

Commentary:

Teaching Human Rights in Turkey: Commentaries on a Single Lesson from Multiple Perspectives

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Social Studies; Human Rights Education; Citizenship Education; Turkey; United States

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Reflection on Turkish Human Rights Lesson from Turkey

A lesson on human rights in Turkey is analyzed for its representativity and methodology within the Turkish teaching culture from the viewpoint of a Turkish researcher.

1 Introduction

The present study is quite significant in that, for the first time in Turkey, it records, analyses, and shares with the reader, Social Studies classes at Turkish primary and secondary schools. Before writing this commentary, the paper was reviewed by two undergraduate students of Social Studies, Selen Kaya and İrfan Erdoğan, a doctoral student, Şule Egüz, and myself. Even though my students and I believe that the lesson is an ordinary one like many others at a first glance, after an in-depth reading our first impression of the lesson has changed in some manner. We all agreed that the lesson has some different points, especially from the perspective of the teacher's enthusiasm and students' participation. Teacher's enthusiasm and positive approach towards students definitely invigorates the lesson and supports students' participation positively. After analyzing the paper we decided to review it under four headings: originality of the class, lesson content, student participation and attitudes, and the points to improve.

2 Originality of the class

Certain basic criteria need to be considered in order for a lesson to qualify as original in a broad sense. These can be classified as originalities pertaining to the chosen method and the lesson content, teacher performance, and student participation. In this sense, this Social Studies class, for seventh-year pupils at a school representative of Istanbul's middle and upper socio-economic circles, appears to bear similarities to classes at many Turkish schools in terms of the teaching techniques and content. As shown by other studies

conducted with teachers and students in Turkey, not only this teacher but also many others prefer lecturing in their classes and often resort to the question-answer technique in order to raise student participation (Aykaç, 2011; Çelikkaya & Kuş 2009; Demircioğlu, 2004, Ünal & Çelikkaya, 2004). So does this mean that this class is quite ordinary and no different from others? The answer is definitely 'no'. Then what is it that differentiates this class that at first gives the impression of being ordinary in terms of the teaching techniques employed?

The first answer to this question is the teacher's performance. Unlike many teachers in Turkey, this one is well-prepared, with a good command of the subject matter. Readers from other countries may be surprised by this statement, as preparation for class and mastery of the subject are expected of all teachers as a matter of course. However, it is quite common among Turkish teachers, and particularly those teaching at secondary and high schools, to come to class unprepared because of work load and class size. Since many teachers' workload is more than 25 hours and student numbers are more than 40, especially in metropolises, teachers in Turkey usually have a look in their course books a few minutes before going into class, and only use the questions available in those books during the class. However, the teacher studied in this paper draws the lines of the teaching topic and prepares the questions accordingly, which facilitates the transfer of the content through a better organized lesson.

3 Student participation and attitudes

Another aspect of this class, which differentiates it from others, is student participation and the way they give answers, in correlation with the quality of the questions. The analysis of the classroom data suggests that the pupils participate at least as much as the teacher, and express their views in total freedom. Throughout the lesson, students had a chance to bring their experiences and opinions into the classroom freely and to link their experiences with lesson content and general human rights problems in Turkey. The following example from



the lesson is quite remarkable in demonstrating students' ability to show this connection.

T: Whatever you see. Is there any difference?

Yavuz: There is discrimination.

T: Ha?

Yavuz: There is discrimination teacher.

T: Tell me how?

Yavuz: Teacher, for example a thief must be sentenced to 30 years according to the law, but s/he gets only 10 years or a criminal that actually should be sentenced to 20 years gets 30 years.

T: Hmm. You say a criminal who must be sentenced to 10 years gets only 5 years and another criminal that actually should be sentenced to 5 years gets 10 years. Do you mean that?

Yavuz: Yes.

T: So you say there is injustice. What else... So why do they discriminate between two criminals?

Yavuz: I do not know, teacher.

T: Have you heard something like that before?

Yavuz: Yes, we hear about it on the news.

T: You see it on the news. So based on that do you say there is injustice?

Yavuz: Yes

...

Yavuz: Teacher, it is actually exactly the opposite. Upper class people are less equal, lower class people are more equal.

T: How? I do not understand.

Yavuz: Teacher, think of a politician's son and a vagabond/roamer from the folk.

T: Who has more advantages?

Yavuz: The son of the politician, teacher...

Let's flash back 10 minutes earlier in the lesson. Possibly, the student (Yavuz) had background knowledge of the Turkish justice system and knew the general problems associated with it, since he watches and reads daily news. He came to the classroom with this knowledge but he had not made the connection between his knowledge and lesson content yet. The teacher had two options at this point; either, he would give an opportunity to the student to share his opinions with the class and the student would get a chance to make the connection between his knowledge and course content, thus, the teacher had a chance to teach subject much more easily and support student's self-efficacy, or, he would keep lecturing and lose this golden opportunity. The teacher preferred the first option in this particular situation and he kept doing this throughout the lesson. However, in a traditional Social Studies class, student participation may drop to as low as a fifth of that in this class and teachers generally prefer second option. In line with their role traditionally cut out by society, teachers continue to see themselves as imparting the right knowledge, and the students as storing that information for later use. As a result of this, students'

talking time in the classroom drops to very low levels. Even more significantly, some students resign themselves to not talking or participating at all in the long run. When the question-answer technique is used, more often than not, students' answers are considered inadequate, with the 'correct' answers usually imposed. This hampers active participation by many students, who later become incapable of answering the simplest questions at university. For this reason, the question-answer technique skillfully employed by this teacher throughout the class and the students' participation are viewed as a significant factor for the originality of this class. In addition, the efficient use of PowerPoint, already on the increase among a number of teachers in Turkey, further raises student participation through the presence of visuals in the classroom.

4 Lesson content

The last, but certainly not the least, aspect that makes this an original class is the teacher's lecturing enriched by examples that are both fun and relevant to the pupils' lives. A successful teacher of Social Studies is expected to follow the current news stories and also know about the books, films, TV series, games, etc. that are of interest to that particular age group so that effective communication can take place. This particular teacher gives the impression of possessing these qualities through his jokes and examples. It is true that the teacher's skills in this area increase students' interest and participation in the class.

5 Suggestions/Points to improve

Although quite successful and original by Turkish standards, this class also shows some weaknesses in light of the general principles of education. It is therefore suggested that teachers consider the following shortcomings if they want to use this class as an example.

However useful and indispensable for teachers the question-answer technique efficiently used in this class may be, it proves inadequate in creating the heated debates suitable for such topics open to discussion as human rights. Even though some pupils did actively participate in this particular case, the number of pupils talking is deemed inadequate for a class of 27. It should also be borne in mind that this class is composed of highly confident pupils in one of the better schools in socio-economic terms by Turkish standards. In a class of relatively lower socio-economic background, solely applying the question-answer technique might further restrict student participation. If the structural approach is to be adopted in the Turkish education system, with a more student-centered teaching environment, the classes must be enriched by further teaching techniques and the debates must be spread around the whole class and not just among seven or eight pupils.

Another weakness is the occasional digression. Too many questions being asked and the very frequent use of the elicitation 'Anything else?' causes digression and,



occasionally, off-topic contributions. For instance, there is a part of the lesson that digresses to smoking and its harmful effects. The teacher would really be expected here to stick to smoking and its infringement on other people's rights. Instead, the factors triggering smoking habits are discussed, without conclusion, and then another topic is jumped into. The problem underlying such digressions is linked to Social Studies teachers making little use of concept maps and their inadequate use of the blackboard. The analyses do not suggest that the teacher wrote the relevant concepts on the blackboard or formed a concept map. This paves the way to the topic occasionally breaking up and digressions occurring. Moreover, the teacher simply enumerating human rights concepts one after another could lead to long-term problems for the students grasping them. As the saying goes, 'verba volant, scripta manent', i.e. 'words fly away, writings remain'.

For all his commendable communication skills in the classroom, the teacher neglects the use of reinforcements. It is quite noteworthy that the data analyses reveal not a single word of praise or encouragement such as 'Thank you / Well done / Very good / Excellent'. Even though his generally positive attitude may appear to make up for this shortcoming, those teachers who might want to follow his example are advised to make a note of this.

Overall, I believe that this lesson is quite successful, despite certain weaknesses, considering Turkish teachers' general attitude to studies of this kind. First of all, it is quite a challenge to convince many teachers in Turkey to agree to their classes being video-recorded in their entirety. It is an even greater challenge to persuade them to allow their video-recorded class to be analyzed and shared with readers in an article. Our particular teacher's courage in all these respects merits praise on its own, significantly raising the importance of this study. What is of importance here is that Social Studies teachers in Turkey should get involved in similar studies, share with others what they do best, and try to minimize their shortcomings. For example, creating a web site, which provides an opportunity to upload lessons for Social Studies teachers may provide a wonderful milieu for sharing best practices among them, therefore, the teachers may see both strong and weak sides and also have a chance to discuss how to improve classroom practices. I strongly believe that computer technology has a limited effect on student learning in classroom milieu but it may be a wonderful tool for teachers' personal development if we can create this kind of sharing platform for them.

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Commentary on a Turkish Lesson on Human Rights

A lesson on human rights in Turkey is analyzed for its content and methodology from the viewpoint of an American teacher and curriculum developer.

1 Introduction

Those of us who are eager to help social studies teachers in the United States connect to their counterparts in Turkey will find "A Social Studies Education Lesson from Turkey: Human Rights" published in JSSE most useful (Açıklalın 2014). In his article Mehmet Açıklalın transcribes into both English and Turkish a videotaped seventh grade lesson on human rights held in Istanbul in March 2013. This unprecedented endeavor required a leap of faith on the part of the school principal and the teacher of the class; it behooves us to make good use of this unique window into social studies instruction in Turkey. Only by encouraging teachers to step into the shoes of their compeers elsewhere can we hope that they will engage their students in meaningful cross-cultural learning experiences via Internet platforms (McClimans and Schur 2014).

As documentarian, Açıklalın provides readers with the minimum amount of information necessary to understand the lesson. This purposeful withholding of his own commentary invites the reader to formulate his or her own evaluative thoughts and invites cross-cultural comparisons. What Açıklalın does tell us is critical to this task: He tells us when and where the lesson was held (at a public school in a well-to-do neighborhood of Istanbul), the significance of commonly used vocabulary terms in Turkish schools, and some norms of socialized behavior among school children. He also provides the seating chart and images the teacher showed to his class. Of critical use to the reader are his parenthetical explanations within the lesson, where he makes explicit the assumptions Turkish teachers and students hold implicitly.

What is the best approach to providing commentary on the lesson? I could assess it in the light of the new Turkish standards instituted by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, Curriculum Division of 2009 and alluded to by Açıklalın in this article and evaluted by him elsewhere (Açıklalın 2011). But since human rights are universal, shouldn't best practices for teaching about human rights also be universal? By this standard I would ignore the history of the educational system and development of civic rights in Turkey, as well as unfolding political events which form the backdrop of the lesson. The lesson was taught in March of 2013 just weeks before the Turkish police first cleared the Gezi Park demonstrators from Taksim Square (Arango and Yeginsu 2013). If my attempt is to become more sensitive to educational norms in Turkey, which would allow me to

collaborate more effectively with Turkish teachers, then I must also stay alert to my own ethnocentricity which leads to me to ask how Turkish schools "measure up" to American standards.

What I find most valuable about the transcript is the opportunity it affords for "close reading" in a skillful translation. In what follows I hope to offer useful commentary from the perspective of an experienced American history and civics teacher at the eighth grade level in New York City, as well as someone who has extensive experience visiting classes in Morocco. The fact that on school visits to Turkey with Ohio State University (and on my own to private schools) I was never invited into classrooms, makes this transcribed lesson all the more valuable.

2.1 Commentary on the lesson: first reading

My personal and perhaps biased reactions to the lesson varied over the course of several readings. I was pleasantly surprised to see so much open discussion of human rights in Turkey. For example women's rights featured several times, raised by a female student in reference to violence against women (p. 88) and by the teacher in the right to choose a spouse (p. 87). Rather than fostering chauvinism about the Turkish nation, the lesson helps students to see Turkey in a realistic light, and it seems as if the student called Yavuz (and perhaps other students) were not expecting this:

Teacher: If I ask you to name a country that supports human rights, which country would that be? In all respects. (...)

Yavuz: Turkey!

T: So you say Turkey is a sensitive country for human rights violations in the world and wherever there is human rights violation Turkey would be there! Is that what you are saying?

Yavuz: No. Actually, not that much...

T: So you say we just get sad.

Yavuz: Supposedly.

T. We condemn [when we see human rights violations]. Is there such a country?

S:...[6 sec]

T: Yes. Is there such a country?

S:...

T: So there is not.

Of human rights violations (highlighted in the second lesson by photographs of women, child workers, starving children) I wondered why the teacher did not include photographs of prosperous men and women also deprived of their rights, such as journalists, but perhaps the teacher's goal was to win sympathy for the visibly oppressed. I was not surprised that specific minority groups were not mentioned in the lesson, such as Kurds, Alevis, and Armenians, as I imagined that discussion of these "hot topic" groups might generate too much



controversy within a Turkish classroom due to the founding ethos of Turkish nationalism (see Bayir 2013).

2.2 Commentary on the lesson: content

In the lesson the teacher first asks students to define “human rights” and then to formulate a list of human rights. He states that, “Humans are entitled to rights as soon as they are born” (p. 87) and cites the Koran (and refers to the holy books of other religions) for a definition of what makes us human (p. 86).

This opening approach, of defining and listing human rights, is one that could easily frame a lesson in the U.S. on human rights, and is not dissimilar to classes I taught. What makes the American context different is that the discussion would be based on helping students to understand the founding document in U.S. history, the Declaration of Independence from Great Britain, written by Thomas Jefferson and passed with revisions by the Continental Congress in 1776 (see Our Documents).

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.-- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Thus any discussion of “rights” in an American context also entails a discussion of government and the rule of law; indeed the *raison d’être* for instituting a government is to secure those rights.

The lesson is ostensibly about human rights rather than the rights of Turkish citizens, but the teacher encourages his students to think about rights in the context of their own lives, and with prompting students provide examples of human rights violations in Turkey, e.g. violence against women (p. 88) or blood revenge (p. 90.) In other cases, the teacher himself provides the example such as the case in Eastern Turkey where “lawless people built barriers on the road and said to travelers that they weren’t allowed to continue their travelling” (p. 92) or “I saw the police stopping two boys” (p. 94).

What I find missing in the Turkish lesson is the role of the Turkish constitution and legal system in relation to the rights of citizens. Which of the rights students identified are codified in Turkish law? Could students identify rights that are not as yet protected by law? I find in the lesson only one reference to the “the right to defend yourself in a court” (p. 93). What recourse do citizens have if they believe their rights have been violated? How can unjust laws be changed, and are acts of civil disobedience justified when individuals believe a law is unjust? These are questions we investigate often in American classrooms, beginning with the American Revolution and culminating in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and its legacy. By high school a controversial issues approach to teaching civil rights often entails

students staging a debate over which right takes precedence when two rights come into conflict—for example, the rights of a defendant to a fair trial (Amendment Six of the U.S. Constitution) versus the freedom of the press (Amendment One).

If the teacher saw the lesson as focusing on human rights in general rather than specifically about Turkish rights and citizenship (as I suspect), the lesson could be framed in terms of international law. For a start, students could compare the impressive list of human rights they generated through the teacher’s probing questions to those in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights passed by the General Assembly in 1948 (United Nations Organization) or the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Unicef). A controversial issues approach in the Turkish context could entail a debate as to whether or not Turkey should ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Hürriyet Daily News, 20.2.2009).

In the United States there is much less support for teaching about human rights in an international context than within U.S. history and civics classes. For example, not until high school do the civics standards of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (NCSS 2013, p. 33-34) refer to human rights and international law. Turkish students might be surprised that we have no holiday dedicated to children in the United States (National Sovereignty and Children’s Day, April 23 in Turkey). The struggle of workers to gain rights and to unionize receives little attention in U.S. textbooks relative to other civil rights struggles (see Albert Shanker Institute report of 2011).

After defining “human rights” the Turkish teacher moves on to the question, “Who violates human rights?” (p. 87) and students offer examples. Here I wish the teacher had clarified the types of rights violations under categories such as: violations perpetrated by an individual, a corporation, the government of a country depriving its citizens of their rights, a nation depriving the people of another nation of their rights. I find the discussion of cigarettes as a human rights violation confusing both because it is not clear what human right(s) is being violated and who is violating it.

References to the United States and human rights appear twice in the lesson. (No other country other than Turkey is referred to in the first day’s lesson, although images of human rights violations shown to students include ones from Africa and Japan.) In the first reference the student called Yavuz exclaims, “Some countries exploit other countries” and the teacher responds:

T: Are there still colonized countries?

Yavuz: There are.

T: For example?

Yavuz: Afghanistan, for example.

T: Who exploits Afghanistan?

Yavuz: America. [...]



T: America exploits Afghanistan. Ok, America. Then, according to your logic, America also exploits Iraq, right. So what does it take from Iraq?

Yavuz: Petroleum. (89)

Here the teacher does not ask for evidence, or pose questions as he does elsewhere like, "Why do you think that?" The dialogue does not lead students to differentiate between the motives for the United States' invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), or to assess the standing of those invasions in international law.

In the second reference the teacher tells students about the American historian Howard Zinn (d. 2010), whose best-selling book *A People's History of the United States*, first published in 1980 "inspired a generation of high school and college students to rethink American history" (New York Times, 27.1.2010).

There is a professor in America (...) His name is Howard Zinn. He is an activist and he is against all kinds of human right violations in America and in the world. He also takes action against the wars America conducts. For years he has done a lot of research on these issues." The teacher explains that in order to write his autobiography Howard Zinn asked the FBI for the extensive files they had kept on him, including transcripts of his personal telephone conversations. "Do you want your phones to be listened to?" the teacher inquires (p. 93).

It is difficult to assess the impression these remarks might have made on the students. On the one hand, we have again an example of the United States as the transgressor of human rights. On the other hand, the teacher provides the class with an example of an American he admires, a citizen who spoke up repeatedly to criticize his country in wartime, and an advocate for human rights worldwide. Perhaps in sum these remarks reflect the great ambivalence many people feel about the world's one remaining superpower.

According to Açıkalın (2011) the new standards for fourth through seventh grades in Turkey as instituted by the Turkish Ministry of National Education Curriculum Division 2009 state that:

The purpose of social studies is to prepare Turkish citizens who embrace Atatürk's principles and revolutions, understand the Turkish history and culture, grasps democratic values, respect human rights, care about environment, know about his/her rights and responsibilities as a citizen, and think critically and creatively in order to make informed decisions [*sic*].

Of these Turkish criteria I think the lesson aimed primarily to enhance "respect [for] human rights," and in

this one transcribed lesson that goal was certainly furthered.

2.2 Commentary on the lesson: Methodology

Pedagogy is also the product of its historical and cultural context. This makes it difficult for an outsider to comment on "what works" in the classroom of another country. I tried to draw on several sources in my attempt to be culturally sensitive to the "culture of the school" in Turkey while reading this lesson. First, I reflected on my many visits to classes in Morocco with participants from the Bank Street College of Education. In Morocco students typically rise when they speak, repeat key parts of a lesson in unison, and wear uniforms. Yet the American visitors (counter to what they expected) found that Moroccan students seemed eager and enthusiastic to learn in this environment.

Although a transcript of a lesson cannot convey tone of voice, body language, and nonverbal interactions (see Winckler 2014), my guess is that students found this class very engaging. Many hands went up, the questions were posed rapid-fire keeping students on their toes, and the teacher made students feel vested in the lesson because he drew on their personal experiences.

I also revisited the Website of the Üsküdar American Academy (Üsküdar Amerikan Lisesi) in Istanbul, founded over 130 years ago by American missionaries and now a Turkish foundation school with instruction in English. For purposes of recruiting non-Turkish teachers who can adapt to the culture of Turkish education, the Website provides the following advice:

[Turkish] students are conditioned from an early age to respect authority and conform to laws and institutional procedures. For example, students wear uniforms to school and are expected to stand when answering questions. Students are used to, and are more comfortable with, traditional teacher directed learning. In a curious sense, Turkish students are more "at ease" with formality than with friendliness and casualness.

I view this as a word of caution to faculty candidates too eager to export American informality and innovation into a school culture that values tradition and formality. Yet in both Turkey and the U.S. new standards, mandatory in the case of Turkey and adopted state-by-state in the United States, pose challenges to teachers trying out new methodologies *within* their own societies (see Açıkalın 2013, Common Core State Standards Initiative, College, Career, and Civic Life (C3), and The Trouble with the Common Core). The Turkish social studies standards of 2009 ask teachers and students to adjust to new constructivist approaches that, " (...) shift from the traditional transmission model to a more complex and interactive model in which students are actively engaged (...)" (Açıkalın 2014, p. 46)



Thus I look at this lesson as one that aspires to move Turkish students, even if in little steps, beyond their acculturated dependence on the teacher as the source of the “right answer.” On this ground I think the lesson is successful. Even if the teacher has not demonstrated how else - through what inquiries, activities, application of skills - the students will construct knowledge on their own, this shift is potentially significant.

The teacher de-centers his role first by not lecturing. He invites students to share their own experiences of human rights as a valid source of information. “T: For example? For example? It is not necessary to give such big examples. Give examples from your own lives” (p. 87). He does not pass judgement on student’s answers as right or wrong. Instead he probes further in response to each answer with questions like: “What else?” “Do we [Turks] do that?” “Why do you believe that?” “For example what kind [of rights violation]?”

The lesson culminates with an interesting strategy on the part of the teacher. He expresses views he does not actually hold: “The police should search me” (p. 95). Only after students weigh in with their own opinions about when searches are justified does he tell his students: “Alright. Kids, in fact I lied to you” (p. 96). I imagine students felt surprised at this news. If the students cannot depend on the teacher to provide the “right” answer then they must, of necessity, think for themselves.

Because of Açıkalin’s meticulous transcription we also get a sense of how many students of what gender participate how often. As in any class there are a few “star” pupils and any teacher can rely on them too often. Because this lesson is about human rights and democracy the methodology of the lesson should ideally reflect and enact democratic principles. How might this teacher have involved more students in formulating opinions and expressing them? I would suggest the Think-Pair-Share strategy which includes “wait time” for all students to reflect, after which they share ideas in pairs and finally with the class. “This learning strategy promotes classroom participation by encouraging a high degree of pupil response, rather than using a basic recitation method in which a teacher poses a question and one student offers a response (from “Using the Think-Pair-Share Technique”).

I find a teachable moment in the following exchange, where democratic principles could have been enacted in a small impromptu debate (p. 93-94) involving many students on each side of the question, and a final vote taken by the whole class to see which side was more persuasive. Instead the teacher turns to the “star” pupil called Yavuz.

T: Is everybody equal in front of the law and the courts?

S: Yes [One group] No [One group]

T: So? I do not want to influence you. Those of you who say “equal” raise your hands... Who say “not

equal” raise your hands. [The majority is for “not equal”] I am going to ask those of you who said “not equal” why they think this way. Yavuz [pseudonymne used] why [is everybody] not equal [in front of the law and courts]?

Finally, I am puzzled as to why students in this class and classes I observed in Morocco do not ask questions, which American students feel entitled to ask frequently, and sometimes to an annoying degree. The K-W-L (Know, Want to Know, Learned) graphic organizer provides a way to stir curiosity but to keep it focused on the task at hand (see K-W-L on the Website of the National Education Association). It is implemented at the start of the study. On the K-W-L chart each student lists under K what they know or think they know *before* the study is undertaken, under W what they want to know (here they can list questions), and *after* the study under L, what they have learned. This technique also focuses the goal of the lesson at the start and asks students to self-assess at the end.

3 Conclusion

The arduous task of transcribing and translating a classroom lesson for international educators is well-worth the effort. It provides readers such as myself with a rich source of potentially valuable insights, as I hope my comments have demonstrated. No one class, however well-taught, could possibly provide all the information we would like to have about human rights education in another country, and no teacher works in a vacuum. The work of this teacher is both helped and hindered by new standards and the textbooks he is required to use. It would be useful to compare this lesson to the observations made by Arife Figen Ersoy (2013) on national and global citizenship in Turkey, based on her analysis of social studies textbooks in Turkey.

To fully explore the benefits of this form of documentation, I would suggest that this lesson be evaluated alongside transcriptions of 7th grade human rights lessons from the United States and elsewhere.

It is harder than I would wish to engage teachers in cross-national curricular activities with their students, something I did (when I was still a classroom teacher) with a teacher in New Zealand (Schnell and Schur 1999). I have come to the conclusion that we must first engage teachers-in-training in cross-national Web-based activities and Skyped conversations, after which I think they would be far more likely to implement these exchanges in their own classrooms. Thus I suggest that professors of education at universities in Turkey and the United States pair their classes so that their students can share and compare their responses to this lesson and other transcribed lessons on human rights.

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Kudret Gürsoy

Review: İnsan Hakları Dersi (Teaching Human Rights)

A lesson on human rights in Turkey is analyzed for its content and methodology from the viewpoint of a German teacher.

As in Germany, the study of human rights is a core component of the teaching of the social sciences in Turkey.^{1 2} A seventh grade lesson on “Human rights and their violation” was documented by a teacher at a state school in Istanbul Prof. Açıklan³ and published in JSSE-1. It would appear that diagrams or similar teaching aids were not used in this lesson.

Before analysing the lesson in question, we note that a teacher is a role model for his/her students, and this essentially influences the learning atmosphere in the classroom. The Hattie Study (and also my own experiences at a comprehensive school as well as at a grammar school in Hamburg) shows that students pay particular attention to the personalities of their teachers. The students’ perception of their teacher immensely influences the learning atmosphere. In this sense, this review intends to emphasize the teacher’s personality and to analyse it from the point of view of critical-constructive educational theory.⁴

The teacher in question is 34 years old and has been teaching for 12 years. Lohmann, according to his typology of teachers (2003), would call him an “expert” and “social pedagogue” who designs his lessons with the help of technical expert terms and topical, relevant content.⁵ Furthermore, he is probably a social pedagogue (Turkish: *rehber öğretmen*) accompanying, guiding and

supporting his students.⁶ Perceived by the students as somebody commanding respect, it is not just the teacher’s attitude that is norm-setting, it is probable that he also has strong informal or non-teaching related ties to his students. Due to being accepted and thus commanding respect, actual subject teaching may run smoothly. For me, as a teacher at a German comprehensive school, this is quite a rare experience, for over here a teacher’s personality is instead understood to be that of a “moderator” not “guiding” his/her students but moderating and accompanying them as an “expert”. In Germany, a teacher is less seen as somebody “commanding respect” as is the case with this teacher in Istanbul. Thus, in Germany, a teacher’s informal ties to his/her students are comparably weak.

The lesson starts with a short introduction followed by a longer period of working oneself into the matter in the form of a longer conversation in class and a link to the following lesson which, however, is very short and open: “We will continue next lesson, kids.” After a short introduction to the topic, the teacher asks sweepingly what the students think about the Human Rights. The ensuing conversation in class is very much guided by the teacher – a “ping-pong” match of questions and answers between teacher and students, consisting mostly of leading questions and answers, the teacher himself giving the answers in most cases.

SM (Male Student): Humans.

T (Teacher): Godzilla or the humans? [Laughing.]

SM: The humans.

T: Humans deprive other humans of their rights. Ok then, how do these humans take over other humans’ rights?

S (Student): ... [2 sec]

Bora: They do not vest/acknowledge rights.

T: For example? For example? It is not necessary to give such big examples. Give examples from your own lives.

Ferit: Not all people are treated equally.

T: Who do you mean, for instance? Are you and I not equal?

Furthermore, the teacher employs elements of moderation. He structures that what is relevant, connects certain aspects, identifies problems at suitable passages, insists on meanings, substantiates and demands substantiations from his students, explains,

¹ *sosyal bilimler*, dt. *Sozialwissenschaften*, taught in Hamburg as *Sozialkunde* oder *Gesellschaft*.

² On this see the Hamburg framework curricula for the teaching of politics, society and economy (e. g. www.hamburg.de/contentblob/2372648/data/lb-gesellschaftswissenschaften-sts.pdf.) See also the framework curriculum of the Turkish Ministry of Education. Social Sciences. Forms 6 and 7. (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Talim Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı. Sosyal bilgiler 6. - 7. sınıf programı) (<http://ttkb.meb.gov.tr/www/ogretim-programlari/icerik/72>, last access 30.07.2014.)

³ Additionally, the essay provides some information about the school and the teacher: <http://www.jsse.org/index.php/jsse/issue/view/135>, last access 02.08.2014.

⁴ Critical-constructive didactics were developed by Wolfgang Klafki. (1.) In this context, students participate in the teaching process, they do not only absorb what they have learned but contribute their own ideas to the lesson. (2.) The teacher involves the students in the teaching. (3.) By way of examples, teaching should involve meaningful discovery. (4.) The teacher includes the students in his plans for communicating knowledge. (5.) This communication is a social process. Critical-constructive didactics is a further development of education-theoretical didactics: the latter states that curricula must be analysed for their content. For this purpose, Klafki developed didactic analysis, consisting of five basic questions about (a.) contemporary relevance, (b.) future meaning, (c.) exemplary meaning and (d.) accessibility. Rather, these questions serve the teacher’s problematizing and reflection aids. See Meyer (1997), II.

⁵ Lohmann, Gert: *Mit Schülern klarkommen. Professioneller Umgang mit Unterrichtsstörungen und Disziplinproblemen*. Berlin 2003, p. 36 ff.

⁶ *Rehber (öğretmen = teacher)*. In the Turkish language this word has many meanings, such as „leader“, „guide“, or „spiritual leader“. The Society for the Turkish Language (www.tdk.gov.tr) defines it as somebody showing someone the way, the right thing to do/ the truth/what is suitable. Thus, the term „social pedagogue“ does not really covert he term *rehber*. For the latter does not only accompany, lead and support but he/she also shows the students what is right, true and/or suitable for them. It may be a topic of discussion in how far this is a task of a teacher. However, it is significant that both the teaching profession and being a student are culturally influenced.

gives reasons, draws conclusions and demands conclusions from the students. Doing so, the teacher increases his share of the conversation (up to 83.2%⁷). The most frequent questions asked by the teacher are: “What kind of a right is x?”, “How are they violated?” In case of topical questions the teacher is able to give satisfying answers. On one occasion he presents an example by acting out a scene to a certain degree, thereby allowing for an alternative approach. Furthermore, what is conspicuous is that he repeats the students’ questions (“Lehrerecho”) and the questions he is asked (s. a.). It may be that that in this way he hopes to buy some time for himself, to be able to give purposeful answers. Furthermore, he detours from the main discussion now and then in order to provide examples (e. g. „Then kids, eventually he asks the CIA... What is the CIA?“). However, it is not possible to say if these methodical elements are purposefully employed and provide kind of a “common thread” or if they are improvised.

I come... [he calls on a male student from the first row] “stand up, stand up, turn around” [talking to him like a policeman]. Let’s say your mother, your wife are there. I do not know... imagine you have your beloved girlfriend or boyfriend with you. But somebody says “turn around, take out your ID” [talking like a policeman] and you say “what have I done?!” “Turn around, take out your ID.” Is this right? Ok, you can sit down. [to the student] Then, is it enough only to assume?

As I understand it, the goal of this lesson is to gather a collection of basic human rights as well as their violations. This way, the teacher takes stock of the human rights situation and calls up contents of the students’ stock of knowledge. Now and again he gives examples his students know from everyday life. This way they are given an opportunity to connect their own life to the human rights under discussion. Furthermore, these students’ who are only in seventh grade display a relatively high level of general knowledge. However, the teacher does not provide an opportunity to deal more intensively with the issue.

According to Can (a student), the first right is “the right to live”, according to another student it is “the right to choose”. Man, he says, is entitled to choose some things, e. g. during shopping: an apple – others do not have this right, such as his parents. This is when the students start discussing real life examples. But the teacher interrupts and starts discussing the topic of human rights violations: “Who violates human rights [...]: Godzilla or the humans?”

⁷ To analyse this, in the original text (in the Turkish language) the teacher’s share of the conversation was calculated in per cent, by counting the complete numbers of words spoken by the teacher and the students. The students achieve a total number of 607 words (16.8 %), and the teacher alone achieves 3,000 words (83.2 %).

Furthermore, from the documentation one cannot tell whether the human rights articles mentioned, “fruitful moments” of the lesson as well as preliminary results were recorded. If this is the case in the lesson presented here, in subsequent lessons the teacher will be able to go on working on the basis of his students’ contributions. If not, the function of this conversation in class must be called into question.

The teacher does not discuss the issues presented in detail. Thus, concerning this lesson we cannot identify any moral or political judgement as such. What can be recognized, however, are phenomena which may be considered elements of frontal teaching. This way, the students’ judgement can be influenced, for sometimes the teacher answers his own questions, thus controlling the lesson somewhat. It would be interesting to analyse the follow-up lessons, in the course of which it might be that political judgements are made. In this context, one would have to analyse if e. g. the “ban on overwhelming students” according to the Beutelsbach Consensus is respected.⁸ This consensus stipulates that students should not be implicitly led in particular directions and prevented from making up their own minds.”

Furthermore I assume that frequently the teacher implicitly and sometimes, by way of his statements, explicitly controls the lesson. In that case the teacher is the one who controls communication and interaction processes.⁹

T: Did the police ever embarrass you? So, what would you think [if you were treated this way by the police]? Would you get embarrassed or...? Your friend said he would. Would you be embarrassed?... I personally am sensitive concerning this issue. The police should search me... I can be anybody, I can be a bomber. Even when the officer gets bored or suspects me s/he should stop and search me... Even if there is not a policewoman there at the moment, a policeman can search my wife! Because our lives and safety are important. The police is for our safety. That is what I think on this issue. Tell me what do you think? Yes.

Further below:

T: Alright. Kids, in fact, I lied to you. I would not want such a thing to happen to me. I mean, if I was certain that I was innocent I would not want the police to stop me and search me in the midst of people. I would not

⁸ Is the teacher allowed to force his/her opinion upon his/her students? The Beutelsbach Consensus answers this question. It represents a consensus stated by the Baden-Württemberg Agency for Citizenship Education on basic principles of teaching. In short, these principles are: 1. Ban on overwhelming 2. Controversy: What is considered controversial among the sciences, must be presented in the same way in teaching 3. Students must be enabled to analyse a political situation as well as their own interests. See Reinhardt 2005, p. 30 (www.lpb-bw.de/beutelsbacher-konsens.html)

⁹ These are elements of frontal teaching. See Meyer, Hilbert: Unterrichtsmethoden. Praxisband. Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 183.

want my wife to be searched inappropriately and undergo an identity check. Because this is not something normal. This is not a normal thing. Imagine experiencing this every day. Every day when you enter school you got searched.

On the whole, this teacher represents a teaching attitude which is of interest in particular regarding the Hattie Study. He provides a positive learning atmosphere without cooperative learning. Furthermore, his share of the conversation (83.2%) is very high, thus controlling the lesson to a considerable extent.

Certainly, from a German perspective, it may be useful to analyse this kind of teaching approach for example where students or their families come from different cultural and religious backgrounds, for example a Muslim background. The parents' culture enormously influences the students, the students influence one another and thus undoubtedly the teaching and learning culture itself. Being the child of a family of Turkish immigrants, I have myself felt these dynamics. I have myself tried to establish informal ties with my teachers and was partly successful. I perceive the same with my students in Mümmelmannsberg (a neighborhood in Hamburg with a large proportion of immigrants). In this sense, the answer to the following question would be of interest: To what extent does the students' culture influence lessons (the learning atmosphere), or to what extent are lessons actually affected by gaps in the cultural knowledge of teachers, and what must a teacher's attitude be like to reach his/her students?

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