

Toward A Justice Oriented Education: An Analysis of Turkish Education from a Rawlsian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

It is argued that a narrow overlapping consensus on education may allow applying a politically liberal account of justice oriented education in a developing democratic society. In this regard, this article examines whether there is a narrow overlapping consensus on education in Turkey.

Keywords: *Turkish Education, Justice, Political Liberalism*

INTRODUCTION

John Rawls (1993) argues in his *Political Liberalism* that in a politically liberal democracy – or what he calls a well-ordered society – citizens live as free and equal individuals under their society’s democratic institutions and public political culture based on the principles of justice that are secured by an overlapping consensus agreed by various incommensurable comprehensive doctrines that are reasonably affirmed by the members of such society. The stability of this justice oriented society is dependent upon the characteristics of its citizens. Citizens in a well-ordered society are free insofar as they know that each individual has the ability to have a conception of the good and conceive of every one as not bound to pursue a specific conception of the good inescapably but as able to revise or abandon their conceptions of the good. Additionally, they are equal insofar as each individual is conceived of having the two moral powers in order for them to be lifelong participants in social cooperation and insofar as each member is represented equally in political discussions while arriving at agreements and framing the principles of political justice. The idea of citizenship in a politically liberal society is defined by the conception of reasonableness. Reasonable citizens in such society take justice as the first virtue and they are ready to propose and accept principles of justice that never assign anyone lesser basic rights than others. Also, they are always willing to comply with the fair terms and principles of political justice.

In this sense, creating reasonable citizens in a politically liberal society is highly crucial for the survival of the culture of justice. In fact, justice oriented reasonable individuals can be developed based on the inherent capacities that each individual have. According to Rawls, individuals have the two moral powers, a capacity for a sense of justice and a capacity for a conception of the good. In Rawls’s (2001) words, the former is “the capacity to understand, to apply, and to act from (not in accordance with) the principles of political justice that specify the fair terms of social cooperation” (pp. 18-19), while the latter is “the capacity to have, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good” (p. 19) that specifies what is valuable for one’s life. In such a developed democratic society, according to Rawls (1993), citizens develop their own conceptions of the good and senses of justice through their participation in democratically organized social and political life, which is called by him as the wide educational role of the public political culture. Primarily for this reason, Rawls does not provide a full-developed educational account that may aim at helping individuals to develop their senses of justice and conceptions of the good, and thus at producing reasonable citizens.

Yet, Rawlsian educational scholars have developed essential aspects of politically liberal approach to education based on Rawls's politically liberal theory. For example, Macedo (1995) discusses that an explicit emphasis is to be put on citizenship and some liberal values such as public reason and tolerance. Reidy (1996) argues that idea of citizen as free and equal, the rule of law, reasonable pluralism, and some basic liberal principles such as mutual respect and toleration are to be taught in schools. Bull (2008, 2012), in addition, identifies basic curriculum elements of civics education in order to help students to develop their own conceptions of the good and senses of justice, and defines basic principles of social justice in higher education from a politically liberal perspective. In short, Rawlsian scholars have framed general principles, content, and aims of politically liberal approach to education. One thing that is common to those Rawlsian educational thinkers, however, is the general aim at contributing to the advancement of a well-ordered society through its education system. More specifically, they intend to educate reasonable citizens so that the stability of a developed politically liberal democracy is secured and the society's just order is perpetuated by new generations. This common aim, in part, comes from the general idea that liberal theories are limited to Western democracies (Levinson, 1999; Shils, 1995). Beyond this general idea and in contribution to the overall discussion about the politically liberal approach to education, I argue that a developing democracy may also apply an educational account that is established based on politically liberal theory in order to contribute to the advancement of a culture of justice in such a developing democracy. But how?

The idea of an overlapping consensus is a basic element of Rawls's politically liberal theory. Basically, an overlapping consensus in a well-ordered society is a constitutional agreement on a political conception of justice among those who hold incommensurable reasonable comprehensive doctrines, which is achieved through public reason with citizens' equal participation and which guarantees the just order of the society under the administrations of different political parties in different periods. An overlapping consensus is agreed by different groups of a pluralistic society because they believe that it is just since an overlapping consensus is not based upon a particular comprehensive doctrine. In other words, an overlapping consensus is supported by all the reasonable comprehensive doctrines in a pluralistic society because it provides justice to all without committing to any comprehensive doctrine but limiting itself to the domain of the political, and it guarantees freedom and equality of each citizens of a well-ordered society. In such a society, developing and implementing a politically liberal educational account is justified because an overlapping consensus ensures – among various aspects of the basic structure – the basic principles that specify the content, aims, and purposes of education in a politically liberal society.

In this sense, I argue that a developing democracy may have an agreement on some of its social and political organizations, such as its judiciary system. Yet, such society may still be in need of arriving at agreements on various aspects of its basic structure. In this sense, if a developing democracy has reached an agreement on its education system including its content, aims, and purposes based upon basic liberal principles such as individual liberties and freedom, then it becomes legitimate to apply an educational account developed from a politically liberal perspective. This may be called as *a narrow overlapping consensus on education*. To exemplify, let us take the case of the European Union (EU). A candidate state is to comply with the *acquis* based on different chapters on various topics in order to become a member state. Yet, each candidate state may align its legislation with the *acquis* through complying with different chapters at different times. For example, while bringing its legislation into line with the *acquis* regarding the chapter on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, a candidate state may still need to show more progress on the chapter on Social Policy and Employment. In the same manner, a candidate state may already fulfill the requirements of the chapter on Education and Culture, while falling short of complying with some other chapters on different topics. Now, consider this society as a developing democracy that has not reached an overlapping consensus on all aspects but has reached an agreement on its education system including its content, aims, and purposes, which may be called a narrow overlapping consensus on education. Therefore, it appears to be legitimate to implement an educational account developed from a politically liberal perspective in such a developing democracy since the agreements on its education system do not conflict with the basic liberal principles.

After clarifying the basic idea about how a politically liberal approach to education can be promoted in a developing democracy, I intend to analyze whether an educational account developed from a politically liberal perspective may be applicable to Turkish education system. To do so, I will examine if there is a narrow overlapping consensus on the education system in Turkey. With this in mind, I will, in the section below, look at the constitution of the Turkish Republic with reference to the key articles about education and the Basic Law of National Education that, along with other laws, regulates educational policy in Turkey. Then, I will examine whether the current agreement on education is consistent with the main conditions for a narrow overlapping consensus on education. Finally, I shall conclude, in accordance with the basic ideas of political liberalism, whether the agreement on education in Turkey satisfies the conditions for a narrow overlapping consensus, in order to understand if a justice oriented educational approach that is developed from a politically liberal perspective can be applied to Turkish education.

General Structure and Legal Basis of the Education System In Turkey

General Structure

The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, the Basic Law of National Education, and the Law for the Unification of Education fundamentally determine the principles of the education system and frame the organization and responsibilities of educational institutions in Turkey. For example, Article 42 of the Constitution secures the right to education by stating that no one shall be deprived of a right to education and specifying that primary education is compulsory for everyone and free of charge in state schools. The Law for the Unification of Education, which was enacted in 1924, makes all educational institutions the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education (MONE). The MONE is organized in accordance with the Basic Law of National Education and with related laws that regulate the education system.

The MONE is the central state agency that is responsible for administrating all educational services in Turkey, including formal and non-formal education. The MONE includes central, provincial, and foreign offices. Provincial and district directorates represent the MONE in each province in Turkey and are responsible for administrating educational activities in accordance with decisions of the MONE and its various offices. In addition, the MONE's educational inspectors supervise all educational activities at local, provincial, and central levels.

Currently, compulsory basic education lasts for 12 years in Turkey, beginning at the age of six. After four years of primary education, students continue to four years of middle school and complete compulsory education with four years of high school. Higher education is available for those who wish to continue, based on their performance on a standardized examination that is developed and conducted by a state organization that is primarily responsible for selection and placement of students in higher education institutions nationwide.

In this highly centralized education system, some organizations play important roles in determining the nature of education in Turkey. For example, the Board of Education, which reports directly to the Minister, is responsible for developing and revising curriculum and for defining the content of course books that are used at all levels of compulsory education nationwide. Decisions taken by the Board of Education about curriculum, educational materials, and other educational issues are submitted for final approval by the Minister of National Education. In addition, while the MONE administers all stages and types of education up to higher education, the Council for Higher Education is responsible for educational planning, coordination, allocation of budgets, faculty appointments, and defining the core curriculum and guidelines for undergraduate programs. The Council for Higher Education sponsors different affiliated organizations that are responsible for organizing higher education activities, such as the Teacher Training Committee that is responsible for organizing and evaluating teacher training programs in collaboration with the MONE and faculties of education. The Council for Higher Education is a non-governmental national board of trustees. However, the president of the Council for Higher Education is appointed by the President of the Republic of Turkey. Both the basic education and higher education systems, in short, are centrally organized and administered, which leaves little autonomy for educational institutions in Turkey.

Aims and Principles of Turkish National Education

The general aims of Turkish national education are defined in Article 2 of the Basic Law of National Education. According to the Article, Turkish national education aims to:

- (1) develop citizens who are committed to Atatürk's reforms, principles, and nationalism as defined in the Constitution; who internalize, protect, and promote the national, moral, and cultural values of the Turkish nation; who love and foster their families, homeland, and nation; who have knowledge of their duties and responsibilities toward the Republic of Turkey – a democratic, secular, and social state of law based on human rights and the basic principles defined in the Constitution – and reflect this knowledge in their behaviors,
- (2) develop persons who are in physical, mental, moral, spiritual, and emotional balance and have a healthy personality and character, thinking ability that is independent and scientific, and a broad worldview; who respect human rights, value enterprise and individuality, and are responsible toward society; and who are constructive, creative, and productive,
- (3) prepare all members of the Turkish nation – by means of developing their own interests and abilities and of providing them with knowledge, skills, and cooperative working habits – for life and professions that will make them happy and will contribute to the welfare and happiness of society.

The Article further specifies that:

In this way, Turkish national education aims, on the one hand, to enhance the happiness of Turkish citizens and society and, on the other, to promote economic, social, and cultural development by means of national

solidarity so that eventually Turkey will become a distinguished member of modern civilizations.

The same Law – in Articles from 4 to 17 – also specifies the principles of Turkish national education, which are:

- (1) Universality and equality: educational institutions are open to all without any consideration of race, religion, language, or sex and without any privilege given to any family, group, or class
- (2) Social and individual needs: educational services are to fulfill needs of individuals and society
- (3) Orientation: individuals are directed to programs in accordance with their interests and abilities
- (4) Right to education: basic education is everyone's right
- (5) Equal opportunity: men or women, and those who suffer from poverty or who need special care are to be equally provided with education
- (6) Continuity: general and vocational education are provided throughout life
- (7) Atatürk's principles, reforms, and nationalism: all types and levels of education are to give special emphasis to Atatürk's reforms, principles, and nationalism and to promote the use of the Turkish language in educational and scientific areas
- (8) Democracy education: students are to be provided with a notion of democratic ways of life
- (9) Secularism: Turkish national education acknowledges secularism as fundamental
- (10) Scientific approach: in accordance with developments in science, educational programs and materials are to be revised continually
- (11) Planning: educational services are to be planned in accordance with economic, social, and cultural development goals
- (12) Co-education: students are educated together regardless of sex
- (13) School-parent cooperation: school and parent cooperation for the realization of educational goals is to be promoted
- (14) Education everywhere: education not only in formal educational institutions but also in non-formal environments – including family, work, and other places – is to be promoted. Any educational institution – including state, private, or charity organizations – are under the control of the MONE.

As primarily specified in the Basic Law of National Education and as stated in various laws that regulate the education system in Turkey, specific aims of educational institutions of different types and at all levels are defined in accordance with the general aims and principles of Turkish national education. Thus, primary education, as defined in Article 23 of the Basic Law of National Education, aims to generate good citizens by providing students with the skills and knowledge necessary for national moral values and to prepare them for the next level of education. Secondary education, as specified in Article 28 of the same law, aims to provide students with a common basic culture, to introduce them to social problems, to encourage them to seek possible ways to resolve those problems, to enable them to acquire the ability to contribute to economic and cultural development, and to lead them to higher education in accordance with their interests and skills. Also, as framed in Article 35 of the same law, higher education aims to fulfill professional work needs, to teach scientific knowledge, to enhance scientific knowledge for resolving Turkish society's cultural, technical, and scientific problems, to do research on the country's problems that benefits the society, to publish research results that will contribute to the development of science, and to educate society through disseminating scientific data in both written and oral forms.

The general aims and principles of Turkish national education as specified in the Basic Law of National Education are derived from the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. For example, Articles 42 and 58 of the Constitution secure the right to education, unity in language, free compulsory basic education for all citizens, state control over the education system, science as the basis of education, Atatürk's principles and reforms, and education for the integrity of the state. Article 27 ensures the right to study and teach science and art freely, unless this freedom is used for changing the form, characteristics, and national traits of the state as defined in the first three articles of the Constitution. Article 24 guarantees the freedom of conscience, belief, and religious commitment. It also specifies that moral and religious

education, which is among compulsory courses in basic education, is provided under the control and supervision of the state. Alternative religious education is optional according to students' and their legal representatives' desires. In addition, Article 62 allows the state to provide education for citizens' children who live abroad. Articles 130, 131, and 132 of the Constitution specify the organization and administration of higher education system in detail.

IS THERE A NARROW OVERLAPPING CONSENSUS ON EDUCATION IN TURKEY?

The general structure and legal basis of education in Turkey imply a highly centralized education system with clearly defined principles and aims that are secured by the Constitution. Now, the question is whether this well-defined agreement on education system of Turkey can be considered to be a narrow overlapping consensus about education. In order to clarify this inquiry, let us first recall the basic conditions for an agreement to be an overlapping consensus. In accordance with what Rawls (1993) discusses, it can concisely be stated that in order for an agreement to be conceived of as an overlapping consensus, it is to be reached thorough free public justification and equal participation of the members of a pluralistic society, and it is to be affirmed and complied with by those who hold incommensurable comprehensive doctrines from their own perspectives – not from the perspective of a particular comprehensive doctrine – and because they consider the agreement to be just. Now, let us discuss the agreement on education in Turkish society in light of these conditions to determine if it can be counted as a narrow overlapping consensus.

A Historical Overview of Educational Reforms in Turkey

The *Tanzimat* era appears to be a phase of history to which the modernization of Turkish society and the Turkish education system can be traced. For this reason, an overview of this modernization process may be a plausible first step in determining whether the current system meets the conditions for a narrow overlapping consensus. The educational reforms implemented during the early republican period and the current educational developments that have been undertaken by the Justice and Development Party (JDP) administration appear to have special importance in arriving at a conclusion about this matter. The long debate between secular and Islamic worldviews has been reflected in the educational policy of the Turkish Republic. Thus, after a historical discussion about educational reforms and the current situation of Turkish education, I shall conclude whether currently there is a narrow overlapping consensus on education in Turkey.

Early Republican Period and Foundations of Education. Before the *Tanzimat* era, the main types of schools were Sibyan schools, Enderun, and Medreses. Sibyan schools were private primary schools that taught students based on Islam. Enderun schools taught children from non-Muslim families and educated them to become soldiers, commanders, and statesmen for the Ottoman Empire at different levels up to the position of Grand Vizier and Sheikh-ul Islam. Medreses in general, correspond to contemporary universities, in which various but mostly religious fields were studied as taught by prominent scholars. Those who graduated from Medreses also served the Empire at various places and levels.

Beginning with the *Tanzimat* era, modernization also affected the education system of the Ottoman Empire. Different types of schools were established in order to modernize the education system based on western education systems. However, while new schools were introduced, the old system was barely changed. Consequently, the Ottoman Empire operated a dual education system during its last decades (Tekeli & İlkin, 1993; Evered, 2012). Also, the first modern course books appear during the *Tanzimat* era (Doğan, 2011). More specifically, the first western-style course books were introduced in 1850 (Arslan, 2010). However, most of the books taught in schools were translations and adaptations of western course books until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (Arslan, 2010).

The social and political problems that led the Ottoman Empire to collapse also created a fundamental concern for the integrity of the newly established Republic of Turkey. Safeguarding the survival of the new state appeared to be a most vital issue for the founders. Nationalism based on Turkism was embraced as the basis for the new nation-state. Creating national solidarity based on a common language, history, and cultural traits regardless of ethnic and religious differences was the aim of the social and political reforms implemented during the early Republican period, with the ultimate goal of Turkey becoming a developed western-style democratic state. A complete transition to democracy, including political, economic, and cultural transformation, was vital in creating a specifically Turkish nation-state. Education in this transition process was conceived of an essential instrument for reshaping the social order, informing citizens about democratic ways of life, and disseminating the new ideology. For this reason, a basic feature of Turkish modernization since the establishment of the Turkish Republic appears to be a state-centric educational project (Akinoglu, 2008; Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2008; İrem, 2012; Özsoy, 2009).

To realize this transition to democracy, the Atatürk administration appealed to the experiences of foreign educators during the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. For example, John Dewey, who has been the most influential foreign thinker within the Turkish education system, was invited to make an educational proposal for Turkey

in 1924. His notion of progressive education in this proposal influenced educational reforms and regulations in the following decades (Bilgi & Özsoy, 2005; Kazamias, 1966; Tarman, 2011; Uygun, 2008). Dewey's idea of democratic education helped in developing among new generations an understanding of democracy in Turkey, even though the educational reforms influenced by Dewey's report reveal a conceptual gap between Dewey's ideas about democracy and the ideology of the Turkish Republic (Dorn & Santoro, 2011).

One of the most important educational reforms at this time is the Law for the Unification of National Education, enacted on March 3, 1924, which is still in effect as mentioned above. Also, the adoption of Latin script in 1928 and the law passed in 1931 that required all children to attend Turkish schools in order to develop a national consciousness and prevent foreign influence over children are seen as among the most important policies (Önsoy, 1991). The 1924 educational law primarily aimed at establishing a single system to replace the dual system established in the Tanzimat era. The old system was abandoned and the new education system was reorganized under the control of the Ministry of National Education.

In fact, the educational policy of the Atatürk era primarily aimed at overcoming the duality between the old and new education systems, organizing the new system based upon a state-centric ideology derived from Turkish nationalism, and disseminating the Kemalist worldview to every corner of the country through education (Ergün, 1982). For example, the first curriculum of the Republic, which was developed in 1924, disregarded such topics as the sultanate, the Ottoman dynasty, and the Caliphate while introducing new topics such as the Turkish Independence War, the establishment of the Turkish Republic, and the abandonment of the Caliphate in order to develop national solidarity and obedience to the newly established state (Arslan, 2010). In the following years, the main civic aims of education became obvious. For example, the aim of primary education program was stated as "raising good citizens" in 1926, "raising people physically and psychologically fit to be Turkish citizens" in 1929, and "raising republican, statist, secular, [and] revolutionary citizens" in 1936 (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2008, p.51).

Disseminating a new worldview of the Turkish Republic was a main educational strategy to achieve a democratic culture in Turkey. By 1935, Kemalism became a complete system of thought. Kemalism was announced in the 1935 congress of the Republican People's Party (RPP) as a systematized ideology with four cardinal principles – Fatherland, Nation, Constitution, and Public Rights – and six essential principles – Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism, Statism, Secularism, and Reformism – which were later adopted in Article 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey (Kili, 2003). As mentioned above, these principles still constitute the legal foundations of Turkish education based on the current Constitution of the Turkish Republic. Education in the early Republican period, in sum, was conceived of as a main instrument in organizing society and forming citizens' notions of democracy and was aimed at disseminating an understanding of a democratic nation-state and developing a society unified by sentimental allegiance to national traits.

Civic Knowledge in Course Books. As stated in the Constitution and Laws that regulate the education system in Turkey, education is to develop citizens in accordance with what is officially defined by the state. At this point, a look at course books on citizenship that have been influential in developing students' conceptions of themselves as citizens may be of help in arriving at a conclusion about whether a narrow overlapping consensus on education exists in Turkey. These books are significant because the MONE, which is responsible for administering the centralized education system, is also the sole authority over curriculum and course books throughout the nation.

As briefly mentioned above, the Board of Education is an important organization of the MONE reporting to the Minister of Education. The Board of Education as it was renamed in 1983, was first established in 1926 as the National Education and Instruction Office based on the law about the organization of education (Law No: 789). The Board of Education is primarily responsible for analyzing the progress of the education system, providing suggestions that may lead to future progress of Turkish education, developing and revising curriculum, determining the content of course books, and approving course books to be used in schools. In other words, no book can be taught in any course without approval of the Board of Education. Course books are developed in accordance with educational programs that comply with the general aims and principles of Turkish national education and represent the aims of education as outlined by the Board of Education. Particularly, the course books that are related to civic education reveal the conception of citizenship to be cultivated in students because all course books taught in that specific course align with the state's perspective on democracy, the nation, and the individual.

Citizenship education was initiated using a course book entitled *Information about the Fatherland* in 1924 (Kadioğlu, 2005). While the first course books did not state a definition of a citizen, those after 1929 began providing a definition of citizenship (Ince, 2012a). Until the 1950's, course books taught in primary and secondary education stated a communitarian definition of the citizen as one who is devoted to the state and nation (Üstel, 2004). Course books during the early republican period emphasize such concepts as national unity and solidarity based on the idea of Turkishness (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2008). Citizenship education in this period was based on duties rather than rights of citizens (Kadioğlu, 2005).

With the transition to a multi-party democracy, course books taught in 1950's began including a notion of democracy with reference to that system (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2008). The Democratic Party (DP), did not make substantial changes in the political order after defeating the RPP (Özbudun, 2008). Accordingly, the DP kept the educational policy of the previous period intact during its ruling period (İnce, 2012b). During the 1960's, the duty-based notion of citizenship was replaced with an active and participatory notion of citizenship in accordance with the overall social and political atmosphere that is characterized as the most liberal period in the history of Turkey (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2008; İnce, 2012b, Soyayık-Şentürk, 2005). Accordingly, course books emphasized pluralist democracy and rights of citizens rather than duties. However, as an outcome of the 1971 military involvement in politics, duties and passive citizenship became dominant notions in course books again (İnce, 2012b). The social and political chaos of the 1970's and the following military coup of 1980 led authorities to intensify the emphasis on the conception of a single nation and shared national traits, while emphasizing internal and external threats to national unity as a central theme of course books (İnce, 2012b, Üstel, 2004). Until 2012, for example, a course titled National Security Knowledge was compulsory in tenth grade and was taught by military officers using course books written by a commission consisting of military staff. This course aimed at teaching students that the military was vital for Turkey given regional and global politics and at imposing upon students a comprehensive ideal of the military (Altınay, 2004). It also put an emphasis on external threats to the Turkish state, such as secret plans of neighboring states to seize the Turkish lands, which promoted xenophobia in students toward the neighbors of Turkey. This course was justified as preserving national unity and order (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2008).

All the periods mentioned in the history of Turkish education share a common set of characteristics concerning citizenship education. For example, emphasis on citizenship, duties toward society and state, territorial integrity, principles and reforms of Atatürk, and unity in national features such as history, language, and ideals appear to be common to all these periods. As Çayır and Gürkaynak (2008) observe, all school curricula and courses have been developed in order to create patriotic and responsible citizens, and citizenship education, which emphasizes nationalist, duty-based, and militarist perspectives, is a cross-curricular theme in the Turkish education system.

Recent Developments in the Turkish Education System. A fundamental change in approach to primary school curriculum in Turkey was made in 2005. Prior to 2005, the approach to the primary education curriculum placed teachers at the center of instruction so that teachers were considered as the ultimate source of knowledge in classrooms while students were passive information receivers who were not encouraged to think critically (Koç et al., 2007). In 2005, in reaction to the inability of this approach to enable students to meet contemporary educational expectations, primary school education was reorganized in accordance with a student-centered model. With the new primary school curriculum, students began to be conceived of as individual beings with their own characteristics and relations to the environment, to their families, and to others. Students also became the center of instruction while teachers supposedly became instructors who encourage students to construct their own knowledge through inquiry, exploration, discussion, and reasoning (Koç et al., 2007).

For this reason, the new curriculum approach can be labeled student-centered. However, it appears to be more society-centered with regard to some other issues. For example, a competency-based curriculum also became a core element. The EU's reports on Turkey and some non-governmental organizations contributed to this curriculum. For example, the EU's progress reports on Turkey put emphasis on the importance of changing the education system to reflect the needs of a competition-based economy, which was also supported by some influential business associations in Turkey (Koşar-Altınyelken & Akkaymak, 2012). The main reasons for the changes in the structure of the curriculum appear to be based on the economic outcomes of the education system. For this reason, the JDP administration is criticized on the grounds that the demands of the market economy were the primary concern while social values of education were ignored. In this sense, therefore, the new approach to the curriculum places emphasis on society-centered educational aims more than student-centered outcomes.

In addition, critics argue that the JDP government adopted this reform because *epistemological constructivism* appealed to Islamist intellectuals – even though constructivism is often valued by secularists – because this version of constructivism allows a pedagogical method that supports a relativist understanding of scientific knowledge that rejects the universality of that knowledge (Ünder, 2012). According to Ünder (2012), the JDP adopted this version of the constructivist, student-centered approach to enable students to construct their own knowledge since it, as opposed to a positivist approach, provides space for religion, promotes a justification for religious education in schools, and enables students to interpret scientific knowledge from Islamic perspectives. It is also important to note that the content of the curriculum remained significantly the same as in the previous curriculum while the approach to instruction methods changed (Koç et al., 2007). In addition, teachers were neither sufficiently prepared for properly implementing the new approach in classrooms nor provided with the underlying philosophy that led this curriculum reform (Bıkmaz, 2006). Moreover, the educational outcomes of courses such as mathematics and social sciences remained predetermined, which indicates a contradiction with the student-centered approach in which students construct their own knowledge through their personal experiences (Bıkmaz, 2006).

Considering these aspects of and criticisms of the new approach to the primary school curriculum, it appears that the JDP administration created a mixed and self-contradictory approach to curriculum while placing economic outcomes and religious education at the center of educational policy. In fact, this educational program of the JDP points to an important aspect of the Turkish education system. Education in Turkey has been subject to a dispute among secularists, the military, and Islamists since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Most recent changes in the Turkish education system continue this conflict over education in Turkey.

With the most recent educational reform under Law No: 6287 enacted on March 30, 2012, compulsory education became twelve years long starting with the 2012-13 education year. Critics of the JDP and opposition parties opposed this reform primarily because they believed that the real purpose of the reform was to promote intensive religious education in schools and to enable Imam and Preacher Schools (IPs) to flourish again. The RPP brought a suit against Law No: 6287 to the Supreme Court charging that some articles of the Law are in contradiction with various articles of the Constitution, especially with those that secure the secular structure of the Republic of Turkey. Yet, the Supreme Court concluded in September 20, 2012, in favor of Law No: 6287 as it was framed.

What has been brought about by this educational reform? Law No: 6287 made various changes in several laws that regulate the education system in Turkey. For example, compulsory basic education was previously eight years of primary school. Now compulsory education includes eight years of basic education, divided into four years of primary school and four years of middle school. Four years of high school education also became compulsory. Also, Law No: 6287 enabled middle schools to be integrated into either primary schools or high schools.

These aspects of Law No: 6287 aim to increase the amount of schooling and to develop an education system that complies with the demands of contemporary societies. However, such changes in the structure of primary education have raised concerns over the secular foundations of the Republic of Turkey. This reform is seen in secularist circles as a response to the previous educational reform that was enacted in 1997 in which compulsory basic education became an uninterrupted eight years long. Because of the military's involvement in politics in 1997, the Islamist-oriented government resigned and various sanctions were imposed against Islamist organizations. At this time, the middle school system was abandoned and grades 6, 7, and 8 were included in primary education, which increased compulsory education to eight years of schooling from five. For this reason, middle school levels of high schools, including IPs, were closed down, and religious education was limited to the high school level. With the most recent educational reform, however, not only were various elective religious courses included in the curriculum but also IPs began flourishing and grades five to eight of such schools were reopened since Law No: 6287 allows combining the second four-year level with the third four-year level of compulsory education.

Why are IPs of importance to this analysis? As mentioned above, the traditional dual education system was unified under the control of the MONE with the Law for Unification of Education in 1924. This Law also enabled the state to control religious education while closing down the old religious institutions, Medresses. IPs were established in the first year of the Republic of Turkey in 29 districts and abandoned in 1932 on the grounds that the aims of the IPs were in conflict with the secular structure of the education system of the Turkish Republic. IPs were reopened in 1952 when the DP was in power. In the following decades, the number of IPs increased, especially once religious education became compulsory in primary and secondary schools after the 1980 military coup as was required by the 1982 constitution (Öcal, 2007; Önsoy, 1991). Since the introduction of the multiparty system, right-wing conservative parties have used the dispute over IPs as a way to gain popular support. Yet, the JDP's educational policies reveal a closer relationship between the JDP and IPs than was the case of any previous conservative party (Coşkun & Şentürk, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Turkish education is a profoundly centralized and state-controlled system. The Constitution and the Basic Law of National Education articulate the foundations of the education system and specify aims and principles of Turkish national education. The first significant educational reform in the twentieth century Turkish education appears with the Law for Unification of Education in 1924. This law unified and centralized the education system under the control of the MONE. It also placed religious education under the control of the state, which in the following decades led to tension between secularists and Islamists.

Early republican governments carried out a state-sponsored democratization project that primarily relied on the education of citizens about democracy and on disseminating the foundational principles of the state, such as secularism and nationalism. The Kemalist worldview and its principles became an essential component of the ideology of the Turkish Republic throughout the early period. The principles and reforms of Atatürk were codified in the Constitution, and their promotion has been a main aim of the Turkish education system.

Accordingly, civics education that aims to develop citizens for the Turkish Republic based on fundamental

principles that are defined in the Constitution has been a main aspect of education in Turkey. In this manner, Turkish education has aimed at developing national citizens who are devoted to the indivisible Turkish nation, imbued with national sentiments, habituated to work for the ideals of the nation, and committed to secular democracy since the Atatürk era. In addition, the civic aims of Turkish education have been achieved not only through specific citizenship courses but also through various courses in the entire curriculum.

However, Turkish education that was established upon a Kemalist worldview has been a target for, especially, Islamist elements in Turkey who conceive of themselves as marginalized by the secularist structure of the state since they are committed to religious ways of life. Beginning with the multiparty system, the tension between secular and religious elements has been a central theme in Turkish politics, which also led the military to become involved in politics at different times as a self-proclaimed guardian of the Kemalist state.

IPs, in which citizens are educated to be committed to an Islamic worldview have been at the center of this secular-religious conflict over education. Since the DP administration, conservative political parties have favored IPs. The most recent educational reform revitalized the IPs in reaction against the 1997 policy of the military and not only enabled IPs to flourish but also introduced into the national curriculum various religious courses (Ünder, 2012). The JDP, moreover, has been unwilling to provide equal opportunities for other religious groups and even Islamic sects different from the one supported by the JDP. For example, the European Court of Human Rights, after considering the case that was brought against Turkey by an Alevi Muslim family, concluded on October 9, 2007, that the Turkish education system does not provide appropriate methods for ensuring respect for parents' convictions and does not meet the requirements of objectivity and pluralism with regard to religious instruction (Akbulut & Usal, 2008). In the following school year, some information about the Alevi faith was included in religious course books at the twelfth-grade level, which was seen as a reluctant and unsatisfactory response to the case and did not alter the general opinion that the government has tried to Sunnify Alevis, since the state imposes a Sunni-Islamic worldview through religious education in state schools in Turkey (Akbulut & Usal, 2008).

These and various other incidents have led to the conclusion among the critics that the JDP has been imposing its worldview through education. This widely shared anxiety in secular circles was intensified when Erdoğan stated in early 2012 that the JDP administration aims to create "pious generations," a statement that dominated public educational discussions especially during February 2012 and increased the worry among critics of the JDP that it is imposing a religious worldview through education. For some critics, such an aim has always been an underlying educational goal of the JDP government, which was eventually declared by Erdoğan once gaining political power over institutions of the state, such as the military and the Supreme Court, as well as the media (Ünder, 2012).

The first significant educational reform undertaken by the JDP administration was the 2005 curriculum reform. With the support of some influential international organizations and non-governmental associations in Turkey, the JDP government placed importance on the demands of the market economy. Course books after this reform began emphasizing certain personal characteristics such as those of producers, consumers, and entrepreneurs, while ignoring individual liberties and giving special prominence to religious elements in the curriculum as mentioned above (Koşar-Altınyelken & Akkaymak, 2012). For this reason, it can be argued that the educational aims of the JDP government have been, on the one hand, developing individuals for the market economy and, on the other hand, creating a society based on Islamic morals and values (İnal & Akkaymak, 2012). However, neither the 2005 curriculum reform nor the 2012 education reform were universally accepted. For example, some scholars and non-governmental organizations criticized the development process of the 2005 curriculum on the grounds that it excluded their involvement (Aksit, 2007). As mentioned above, the ongoing dissatisfaction with the 2012 reform also signifies that it was controversial.

In the final analysis, the Turkish education system was established as a part of a modernization project conducted by the central state authorities and has remained centralized and authoritarian. From the early republican period to the JDP administration, education has been a powerful instrument in the hands of ruling political organizations. Although the Turkish education system ostensibly aims to create a culture of democracy, ruling parties have shaped their educational policies in accordance with their own conceptions of democracy. In this sense, it can be concluded that a ruling political organization in Turkey uses political power – that is gained through democratic means – to promote its own comprehensive doctrine by means of the education system. In fact, considering the democratization project of the early republican period, the 1997 educational reform, and the recent educational reforms implemented by the JDP, none of the important phases in the recent history of Turkish education provides an example of a popular agreement on education achieved through free public justification and citizens' equal participation in discussions on educational matters. Moreover, considering minority controversies including the Alevi-Sunni dispute over religious education and the tension between secular and religious worldviews, none of the educational reforms has been accepted by various groups in light of the comprehensive doctrines they affirm and because they believe that these reforms are just. In sum, considering the conditions given above for an agreement to be regarded as an overlapping consensus, it can be concluded that the educational reforms in the recent history of Turkish education and the principles derived from the

Constitution have not been reached through free and equal participation of citizens based on public discussions of the meaning of equality and justice for education. Thus, there is not and has never been a narrow overlapping consensus on education in Turkey.

Moreover, the organizational structure of Turkish education system makes the state the sole authority over the education system and leaves almost no authority to local educational agencies, schools, parents, and students. As mentioned, the MONE has the right to determine curricula of all courses and books that are to be taught in classrooms nationwide, for example. Teachers are obliged to educate students in accordance with what is dictated by the central authority. In other words, teachers are responsible for implementing the decisions taken by the MONE. Unfortunately, with these characteristics and organizational features, the Turkish education system does not represent a narrow overlapping consensus on education.

However, the authoritarian and centralized structure of the Turkish education system that provides the ruling party with absolute power over education does not undermine the argument that Turkish society can agree upon a justice oriented education system. Turkey is a constitutional democracy. Yet, the common understanding of democracy in Turkey appears to be one that is not wide and deep enough to establish a culture of a just constitutional democracy that goes beyond a procedure to arrive at decisions in democratic ways. One way to contribute to the development of a culture of justice in a developing democracy, however, is promoting a proper educational approach that may help developing justice oriented reasonable citizens who may further the advancement of such culture in their society. In this regard, even though there is not a narrow overlapping consensus on education in Turkey that could allow us to discuss how to integrate a justice based educational approach into the current agreement on education, there might be other means to discuss how to, first, develop and, later, advance a justice oriented educational approach in Turkey. Therefore, a further research is to be conducted on the possibility of developing and applying a justice oriented educational account under the absence of a narrow overlapping consensus on education in Turkey.

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