

Gunel, Elvan (2018): Controversial Issues in Social Studies Education in Turkey. The Contemporary Debates. Information Age Publishing, ISBN 978-1-64113-305-0, 35,56 €

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Citizens and thus also pupils encounter conflicts in their environment every day. This concerns pupils in particular. Especially at school, the daily exchange with different people leads to misunderstandings, different positions and disputes. These have to be reflected in school lessons in order to enable students to participate in social and political discourses. The anthology written by Elvan Gunel (Anadolu University, Turkey) deals with this topic - the inclusion of controversial issues in social science education - and is thus based upon the academic debate on how social sciences can be supported in education. The aim is to "*help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the common good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an independent world*" (National Council for Social Studies, 1994, p. 1), as the editor also quotes in her introduction. Despite that, the inclusion of controversial issues can help students to mature and develop the ability to "*empathize with others who come from different cultural backgrounds*" (p. VII).

The book is divided into seven chapters which present a series of studies that illustrate how different controversial issues are addressed by Turkish educators of pre-service and in-service.

The following articles relate to Turkey for various reasons. On the one hand existing studies show that the treatment and discussion of controversial issues in Turkey is perceived as a central task of social science education. On the other hand the social and political dynamics in Turkey as well as the extraordinary geographical situation with different cultural influences are remarkable and controversial and therefore worth to be considered in the research context of Social Studies Education. At the same time, the challenge that controversial debates in Turkey are aggravated and prevented by "cultural and political forces" underlines the need to address controversial issues related to education.

Concerning the political context of the controversial right to freedom of expression in Turkey, Elvan Gunel's anthology on social science education could not be more contemporary. The volume summarizes a multitude of aspects of the implementation of controversial topics in social science education. Doing so, it always presents the approach "*how various controversial issues are perceived by Turkish educators*" and "*how to think and reorganize education both in Turkey and in a global world*" (p. VII).

The anthology is divided into two parts and classifies the field into "gender questions" and "cultural and political questions". After an overview introduction by the editor, the reader will find three chapters on "Gender Issues".

The starting point here is the first chapter, which deals with the "Intersections of Globalization, Gender, and Culture in Social Studies" (*Mustafa Sever, Ankara University; Ayse Soylu, Nigde Ömer Halisdemir University; Ahmet Kaysili, Stockholm University*) and an overview of the emergence of the political system in Turkey as well as the historical and cultural development after the Ottoman Empire. At the beginning of the volume, this chapter provides a good introduction into the development in the Turkish Republic to this day and reflects the historical emergence of the Turkish educational system. Additionally, it provides a clear overview of the existing development of social science education in Turkey. The authors allow



the reader to understand the current state of the scientific discussion on social science education, while addressing the issues in the discussions of social science education. This clear presentation makes it easier for the reader to understand the role teachers have played in the transformation of the system into a republican Turkey and the challenges it poses for the current structure. In addition, they show that gender equality can only be achieved by educational structures that empower gender equality.

In the second chapter, *Aysegul Pehilvan Yilmaz (Anadolu University)*, *Onder Eryilmaz (Amasya University)* and *Elvan Gunel* discuss how gender roles in social science education are perceived by teachers in preparatory service and to what this means for the general picture of gender roles in Turkey. On the basis of document analysis, the authors examined how gender issues are integrated into social science curricula. Their research showed that the presence of gender equality is visible to pre-service social science teachers and "*that preservice social studies teachers strongly emphasized on the common belief that women are subordinate to men and that this has become widespread over time due to common patriarchal practices in Turkish society*" (pp. 60-61). Overall, the chapter gives a revealing insight into the opinion of pre-service teachers towards gender equality.

In chapter three, *Tuba Cengelci Kose (Anadolu University)* examines how teachers' perspective on value formation is influenced by gender aspects and what conflicts arise between teachers in regard to this issue. Kose gives an impressive overview of how research among teachers in preparatory service reveals a complexity in value formation: concerning a rather general, theoretical understanding of values equality in particular, it is mainly the male preparatory teachers who share this understanding in the classroom, but: "*however, when it comes to real life plans, they would like to continue what they learned in their culture and what they see as traditions.*" (p. 93). The authors' observations underline the disregard for how these theoretical democratic values can be extended to the individual space.

The second part of the volume focuses on "Cultural and Political Issues" and begins with an article written by *Ayca Sesigur (Mugla Sitki Kocman University)* and *Handan Deveci (Anadolu University)* which gives an insight into the life structures of students with a migration history in Turkey. The results of the study provide information on how students see themselves and integrate themselves into society. The methodological approach used in the course of the study is particularly interesting. In order to gain detailed and possibly hidden insights into the self-image of the students, the researchers evaluated pictures that had been painted by the students themselves. Furthermore, the drawings revealed information about the examination of the students' environment by the chosen means of creation. This chapter shows how such experiences can be integrated into Social Studies Education for shaping controversial issues.

In Chapter 5, *Mehmet Acikalin (Istanbul University)* explains how topics of the core curriculum of social science teaching are taught in Turkish classrooms. He comes to the disillusioning conclusion that social science teaching in Turkey is oriented towards basic concepts of democracy education, but does not promote the active participation of pupils in society: "*Thus, it can be concluded, that, from the early years of the Turkish Republic to date, citizenship education and social studies courses do not go much beyond teaching students basic facts regarding administrative structure of the Turkish Republic, and rights and responsibilities of citizens.*" (S. 157)

In Chapter 6, *Nevin Ozdemir* and *Alper Kesten (both Ondokuz Mayis University, Samsun)* take a closer look at future social studies teachers and their attitude towards the topic of nuclear energy and the construction of nuclear power plants. The underlying ecological value attitudes were examined on the basis of a cross-sectional study. As an explanation for



conducting this study, Özdemir and Kesten argue that it is necessary to examine the factors influencing pre-service teachers' opinions, since Turkey's curricula neither address the issue of nuclear power plants, nor do they address the impact on people and the environment.

In Chapter 7, *Canan Colak (Giresun University)*, *Hidir Karaduman (Anadolu University)* and *Isil Kabakci Yurdakul (Anadolu University)* trace the concept of digital divide in Turkey. The authors' observations indirectly confirm and underline the pedagogical, sociological and political problems associated with the difference of access to technologies based on the concept of digital divide. Hence, the digital divide "*influences the social studies classroom through the material access and skills and usage access dimensions*" (p. 243). In view of the constantly growing importance of –technologies and digitalization in society, this tension must be tackled within the legal educational context as well as in social studies education. The contribution thus represents an important aspect of the discourse of Social Studies Education, as it focuses on a problem that raises the fundamental question of social justice.

In summary, the book addresses important social science issues and presents a wealth of principles, concepts and methods for social science research into controversial issues of social science education in Turkey. The contributions provide a well-founded insight into the effects on civic education. The strength of the book lies in its methodological and content-related diversity. At the same time, the anthology offers cross-national insights into the treatment of controversial issues in social science education. The results of the various contributions raise core questions of social studies education and lead to overarching results on the basis of the subject areas "Gender Issues" and "Cultural and Political Issues". Hopefully, the book which appears in the series *Research in Social Education* released by an American publisher will find its' readers in European countries.