



## “I Have a History!” Life Sciences Teaching with Oral History Activities \*

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### Abstract

The course of life sciences aims to help students to recognize themselves, their families and their close environment. One of the elements helping this recognition process is history education. Students primarily recognize their own families thanks to history education. Later, they learn about the history and culture of the nation they belong to. Recognizing history and culture allows them to make sense of social rules, and thus, to form a connection between the past and present. This constitutes the basis for them to develop a historical understanding.

Studies in the literature show that teaching history based only on textbooks in primary school fails to develop historical understanding in students. Thus, the aim of the study was to present the contributions of history teaching by using various oral history activities on 3rd-grade students. In this study, the syllabus “I Have a History” designed by Diekema (1989) was followed for seven weeks. In addition, the activities named “Living Generations” and “Then and Now” prepared by Hickey (2017) were used. The model of the study was action research from qualitative research methods. The 3rd-grade students (n = 9) of a private school in Istanbul constituted the study group. The data of the study were collected from oral interviews with history students, semi-structured interviews with participating students, family trees, family maps, time schedules, time capsules, oral history interview self-assessment forms and the “Simultaneously Living Generations” and “Then and Now” activity forms. Content analysis was used for analyzing the data obtained.

The results of the study showed that oral history activities developed historical thinking skills of students, such as perception of time and chronology, establishing a cause-effect relationship and perception of change and continuity. In addition, the students realized that they had a personal history and that they were a part of history. Moreover, they had the opportunity to materialize and make sense of concepts difficult to understand for primary school students such as “time” and “generation”. Classroom teachers can

### Keywords

Life sciences  
Oral history  
Primary school  
History education  
Historical thinking skills  
Family history

### Article Info

Received: 08.29.2018  
Accepted: 03.18.2019  
Online Published: 09.30.2019

DOI: 10.15390/EB.2019.8132

\* This article is the extended version of the paper presented at the 4th International Educational Sciences Symposium.

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choose oral method to help students to make connections between the past and present.

## Introduction

People start to discover themselves after they are born. First, the family members and then people around them play an important role in this process since interaction with the family members and people in the social environment help them to know and recognize themselves. In later periods, individuals get the chance to recognize themselves better in a formal environment, the school. The primary school is the most important complement of this process (Tay, 2017).

In primary school, which plays a complementary role for individuals to discover themselves, the most important lesson allowing students to recognize themselves and their family is the life sciences course (Kabapınar, 2014). In this course, individuals are given the basic knowledge, skills, and values of the society which they live in. Individuals do not only learn about life but also recognize themselves and their environment. Aiming to prepare children for life in a sense, this course takes its subjects from the objects, phenomena and events children encounter in their close environments. Ultimately, the foundation for the knowledge, skills, and values that are necessary for students to become good citizens are laid in this course (Aladağ, 2016). Students are taught about a good attitude, a way of life and behaviors in this course rather than information, and therefore, they adapt to their environment more effectively and successfully (Binbaşıoğlu, 2003).

The life sciences course taught in the first three years of primary school (1st-3rd grades) (Barth & Demirtaş, 1996) is at the center of the education system called “public education”. This course has a close relationship with other courses taught in the first three years of primary school. With regard to this importance, other courses are carried out in connection with the life sciences (Binbaşıoğlu, 2003). Therefore, the scope of the course includes social sciences, such as history, geography and citizenship and simplified forms of sciences, such as health, safety, biology, physics and chemistry (Kabapınar, 2012). These subjects are dealt with systematically and in an interrelated manner according to the principle of public education.

History is one of the most important parts of the social sciences subjects taught in life sciences. History answers the questions of individuals who are trying to make a connection between the past and future. In this context, students have the opportunity to make connections between the past and future, to encounter new facts and to construct them by examining events and phenomena during life sciences courses (Aykaç, 2011). In this process, they earn an identity by learning the history of their families, environment, and country and gain a culture. Ultimately, one of the aims of history education in school is to create an awareness of history in students (Kabapınar, 2012). The historical consciousness that is desired to be given includes various historical knowledge intended for understanding and comprehending history as a whole, simple historical images and patterns, the life stories, families, workplaces of individuals and the cultural, social, political and economic phenomena that surround their cities, regions, countries and lives (Dinç, 2014a). Consequently, by gaining historical consciousness, students can make sense of the past and present of the country they live in starting from their close environments.

### *History Education in Life Sciences Curricula*

It is necessary to talk about life sciences curricula to make the position of history education in life sciences courses more understandable. Historical topics were first gathered under the theme of “Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” in the 2009 Life sciences Curriculum. In this context, the childhood memories of Atatürk, his personal characteristics, the fundamental changes that were made in Turkey under the leadership of Atatürk, the skills people have gained over time, their various habits, cultures, lifestyles, the games they played, the sports, the various growth and development rates of individuals were included. These topics are directly involved in the scope of history education. Upon analysis of some of the concepts taught within the scope of the related theme (past, now, future, background, toys,

calendar, change, comparison, republic, museum, time, continuity...), the place and significance of historical topics may be more clearly understood. Considering the skills desired to be developed, it is seen that research, recognition of the basic concepts of science and skills of perception of time and space are closely related to historical topics (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2009).

The Life Sciences Curriculum was updated in 2015. In the unit of this program named "I Love My Country", historical subjects such as historical and touristic works in the close environment (mosques, fountains, inns, Turkish baths, museums, castles, bazaars, bridges), cultural heritage elements (traditions, customs, food, clothing, music and folklore), The Ramadan, Feast of Sacrifice, 29th of October Republic Day, 23rd of April National Sovereignty and Children's Day, 19th of May Commemoration of Atatürk and Youth and Sports Day and the relationship of these holidays with Atatürk were included. In addition, in the unit named "My Home and My Family", subjects of recent history such as the childhood years of elders (such as the games they played and the technological possibilities of the time) and the history of school were included (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2015). Finally, although some changes were made in the life sciences curriculum in 2018, the outcomes involving historical topics have not changed (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2018).

The historical topics taught in life sciences curricula aim to allow students to recognize themselves, their families and their close environments. In teaching these subjects, it may be observed that giving students the skills of "perception of change and continuity" and "perception of time, chronology and place" is important.

#### *Teaching Historical Topics in Life Sciences Courses*

The aim of teaching history in life sciences course is to allow students to understand the history of their families and close environments and to give them a historical consciousness. To achieve this goal, teachers who will teach the course should know the history of teaching methods and techniques well (Dinç, 2009). The methods and techniques to be used within the context of history education in the life sciences course should be as concrete as possible and taught in a way to actively involve students in the learning process (MEB, 2018). Because it is important to teach an abstract field such as history (Çulha Özbaş, 2014; Şimşek, 2018) to children who are in the concrete processing period according to the cognitive development theory of Piaget (1977) through activities sensible via the five sense organs (Seefeldt, Castle, & Falconer, 2015). In fact, there are many examples showing that history should be materialized for children. The first example can be shown in England. History educators attempting to materialize historical topics in England have chosen materials appropriate for the development scheme of students in the 1995 History Curriculum. It was decided to carry out lessons based on concrete materials such as transportation vehicles, clothing and home types for students in the concrete processing period (7-12 ages). For this purpose, the curriculum was made to enable students to move from objects, family, and environment as much as possible (Ata, 1999). So, the program was organized according to the principles of teaching from concrete to abstract and from close to far. The second example pointing to the need for materialization of history is the findings of the doctoral thesis conducted by Şimşek (2006). In this study that comprehensively dealt with the development and teaching of the concept of historical time, students were asked to explain the concept of change with examples. When the examples that the students gave were examined, it was seen that they rather mentioned the indispensable elements of social life such as clothing, shelter, social life, transportation vehicles, writing/education, and nutrition patterns but preferred subjects such as democracy, thoughts and beliefs much less. Students presented historical change by associating it with their daily life experiences. Similarly, the results of another study by Şimşek (2007) showed that the concept of historical time could be taught from very early ages by materialization and with the appropriate methods and approaches. These three examples are important in terms of showing that concrete examples and activities related to daily life should be preferred in history education in primary and middle schools.

One of the basic qualities that history education wants to give students based on the consciousness of history is historical thinking skills. These skills consist of qualities such as

chronological thinking, historical understanding-comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical researching skills, historical problems, analyzes and decision-making (Demircioğlu, 2009, 2014). In connection with these qualities, various skills such as perception of historical time, chronology, change and continuity and historical empathy (Demircioğlu, 2005; Safran & Şimşek, 2006; Şimşek, 2007; İ. H, Öztürk, 2014; Sarı, 2014; Kaya, 2014; Demircioğlu, 2015; Doğan, 2015; Altun & Kaymakçı, 2016; Aktın, 2017; MEB, 2018) are within the framework of historical thinking skills.

For students in Turkey to acquire historical thinking skills and to be able to make sense of and materialize historical subjects, various methods and techniques are used. Of these methods, the traditionally well-known and used ones are a declaration (direct instruction) and questions-answers (Dere & Dinç, 2017; Uysal, 2010). However, these classic methods make the teacher active rather than the student and include a one-way transfer process. In contrast to these two traditional methods, a variety of methods that allow students to actively learn by doing and experiencing are also used. These include contemporary methods, techniques and activities such as discussion, drama, oral history and local history, guest speaker, museum and historical field trip and virtual museum tours (Şimşek, 2006; Dinç, 2014b; Ata, 2015; Çulha Özbaş, 2015; Demircioğlu & Demircioğlu, 2015; Kabapınar, 2015; Turan, 2015; Yeşilbursa, 2015; Sidekli & Gökdemir, 2016; Üztemur, Dinç, & Acun, 2018).

Of the previously mentioned methods, oral history has stood out in recent years in giving students historical thinking skills. Besides being a historical data collection tool, oral history has been used as a learning and teaching method in education practices for many years (Dere & Dinç, 2018). However, for the effective use of this method, a good preparation phase is required. First, in a good oral history study, the teacher chooses a subject –preferably from the curriculum- together with the students. Then, the students get familiar with the subject by making background research (literature review) on it. After the students learn the main aspects of the subject, the type of study is decided. In this instance, oral history studies can be done in three ways as with the whole class, individually or in groups. After determining the type of study, the students prepare the interview questions under the guidance of the teacher. With the clarification of the interview questions, potential source persons are determined. At this stage, students are taught how to carry out a correct interview through example interviews. In addition, how to record the interviews is discussed before the students are sent to the field, and solution suggestions are developed. After taking measures for the recording tools, the students go to the field for interviews. In this process, they simultaneously record the interviews and collect historical materials (photographs, items etc.). After the interviews are completed, the interview records are written down, and the data are analyzed, again under the guidance of the teacher. By analyzing and interpreting the data, various products such as articles, stories, compositions, presentations and newspaper articles can be produced. The products at this stage depend on the creativity of the students. Finally, a suitable place where the data can be stored is found, and the records are stored there (Angrosino, 2008; Doğan, 2015; Dutt Doner, Allen, & Campanaro, 2016; Trškan, 2016). When these steps are properly followed, a significant step is taken for a successful oral history project or study.

A well-planned and executed oral history study contributes much to the students in their academic, personal-psychological, socio-cultural and intellectual developments (Dere, 2018). In this context, while students collect historical information as amateur historians, they perceive time, chronology, change, and continuity and develop historical empathy skills by using scientific steps followed by historians (Kabapınar, 2014; Kabapınar & İncegöl, 2016). In addition, oral history studies contribute to the development of basic skills of students such as reading, listening, writing and speaking (Sears & Bidlake, 1991; Erickson, 1993). Besides these, thanks to oral history studies, students learn to conduct research and to record real events from the lives of people in society (Kabapınar, 2014).

Providing various contributions to students, the oral history method can be used in every subject that is suitable. However, at the primary school level, teachers use this method for students to research their personal and family histories. In this context, students do these family history researches for various purposes. The main aim for students to do family researches in oral history projects determined by teachers is creating a bridge between generations. The second is to increase the respect

of students for their own culture. The third is to have students recognize the historical subjects that are not in textbooks. Finally, it provides students with the opportunity to observe and analyze social interactions in their society within the social sciences (Yow, 2005). In addition, these studies ensure the recording of information between generations through interviews (Shopes, 1980) because connections get broken as family members increase and relatives expand.

While family research is performed with the oral history method in primary school, many other important teaching methods, techniques and activities are used. These include important practices such as making family trees, drawing circle and migration maps, timelines, time capsules and family box museums, "Then and Now" comparisons and "Simultaneously Living Generations" (Wieder, 1984; Diekema, 1989; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Şimşek, 2006, 2014a; Sarı, 2014; Hickey, 2017). The most common activity to do together with family history research is making family trees. Learning about their family members and their roles through these activities, students begin to think of themselves as a part of the family history. An efficient family tree format may show not only information about the biological parents of students but also the truth about three generations of family members (Hickey, 2017).

Students can investigate the migration story of their families within the scope of family research. After determining the migration route of the family, relevant places are marked on the map, and the information obtained in interviews is written on the map (Diekema, 1989). For example, the hometown of the grandfather who has migrated from somewhere is marked on the map, and a label such as "My grandfather's hometown" can be written on the map legends. In addition, where they started and where they reached at the end can also be indicated by an arrow. Similar to the migration map, students can draw thematic maps of their neighborhoods by only using pen and paper. This activity can also be performed as associated with oral history and local history studies.

Timelines can be used for primary school students to perceive time and chronology and see events from the past to the present simultaneously and comparatively (Barth & Demirtaş, 1996; Şimşek, 2014b). Using timelines in younger age groups particularly has many advantages. Children often find it difficult to distinguish last week from last year. Timelines help children to visualize and materialize abstract concepts like time and to associate it with their own lives (Hickey, 2017). In addition, studies conducted on primary school children aged 8-11 years using timelines (Hoodless, 2002; Duplass, 2010; Sarı, 2014) showed that tables helped them to learn and perceive chronology. However, it is very important that children use timelines to associate some facts with their lives (Safran & Şimşek, 2006).

Besides from chronology, the concept of "time" can be given to them by preparing a timeline of the class. For this, students can tell the important or memorable events of the last week on the board or on the computer screen and with the help of the teacher after determining them. After students analyze the timeline of the class, they try to make their personal timelines. In timelines, each horizontal line represents one year of the student, and vertical lines represent important events. Personal timelines, in particular, may include various things such as birthdays, first speech, first walk, favorite toys, and first day in school, when they learned to use a bike when they broke their arm or leg, or their first teething (Şimşek, 2006; Hickey, 2017). The personal timelines to be created to provide this information in chronological order can include time from their birth until that year (Şimşek, 2007).

The type of activity where timelines are used most intensively is called "My History" where students investigate their own past. In addition to learning about important events that students do not know or remember, this practice helps them make sense of their personal identity or family identity (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Within the scope of "My History" activities, activities such as time capsule, family box museum, "Then and Now" comparisons and "Simultaneously Living Generations" are performed. For example, in the personal time capsule, they put their personal belongings in the capsule they made from a box and display them. These could be a baby's bottle, socks, shoes etc. In family box museum, they can place the past belongings of their grandparents into a shoe box as in a museum and display them. Moreover, in the "Then and Now" activity, they can perceive change and continuity by comparing the past and the present in the framework of the information obtained from oral history

interviews with their grandparents (Diekema, 1989). Finally, the "Simultaneously Living Generations" activity lays the foundation for mathematical skills while teaching subjective and family history. In this process, first, a photograph obtained from a newspaper or anywhere else is brought to the class. This photograph should have a baby, a young mother, a grandmother, and a great grandmother. Through this photograph, the "generations" are introduced to students. Students discuss the memories of the people in the photograph by establishing a connection with their own life over the photograph. Meanwhile, students are given the following information:

*"You are the first generation,*

*Your mother and father are the second generations.*

*Your grandfathers and grandmothers are the third generations."*

After this information, this question is asked: *"How many generations live together at the same time?"* (Hickey, 2017). After this question, some students may talk with their family members (grandfather, parents, aunts and uncles) and obtain information regarding their generations and the past of their families (Wieder, 1984). By this way, meaningful connections can be established between generations.

There are many contemporary methods and techniques for primary school students to recognize, learn about and make sense of the histories of themselves, their families and their close environment. While these methods became apparent after the changes made in the curriculum in 2005 in Turkey, traditional methods are still widely used in primary school, and practices based on learning by doing are not sufficiently applied (Uysal, 2010; Aykaç, 2011; Demir & Özden, 2013). Life sciences courses should include practices that will help students establish connections with real life, achieve their goals and actively access information or participate in producing information. In light of the information available in the literature, one of the useful methods to be proposed is oral history. With the potential to be used in all suitable topics, this method could be benefited by life sciences courses a lot. Oral history is already intensively and efficiently used in history education in primary schools all around the world. For these reasons, the 3rd Grade Life sciences Curriculum was examined and various oral history activities were designed for the acquisition of *"LS.3.2.1. Compare the characteristics of the childhood of family elders and the characteristics of their own childhood."* (MEB, 2018). Because the statement *"Subjects such as the hometowns of family elders, things they liked doing, the games they played and the technological possibilities of the period are dealt with."* was included. It was seen that the aims in the statement were quite compatible with oral history activities. For this purpose, the 7-week lesson plan presented by Diekema (1989) in his master's thesis and the activities "Living Generations" and "Then and Now" prepared by Hickey (2017) are adapted to the related acquisition. Consequently, the aim of this study is to determine the contributions of history education done by using various oral history activities to 3rd-grade students. In this context, answers to the following research questions were sought:

- 1) What do students think about the oral history activities?
- 2) How students have perceived change and continuity?

## Method

The action research method from the qualitative research methods was used in this study. Action researches are performed to increase the quality of education (Johnson, 2015). The basic problem encountered in the education of historical topics in life sciences courses taught in 7-10 ages (primary school 3rd grade) in Turkey is that the subjects are abstract for the students. Students in this age group make sense of the world through concrete operations, concepts such as time, past, change, and continuity are abstract. Based on this problem, this research is designed to reveal the contributions of oral history containing concrete activities in the education of abstract concepts. The action research process was created based on the 7-week curriculum "I Have a History!" prepared by Diekema (1989) and the activities designed by Hickey (2017). The action process followed throughout the process is presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1.** Action Research Process

Implementation Weeks	Activity Name	Actions and Activities
1st Week	My History	In the first week, the students created their personal timelines with the help of their parents. For this, first, the class teacher prepared his/her own timeline and distributed it to the students.
2nd Week	My Family Tree	In the second week, the students created their own family trees, including their grandmothers and grandfathers, with the help of their parents. For this, first, the class school teacher created his/her own family tree and distributed it to the students.
3rd Week	Family Map	In the third week, the students showed where the people in their family trees came from and where they lived on the family migration maps they prepared. For this, first, the class school teacher made his/her own family map and distributed to the students. Then, the students made their own family maps with the help of their families. The purpose of a person living in a place shown on the map was noted at the bottom of the map.
4th Week	Oral History Interview	In the fourth week, the students conducted oral history interviews with the questions distributed by the teacher. In these interviews, the students compared their own childhoods with the childhoods of their grandparents in various aspects. In addition, the students were given the "Oral History Interview Evaluation Form" to evaluate their interview performance.
5th Week	Change and Continuity Practice	In the fifth week, the students practised the "Simultaneously Living Generations" and "Then and Now" activities using the information they learned in the oral history interviews. These activities were given for the students to perceive change and continuity.
6th Week	Time Capsule	In the sixth week, the students put various materials such as baby bottles, sweaters, and toys belonging to their personal histories in the time capsule they made from boxes and displayed them.
7th Week	I'm Sharing What I Learned	In the last week, the students presented the data and the materials they had obtained in the conference room with the participation of their families.

Throughout the followed activity process, various activities were used to improve the practice.

### ***Working Group***

The study group composed of 3rd-grade students (5 males, 4 females) of a private school in Istanbul in accordance with the purposeful sampling method (Merriam, 2009). The participating students were the students of the class taught by the co-researcher. In accordance with research ethics (Glesne, 2012), written permission was obtained by "Parent Information Form" from the students to participate in the study and to allow all the data obtained in the study to be used for scientific purposes. Nicknames were used instead of the real names of the students.

### ***Data Collection Tools***

Data were collected from personal timelines, family trees, family maps, oral history student interviews, oral history interview self-evaluation forms, time capsules, "Simultaneously Living Generations" and "Then and Now" activity forms and semi-structured interviews with students. Oral history student interviews were used to evaluate and understand what students learned during the interviews. Moreover, students were given self-evaluation forms immediately after oral history interviews to evaluate themselves. How the students perceived their own performances was seen over these forms. After the oral history interviews, the "Simultaneously Living Generations" and "Then and Now" activities were done for the students to perceive time, chronology, change, and continuity. With the answers given in these forms, their perceptions of time, chronology, change and continuity were analyzed. The semi-structured interview form consisted of 10 questions prepared by the researchers. Face-to-face interviews were done with each student using this form. In these interviews, the students were asked various details that could answer the research questions. Other than this, the data obtained from other weekly assigned activities were analyzed within the scope of the research questions.

### ***Analysis of the Data***

A simultaneous and continuous analysis was carried out as foreseen by the method (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008) throughout the course of the action research. The content analysis method was used to analyze the data in accordance with the research questions (Maxwell, 2018). For this, the data were coded within a general framework. In this coding method, a general conceptual structure is formed before the analysis of the data. Coding is done based on this conceptual structure. While a predetermined code list directs the content analysis in this way, the data resulting from the analysis of the data by an inductive approach are added to the previously formed code list, or the old codes may be changed according to the new codes. In a coding process such as this, general categories or themes are predetermined, and more detailed codes that may be included under these themes are identified as a result of the analysis of the data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). All the data collected in accordance with these principles were coded in the scope of the aim of the study and the questions it seeks to answer. However, when different concepts outside the predetermined framework were obtained, the codes were reorganized. In addition, the findings obtained as a result of analysis and interpretation were supported by quotations from the interviews, activity photographs and tables.

### ***Reliability and Validity Studies***

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research, various issues recommended by Maxwell (2018) and Johnson (2015) were taken into consideration. In this context, the researcher-teacher has always been present in the data collection process and has made observations. The interview records were written down word-for-word. 9 different data sources (source variation) were used to confirm the findings. In addition, the data were analyzed separately by both two researchers, and then the obtained findings were discussed and interpreted together. Finally, in the analysis process, two field experts were consulted, and their criticism about the analysis and interpretation was received.

## Results

Data were analyzed and interpreted within the scope of the research questions. Nine students participating in the study conducted oral history interviews with their family members within the scope of the "I Have a History!" activities. Information on the family members the students interviewed are given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Information on Source Persons

Age	Relation	Occupation	Educational Status
39	Father	Dentist	University
51	Father	Tradesmen	University
59	Grandmother	Housewife	Primary School
60	Grandfather	Teacher	High School
60	Grandfather	Worker	Primary School
63	Grandfather	Retired	High School
63	Grandfather	Retired	Middle School
65	Grandfather	Retired	High School
65	Grandmother	Housewife	Primary School

As seen in Table 2, students interviewed elder family members of various ages, occupations and educational status. In these interviews, the students learned about the games played in the past, toys and childhood circumstances. They compared past circumstances in terms of similarities (continuity) and differences (changes) according to the information provided by the source persons.

### *Student Opinions on Oral History Activities (First Research Question)*

Students carried out various oral history activities during the 7-week period. These activities were evaluated in the semi-structured personal interviews made with them at the end of the research. Opinions of the participating students on the activities are summarized in the table below:

**Table 3.** Opinions of Students on Oral History Activities

Opinion	<i>f</i>
I learned how many generations are simultaneously alive in my family.	8
I discovered where my family's origin came from on the family map.	8
I learned about my family tree and I can make it now.	7
I learned about my memories of infancy from the Timeline.	5
I put my old clothes in the time capsule.	5
I realized that the childhoods of my grandparents were more fun than my childhood.	5
It helped me know my family better.	4
I learned my birthday and the first time I walked from the Timeline.	2
I realized that the childhoods of my grandparents were more difficult than my childhood.	1

Considering the opinions of the students regarding the study, it was seen that the activities were most useful in terms of important issues such as noticing the simultaneously living generations (8), discovering from where the family members and their relatives migrated to Istanbul and where they currently lived (8) and learning to make a family tree (7). Because in the "Simultaneously Living Generations" activity, they investigated the parents (generations) living during the time of the study beginning from themselves and were introduced to the concept of "generation". The details of the information the students obtained in the generations activity are given in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Simultaneously Living Generations

Generations	f
2nd Generation Secondary (Parents of the Students)	16*
3rd Generation (Grandfathers and Grandmothers of the Students)	29
4th Generation (Parents of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers of the Students)	14
<b>Total Number of Parents</b>	<b>59</b>

The students participating in the study were not included in Table 4, because they constituted the first generation. According to the research they conducted, people from four generations were living simultaneously in seven of the nine students. In the other two families, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd generations were living simultaneously. It was found that thanks to this activity, the students learned how many generations were simultaneously living in their families and who constituted these generations. It is possible to understand that the students learned the concept of generation and generation differences from the following statement of Ebru: "I am the first generation, my mother and father are the second generations, my grandfathers and grandmothers are the third generation, and there is someone in the fourth generation, but I don't know his/her name."

The second important contribution of oral history activities to students was that they learned where their families came from and where they migrated to. Students were given the Family Map activity for them to learn this information. In this context, they were given blank maps of Turkey and asked to ask their family elders from where and in which year they came to Istanbul. The students filled this activity in with their parents and grandparents. It was also seen that the students marked on these maps where their relatives have been to in Turkey and they noted down on the outer parts of the maps their purpose. An example of these maps is presented below:

**Figure 1.** Family Map of Yakup

Yakup, who prepared his family map with the help of his parents, showed in which cities of Turkey his parents, uncles, and cousins lived. In addition, as the students examined the locations of cities on the map while preparing this activity, their skills of perception of the place were also developed.

\* The study also included twin siblings. Due to this, since their parents and other generations were the same, they were included only once in the frequency.

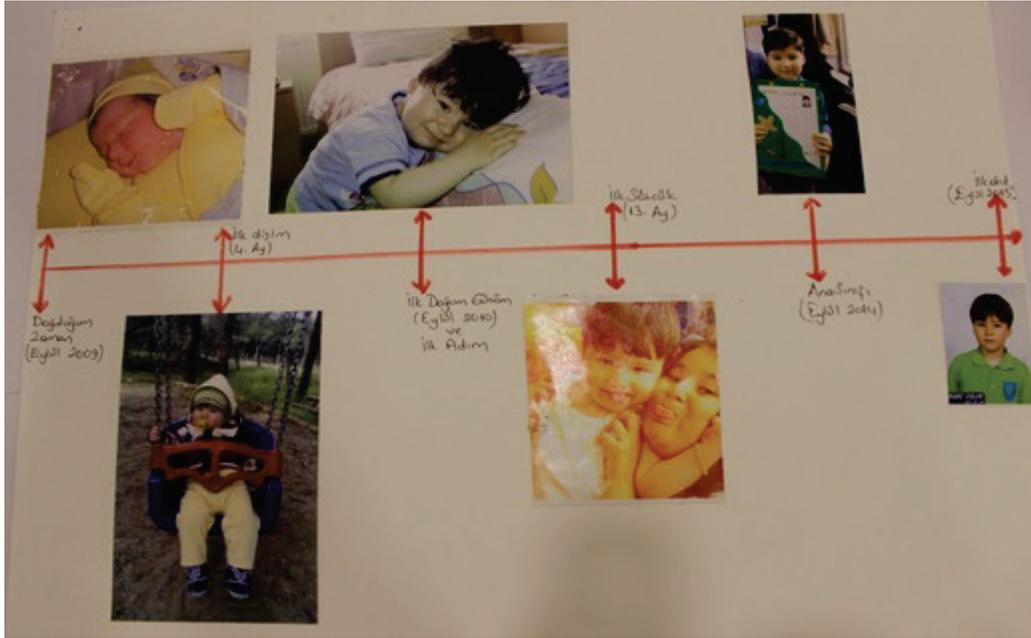
The third important contribution of oral history activities to students was learning how to make a family tree. In this study, the photographs of each family member were glued to the relevant branch on the hierarchically-prepared tree. An example of a family tree prepared by a student is given in the following photograph:



**Figure 2.** Example Family Tree

When the example tree was examined, it was observed that the student first added himself and his elder sister and then placed his other relatives vertically, beginning from his parents. All students drew their family trees and glued photos on relevant parts.

In fact, students started their oral history activities by first preparing their own timelines. However, the reflections of the interviews were included first because the contributions of the family map and family tree activities stood out. The personal timelines the students prepared provided various contributions to them. First of all, with the timelines, students realized that they also had a history and that they were a part of history. Hale expressed the contribution of the timeline to her as follows: *"I remembered what I experienced in my life because I had forgotten what I did when I was 3-4 years old. For example, I remembered that I built a snowman with my grandfather."* Another student, Yasin, learned the following from his timeline: *"When I was born, my first teething, the first day I spoke, kindergarten, first grade, second grade..."* Yetkin stated: *"I learned everything I experienced, the things that I had forgotten. And I learned how little I was, how I looked when I was little."* and expressed that the timeline was an activity that reminded him of the things he had forgotten. Apart from these, the students learned about important firsts like their year and day of birth, their first teething and the first day they walked and the first birthday. Photograph 3 includes an example timeline.



**Figure 3.** Example Timeline

The timeline included important events that constituted the personal history of the student between 2009 and 2015, such as birthday, first teething, first birthday, first steps, first words, kindergarten and starting primary school. This activity has a significant role in terms of enabling the student to understand that he/she is also a part of history.

The students were tasked to prepare time capsules to have them perceive that they are a part of history and that they all have personal histories. The students put the things they had used in the past into a box. Murat explained what he put into his box as follows: "Which toys I had when I was little, my clothes, the moment I was born when I was in intensive care after birth. There was a photograph in it." Figure 4 below includes two example time capsules:



**Figure 4.** Example Time Capsules

When the capsules were examined, it was seen that the boxes had toys, socks, vests, spoons, pacifiers, baby photos, baby's bottles, T-shirts, berets and a suit of clothes. Every item is a part of the personal histories of the students, and they remain as pieces of evidence of the past they have. For example, Hale explained what this activity taught her as follows: *"For example, I learned about the apron I used when I was a baby, I remembered my first toy. Here, I remembered my baby shoes."* Even though the students only 9-years old, she had forgotten many things that she attached importance to in the past. She also became aware of things that she never even remembered using.

It was seen that the opinions of students on the study focused on the contributions of the activities towards personal and family histories. In addition to these, oral history activities had various academic contributions to the students such as learning the concept of generation, making timelines, doing oral history interviews and family trees.

The students learned about the games their family elders played in the past, their toys and their childhood periods in the oral history interviews they did. For example; Murat explained what he has learned in the talks by saying: *"I have learned my granddad's childhood. Then, I learned what they ate, what they did, what they played, when they were little."* In addition, Yakup learned which schools his grandfather went to, Yetkin learned that toys were not easily accessible in the past like today and that the children of that time used to make their toys themselves. In addition to these, after the oral history interviews, the form below was given for the students to evaluate themselves:

**Table 5.** Oral History Interview Evaluation Form<sup>1</sup>

Statements	Yes	No
I think I asked the questions correctly in the interview.	8	-
I was glad to do the interview.	6	2
With what I learned in the interview, I compared my childhood with the childhood of .....	6	2
The childhood of ..... was very different from my childhood.	6	2
When I listened to the childhood of ....., I was thankful for what I have today.	6	2
During the interview, I imagined myself living in those days.	5	3
When I listened to the childhood of ....., I wanted to live in those days.	5	3
..... we talked about our family history for the first time.	3	5
I was a little excited during the interview.	4	3
It was hard for me to do the interview.	2	6

When Table 5 was examined, it can be observed that the students rather focused on the personal effects of the oral history interview and mentioned what the person told them less. In the interviews, the situation most positively perceived by the students was that they asked the interview questions correctly (8). This shows that the students found themselves sufficient and successful in terms of asking questions in the interview. It was also noted that they thought they listened to the interviews carefully (6), they were glad to do the interviews (6) and they had no difficulty doing the interviews (6). When the opinions of the students regarding the oral history interview were evaluated in general, it was understood that they had positive perceptions and the oral history interviews introduced them to past living conditions.

When the opinions of students regarding all of the oral history activities were examined, it was seen that they used quite positive statements. For example, Hale explained the contributions of the activities in the process as follows: *"I think positively. It added new things to my life. They have developed my*

<sup>1</sup> In the blanks, the students added the degree of relationship of the interviewee. For example, the student meeting with his grandfather filled the blank as "My grandfather's childhood was very difficult." In addition, one student could not be included in the evaluation since he did not fill this form.

*handcrafts; I have learned new things from my father. For example, I made a mistake when I was making the time capsule and my father put a white paper on it. I have learned to find a different solution."*

Hale emphasized that the activities made many important contributions to her from developing her handicrafts to finding different solutions. Besides, Yakup said: *"I think very positively about these studies. These studies made me remember some of my memories in my infancy. I think these studies are very nice."* and mentioned the role of the activities in helping him recognize his own history, while Yetkin mentioned that the study was a fun and beautiful process allowing him to recognize the past of his family.

When the findings in this section were considered holistically, it was seen that the students had positive opinions about each of the oral history activities. It was determined that the activities were rather beneficial to the students in terms of making them realize that they are a part of history, recognize their personal histories, discover the past of their families and learn about the concept of generation.

#### ***Change and Continuity Perceptions of Students (Second Research Question)***

The first section of findings included the reflections of the oral history activities done by the students. In this section, how the students perceived the change and continuity in the subjects they learned and discovered through oral history activities were considered. When the change and continuity perceptions of the students were evaluated in general, it was observed that the students perceived some dimensions of change and continuity positively, and some negatively. These perceptions are derived from various statements of the students. For example: Considering the "Oral History Interview Evaluation Form", five students said: "Yes" to the statement *"When I listened to the childhood of my grandfather or grandmother, I wanted to live in those days"*. In other words, the childhood circumstances of those days were perceived more positively. On the other hand, three students stated that they did not want to live in that period. Again, six students checked the following statement included in the form: *"When I listened to the childhood of my grandfather or grandmother, I was thankful for the opportunities I have now"*. This indicates that the students perceived the circumstances they were in more positively. Apart from these, the fact that five students considered "the childhood of the person they interviewed to be more fun" reflect a positive perception towards the period. However, there is a disagreement on the "difficulty of the childhood" of the source persons interviewed. Because half of the students who filled in the form thought the childhood of the source persons were difficult, while the other half thought they were not. This was the point where the change and continuity perceptions of the students were separated the most.

After the oral history interviews, the students compared the circumstances of today with the games, toys and childhood days in the past with the "Then and Now" activity. In this context, they wrote the past circumstances in the left column and the circumstances of today in the right column. In this comparison, they learned that the majority of the past games (such as hide-and-peek, nine stones, and jumping rope) continued with small differences but video games were played more and playgrounds used to be wider and safer. One of the students, Ender, explained his change and continuity comparison about games and toys as follows: *"The games played in the past and today have not much changed. We still play hide-and-peek and jump rope. The differences are that they did not have molds back then, so they had to make their toys themselves from mud. They made their own dolls."* As it can be seen, Ender has understood change and continuity accurately.

They have revealed that children have been making their toys from mud, iron wire, wood and fabric since the purchasing power were low and there were not many toys in the past, but today ready-made and technological toys are preferred because the purchasing power is high. Finally, they have compared the responsibilities of children in the past with their responsibilities. They learned that in the past, children were helping their elders in the field or other areas instead of playing or studying, and the children today had more opportunities in their school lives and home lives. As a result, the students had the opportunity to assess both change and continuity in the oral history interviews and the "Then and Now" activity.

The change and continuity perceptions of students were also revealed in the personal interviews made with them. There were different perceptions about change and continuity. One of the students to perceive change positively, Hale explained her opinion as follows: *"I tried to imagine my grandfather's childhood... They used to lack some things back then. It was irregular and bad. I noticed them ... I don't want. Then it was worse and there were wars. There are amusement parks now."* Hale was pleased with her life because the negative circumstances in the past did not happen anymore. This allowed her to perceive change positively. Similarly, Ebru said: *"We can buy toys now. It is nicer to buy them and play."* and stated that she thought positively of change. A group of students perceived change negatively. One of them, Ender, answered the question *"Would you like to live in the past?"* as follows:

I have thought of those days. It was a bit nice. Everywhere was open then, there were not many buildings around. They could play on the grass. They were comfortable. Even at times when they were going to school, my grandmother was waking up early and she was milking her cow. She was doing it herself. Their days were better and more fun. It is not that much fun today.

Ender perceived change negatively because he was troubled with having buildings everywhere, natural habitats becoming narrow and with intensive life today. Similarly, Yakup said: *"I would like to live back then. There were neither computers nor many buildings."* and complained about the artificiality caused by computers and buildings. It was seen that the statements of Yasin and Yetkin also supported Ender and Yakup. Yasin said: *"Yes I would like to live then. It was more fun. We were able to go out, but today we cannot do it because there are so many cars on the streets."* He complained about not being able to go out due to intense vehicular traffic and Yetkin explained the impact of tablets by saying: *"I would like to be back then there were many games. Now we have tablets, you would play games back then because you did not have tablets."* As seen, the students who perceived change negatively (4) complained about the intensity of buildings and vehicles and the artificial life caused by computers and tablets. Naturally, learning about pure life in the past, these students were rather focused on comfortable and safe games rather than economic opportunities.

Consequently, a majority of the students comparing the circumstances of the past and today from various perspectives perceived the change negatively because they could not find the natural and wide-open playgrounds they wanted today. In contrast, some students perceived change positively because they thought change created more beneficial results for them on the basis that they had better opportunities today.

### Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions

The results of this research that was conducted to reveal the contributions of the oral history method as an alternative method in life sciences courses have shown that the method has made considerable contributions to students. The first important question sought to be answered within the scope of the study was the opinions of students on oral history activities. According to the opinions of students, oral history activities were most beneficial for students in "realizing how many generations simultaneously lived together". Because in the "Simultaneously Living Generations" activity, they investigated the parents (generations) living during the time of the study beginning from themselves and were introduced to the concept of "generation". The second most beneficial activity was the "Family Map". The students saw from where their family members and relative migrated to Istanbul and the places they currently live on the map. By doing this activity, they developed spatial perception skills. One of the most important materials developing space perception skill is maps (Aktürk, Yazıcı, & Bulut, 2013; M, Öztürk, 2014). The third most beneficial activity was family trees. In this activity, the students put themselves, their family members and relatives on the related parts of the tree and learned about the connections between generations and family traditions (Brophy, Alleman, & Halvorsen, 2016).

Safran & Şimşek (2006) highlighted that timelines had an important place in chronological history education but were ineffective when they were not associated with the child's life. The timelines

prepared by the students in this study enabled them to directly connect with their own lives. In this context, the students included important firsts such as birth year and day, first teething and the first walk and the first birthday celebration in the timelines they prepared. They have also developed their chronological thinking (perception) skills as they sorted the important events in their lives by years during this activity. These results are also supported by the studies of Hickey (2017), Brophy et al. (2016), Levstik & Tyson (2010) and Hoodless (2002). In addition, time capsules the students prepared as another activity helped them realize that they are a part of history and that they all had a personal history. In other words, both timelines and time capsules enabled the students to realize their personal history. Similarly, in a study conducted by Şimşek (2007), the students stated that preparing personal and family timelines showed them that they too could have a history.

The perceptions of students towards the oral history interviews they made were revealed. All of the students thought that they did the oral history interview correctly and listened to what was said properly. This means that the perceptions of the students towards themselves were positive. When the opinions on the general of oral history activities were examined, it was seen that positive statements were used.

The second important question sought to be answered in the study was the change and continuity perceptions of the students. It is seen that the students perceive some dimensions of change and continuity positively and some dimensions negatively. In this context, it is determined that male students perceive change negatively while female students perceive it positively. Despite this difference, almost all of the students expressed that they were thankful for their opportunities after learning about the past. In fact, their negative perceptions on change were rather related to the lack of free, safe and comfortable living spaces for the children today. While they were satisfied with the opportunities they had, they complained about the narrowness of the living spaces as children. Meaning that the students associated the negative aspects of change -as emphasized by Şimşek (2006)- with their own life experiences.

The participant students compared the circumstances of the past and today in the "Then and Now" activity. According to Şimşek (2006), students should be taught the terms "today", "yesterday" and "tomorrow" in the first years of primary school. There is a need for concrete experiences for the education of these concepts. In fact, thanks to the concrete experiences the students acquired in the given activities in this study, it was seen that they learned concepts such as "time", "yesterday" and "today" in a more meaningful way. However, the level of students to know and understand these historical concepts will increase in the following grades. In fact, in a study by Pala and Şimşek (2016) on 410 5th-8th grade students, the level to know historical events was found to increase as the grade level increased. The experience gained in this study can be considered as one of the first steps for students to make sense of history.

In addition, considering the "Then and Now" comparisons the students made, it was seen that they perceived change and continuity correctly. The results of oral history towards the change and continuity perceptions of students are also supported by the studies conducted by Diekema (1989), Kabapınar (2014), Doğan (2015), Kabapınar & İncegöl (2016), Von Heyking (2017), and Kılıç (2018). It can be said that this success in the change and continuity perception of students was caused by the life experiences of the students (Şimşek, 2006; Safran & Şimşek, 2006). Because of all the activities that the students did were more meaningful for them as they were subjective and related to their family history. In relation to these, it was seen in the same comparisons that students were able to establish a cause-effect relationship between events. The oral history activities in this study developed the historical thinking skills of students such as time and chronology perception, establishing cause-effect relationship and change and continuity perception. Bertram, Wagner, and Trautwein (2017) also found that oral history developed historical thinking skills, supporting these results. These results are valuable in that they reveal the place and importance of oral history in developing historical thinking skills.

The whole results obtained shows that oral history activities are liked by the students and make various contributions to them. Firstly, the students realized that they had a personal history and found that they were a part of history in this study. Secondly, they learned about their family histories and established a connection between generations. Thirdly, they had the opportunity to materialize and make sense of abstract concepts that are difficult to understand for primary school students such as "time", "generation", "yesterday" and "today". Fourthly, they developed various historical thinking skills. The fact that the results obtained were in parallel with other studies in the literature reveals the potential of oral history as an alternative method in life sciences courses. In addition, the contributions of different activities carried out in seven weeks in this study to students are valuable as a whole. These two cases point to the strengths of the study. However, the fact that the application was carried out in a school requires carrying out different applications in terms of the transportability of the study results. Moreover, it may not be possible for teachers to use seven different activities in this application in their classrooms for a single acquisition. Since nine students were included in this study, no significant problem was encountered in the application. To overcome this disadvantage, it is possible for class teachers to use the related activities separately, adapting them to other subjects and acquisitions. These two cases were the weaknesses of the study.

In the context of the results obtained, some recommendations for class teachers would include using oral history more in life sciences. This method offers students the opportunity to acquire a wide variety of experiences. It would be especially useful to evaluate the activities used in this study by adapting them to various subjects. For example, the timelines can be used during the forming of their own histories or when telling them the historical steps of various subjects.

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