step was that some children who could read the words quickly like Şebnem and Lale offered help to their friends. Introducing the several topics of the interview in a game-like format made children more excited to speak and give their opinions. However, it took more time than planned. Before starting the interview, I explained children again what we would do together. I reminded them that there was no ‘right answer’, they could just tell me what they wanted or how they felt about their word. At this point, T2 was with us and she intervened by reminding the rule of listening for other friends:

“T2: Can I remind something? When your friend is speaking, you sit and you do not talk, right? You do not interrupt your friends and take their rights to speak. We do not talk to each other; we talk together and listen to each other”.

#### 5.15.12 Who is a best friend?

I asked the first child, Kayra, about his friends, best friends and what he liked doing with them. He listed Orhan, Kerem and Ercüment as his best friends and stated that he likes playing games with his friends the most, especially making legos. He told me that he also meets them outside the school and they meet to eat hamburgers at a shopping centre.

#### 5.15.13 What makes me sad?

Orhan had the word 'sad'. I included this word among the interview topics as I wanted to understand what makes children sad or happy at school or at home; whether there is any special issue they will mention. Orhan shared with me that he feels sad when he gets injured or hurt and he directly goes to the teacher to complain and gets angry. He did not complete his sentence while he was going to say what he would do when he got angry:

“Orhan. I get angry and I do.... No, I'm not gonna say it.

Aylin: I know what he will say!”

From the observations, I know that Orhan was warned several times about being involved in fight and suggested to calm himself down so that he wouldn't hurt anyone. This question reminded him of the strategy, I assumed.

#### 5.15.14 What makes me angry?

The next child was Lale and she had the word 'angry'. This word is chosen to be on the list as I wanted to see what makes children angry in the classroom and how it is managed at school. Lale explained me that she feels angry when her friends treat her badly or push her. Then she added that she speaks with her friends when she really gets angry.

#### 5.15.15 More garden time, please!

Şebnem had the word garden on her paper. As the researcher, I decided to include this topic as I listened to children during the interviews and class interactions saying that they enjoyed spending time in the garden a lot and wanted to have more time there.

When Şebnem read the word, she told me that she enjoys going out to the school garden and playing monkey bars there. She shared with me that they get the chance to go to the garden twice a day but she wanted it to be five times. While Şebnem was telling me how many times they go to the garden, Halit shouted ‘say a hundred, say a hundred!’ by smiling. This reaction and Şebnem’s answer might show children’s will to spend more play time in school garden and it is a valuable place for them.

#### 5.15.16 Children and school

The theme school was added to the interview questions list as there were discussions among children lately about going or not going to school in the coming year. It was Orhan’s word and he told me there everyone comes to school to learn things they do not know. There are teachers and students in the school. When I asked him how long he must go to school, his answer and reaction was interesting:

“Orhan: Well, I guess we have four more years, unfortunately”.

Orhan was one of the kids who were involved in the argument about not going to school with T2 so I wanted to see what he plans to do after these unfortunate four years. I asked him what he would do after four years. Kerem interrupted our conversation there and added that school does not finish after four years. Orhan was confused about the answer:

“Orhan: After four year, primary school, then university. I think all schools end after university”.

At this point, Kerem and Ercüment got involved and reacted to Orhan's answer saying that it was wrong and there is high school. They wanted me to explain which school to go and study more and they asked me very interesting questions worth sharing here:

“Ercüment: There is high school.

Orhan: Is that after university? What do we do after university?

Fetiye: You can have a master's degree after university like I do. But not everyone has to do it.

Kerem: What is it? What is it?

Fetiye: There is school and it is named 'master's degree' if you want to be a researcher but not everyone has to go.

Orhan: So, there is no school after university?

Fetiye: No, if you do not want.

Ercüment: High school?

Fetiye: It is before university.

Kerem: But you can study more if you want, right?

Fetiye: Of course, you can study until you are 100 years old if you like.

Kerem: What? But can I go back if I do not enjoy it?

Fetiye: Of course, you can”.

This conversation is worth analyzing because it shows many valuable points. It is seen that children are still under the influence of the argument over going to school that they had a few weeks ago in the classroom. Another point is that they do not have a clear idea about the steps they are expected to take in their upcoming education years. More importantly, these children talk about school and education as something they are forced to complete and want to know when this requirement will finish.

#### 5.15.17 Children and classroom

Ayşe's keyword is classroom. I asked her why we come to classroom and what we do there. She stated that they come to the classroom to do some activities; or maybe it is too cold in the garden and there is wind outside so they have to come to classroom. She shared with me that she likes the toys corner the most in the classroom as she can play there; and she feels comfortable when she works at the table. It is interesting to see in this answer that the child, Ayşe, conceptualizes school as a whole and thinks of classroom and garden (and probably other places in the school) not as separate places but as places of learning and playing that complement each other. Her favorite place in the classroom is the corner where she can play freely; this again shows us the importance of play in children's conceptualizations of school and classroom.

#### 5.15.18 My favorite activity

Activity is Halit's keyword. I asked him what kinds of activities he likes and he does not like doing. He enjoyed speaking about this topic and he told confidently to me that he is really good at drawing palm trees, humans, roads and grass. He adds that he cannot really draw cars that well but he tries.

At this point, other children start sharing what they can draw the best. It would have been better if I had thought that they would want to answer each other's' questions. Even in this short answer, it can be seen how a child can speak confidently about the things he can or cannot accomplish. He could have spoken about any activity that they do in the classroom but he focused on one; drawing probably because it is what he enjoys doing the most.

#### 5.15.19 Who is a teacher?

Aylin was given the word teacher and asked who a teacher is and what he or she does. She replied by saying that a teacher is a person who teaches things to people at school. I wanted to learn what she thinks about the role of the teacher and asked her what the differences are between a teacher and children. Her answer is worth sharing:

“Aylin: A teacher knows everything! She has finished all schools. She teaches something to the children”.

It is important here to underline the answer that Aylin gives about teachers; their higher status resulting from knowing more than the children. Teacher authority might be formed upon knowledge difference between adults and children in this classroom.

#### 5.15.20 Starting primary school

The next keyword is chosen as primary school as I observed several times children and teachers talking about how difficult it would be and it is aimed to understand how children feel about it. Elif gets the word and she tells that she does not go to primary school yet but she will later. Here, Şebnem and Yıldırım interrupt and add that there are almost a hundred days left to start primary school. Elif speaks very quietly and adds that she does not want to start primary school. When I asked her why she feels this way, she hesitates to answer and I notice that she might need time to share her feelings and I go on to the next child. While Elif was thinking, other kids shouted their own answers;

“Yıldırım: We do not want to start primary school because there are babies!

Kayra: Carpets have concert there!

Fetiye: Such funny jokes! Thank you for sharing them. Can I go on to the next person, now?”

I noticed that more children started to get bored and they wanted to be involved by making jokes and changing the agenda of the interview. I acknowledged their involvement and gave them a space and time to share their jokes. It is also interesting that some children literally count how many days were left for primary school. This shows the importance of starting primary school in their lives.

#### 5.15.21 What is a rule?

Nihal was asked about the word rule as I wanted to understand how children feel about the rules and their implications in the classroom. Nihal defined rule as something very important and she added that not yelling in the classroom is a rule she finds very necessary. Nihal is mostly a very silent, calm child. This answer may reveal that she is disturbed by the noise level in the classroom and wishes it to be controlled by the rules.

#### 5.15.22 Learning

Yıldırım was given the word learning. He answered by giving examples saying that he recently learned about how planes fly; how steam is used in vehicles and added that he enjoys learning very much. Yıldırım's answer demonstrates that learning is no confined to school learning. When asked about learning, he immediately refers to what makes him curious and engaged; understanding how vehicles work.

### 5.15.23 Feeling happy

Hamdi tells that he has the word 'happy'. He states that he feels happy when he plays games at school and when he plays with phones or eats hamburger at other places, outside the school. He adds that he is always happy; he never gets sad except when his mother asks back her phone saying that his play time is over. This short anecdote may show that the child, Hamdi, is more interested in the games at school rather than other learning oriented activities. He always refers to his wish to play more while talking about his happiness and unhappiness.

When the interview is finished, I thanked all the children for their time and contributions. I invited back to the tables; gave each of them a 'certificate' appreciating their participation in this research. When children saw the certificate, and made me read what was written there, they felt very happy and proud, showed the certificate to each other. I also prepared them a 'thank you' package of small gifts including their favorite sweets. I prepared the certificate papers in a way that they could draw and I told them that they can draw how they participated in my research, what we did together.

### 5.16 Individual interviews

Experiencing difficulties with the first whole group interview, I decided to give myself some time and think on how to get children's ideas in a different way, in a way that wouldn't disturb their natural environment or flow of thought. As I had been in the classroom for more than two months, children got used to me, most started to enjoy spending time with me. My interactions with them occurred mostly free play times, garden times, meal times. During free play, if they are in the classroom, sometimes I would join their games or sometimes sit at a table, take notes

or go over my notes. Many times, one or two children came next to me and wanted to chat with me about what I was doing. I noticed that children enjoyed my companion, wanted to be alone with me probably because I listened to what they were telling me very carefully. There were a few children like Halit or Orhan who avoided talking to me on their own but I found it very normal and tried my best not to disturb them at all if they did not want.

While going over the notes and record of the first group interview with children, I had noticed that some children might be feeling that they had to give the right answer or they might be influenced by their friends' answers. So, I decided to get their opinions individually this time but in a less structured manner. I purposefully did not want to design a structured, game-like format for this interview because I dreamed an atmosphere in which the individual child feels comfortable, can give intimate answers, can trust me and feel that there is not any pressure of giving the right answer. Also, this would give me the flexibility to alter the interview questions depending on the context; the day, what the child experienced that day.

I took the case that children liked spending some individual table time with me, drawing on my notebook while having a chat and I turned this into an opportunity to ask my questions to the children. When children came to me, I always listened to them first because they always had great stories to tell. Then, I openly told them that I wanted to ask them some questions and continued if they accepted. Almost all children did not mind being asked questions because it was a part of their chat with me. My questions in these interviews included what they thought about school, what rules mean to them and what they think of play. I did not ask them all to each child; I just went on by looking at the flow of the conversation. I chose to ask about 'school' because I was curious about how it is conceptualized in children's minds as an

educational institution. This curiosity of mine increased when one day a group of children openly argued with a teacher by rejecting to obey the rules and by sharing their negative emotions about school. So, in the following days I asked about school to these children and also what rules meant to them. I asked about ‘play’ because in the classroom, I heard children several times telling me or to their teachers that they wanted to play more, wanted more free play time.

These individual interviews are shaped mostly by the child. I played with them, drew with them, and talked to them at the same time. When I saw a child willing to speak, I kept asking questions. But when I felt that they were hesitant to speak, I stopped asking questions. There was one case that the child, Ercüment came to me while I was taking notes. He normally does not come to talk to me and he was speaking about how much he did not want to come to school in the morning so I thought that it would be a good idea to get his opinions. However, when he gave me very short answers and showed no interest in the topic, I did not keep it long. He was more interested in drawing a picture on my notebook and painting it. He might have found the topic of my questions boring, irrelevant or formal. So, it is always a good idea to keep an eye on how the child acts and feels and to adapt yourself as a researcher to children’s interest or motivation during the interview.

#### 5.16.1 Ercüment

I started the interviews in one afternoon session while children were around a circle and T2 was reading them a story. Three boys, Kerem, Orhan and Kayra had an argument with the teacher and teacher gave them an explanation of school rules. Children got angrier, especially Kerem, of being reminded about the rules. He had a long discussion with the teacher about why he had to come to school and why he had

to follow the rules. The detailed analysis of this discussion is made in another section but here I shortly summarize the issue to give my reason of talking individually with children. Upon seeing children's refusal about school rules and their resistance to the teacher, I decided to ask them questions about school.

Later that afternoon, I was sitting next to Ercüment and we were talking and drawing pictures together at the table. It seemed that he enjoyed our conversation so I wanted to open up the 'school' topic. I asked them whether he likes being at school, why he thinks we come to school and what he likes doing here in the school. He told me that he likes school. His reasons of coming to school were to learn something and to have fun. He enjoyed going out to the garden, playing football, playing catch and run games, and free play times. Although he listed two main reasons for coming to school; for learning and for having fun. He spoke about games and playing among his favorite activities at school. He might have given 'for learning' answer as he thought I might expect that or he simply enjoys fun part of the school more and he is interested to talk about it more.

Ercüment's answers were short. When I saw that he was not very interested, I did not want to continue the conversation not to disturb him anymore. He normally does not have long chats with me so he is not very familiar and the topic of the conversation, 'school', might have sounded formal, out of context for him. Therefore, I kept the interview short. Having individual interviews with children is important and valuable as it gives the researcher the chance to adapt the interview to the individual child's needs and interests.

### 5.16.2 Kerem 1

When Kerem saw me having a short interview with Ercüment, he came and told me to ask him questions, too. Kerem was also involved in the school argument with the teacher and I wondered his opinions but I did not go to him directly as I thought he could be a little bit under the influence of the argument. However, when he came to me for the interview himself, I thought that there are things he wants to share. I informed him about the topic and asked him whether he liked school. His answer is interesting and it, probably, reflects his emotions at the moment: “Kerem: I like school but not so much! I like it this much!”

Upon hearing this, I decided to ask him what he does not like here at school instead of what he likes. He listed ‘not being able to go to garden and not being able to drink water’. I took one step forward and reminded him shortly the argument they had with the teacher and whether he wanted to speak about it. He got a little bit angry and then he smiled and told me:

“Kerem: I already forgot it! We fight with Orhan like cats and dogs, ok? I’m a dog and Orhan is a cat. I’m a even Sivas (a city in Turkey) dog. We enjoy fighting so much. Good for us!”

He took my notebook and tried to write some words, one looks like a slang word referring to a body part and then he left by laughing. This incident is interesting in many ways and worth a deeper analysis. It reflects how a conflict might have emotional influences on a child and how it can be carried into the interview. His attempt to write slang words on my notebook and his statements of how much he enjoys fighting look like his own individual way of protesting. The child might see me as another adult figure or someone who reminded him of a conflict. This might be the reason of the protest.

When it comes to analysis of his answers, it can be said that although there are things he is not happy about, he still likes being at school. School itself is not the source of oppression but what children are told to do or not to do in the school. Kerem gives examples of the physical restrictions at school that make him unhappy; not going to the garden and not being able to drink water. School rules do not allow him to go to the garden or to drink water from the drinks-corner whenever he wants. Children might find some of these rules restrictive and against their nature.

### 5.16.3 Halit

In the same argument about school, Halit told that he wanted to quit school in a short time to his friends sitting next to him. The teacher did not hear it but I did and I wanted to learn about his ideas and why he felt that way. Later on the same day, we were having cookies at the same table and I thought it would be a good opportunity to ask him more about school. I started the conversation by telling him that I heard he wants to quit school and he proudly accepted it. I asked him his plans on when to quit the school. He told me it would be after primary school. T2 gave this information as the earliest time to leave school legally. I did not want to ask him why as it would be sensitive but I decided to ask him what he wanted to do when he left school.

“Fetiye: What do you want to do when you do not come to school?”

Halit: I want to play with my toys, watch television, watch cartoons, buy more legos, sleep and stay at home”.

I stated that I understood him and thanked him for his answers. He looked very still that day and I did not want to make the conversation longer. I did not want to make it look like a very formal interview. It obvious that these three children and the ones

who were involved in the school argument have some opposition about the rules, routines and limitations of school. Halit makes it very clear that he needs and wants some more free time. He is usually a very calm and slow child. He likes sitting and thinking for a long time. It can be seen here that he requests some time alone, without the disturbance of other friends. He lists the activities that he wants to do rather than coming to school. All point to the fact that children want to play more, in an uncontrolled manner.

#### 5.16.4 Lale

In free play time, some children came to my table and wanted to play hangman game on my notebook. This has become a habit for us. Every week, Elif, Lale, Kerem, Nil and Ayşe come and play the game with me. I write the letters of a four or five-letter word, they try to guess it. They get extremely happy when they find the word. As it is the last semester of preschool, they have started learning the letters and putting them together. This game is connected to what they have been learning in the classroom. Probably, they enjoy playing the game with a bigger person as it is more challenging for them. While playing Hangman, I also have a chat with them. We talk about what they are interested in; their hobbies, their newborn baby brother, the movie party they'll have over the weekend. My notebook has become a medium of communication between me, my research and children through children's wish to draw pictures on it and their request to play Hangman on it.

With the help of these small group conversations or sometimes one-to-one chats, some children started to feel closer to me. We both have fun and share something. They feel comfortable around me and in turn, I get to know them better. Besides, it is really enjoyable to spend time with the children. When I decided to ask some

children about 'school' issue, I did not only want to include those kids in the hot debate with the teacher. I also wanted to ask some other kids so that I can have a better picture and deeper understanding. However, instead of turning it into a formal, structured interview, I kept doing what I normally do and turned into an informal interview. Through these conversations, children give me more intimate answers. There is usually a relevant context. Children trust me and they feel comfortable around me and their close friends. We also can eliminate the 'right answer' pressure on them.

So, we were playing the game and Lale also joined the group. She told me that she wanted me to give her a word so that she could guess. I said ok and asked her if I could ask her a few questions while she was guessing the word. I turned the Hangman game into my interview and I wrote four letters representing the word school in Turkish; okul. After some attempts, Lale could find the word. She put the letters together and read it. She was very happy to have found it: "School! School! You wrote school here!".

As I knew Lale enjoyed drawing pictures, I asked her if she could draw a picture of a school. She drew happily her own school with a big garden, a play area and kids. I continued the interview on talking about the picture:

Fetiye: What does this school mean to you, Lale? What does it mean for you?

Lale: Toys, school bus, eating, then reading books. Sometimes unfair things about toys.

Fetiye: Well, why do you think we come to school? What do we do at school?

Lale: We learn staff. We sit and chat together".

Lale gives me mostly positive comments and reflects positive feelings about school but she also wants to underline some unfairness about things she values. An important thing here is that while she tells about what is done in the school, she describes the ‘format’ of teaching in the classroom; sitting, talking and learning. It is the circle time format she refers to.

#### 5.16.5 Şebnem

In the previous individual interviews with children, I asked their opinions and feelings about school, what they like and do not like about being at the school. They usually talked about the limitations or rules among things they do not like. Therefore, I decided to ask about the concept of rule to the next child. This time I did the interview with Şebnem. She is one of the kids who enjoy spending time with me the most. She comes to me in the breaks, plays with me and draws pictures on my notebooks. She makes me write long words and tries to guess them.

That day, she approached me herself and asked if we could play. I accepted it but this time, I asked her whether I can ask her questions about the word she will guess. She did not mind it. I wrote the five letters representing the word ‘rule’ in Turkish; kural. We played like five minutes and she finally guessed the word. She was very proud of herself when we guessed correctly. I asked her what rules mean for her. She immediately answered by saying that schools have rules. I asked her to give me some examples and she listed these; not throwing your toys around, not taking toys home, not stepping on toys and letting toy-cars pass in the garden.

Then, I asked her who make the rules. She listed teachers and school principals. Then, she wanted to add another rule; not drawing pictures. In the meantime, Nil came to our table and asked what we played and wanted to get involved. She

immediately listed the rules she thought of; not playing games, not drawing pictures, not going out to the garden. These answers from the very short but fruitful interviews show a lot. First of all, these children refer to the rules at school only. There might be more rules at school than at home or it can be the school context of the study that limits the answers. Children pointed at the rules that regulate or restrict the activities they enjoy doing; games, garden time activities, or drawing. Şebnem gave examples of rules only about toys.

From my observations in the school, I know that there are not rules like not drawing pictures or not going out to the garden. However, children may refer to the times these activities were shortened in time or totally missed when children did not follow other rules like not hitting friends or tidying up toys. So, getting children's favorite activity times shorter or eliminating them completely feel like rules or restrictions for children instead of behavior regulating decisions. These decisions might be leading to aggression and reaction against the idea of rules.

#### 5.16.6 Nil

It was free play time and I was taking notes on my notebook. Nil came to my table and wanted to draw pictures on my notebook. She especially wanted to use my pen and drew the picture of a girl. She asked me to teach her to write my name, Fetiye, on the paper. I gave her each letter one by one and she completed it successfully! She was very happy at that moment and I was happy to get my present from her. When there was such a positive, intimate connection between us, I asked her if I could ask her a few questions while she was drawing something else. She cheerfully accepted it. I decided to ask Nil about play because children mentioned an inadequacy of play hours both in group and individual interviews. I asked her what play means for her;

then her play friends. She listed toys, legos and teacher while defining play. She gave the names of her play friends as Ayşe, Elif, Aylin, Lale, Nihal and me, Fetiye.

We had to finish the interview there because T1 called all the children for an activity.

However, even this short dialogue showed me important things. Firstly, it is important for a researcher to build positive and playful relationship with children.

This relationship creates a ground based on trust for individual interviews and children themselves feel comfortable when researchers want their permission to ask them questions. It is also worth mentioning that Nil referred to her teachers and the researcher talking about play. It is seen that she gives meaning to the people around her through the interactions in their plays. Her stating me as a play friend can be a sign of positive relationship we formed in months.

The format of the interview is also interesting. It is completely a natural environment and moment for the child. She is not sitting at a separate place and under the stress of answering interview questions. She is drawing what she wants, having a chat with me and answering a few questions in this comfortable environment. However, it has its own drawbacks as well as it seen in the example that the interview is interrupted by the class activity. As the interview, I had with Nil was interrupted with the class activity, I looked for chances to complete it. I did not go to Nil and asked for the rest of the interview. Rather, she came to play with me again in the free play time. This time she wanted to play Hangman. It was a great opportunity for me to relate it to the interview. I wrote four blanks representing the Turkish word for play. She guessed the word by trying so many letters. When she found out that the word was play, I started asking her questions about play. I asked her what play is. She told me that it is something fun and she feels happy playing games. When I asked her when and where she played, she listed times after the lesson, in the classroom, at home and in parks.

When I asked her about her play friends, she firstly listed family members; parents, cousin, sisters, brothers, uncles and grandparents. While giving these names, she wanted to include the fact that her parents did not want to play with her sometimes as they felt tired after work. Then I asked her whom she played with at school, this time she only listed Elif and added that they cannot play sometimes as some children talk a lot and they miss the free play times.

It can be interpreted from Nil's statements that she thinks lesson and play as separate things although their lessons involve many play-like activities. These play-like activities may not be conceptualized as real play by children. She may be referring to play as something she does in an uncontrolled manner without the interruption of adult teachers. More studies are needed to understand it. In addition, it must be noted that Nil wanted to emphasize, without the question or leading of me, that she is not happy about her parents' being tired and not involved in her play although it is not always. Also, she refers to another problem that she cannot have enough of play times because of her classmates and their over talk leading to the shortening of free play times.

Here, Nil points out very important facts for us; play is a very crucial and meaningful part of children's everyday lives and they carry out their interactions and social relations through play. So, no matter what the situation is, they wait their parents to be involved in their play. Besides, in the classrooms of young children, when 'lesson time' is interrupted by children's talk, it is almost always free-play time that is sacrificed. However, even in one child's accounts we can see that free-play time is as important as lesson time for them.

### 5.16.7 Kerem 2

It is the second individual interview with Kerem. He saw me playing hangman with Nil and her answering my questions. He watched us for a little while and when we finished, he told me to have an interview with him, too. I couldn't miss this chance as the child himself was willing to talk. I opened a blank page in my notebook and he made me write 'Mr. Kerem – Interview' on the paper. Then he wanted me to write the same word Nil guessed correctly. Normally, I would have written a different word as I would think that Kerem might be influenced by Nil's answers. However, here I have accepted this because it was obvious that he wanted to be in the control of the interview and he is willing to talk about this concept; play. He made me recognize his agency of telling me that he has ideas he wants to share with me.

We played the hangman game for a while and he found the word 'play' at the end. After guessing the word, I asked him what play is for him. His answer must be quoted here:

“Kerem: Playing is doing what we want. We can do what we want; for example, playing with balls, doing craftwork, playing in the corridors and throwing arrows”.

Then I asked him how he felt while playing and he answered by saying 'so so'. To the question on where he usually played, he responded by listing garden and home. Upon hearing the answer of home, I wanted to learn more about his home environment and asked whether anybody played with him at home. He started saying 'sometimes, yes' but then he hesitated and changed his answer: “Actually, never. My mother gets hurt when she hears our crying noises and she gets a headache”.

I wanted to understand the conflict here more so I asked him why he cried: “I do not want play time to finish so quickly”. Then, I asked about his play friends and he

listed them as Ercüment, Kayra, my mother and my father. He repeated the last answer; ‘my father plays with me’. I wanted to clarify the conflict over play at home and asked him how much he could play: “There is a certain time. Until that time, I wanted to play”. I thanked Kerem for his answers and tried to finish the interview but he again showed me that he is and wants to be in control of the interview: “It is not finished yet! I have more words. I love playing with my mom and daddy”.

This short interview with Kerem opened up lots of doors for deeper interpretation. First of all, being in a research interview might be a chance and ground for children to use their agency and to speak their minds. Although I was doing this ethnographic study to understand children’s agency better, I failed to notice how strong children can become when the topic is something they really want to talk about. Here Kerem heard about the topic and directly made himself a part of the interview.

Besides their strong agency, it shows us how important play is in Kerem’s life, too. There are things Kerem is not happy about the amount of play in his life and he uses this interview as a medium to convey his protest /unhappiness. He openly states that he wants to have more free play time at home without restricted by adults but supported by adults. He clearly asks for the involvement of his parents in his games. Even in his final sentence that he added to the interview, he showed how much he enjoyed spending play time with his parents.

Another point is that he lists garden and home as places of play but not any indoor places in the classroom. There is again a separation in children’s mind about what is play and what is not. Kerem refers to play as ‘doing things we want’ and then lists things that are not allowed at school; playing in the corridors, throwing toy arrows. He is obviously not happy about being restricted about what he can and cannot play.

Kerem enjoys being in the interview, being asked questions, being listened to and maybe seeing that his ideas are valued, taken note of. It is important for all the children to be recognized and valued but here we remember that it is as much important for a single child to take part in this interview and having his name written on the interview paper. It is such an individual relationship.

#### 5.17 Interview with teachers

I had interviews with all four teachers of the classroom and the school principal. All of them are female teachers; working together for a long time at this preschool. I carried out the interviews till the end of the semester as teachers were more available around these times. Interview times are set by teachers and interviews are carried out in different settings inside the school building; in the waiting hall, in the teachers' room, in the classroom. I have carried out all the interviews in a quiet room, being one to one with each teacher. I have first explained the reason of these interviews to the teachers, presented them the interview protocol, asked for their consent in a form and asked for their approval to be able to use the voice recorder. Interviews lasted around forty-fifty minutes each. After the interviews, I typed the transcripts of the interviews, sent each transcript to the teacher by e-mail and asked if there is anything they want to change or add.

The interview questions have been developed at the beginning of the study; however, they have been shaped a lot during the field work based on my observations and issues emerging during the research process. I have carried out the interviews with the goals of understanding several things. This is why I have asked questions to the teachers on their teaching background, personal stories of being a preschool teacher, how they started working in this school, the working environment of the school, how

programs are developed, how they define child and childhood, how they support children's self-expression, how they make the classroom rules, how the decision making process is carried out in the school and in the classroom, how they listen to children, what they think about children's rights, etc.

Before presenting the analysis of teacher interviews, it is important to note here the common and different titles they touched on. All teachers talked about their teaching background, how the school develops and implements the program, how they view children and childhood; how children are viewed in the society; how classroom rules and decisions are made; the ways children express themselves and the ways teachers support it. There are different things that teachers or the principal underlined apart from these common points. The principal especially focused on the background of the school and school atmosphere. E1 wanted to add how she views exhibiting children's work and how to expand children's freedom both at school and in the society. E2 contributed by presenting her views on how childhood has been changing and how teachers include children's ideas in the classroom.

#### 5.17.1 Background of the preschool

It is important to start with background of this preschool because it helps to understand the school and classroom atmosphere; the working environment; how philosophy of teaching is constructed and lastly how program is decided, built and shaped. It was mostly the school principal who spent a lot of time on talking about how the school was founded and developed. Therefore, her words are included here. As the principal is one of the founders of the school, it is special for her personally as well. This private preschool is chosen for this study as it is a special one in the field.

It is one of the earliest preschools founded in the country and it has developed its own program; supported the authorities to create such programs in state schools. It is known as a child-centered school by many people. The principal tells how the school is opened and how the process is reflected on the governance of the school by then:

“Principal: This school has been on and working since 1974. It has always been a bilingual and sometimes multilingual school; Turkish, English and German. The owner of the school was German and she used to teach art lessons in the past. She had a child when she was studying at university. There was no place to leave her baby so she took her daughter to the university lectures. Then she decided to take over this school and developed it. She had business background and we had education background; this was an advantage. We never worked in a hierarchical relationship. We always worked together. Most of us have been working here since the foundation, for more than thirty years. This is a different synergy”.

From the statements of the principal, it is possible to see how she values being in the foundation of the school and determining the values of the school. The emphasis she made to working together is important here to understand the atmosphere of the school.

#### 5.17.2 The school atmosphere

As the principal reflects on the foundation of preschool and relates it to the school atmosphere, it is necessary to look at this topic in detail. She mentions the years of experience most teachers have here as an advantage and says that it contributes to the positive atmosphere of the school. She says that they all feel happy about working together despite the problems. She compares it with other private schools and says that teachers usually change schools in every four or five years; but it is not the case here. There is a term she uses to describe the positive atmosphere of the school; the climate of our school and she underlines that all different teaching methods and characters of teachers are appreciated and included in the school.

### 5.17.3 Teaching background

The foundation story of the school and its atmosphere show us that the contribution and experience of each individual teacher and their collective work mean a lot for creating the values of the school; so directly creating the school culture. I believe that it is essential here to add here how teachers described their teaching background and then to relate it to their practices in the classroom. As there are four different teachers in this classroom, it is possible to see four different stories. The most common thing in these teachers' teaching background is the long years of teaching experience.

When it comes to differences, both Turkish teachers and the English teacher mostly taught in this preschool; but E1 worked at as an English teacher at a university for most of her time as a teacher. Her decision of changing her career is in line with her perspective in life, her willingness in her job and her approach towards children.

Starting with E1, it is possible to say that E1 is a very experienced teacher having twenty-three years of teaching experience and she has been working with young children in the last twelve years of it. She used to work as an English instructor at university level; then she focused on teaching English and art to young children.

These are what E1 has told me at the beginning of the interview but there is more I would like to tell about her that I think affects the research and her role. She is a vegan and keen on protecting the environment. She loves animals and everything that is related to nature. She does yoga and teaches it to children as well. Her philosophy and life style shape how she approaches children and how she views teaching. She values each child's ideas and contribution in the classroom and she behaves children as individuals with equal rights. Therefore, I believe, I could observe that she supported children's participation in all parts of classroom activities.

The second teacher, E2 mentioned her teaching background very shortly. I asked her how she started teaching and how she chose to be a teacher for young children. E2 started teaching in this school and has been working here for eleven years. She studied English literature but after graduation, she decided to be a teacher. She mostly worked with very young children at ages three-four. She taught both in Turkish and English in the same school. E2 has a very positive and understanding nature towards children. She pays attention to listening to children, especially during close, informal chats with them in the mornings. She is a mother of two young children and she values having physical contact with children when they need love, encouragement or calmness. Her positive attitude and adaptability make it possible for children to approach her easily and for her partner, E1, to cooperate with her effectively.

The third teacher that I had interview with was T1. I chose to start the interview by asking the teacher questions on her teaching background. She told her story of how she started teaching:

“T1: I have been teaching since 1985. I started teaching here and I am still working here. I’m a graduate of vocational high school and I studied child development as my subject at high school. I chose it because I love children very much and I wanted to directly go into teaching after high school. Then, I had the chance to study at a university, in a very good one in Turkey. I was lucky, you can say”.

To add what the teacher says about herself, I should also mention her role in the school. She is one the teachers who has been working in this preschool from the beginning. She is close friends with the principal and other experienced teachers. She has an important role in developing the school’s program, philosophy and materials. She published books on methods of teaching preschool children; she has been presenting their work at many universities and conferences. She is keen on learning

new things and applying them in the classroom. I have met her in a presentation at the university I am studying right now and impressed by her perspective on childhood and how she described her relationship with children. Therefore, I have decided to reach her and carry out the study in this preschool classroom.

The last teacher interviewed was T2. When asked about her background in the profession, T2 explained that she has been teaching for twenty years and this is her twenty first year in this school. She chose this profession as she was interested in learning about psychology and she enjoyed being with children. She worked hard to persuade her parents to be able to study child development in vocational high school and then she continued university education by enjoying every moment of learning about children.

#### 5.17.4 School program

As explained in describing the research setting, the school has long years of developing its own program. In the interviews with the principal and teachers, how the program was developed became the focus a lot and it was related to the school atmosphere, participation of teachers in decisions, school governance. Therefore, this section is separated to learn about the perspectives of the principal and teachers about the program development.

Firstly, it is necessary to look at the words of the school principal. Working together as what the principal focused during the interview and it was also related to how the program was developed at this school. She mentioned the fact that from the very beginning, the administrators and teachers always worked together to design and implement the school program. She described the nature of relations between them.

She highlighted democratic co-construction of the program based on classroom needs:

“Principal: We have worked together since the very first days of program development. Friends (teachers) implemented the programs they designed and planned. Nobody has imposed anything to each other. Maybe this is our difference from other schools. Every year we come together; we follow the literature. In summer, our teachers choose something to work on and they study it. Then each teacher explains his or her topic to other teachers... This is how everyone works together and learn from each other. We value this”.

The next person who shared her opinions about the program was T1. As T1 had years of experience in the development of the school program, I wanted to ask her how they experienced collaboration in designing the program. She started by saying that they worked together with all teachers and everyone had contributions to the program. She added that there is no pressure of keeping up with the pace while implementing the program. She noted that each teacher integrates her own style to the program in the classroom. While talking about the program, I wanted to learn how the topics or themes are chosen and by whom. The teacher explained me that they all together decide on the topics and themes. Here is how she explains the process:

“T1: We chose the topics all together. Then, it is mostly in the control of the classroom teacher or the group of teachers who teach the same level. Each year we do written and oral evaluations on how the program is implemented; we discuss what we like and do not. Then we work on the next year’s program”.

It is important to note two things here; the first one is the nature of working together on designing and evaluating the school program. It surely contributes to the school atmosphere positively. The second one is the absence of children’s direct involvement in the program development. All together means all teachers but not children.

Lastly, T2 was asked for her opinions about how the school program was constructed. She started by telling that it is designed by all teachers together and the evaluation is done together, too. The teacher touched upon the individual differences of teachers and how they can adapt the program for their own classroom, for each child looking at learning needs and individual expectations. I wanted to ask what the teacher is thinking about including children’s ideas in the program. T2 agreed that

children contribute to the program through their suggestions and they shape the day plan:

“T2: This is how we do it; we integrate children’s ideas in the program. The child asks whether it is possible to do something in a different way and we try to do it. If it is something applicable, we make it real. If it is something we cannot do, we explain it to the child. For example, some children want to go to Disneyland for school trip. So we tell why it is not possible. One year, we were doing our art theme and we included many artists in the program. Once a child came from home and told that he researched an artist and liked her works very much and asked if we could include her in the program. We immediately changed the program and included this artist in the exhibition”.

Another example that the teacher gave on children’s contribution to the program was about games:

“T2: There are times when children change the pacing of the program. You say you want to start the session at 13:00 and do the group discussion. However, if children are not ready, it is better to ask them what they want to do rather than pushing them to do things they do not want. We ask them what they would like to do; especially in play times. We ask them what to play together”.

The teacher mentions the things children involve in shaping and these include games, exhibitions, day plan, places for school trips, etc. The teacher believes in the importance of including children in the classroom decisions, but on certain topics. As proposed in this thesis, it is obvious from teachers’ reflections that children try to shape the program of the school through their interests or through not showing interest to certain topics. Although some teachers notice this and try to include children’s wishes in the implementation of the program, children’s ideas are not officially included in the design and development of the school program. It is possible to say that there is very limited child participation in the development of the school program.

### 5.17.5 Implementing and evaluating the program

It was only the school principal who talked about how program is implemented in the classroom. It is highly important to include her opinions here because she underlined how teachers' differences are appreciated and how they are supported to take initiative. The term she used to describe the different approach of each teacher is worth noting here; the color of the teacher. Here is a part of her analysis:

“Principal: Even if two teachers implement the same program at two same-age classrooms, the color of the teacher should be reflected on the program. The colors and personalities of teachers are important. Each classroom has a different climate; one enthusiastic, one calmer. Teachers might be aiming the same objectives but their techniques will differ”.

About the evaluation of the program, the principal again highlighted the value of working and deciding together. She explained that teachers evaluate the program of that year both individually and as a group. They give importance to how the program and activities have worked out in their classrooms. They give their feedback on the next year's teacher. She underlined the fact that how each teacher is supported to be creative while reshaping the previous year's program in the classroom:

“Principal: Teachers change the plans on the programs almost always. I never ask them why they make these changes. I usually do not comment on the in-class activities unless the issue is a macro one. Teacher is the boss of the classroom and I do not interfere”.

It is possible to see from above examples that the principal is proud of sharing the power of making decisions with teachers. It seems that the hierarchy between administration and teachers is limited; however, it is also critical to note here that power is shared with teachers but not very much with children. It is good to know that the principal is not the only boss in the school; however, there are also disadvantages of teachers' being the only decision makes in the classroom about children's participation.

### 5.17.6 Image of child and childhood

How teachers view children and childhood is an important question of this study. I wanted to understand it through the statements of teachers and the principal during the interview and through directly asking them to define children and childhood.

Looking at all five interviews, it is possible to say that there are commonalities and differences between teachers' perception of child and childhood. Although all of them suggest that children are the center of most things in the school and they are individuals with their own opinions, some teachers believe that there is a certain distinction between adults and children, and it gives children less rights to speak their minds. There are also teachers who are aware of the natural differences of children and their need to be supported by adults but they point out to their rights as equal members of the society.

Firstly, the detailed analysis of the interview with the principal is shared here. The principal views children as people who give positive energy around themselves.

When asked how she and the institution define children, she explained that children are at the center of the school; all is designed around and for them. She called children as service takers and people who are addressed in their teaching philosophy.

I need to underline here that there is a contradiction between the arguments the principal made use of while defining children. On one hand, she underlined children's being active agents when explaining their influence on shaping the classroom and the school program as can be seen in the quotation below:

“Principal: You need to shape your program depending on the climate of the child in your classroom. You cannot just say I have done this and it will be applied so. The previous year's children might be very different from this year's children. Therefore, you need to modify the program according to the atmosphere of the classroom without giving up the basic elements of your teaching goals”.

So, this statement might be interpreted by showing that the principal accepted children's agency in shaping what is around them; the classroom atmosphere, the program despite its indirect nature. On the other hand, the principal made a slightly different definition or role of children when she was asked how the school as an institution views children:

“Principal: In this school, the child is the one we address, the one we provide service for. We do not aim to please parents and keep the child busy in one corner. Our primary goal is to make the child happy. He or she should come and leave here by enjoying it. However, it does not mean that the child spends time however he or she wishes here. I will be the one who will design and cater the program and the child will enjoy it the way I design it”.

As seen above, this quotation still refers to a child who has little or no influence in constructing the program. The teachers' and the administration's role is to create a program that a child can enjoy and the child is given the role of enjoying or making the most of it. The child is depicted to have a rather passive role here. The principal talks about happy children who are active and busy learners at school. She mentions that the whole aim of the program is to raise children as critical thinkers who can question any given information to them. She talks about the differences of children in terms of interests, skills and needs and she sees teachers responsible of flowering the children through presenting them different forms of instruction like arts, music, movement, science.

In the interview, the principal touches upon an important aspect; children as right-bearing individuals. While talking about how children and childhood have changed over time, she included how they behaved children at school:

“Principal: So, at the end, children are seen here as people who we provide the service for. We can discuss what we want democratically and we can find out solutions. Some families just cross this line and behave children as their friends or their peers. But here, we see children as children. Although they are

children, they have the same rights with me. They are children, I am an adult. We communicate together with equal rights. However, our abilities differ. I can think better than them. I can assess the past and future better”.

As can be seen from the statements of the principal, children are depicted as individuals with rights. The principal touches upon the issue of being equal in terms of rights and skills. Despite this approach towards children, it is important to note here that she describes adults as having better thinking abilities, slightly from an adultist perspective on children.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning here that the principal talks about children’s right to express their opinions. The principal explains how they value children’s ideas and how they support children to ask questions. These are all positive examples of supporting children’s participation in a preschool. However, I just want to emphasize the wording about children’s rights; “we give them the right to speak”. It seems that children’s right to express their opinions is seen as a favor by adults according to the principal. Principal’s referral to children’s common demands can be seen in the observational data. When children lost interest in a discussion, they start demanding something altogether by shouting the name; a game or a video. When children show this common agency, they almost always ‘win’ and what they want is done in the classroom. When it comes to E1, she described children as humans with their own choices and rights. While talking about children, she underlined their freedom, free will and agency a lot. She does not believe in classifications of children by age. She portrayed competent, active children, who have interesting ideas to share; who have every right to share their ideas. E1 mostly had a critical view on how children are behaved at schools and she believed that children are restricted a lot at schools. Here is an example of her ideas on children:

“E1: I do not really think that there is difference according to age in teaching. When people observe my classes, they say that ‘it is so good because children are free’, why should not they be free? I believe that we should approach every person as a human first. Everybody needs to have an area of freedom. Everybody should have choices... We always restrict children’s freedom in education here in Turkey. We always try to give something to children in education”.

E1 acknowledges that children are active learners and should be respected as they are; human beings with dignity.

In the interview with E2, I asked her own definition of a child and how children are viewed in this school. E2 described how she and the school defined children by saying that children are the center of everything in the school and they are asked in deciding the discussion topics. The teacher added that children’s hands-on experience is also valued a lot. The teacher explained the reasons why children are supported to experience different things by saying that learning would be more permanent when teachers follow children’s curiosity. As seen above, the teacher sees children’s participation as a way to support learning. She supports child-oriented teaching. She also mentioned how children who finish their preschool are praised when they start other schools. It is obvious that she is proud of how they talk about this school’s children as autonomous individuals who can express themselves well later in life.

The next perspective belongs to T1 about her image of child and childhood. When asked about her personal views and the definition of the school’s on child and childhood, T1 started by underlining that she views children as individuals. She described that children are beings who can understand everything going around them, understand the relations, realize many concepts if explained to them clearly. She added that children also need to be supported for their development. Then she explained the position of the school about this issue:

“T1: This preschool has the same idea with me too. This is why I have been working here for very long years peacefully. It wouldn’t be possible if our perspectives did not overlap. Here, our priority is the child”.

On the other hand, the teacher criticized how children are viewed and treated in the society and in some families. She believed that children are not listened enough; their ideas are not valued. She added that some schools also do not prioritize children’s wellbeing and ideas; they do not follow children individually; therefore, children experience some difficulties at schools. Lastly, the image of T2 about child and childhood is shared here. T2 made many different descriptions of children while explaining why she enjoyed working with children for many years. For her, children are energetic, competent, curious, and open to learn new things. T2 added that as children question everything, preschool teachers need to expand their horizons and keep learning continuously.

While speaking about the nature of childhood, the teacher introduced ideas that are different than the depictions she made above. She touched upon the innocence of children; their need to be loved and their openness to be influenced by teacher’s behaviors. Besides these, the teacher assigned two roles for children; the first one is asking for their rights and knowing their responsibilities. The second one is knowing the boundaries. Here is how she defends her stand:

“T2: I said confidence is important; surely our children should be individuals defending their rights but they should not be crossing some limits. It is important for us because ‘right’ is different from ‘boundary’. When a child crosses some boundaries, the right does not matter anymore. Of course, the child will have self-confidence but he or she will also know that there is a limit talking to someone. I am their teacher; there is a line between them and me. They should recognize this while talking to me”.

As seen above, the teacher has a different status as an adult and teacher in the classroom and she expects certain ways of behavior from children. So, believes in children's rights but she also thinks that these rights have limits.

#### 5.17.7 Children in families and society

Apart from teachers' own views on childhood, I see it as a necessity to include their views on how children are treated in the society because their reflections and criticism are indeed related to their own perceptions. E1 shared her ideas on children and childhood by commenting on their roles in the society and schools as well. She criticized how children are viewed in the society by saying that most adults look down at children; think of them as incompetent to understand what goes on. She believed that adults do not give children the right to speak at all. She also stated that schools are a part of this image. At schools, it is usually the teachers who decide what children like. The schools are not physically designed for children and children are not happy at schools, she believed:

“E1: We have turned our schools into terrible, sterile buildings and this is why our children are not happy here. They would be happier if they were playing with more mud and soil outside”.

While E1 criticizes how children are treated and repressed in the society and family, T2 had a different stand towards it. She gave examples from her own family and portrayed a different definition of a child. When T2 was asked whether children are encouraged to speak and express their ideas in their families and in the society; whether they are listened and involved in the decisions; she answered it by giving examples from her own family.

“T2: Well, I can speak about my family. My children have a right in decisions but it is in certain limits. This is a very rare example but suppose that she comes saying that ‘I decided to make my hair color red’...She needs to speak to me first; she cannot decide on this on herself. But we make decisions together on matters that interest the whole family. If there is something we can do; if there is an issue which we need children’s ideas, we ask them. In the society, children are asked to stop speaking saying that they will not understand things”.

Although the teacher criticizes the society in silencing children and not valuing their ideas, she also implies that she consults children or includes their opinions in her family if they need children’s decisions. So she believes that children can speak about certain issues and these issues are decided by adults; teachers or parents.

#### 5.17.8 Engaging children

After looking at teachers’ perception towards children and childhood, it is important to look at how teachers support children’s participation through engaging them in the activities in the classroom. Both E1 and E2 stated their practices about this issue in the interview. Firstly, E1 believed that there are many things they do to engage children and increase their participation in this classroom. She underlined the importance of carefully observing children; following their signals of interest; adapting the activity based on their interest and skills and being prepared with extra materials if children complete the activity in a short time. The teacher noted that she tries to give children the chance to experience different materials and work in different spaces in the classroom. She also believes in the importance of keeping children active and moving; that is why she tries to give kinetic breaks. She thinks that children learn the best when they are moving and imagining.

During the interview, E1 focused on children’s different skills and needs both as a group and as individual children. She stated that they pay attention to designing

format and timing of the activities thinking of the skills of each individual child.

Therefore, they try to give small duties and responsibilities in the middle of a focused activity to certain children so that they can find a way to deal with their energy.

Different from E1, E2 pointed out the language as a barrier and the function of listening to children as a way of assessing children's learning.

In the interview, E2 mostly focused on how to get children speak in the classroom.

She firstly mentioned English, a foreign language for children, as a barrier that limits children. She explained that children explain themselves better in Turkish, their mother tongue and they cannot discuss topics in English as deeply as they do it in

Turkish:

“E2: Sometimes I wish that I also do the teaching in Turkish; for example, there is a new topic and there are so many things you can teach about it. You see ‘the light’ but you cannot go to this light because of language barrier. This restricts me a little bit but it may not be the same for other teachers”.

The teacher continued by telling that they try to engage children by asking a lot of questions to children. She added that they also note down children's ideas before and after an activity because they want to see how much the child develops. She made an explanation on why asking children their ideas and noting them down is important:

“E2: Both before and after the activities, we write down what children think. At the beginning of the semester, they really say irrelevant things but later, we start to get very intellectual answers. We ask children their ideas because we want them to be curious; and also we do it to engage them in the discussion. We want to give them the feeling ‘I'm contributing to my own learning. I wanted to learn about this as I was curious’. To tell the truth, it is mostly adults who make decisions for children, it is the parents. They tell children ‘do this’, ‘do not do this’, ‘eat this’, ‘sit down’. We want children to have a right to speak at least about some simple things”.

The words of E2 speak for themselves in explaining the importance of involving children's ideas and asking them questions in developing their ability to express themselves. While explaining this, it is notable that the teacher accepts children are

mostly controlled by adults. However, the teacher argues that these adults include parents, not the teachers. This preschool classroom is seen as an area where children have more rights and more agencies compared to children's houses.

#### 5.17.9 Listening to children

Besides how teachers engage children, how they listen to children is also very crucial in determining the level of children's participation. As I observed E1 many times while listening to children individually and taking note of their ideas after activities, I wanted to ask especially her about it and how she thinks this contributes to their learning and participation. E1 told me that listening to children individually after each activity is purposefully designed to follow children's development and learning better. The teacher accepted that it also has a nurturing function for children. One point underlined by the teacher is very important here; not all children want to or can speak in a group so this is a chance for them to speak to the teacher one by one.

Besides listening to children individually, the teacher added that listening to them in groups is also very crucial. When there is a child who needs more time, there should be a fine balance between giving the child enough time to speak and not making it boring for other children, she believed. The teacher proposed that new methods should be applied to be able to listen to all children equally; having at least two small groups in the classroom and starting a chat club in which children can speak about anything they want in any format.

#### 5.17.10 Supporting children to express themselves

In addition to how children are listened, the ways they are supported to express their ideas is crucial in determining their participation in the classroom. Therefore, I wanted to ask teachers how they do it. Both T1 and T2 commented on this issue giving examples from their own practices. I asked T1 how the school and teachers support children to express their opinions in this classroom. She started by underlining that it is not the materials or equipment that are used but it is teacher's point of view that creates chances for children to speak their minds. She explained her stand by giving examples and details:

“T1: First of all, our attitude towards children is really important. I think that we care about children and create opportunities to have them speak. We base it on children's rights or let me change it with human rights. I very much believe that you need to give chances to children to have a word, to listen to each other and to discuss their ideas. We do it in circle time or group discussions”.

The teacher touched upon a subject that I also noticed a lot in the classroom; supporting participation of children who do not want to join the activities:

“T1: Children have at least one chance to speak. When they do not want to speak or feel shy, we try to find a way and support them, motivate them to speak their minds”.

I asked T1 which methods they apply to support children to speak and explain their ideas. The teacher suggested that teachers here observe children very carefully. They know and realize hesitant children. They let other children speak first and wait until hesitant children feel comfortable to start speaking. She also added that teachers' tone of voice and body language are crucial in making children feel relaxed and safe.

When it comes to T2, her ideas are not very different from T1 in this matter. When asked about the ways teachers make us to support children to express their opinions,

she highlighted that they value children's gaining self-confidence through asking questions and finding answers together in class discussions. According to T2, children are supported to listen to each other, ask why their friends think if there is a different idea, know how to disagree and explain. She added that teachers' role is only facilitating the discussion here. The teacher explained that children are individuals with a right to an opinion and they can express their opinions freely in discussions.

#### 5.17.11 Making rules

How rules are made in this classroom is a part of children's participation as it shows whether children are included in the process or not. So, I wanted to include this topic among my interview questions to teachers. Firstly, when I asked E1 how rules are made and how children are involved in this process, she explained that it was not a participatory process because of the barrier of discussing the rules in a foreign language:

“E1: We presented the rules by always explaining them. As we all stay indoors all day, we said that people might disturb each other this is why we all should be behaving in certain ways. When I think about it, I feel that it was a little bit authoritative because we wanted to make it short. It is usually boring in the foreign language and we have to make the rules at the very beginning. I guess we did not let children question the rules later on”.

As can be seen from the quotation, the teacher is aware of the limitations they had in participating children in the construction of classroom rules. The same question of how rules are made at the beginning of the year is asked to the second teacher in the interview. Like E1, this teacher mentioned the difficulties that language difference created in forming the rules. She explained that children mostly learn the rules in

Turkish and English teachers repeat the same rules a lot in English. When children do not follow a rule, she explained that teachers remind the rule several times as it is normal for children to forget it. As these were all what E2 said about making rules, we can say that discussing rules and deciding on them together with children are not practiced in English sessions of this classroom due to language barrier at the beginning and to keep the time spent for rules short.

When it comes to T1, she explained that they make rules together with children at the beginning of the year in a group meeting. They write down the rules on a paper and all children sign it. The teacher added that when there are violations to the rules, children remind them to each other a lot. T2 showed a different perspective about how classroom rules are determined. She told that they are chosen by children; however, at the beginning of the semester, some boundaries of what can be done in the classroom are underlined:

“T2: We first prepare some background for it. We wait for some time and underline what can and cannot be done in the classroom. Then the rules just come out, for example, ‘we should not be running in the classroom’, ‘we should not take our friend’s chair’, ‘we should wait for our turn’, etc. Some many rules like these come up. During the year, we may need to remind these rules from time to time. We tell children to follow the rules they have made themselves. We ask them to think about the rules”.

It is clear from the teacher’s statements that children are allowed to create some rules under certain limitations and leading by teachers.

### 5.17.12 Including children's ideas

I wanted to ask teachers whether children's ideas have an influence on classroom plans and whether there are any cases children do not want to attend the activity or propose a different topic. E2 explained me that she did not experience cases in which children did not want to do an activity but there were many times children wanted to talk about a specific topic. Here she gave an example from previous years:

“E2: For example, a few years ago children were so much into zombies! So we cleared out a day and talked about only zombies! We did research. We watched Thriller by Michael Jackson. They asked questions about zombies. So I do not remember a day in which children suggested to do something and we did not want it”.

Related to including children's ideas in the classroom plans, I wanted to learn whether children have any role in determining the content of child presentations. As there are two main different presentations children do in this classroom, we also talked about the contribution of them to children. E1 started by highlighting that there are two functions of presentations; they teach children how to express themselves and how to listen to others. One of the presentations is named 'my box' in which the presenting child brings a box full of photos, clothes, toys, objects from his or her babyhood times. It is the same topic for everyone and I wondered how this topic was chosen at the beginning of the year. I asked this to T1 to learn the reason. She told me that it was decided by parents to involve parents in school activities:

“T1: We (teachers) were brainstorming on what to do so we came up with this idea. The parents wanted to be with us in the school and we thought about how to include them here. The parent is an adult who is not here all the time so the children need to do and listen to the presentation in a serious manner as well”.

Topic of the presentation is set by the teachers and children's influence is not present in this decision. I also asked E2 how the classroom presentations made by children

contribute to them. E2 gave several explanations. Firstly, she argued that presentation is a chance for children to express themselves and to present their interests. Also, she believed that gives children new experience and helps them to socialize. E2 stated that presentations are also good for language development of children. The teacher explained the feeling they aim to give the child through presentations: “Everyone is watching me. I am on the stage”.

#### 5.17.13 Exhibiting children’s work: “Something to hang on the wall”

As stated before, there were issues only one or two of the teachers brought about in the interview. Exhibitions and its relation to children’s participation is one of such issues. It was uttered by E1 who had mostly a critical look at what is being done in the school about how exhibiting children’s work. She talked about art exhibitions and end-of-year shows as activities designed to please others like parents, grandparents. She touched upon the stress and limitation such work brings to children. She underlined that some children may not feel comfortable or they may feel nervous and afraid in such contexts. She criticized the fact that attending such shows and exhibitions are required for everybody. She explained that she rather preferred some unstructured activities in which children draw or dance freely and have a chance to discover language and themselves; to produce something they want. She offered solutions like making such shows optional or doing them in the classroom without the presence of parents and filming them for children for later use if they want:

“E1: For example, we have an exhibition. It really limits us. They say ‘do something that can be exhibited’. It is always stress and limitation for me. Whenever we want to please parents, we take something away from children. At other times, the child paints a few things and he or she discovers great things about the language and himself or herself. The child can produce but it is not ‘something to hang on the wall’”.

E1's perspective shows us that she is sensitive about children's freedom and agency to make choices. She suggests inclusion of their ideas in decisions and giving children the right to stay out if they do not want to be a part of an activity. The teacher, E1, continued the interview by saying that there are things they, as teachers, need do to expand children's freedom of choice in the classroom.

#### 5.17.14 Changing childhood

It was solely E2 who wanted to talk about how childhood changed over the years and why this change was not for the better. Although E2 expressed that children's right to speak and choose is important and their ideas are not valued at home, she gave a different explanation on how childhood has changed over the years:

“E2: Depending on my eleven-year experience, I can say that there have been so many changed both in children and parents. What goes wrong about children? I can say this easily because I have a child, too. Everything is too much child-focused. Children should be given the right to choose but there cannot be a right of choosing whether you want to go to school or not. The child can choose which shoe to wear or which meal to eat; that is ok. But asking them if they want to go to school; this is something children should not decide. Mother and father go to work, the child goes to school. This is the duty of the child”.

The quotation above shows that the teacher supports children's right to express their opinions and choose the things they want in certain boundaries. The teacher, E2, believes that there are issues that can be asked to children and there are not. Such a perspective sets limits for children's agency and participation. The same limits might be present in the school program and classroom activities according to what the teacher supports. The teacher might be consulting children about what to do in the classroom only on topics that she thinks children have a right to speak about.

#### 5.17.15 Supporting autonomy

It was again E2 who underlined the importance of supporting children's autonomy. She wanted to add that autonomy of children is supported a lot in this preschool. Children are encouraged to wear their own clothes, eat their own meals with little or no assistance from teachers. The teacher explained its reason by saying that children need to get ready for primary school and the transition to real life becomes hard when children are not autonomous enough. It is interesting to hear the phrase real life, referring to life after preschool or life in primary school as it might reveal teacher's underlying belief that childhood consists of stages and preschool is important because it prepares children for how to behave in primary school. It makes me feel that the here and now moments of children in preschool are thought as steps for future childhood.

#### 5.17.16 Democratic and participatory classroom

My last question in the interviews was about what teachers think of their own classrooms; whether they believe it is a democratic and participatory one. The answers of E1 and E2 are shared here as they are interesting to share. E2 answered the question saying that it is and explained it by focusing on the contributions of teachers. She argued that the importance of teachers and their practices are the factors that make a classroom a participatory space. She explained that this classroom has teachers who are idealistic and respectful to human rights. The teacher added that children's opinions are always asked in this classroom; their problem-solving ability is supported; they are encouraged to ask questions and develop as intellectual individuals.

Lastly, I asked E1 whether she believed that her own classroom is a democratic and participatory one. She said that she believed so and gave examples on making rules, deciding on classroom activities, and children's right to have a word:

“E1: I see this classroom as a democratic and participatory one. Beginning from determining the classroom rules, it is democratic. Or, we have a school trip activity, you missed that. Before the trips start, children choose where to go themselves. They want to go to some places. We visit the ones that are possible and explain why we cannot go to the others. Sometimes a child says that he or she wants to go to the kiosk in the corner (laughing). Children have a right to speak about many issues here so I believe that we give children chances to express themselves. We sometimes lead them into certain activities, though; like some games and activities. We do it in a way that will motivate the children and want to do the activity”.

As seen above, the teacher believed that her own classroom is a participatory one in which decisions are made democratically and she gave examples on the things children can choose or can have a word on. The examples she gave are in line with the findings of this study; children can make choices on limited issues.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

#### 6.1 Discussing the findings

Children's agenda represents what children prefer talking about or what they are interested in among themselves in the classroom. The topics of these discussions are quite diverse and rich in nature. Children's agenda is obviously different than the agenda of the classroom and teachers. There are very rare cases in which children's agenda has become the topic of classroom discussion. It is either given limited time and space or completely passed over. To get closer to the inner circle in the participation model I propose, topics of children's agenda can be given more place in the classroom. Teachers can design the discussions, projects and presentations by looking at what children are engaged in these days. To be able to realize, learn and note down what children enjoy talking about or what they care about, teachers can spend more informal time with children during lunch breaks, garden time or free play sessions.

The analysis of the data shows that children care about their relations with their friends in the classroom. They enjoy talking about what they do together after school or their plans for the weekend. Even this example can transform any activity like presentation. Teachers can ask children whether they want to give a presentation about a friend, about how they spend time together. This might engage children more compared to the presentation they are doing about the same topic for every single child. A similar thing can be said about children's families. Children come to school from home sometimes thinking about their siblings, parents or pets; they sometimes

feel bad over what has happened at home. It can be easily seen from children's dialogues that they want to talk about their home and family. So, teachers can give more time and chances to children to express how they feel and what has been happening in their families. It would be an effective way to turn a few of the group discussion times into opportunities for children to talk about their families.

The analysis of observational data shows us that although teachers' agenda and children's agenda are separate most of the time, children can shape what teachers present as an agenda by talking about their interests and by opening up new topics they are curious about. The extent teachers welcome this intervention is a matter of participation in the classroom. All in all, I suggest that the topics of children's informal chats could be used to shape what is discussed in the classroom to increase children's participation. From the examples and dialogues, it can be clearly seen that children can speak a lot about their needs. So, in developing the program and designing the daily activities, not only teachers' ideas on children's needs but also what children think they need should be considered. When we start listening to children, they make us realize their needs which we cannot even imagine like smelling the trees. Also, giving more voice to children to express their needs would be an effective step to foster children's participation in the classroom. By doing this, children would feel that their words are trusted and respected. Besides, they are regarded as important individuals who can express what they need.

The data shows us that children have a diverse range of needs; physical, social, psychological, self-expression, agency, etc. Cooperating with children to understand these needs would ease a teacher's job. This also shows that a teacher needs to follow so many things at the same time to make a participatory classroom possible and it is a very difficult task. However, this task can only be accomplished with the

integration and inclusion of children as learning partners in the classroom. Creating and applying classroom rules are chances for children to practice real participation, to shape the classroom along with teachers. The analysis of observational data and interviews show that some teachers have tried to include children in the rule making process but what they say between the lines shows us that teachers have already had some certain rules in mind and leaded children to discuss and accept those. Teaching in a foreign language has been proposed to be a barrier in creating and applying the rules practically by English teachers.

Most of the classroom rules are designed to regulate how children will speak and listen to each other. These rules aim to teach children to wait for their turns, to show respect towards what their friends are saying. When a rule is applied by a teacher but not accepted by another teacher, it is seen that it leads to confusion and conflicts in the classroom. It can be suggested here that all four teachers and children of the classroom should come together to determine and talk about the common classroom rules at the beginning of each semester. The data shows us that children have their own rules as well and these rules work mostly in their play time or friendship interactions. When classroom rules are ignored, how teachers react to children differ and it has a direct influence on the classroom atmosphere. It is important to note here that teachers might see a child not following the classroom rule but when looked closely, it can be understood that this child has needs different than other children. So classroom rules are not always built on children's needs and there might be chances for individual children to express why they need another perspective on a rule. It should be accepted by teachers that children want to speak among themselves and follow their curiosity. Instead of applying the rules strictly, changing the format of the activity and giving children more space and time to express themselves would

contribute to the participatory nature of the classroom. This preschool classroom is a small community that is built upon so many values like responsibility, fairness, respect and care, etc. These values are shared by both teachers and children.

Teachers support children to exemplify these values in their behaviors and remind them nicely if they are forgotten. The classroom is a place for its members to feel safe and comfortable. Having these values in practice might be helping children to feel that they belong here, to feel that they are appreciated and respected here. This promotes children's participation.

When children have the feeling of belonging, they take on more responsibilities voluntarily; they help to keep the classroom as an organized place so that everyone can enjoy being there. In addition, children ask for taking over more responsibilities as it is a way for them to practice agency and control. Children also wish for being respected about their choices as it signals respecting their individuality and the freedom of making choices. Having such values is a way to celebrate diversity in the classroom as well. The data from classroom observations along with child and teacher interviews demonstrate that how decision making works should be looked at all levels of interaction in the classroom. Decisions are made on which song to be listened, which activity to be done, when to start break time, which game to play or what to eat for lunch, etc.

Analysis of the data shows that there are certain issues children can join in the decisions like play time, songs and videos, story book, food, presentation topics, etc. However, when compared to what teacher can decide, children's influence on decisions is very limited. Teachers decide on most of the things that go in the classroom; program, timing, content, activities, most classroom rules, discussion topics, activities, materials, exhibitions, etc.

On the surface, it seems that children's making choices is promoted by teachers; however, there are boundaries of what children can decide. The level of implementing or signaling these boundaries change depending on the teacher and implementation of these limitations define the nature of children's participation in this classroom. Children show that they are capable; they have ideas or they do not want to do what is told to them on a certain issue by reacting to the decisions of teachers. Teachers welcome these reactions if they are about the issues children can have decisions on. If not, some teachers remind children their limits by making use of the control and power they have.

To be able to increase real participation of children and get closer to the inner circle of the participation model, children should be included more often in the decision-making process. Teachers should revise what they think about who can decide on the school program and its content, etc. and then should find ways to get children's ideas on them. When children's opinions are welcomed more, there will be less resistance towards involvement in the activities. In this preschool classroom, there are a great number of activities and formats in which children are listened to. Most teaching occurs in a group discussion format. Teachers try to give every child a chance to speak. Teachers listen to children carefully in an engaged manner most of the time. Children are reminded and supported to listen to all different ideas in the classroom. As there are four different teachers, how they listen to children also differ. When a teacher genuinely listens to a child by interacting with him or her through real questions, the child understands that he or she is being listened carefully. It is when the child willingly participates.

There are some issues to be discussed about the way of listening to children.

Although most activities are designed so that teachers can listen to children, the topics of these discussions are almost always set by teachers. So, children are invited to give their ideas on the issues that are given to them or asked to them. We need to think whether this contributes or hinders children's real participation. When children do not want to say a word in such a discussion, it might not mean that they do not want to participate at all. When children feel relaxed, safe and happy in the classroom, they feel more comfortable to express their opinions and to involve in decisions. The atmosphere of the classroom defines how members of it feel there.

The data of observation shows us that teachers have a significant role in changing the classroom atmosphere into a negative or positive one. There are cases in which teachers play with children, give breaks when they realize children's needs, join the fun with children. There are also other cases in which teachers stop jokes, remind the rule to be silent when children are enthusiastic to talk about something. The feeling each case gives children determines their level of participation.

The analysis of observational and interview data demonstrates that teachers taken on so many distinct roles in the classroom. We must accept that it is something challenging for teachers. Children get the support of teachers in diverse ways.

Teachers calm down children, solve the conflicts, help when they need, help children feel comfortable, etc. It is important to note here that children also support teachers during activities, when teachers need help with translation, by taking over responsibilities in the classroom, etc. Teachers almost always ask questions during discussions and presentations to children. Teachers try to support children to come up with new ideas, to foster thinking and to discuss challenging issues with each other. There are a lot of activity formats in which children are expected to ask

questions. However, there are also some cases in which teachers lead children to certain answers through their questions. The examples show us that children can understand what the teacher expects them to say and they try hard to find out what is in teacher's mind. Although it shows children's competence to understand the teacher, it is not a good sign for true participation. Children speak and answer questions not to discover something they are curious about. They only reply to please the teacher by finding the correct answer. To decrease such instances, teachers should revise what kind of questions they ask and why they ask them for.

Teachers have control and power over the classroom due to their status as a teacher and as an adult. Some teachers do not use this power overtly while some others think there should be an obvious difference between a teacher and children so they see this power as inherent. The analysis of observational and interview data highlights that children are mostly controlled by teachers in different manners. Teachers control the activities, the decisions, the rules, the pacing of what is done in the classroom. In some cases, teachers use their power more obviously when they feel that children start getting the control. Children resist more to being controlled when their informal chats are interrupted or stopped by teachers during lunch breaks or when they are asked to do something they do not really want to.

When it comes to relate the topic of control and power to children's participation, it can be suggested here that teachers can share this power more with children to engage them in the discussions. The examples in the data show us that children enjoy having small moments of control over the activities or presentations so such examples could be increased in number. It is also necessary for teachers to go over their views on child and childhood and equality to question the moments when they only make children do something through exercising power.

As there are twelve different children in this single classroom, there are also disputes among them from time to time. Children have conflicts over toys, classroom materials, game rules, or where to sit on the carpet. There are conflicts between a teacher and children, too. Both teachers and children take part in resolving these conflicts. Children go and talk to their friends when their friends do things that hurt them or make them feel uncomfortable. When children cannot solve the issue by themselves, they go and ask for help from teachers. Teachers promote children to deal with the conflict by themselves as a first step. They show how to resolve conflicts by talking to each other and telling how they feel. If it does not help, teachers talk to children separately and ask them to make promises on not to behave like this again. Teachers make use of distractions to avoid conflicts or they even consult to activities like yoga or dancing to make children let off the negative feelings.

Involving children in the process of conflict resolution is a practice that needs to be praised here. When children are encouraged to participate in solving their own problems with friends, they can express their feelings better and form stronger and healthier relations. When looked at the topic of children's participation in particular, I can easily argue here that there are some important numbers of ways of participation in this specific preschool classroom. The nature or format of the activities are especially important to note here as they can foster or hinder children's active participation. Teachers' role is essential in supporting children's participation. Teachers' way of asking questions, careful observation, close interaction with children and respect towards children's individualities have an influence on the level of children's participation in a preschool classroom.

So many factors can turn into barriers against children's participation like the content of a group discussion, the approach of a teacher, the classroom atmosphere, a conflict situation, the second language use, control of teachers, etc. I claim that preferring not to participate should also be viewed as legitimate as the right to participate. This study shows that five to six years old children in this preschool classroom practice their agency individually and collectively in different ways. Joining or staying out of the activities, refusing to top down decisions, preferring to chat about what they like despite the teacher's warnings can all be examples of children's emerging agency. The observational data shows it very clearly that children want to be recognized more as an individual with preferences and interests.

Apart from analyzing what happened in the classroom through observational data, it is also very necessary to try to understand the different perspectives of the research participants and it could be gathered through interviews. I aimed to understand how children viewed being a child and childhood at the beginning of the study so and the child interviews show that children define being a child through description of physical features and comparing children with adults. Childhood is no single homogenous category for children; they see it as a process which includes different childhoods. Children talk about responsibilities, duties and roles when they talk about who an adult is. They also underline the physical differences of adults. Children almost always refer to adults' obligation to go to work in a negative way. It is interesting to see from children's answers that children enjoy being a child and explain it in so many different ways. They underline the fact that they are free from many responsibilities and enjoy their time by playing, with their friends, through the activities at school. Children talk about the good sides of being a child by pointing at the negative sides of being an adult.

Children's positive descriptions of their childhood should also be analyzed by looking at their resources which are provided by their families and social class in the society. As it is suggested at the beginning of the study, the childhood depicted here by children is only one of many different childhoods in the society. It is worth discussing here that growing up is a very important issue for children. These children clearly separate themselves from younger children by referring to them as babies. They use baby as an insult word to mock with friends. Teachers and other adults at school seem to promote the desire for growing up. However, when children are asked whether they want to grow up, they mostly answered negatively and explained me why it is so difficult to be an adult and why they do not want to lose a child's comfortable and enjoyable life. It can be argued here that children's definitions of themselves are influenced by the expectations of adults.

When children are asked about the functions of listening, speaking in groups, asking questions to each other, they mostly talk about these referring to classroom rules, and the practices of group discussions. Children underline the differences between home environment and classroom environment in terms of speaking and being listened to; demonstrating that classroom speaking is mostly controlled and structured.

Child interviews reveal many other things. They clearly show that children value their friendships in the classroom. The things that make them feel sad or angry are always the arguments they have with their friends. It should also be underlined here that children demand more garden time as it is a need more urgent and vital than we adults suppose. Although children mention a few things they do not like at school, they mostly express that they enjoy being in their classroom and doing the activities. Classroom is an important space in these children's lives as they probably feel safe and comfortable here among friends and trustworthy adults. This should be kept in

mind in participation studies because if children experience negative feelings at school, this can directly influence their motivation for participation.

This study underlines a principal issue for researchers who are working with children. Listening to children as a group is not adequate to understand their agenda and perspectives. Finding and adapting ways to listen to children individually on their will is necessary in an ethnographic study with children. Through such individual interviews, I understand that children may tend to give the answers they think I would expect as they probably liken this interaction to the one between a child and a teacher. Keeping the interaction with the same child and asking similar questions again are ways I could suggest here. Children enjoy talking to a researcher who genuinely listens to them. They enjoy the idea of their words being noted even more. One to one interviews with children may reveal many things a researcher does not notice in the classroom. In my case, I could witness and understand how some children felt controlled and restricted at school and how they wanted to spend more and free time at home.

Adapting the individual interviews to children's interests is another skill a researcher needs to develop. This can only happen through careful observation of each child. I could make use of this skill and have many children play and speak with me through turning my notebook into a game board or a drawing notebook. Children want to take more control of the interview and they want to ask their own interview questions.

This can be regarded as an important contribution to the area of children's participation in research process. To be able to understand children's participation, one needs to look at the role of the teacher in detail. In our case, there are four different teachers in one single classroom and one very experienced school principal. These four teachers and the principal have been working for very long years. Three

of them are among the founders of the school. Talking about the background of the school, they all pointed out to this fact. They have explained that teachers and the school administrators developed a sense of trust and cooperation, took initiative most of the time and made decisions on how to design the school, the teaching philosophy, the program, etc. All four teachers highlighted the feeling of autonomy and freedom they have in adapting their lessons. The school principal made it clear that the differences among teachers are welcomed by introducing the term; color of the teacher.

Teachers' image of child and childhood meet at some points but differ at others. Although all teachers portray a very capable, active child with rights, some teachers point out their being equals to adults and need to be treated so everywhere. One teacher focuses on the needs of children and the support that should be given by teachers. Another teacher acknowledges children as competent beings but draws a very clear line between children and adults, saying that children's rights to participate in decisions are determined by adults and children should not cross some limits. It is obvious from this study on a specific preschool classroom that how a teacher views a child and childhood in general tend to contribute to how he or she behaves towards children, the interactions taking place, etc. This image of childhood is also in constant interaction with the determination of classroom rules, classroom decisions, and format of the activities. As one can infer, the image of childhood in teachers' mind has an influence on the level of children's participation, and the level of teacher support for children's participation.

It will not be right to say that teachers' image of childhood and the level of children's participation are all influenced and determined by the teachers of the classroom. As explained above a lot, so many varied factors are in reciprocal interaction to

determine how children's participation takes place. However, it is vital to remind the role and agency of children in shaping teachers' image of child through contributing to classroom rules, reacting to classroom decisions, asking for acknowledgment, demanding for more time and space for their ideas and interests. This research clearly shows that children are as important as teachers in shaping the classroom and the level of participation.

## 6.2 Placing the study in the field

The study has revealed many important things and contributed to the literature on children's participation. It is possible to say that results of the analysis and interpretation of the data are in line with many studies in the field. To start with, the research on this preschool classroom supports the suggestion of Theobald, Ailwood and Danby in that we need to look at children's daily activities to be able to have a solid understanding of their participation (2011). This study shows that a focus on daily activities of children reveals the function of free play, children's own agenda and rules in children's participation.

It is also suggested in Theobald, Ailwood and Danby's study that how the adults communicate with children in the classroom determine the nature of children's participation (2011). Adult-child interactions have an important place in my research on this preschool classroom. Children get the chance to express themselves, to shape the agenda of the classroom through these interactions. Adult-child interactions are good signs of teachers' attitude towards involving children and their perceptions on child and childhood. It is underlined in Theobald, Ailwood and Danby's work that not only adult-child interactions but also all social interactions of children should be

analyzed to understand how children participate as competent individuals (2011). Therefore, I spent an important amount of time listening to children's own conversations in small groups. It is through the analysis of social interactions of children that we understood how they value their friendships, how diverse their interests are.

Luff and Webster's (2014) study reminds us that it is valuable for young children to feel belonged to the preschool classroom so that they feel comfortable to participate in the activities. The findings of this research make it clear that the feeling of belonging is created through several classroom values like fairness, cooperation, sharing and helping each other. Besides values, children the feeling of being secure in order to participate as put forward by Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen and Ojala (2014). A further suggestion of Luff and Webster's (2014) study is that children participate more if their ideas are respected. The examples shared in the interpretation of my research demonstrate that children feel whether their teachers genuinely listen to their ideas and they expect approval and respect for their ideas. This analysis is also in line with Pramling-Samuelsson and Sheridan's (2003) findings in that children feel they are valued if adults around them care about their perspectives and support them to be involved.

Pramling-Samuelsson and Sheridan's (2003) study underlines the importance of availability in children's participation as well. The teacher-child interactions noted in this research showed that children felt more comfortable in speaking with teachers who spared them enough time to listen to their needs, problems, ideas or stories. Luff and Webster (2014) question the role of teachers in the governance of school and suggest that they need to have a right to decide on school issues so that the school can be a participatory place. The analysis of the interviews with teachers and school

administrator in this research supports this argument. In the preschool studied for this research, teachers create the school program, school rules and values along with the school administrator. This cooperation and equal contribution of all teachers determine the positive school atmosphere which shapes children's participation in return.

When it comes to teachers' perceptions of child and childhood, it is suggested that teachers' ideas are shaped by whether they believe children are agent and competent beings (Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen and Ojala, 2014). The findings of my research are in line with this study. The teacher interviews and classroom observations of teacher practices show that teachers who believe children are equal members of the classroom with ideas worth listening create more space and opportunities for children to speak for themselves and to participate. However, children are restricted and controlled more both in activities and while speaking when there is a teacher who believes children's rights exist but in limited manner and decided by adults. Speaking about teacher control, Emilson and Folkesson (2006) put forward that children's participation is limited by teachers' control and when there is a teacher who practices control over children, the chances for him or her to pay attention to what children are really talking about decrease. Supporting the claim of this study, findings in my research show that when a group discussion is carried by a teacher who tends to control children more, the teachers asks for children's ideas about the topic but does not really pay attention to their explanations. The teacher listens to the children with a purpose of fulfilling the activity. However, at other times, children are given feedback with verbal and facial gestures, supported to make detailed explanations when the teacher is a one who genuinely focuses more on children's ideas rather than the completion of the activity.

### 6.3 Significance and implications of the study

The study is significant in the context of early childhood education and research in Turkey in its own terms for several reasons. The literature review on the participation of young children shows that not a single study has been carried out with children at this age, five and six and with an ethnographic methodology so far in Turkey. It is the first and only long term, observational, ethnographic study that aims to understand how young children participate in a preschool classroom. Besides, the study is important as it includes perspectives of all partners; the school principal, all four teachers, all children in the preschool classroom. I have taken one more step and include my own reflections and voice to be able to present my own role in the construction and analysis of the study; this may make the study a different one among the others.

I might suggest that this research has contributed to the area through its practical implications, methodological implications and lastly conceptual implications. To start with the conceptual implications, the theoretical background of the study provides a framework for further studies to question and change the view of child and childhood in the schools and in the society. This theoretical framework can guide teacher education programs, in-service training of teachers in practice and the development of programs. In addition to these, the same perspective can lead childhood policy makers in Turkey in integrating children's voices and agenda to the policy notes. The methodological implications of the study are in line with the conceptual ones. This study proposes that children should be given more space, attention and value in research and there must be new ways and approaches to include very young children's opinions. This proposal can guide new studies on childhood in Turkey and help to raise children's voices.

Lastly, it is necessary to touch on the practical implications of the study. There are a great number of practical implications suggested by this research. To list a few of them shortly, it is possible to say that teachers should pay more attention to what children are interested in and what they are talking about in their free time so that these topics could be included in classroom discussions. Children should be viewed as equal members of the classroom and it should be applied in determining the classroom rules, values, in making decisions, in determining the content of the activities, pacing of the day, etc. There are many practical suggestions that can be taken out of this study and applied by preschool teachers, teacher candidates and practitioners in the field.

#### 6.4 Directions for further research

This study can guide further studies in several ways. Researchers who are willing to work on young children's participation in a preschool setting can start their research by knowing that there are so many factors interacting with each other. So these researchers can have a comprehensive approach from the very beginning. This study is conducted with children who are five and six-year-old children. It is an important contribution to the field of early childhood education in Turkey as ethnographic work on young children's participation is not studied much so far. Other researchers can initiate new research with younger children who are three or four years old so that it can be understood how factors determining participation change when the age group is totally different. The barriers against participation and teachers' role might be very different in different age groups.

In addition, further research can be done on children's participation in state schools. As this study is conducted in a private preschool classroom, it only explains the situation there. The findings might be limited by the social class of families, resources children can reach or the school's approach to children. All these factors and more may be very likely to differ in a state preschool classroom. Further research should compare the participation of children in state preschools and private preschools. Such comparison is needed in also state independent preschools and the preschool classrooms in state primary schools. Another interesting point would be to look at whether there is a difference between how children experience participation in their families and at school and whether the social class of their families influences this.

This study aimed to discover and suggest new ways of listening to children and it is achieved to some extent. Due to time restrictions and the schedule of the school, I could not carry out any project with children and that would have been great if we decided on the research focus with children. This missing point of this specific study can be turned into new further studies. Researchers can work on new, comprehensive, child-friendly techniques to work with children in research. When new tools are developed, they can be practiced and evaluated by other researchers and by children.

The classroom mentioned in this research had four different teachers as the program of the school required so. The model of participation I suggested and all the interpretation depend on this fact of four teachers. Participation of young children could be very different in single-teacher classrooms as availability, resources, attitude of this single teacher may vary. Besides, the classroom had fifteen children so it can be said that the number of children were not that high. Other researchers can

work in classrooms with higher number of children and see the differences in factors determining children's participation. This research underlines the importance of teacher-child interactions and the quality of teachers in promoting children's participation. There is a need for future research to look more deeply on the effect of teacher quality, the effectiveness of teacher education and their relation to how teachers view children and support their participation. This topic may gain much more importance as the preschool education has just been compulsory in Turkey and this decision will be applied all over the country in a few years.

As a last point, it is significant to note here that none of the children in this specific study is a child with special education need. I believe that it is urgent to look at participation of young children with special educational needs and disabilities in further research. Such new studies may change our understanding of what is needed for the participation of all children in a preschool classroom. Besides, there is an essential need to look at how immigrant children or working children participate, whether they are supported to participate as equal members of the classroom and what kind of difficulties they experience in practicing their agency and voice.

## APPENDIX A

### SAMPLES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How many years have you worked as a preschool teacher?  
(*Kaç yıldır okul öncesi öğretmeni olarak çalışıyorsunuz?*)
2. How did you start working at this school?  
(*Bu okulda çalışmaya nasıl başladınız?*)
3. How did you decide to be a preschool teacher? Do you have a personal story?  
(*Okul öncesi öğretmeni olmaya nasıl karar verdiniz? Bir hikâyesi var mı?*)
4. Have you ever worked with older groups? What kind of experience was it for you?  
(*Hiç daha büyük yaş gruplarıyla çalıştınız mı? Nasıl bir tecrübeydi sizin için?*)
5. What kind of main differences are there between working with younger and older groups, based on your experience? Can you elaborate on it?  
(*Tecrübelerinize dayanarak, daha büyük yaş gruplarıyla çalışmak ile küçük yaş grubuyla çalışmak arasında ne gibi temel farklar neler var? Bunu biraz açabilir misiniz?*)
6. If you think about the curriculum and educational approach of your school, where is the child in this approach? How is child defined?  
(*Okulunuzun müfredatını, eğitim yaklaşımını düşünürseniz, çocuk bu yaklaşımın neresindedir? Çocuk nasıl tanımlanır?*)
7. How do you perceive child personally? Do you have a different definition?  
(*Siz bireysel olarak çocuğu nasıl algıyorsunuz? / Buna ek olarak sizin farklı bir tanımlamanız var mı?*)
8. What are the clearest feelings and moments that you remember from your own childhood?  
(*Sizin kendi çocukluğunuza dönersek biraz, en net hatırladığınız anlar/hisler nelerdi?*)
9. How do children in your classroom express themselves?  
(*Sizin sınıfınızdaki çocuklar kendilerini ne şekillerde ifade edebiliyorlar?*)
10. What kind of methods and tools do you use to support children's ways of expression?  
(*Bunu desteklemek için hangi yöntemleri, araçları kullanıyorsunuz sınıf içi etkinliklerde?*)

11. Do you take children's opinions on diverse topics? What are these topics?  
(Çeşitli konularda çocukların görüşlerini alıyor musunuz? Hangi konular ya da durumlarda alıyorsunuz?)
12. Do these opinions change the education process?  
(Bu görüşlerin gidişatı eğitim-öğretim sürecini değiştirdiği oluyor mu?)
13. Can children decide on the activities and subjects in this classroom? How?  
(Bu sınıfta yapılacak etkinliklere, seçilecek konulara çocuklar karar verebilir mi? Nasıl?)
14. Should children get involved in the decision-making processes at school, in family and in society?  
(Çocuklar okulda, ailede ve toplumda karar alma süreçlerine dâhil olmalı mı?)
15. Do you support children in making their own decisions? Do you have any specific methods?  
(Bir eğitimci olarak siz çocukların kendi kararlarını alabilmelerini destekliyor musunuz? Kullandığınız bir yöntem var mıdır?)
16. How are the rules determined in this classroom?  
(Sınıfta kuralları nasıl, hangi yöntemlerle belirliyorsunuz?)
17. Do children have responsibilities in applying rules?  
(Kuralların uygulanmasında çocukların sorumluluğu var mı?)
18. What kind of problems do you experience in the classroom and how do you solve them?  
(Sınıfta ne tür problemlerle karşılaşıyorsunuz? Çözülmesi için neler yaparsınız?)
19. Are there conflicts in the classroom? What do you teach them to do about confronting different ideas?  
(Sınıf etkinliklerinde çocuklar arasında düşünce çatışmaları oluyor mu? Farklı fikirlerle karşılaştıklarında onlara öğrettiğiniz neler?)
20. Do you consider your classroom as a democratic, participatory one? Can you elaborate on it?  
(Sınıfınızı demokratik ve katılımcı bir sınıf mı olarak görüyor musunuz? Hangi yönlerden böyle olduğunu söyleyebilirsiniz?)

## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

Sayın veli,

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi İlköğretim Yüksek Lisans programımız öğrencisi olan Fetiye Erbil, 2015-2016 eğitim-öğretim yılının ikinci döneminde (isim gizlenmiştir) okul öncesi kurumunda büyük grupta yüksek lisans tezi saha çalışması yürütecektir.

Tez çalışması; okul öncesi bir kurumda çocuk katılımı ve öğretmenlerin çocuk algısı ile ilgilidir. Okulda çocuk katılımı kısaca “*çocukların dinlendiği, görüşlerini ifade etmede desteklendiği, görüşlerinin dikkate alındığı, karar verme sürecine dâhil edildikleri ve karar vermede yetki ve sorumlulukların çocuklarla paylaşıldığı*” bir model olarak tanımlanabilir.

Bu kapsamda dönem boyunca haftada iki gün (Pazartesi ve Çarşamba günleri), büyük grubunun derslerine gözlemci olarak katılacak, çocukların sınıf içinde birbirleri ile ve öğretmen ile olan etkileşimlerini inceleyecek, aynı zamanda çocukların kendilerini nasıl ifade ettiklerini, sınıfta bunu yaratan yolları anlamaya çalışacaktır.

Sınıfın öğretmenleri ile koordinasyon içinde olacak şekilde birkaç kez çocuklarla grup çalışması yapılacak ve onların ‘çocuk, yetişkin, haklar, sorumluluklar, karar alma’ gibi konulardaki fikirleri öğrenilmeye çalışılacaktır. Bu çalışmalar oyun formatında olacaktır.

Bu araştırma bilimsel bir amaçla yapılmaktadır ve katılımcı bilgilerinin gizliliği esas tutulmaktadır. Gözlem notlarında çocukların ismi yerine bir numara ya da kendi

seçtikleri takma bir isim kullanılacaktır. Tez çalışması sınıf etkinliklerini aksatmayacaktır. Hiçbir çocuğun gerçek ismi tezde yer almayacaktır; görüntü ve ses kaydı alınmayacaktır. Yapılacak her aktiviteden önce çocuklara bilgi verilecektir.

Bu araştırmaya katılmak tamamen isteğe bağlıdır. Katıldığınız takdirde çalışmanın herhangi bir aşamasında herhangi bir sebep göstermeden onayınızı çekmek hakkına da sahiptir. Çalışma hakkında ek bilgi almak istediğiniz takdirde aşağıdaki iletişim bilgilerimizden bize ulaşabilirsiniz. Çalışmaya onay vermek istiyorsanız lütfen ikinci sayfada yer alan kısmı bilgilerinizle doldurup, bize iletiniz. Desteğiniz ve ilginiz için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz.

Tez akademik danışmanı: Yard. Doç. Zeynep B. Erdiller Yatmaz

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Yukarıdaki bilgileri okudum, velisi olduğum

.....'ın/in sınıfında tez çalışmasının

yapılması için onay veriyorum.

Veli adı-soyadı:

İmza:

Tarih:

## APPENDIX C

### ETHICS COMMITTEE REPORT

Sayın Arařtırmacı,

"Okul öncesinde çocuk katılımı üzerine bir örnek olay incelemesi" başlıklı projeniz ile ilgili olarak yaptığınız SBB-EAK 2016/13 sayılı başvurunuz İnsan Arařtırmaları Kurumsal Deęerlendirme Alt Kurulu tarafından 28 Nisan 2016 tarihli toplantıda incelenmiř ve uygun bulunmuřtur.

Saygılarımızla,

İnsan Arařtırmaları Kurumsal Deęerlendirme Alt Kurulu

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