

Review

Political education in school

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Political education is a term with negative associations and triggering prejudiced approaches and discourses -maybe some paranoid thoughts- like “keep politics away from education!” in the minds of several people. This article deals with “political education” phenomenon almost never discussed and made subject to scientific researches in Turkey; and discussing what is tried to be achieved in the minds and actions of the children and youths via political education suggests integration as a cross curriculum of the formally neglected political education phenomenon we rather see at informal contexts. This study is a theoretical one based on literature review. It has been realized by review, compilation, synthesis and presentation of the existing researches on political education.

Key words: Education, good citizen, politics, political education.

INTRODUCTION

Today, schools not only provide the fundamental knowledge and skills the students need to enter the labor market, but also develop the competences students need to improve the culture of democracy, reinforce awareness of rights and responsibilities, rise of the idea of justice, enrichment of the freedom understanding, in brief construction of a sound social order looking for common good. Besides those duties, schools try to balance and improve political equality in the society by supporting disadvantaged students with restricted possibilities. The most fundamental conceptual and theoretical connection between education and politics show that both are based on a common sociological foundation and are two fundamental functions of societies¹.

In a wide range extending from Ancient Greek to Eastern Philosophy, from enlightenment philosophy to

democratic theory, almost all significant thinkers of the political field established a connection between politics and education, and wrote texts that problematize that relationship (Komsuoglu, 2014: 3). No doubt, there is a mutual relationship between education and politicsⁱⁱ, which is both express and covert. Not only the changes and transformations in the political arena influence and determine educational processes but also educational processes influence and determine political culture.

However, about the relationship between education and politics -particularly in democratic countries- education and politics do not dominate each other. In other words, there is no such thing as one oppressing, trying to design, or forcing the other into the former's will. However, education and politics are not two distinct sets. They have a mutually dependant relationship (Işık, 2013:

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95).

Each implementation in the field of education does not server only an educational value, but also corresponds to a political meaning. For example, the rank of our country in international tests like PISA (The Program for International Student Assessment), PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), TIMSS (The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) or the recommendation decisions taken in the National Education Council or the duration or form of grading of compulsory education are matters of discussion in both the educational society and political environments. In similarly essentially political matters or problems like the USA's deciding on concentrating its educational investments on basic sciences when the Soviet Union sent Sputnik, the first satellite of humanity into the space in 1957; education was considered the main component of the solution. Education was considered a fundamental point of exit in ensuring social integration of the immigrants accepting intensive migration. As those examples imply, politics cannot be thought in isolation from education and vice versa. As Plato and Aristotle expressed, politics is a human activity held everywhere, and is imperative in terms of meeting the natural needs of people (Havard, 1980: 936).

Politics does not involve humans only, but also corporations, establishments, societies and communities. In this context, school is a structure within politics which produces politics, examines political systems in effect, and shows their consistencies and inconsistencies (Sönmez, 2012: 58). Political concepts are introduced to children via education and school either directly or indirectly starting from early ages. School is both a surety of formation of socially qualified political culture¹, and a means to political socialization (Türköne, 2005: 244).

School not only directly supports socialization and political participation via formal curriculum but also encourages the same indirectly through the school atmosphere, the sense of togetherness among teachers and students, its form of communication and interaction and the order of seating in classrooms etc. Besides school reduces social matters to student level, makes them rationally and collectively debatable to serve formation by students of political foresight or awareness, and their achieving the set of skills required for political participation. It fulfills the purpose indirectly via the school culture in the school. In other words, both school and the educational service in schools have a political content and function.

The political function of the school and education is to bring up good citizens. This, in fact, is particularly the

common and fundamental purpose of political, democratic and citizenship education. Awareness and responsibility of citizenship is gained by people's living it in practice and through the political education process (Pandey and Kumar, 1977: 518).

Political education is a process whereby citizens internalize the set of values of the political system. To clarify, political education is a process whereby people learn several matters such as how to socialize within political culture, how to think and act on politics and government, how to adapt to the political process, how to shape political system and how to make decisions (Pandey and Kumar, 1977: 517-8).

Political education is a term with negative associations and triggering prejudiced approaches and discourses - maybe some paranoid thoughts- like "keep politics away from education!" in the minds of several people. This article deals with "political education" phenomenon almost never discussed and made subject to scientific researches in Turkey; and discussing what is tried to be achieved in the minds and actions of the children and youths via political education, suggests integration as a cross curriculum of the formally neglected political education phenomenon we rather see at informal contexts. This study is a theoretical one based on literature review. It has been realized by review, compilation, synthesis and presentation of the existing researches on political education.

Political education in school

There are various opinions regarding the purposes of political education. For some, political education is preparation to a time when individuals will have the chance to think about political matters, form their personal decisions, and to materialize them. For some, political education is a process vesting rendering students the chance to learn about the politics of the groups and corporations they may be involved in at various degrees. Some merge the two opinions and consider political education as a process, which by having individuals at various age groups analyze the political nature of their groups and corporations, makes them politically literate and at the same time tries to ensure that individuals compare the policies of such groups with the political fashion of the adult world and the current political events -the very experience of such analysis and comparison is a means of elevating political awareness and literacy and preparing children to effective political activity in their adulthood-(McNaughton, 1982: 264-5). For some educators, the term political education expresses an ambiguity that needs to be eliminated. They claim that the term is oxymoronic, and implies a meaning like "education is political" (Frazer, 2010: 11).

¹As to trial by any economic, social and political power of construction of the political culture, that would result in social depoliticization, which causes formation of fanatic political attitudes and a dogmatic political culture.

There is in fact only one thing at the foundation of all such discussions and conflicts: What we wish to succeed about political education in the minds and actions of children and youths (McNaughton, 1982: 267). The final objective of political education in the mind and actions of an individual is no doubt in close relationship with what the individual figure needed by political systems of societies should be. At this point, maybe we should question whether political education is formal or informal.

For most people, political education process is informal because most people earn their political knowledge, opinions or attitudes by informal means like family, friend, media etc. Informal political education happens in schools too. School helps one to understand political events, and affects his/her appropriate role opinion as a citizen. Children are introduced to political system, parties, leaders etc. concepts and phenomena in the primary school and discuss matters related to politics in courses like history, geography more often in the secondary school (Denver and Hands, 1990: 263).

The purpose of political education in schools, no matter what the grade is, to teach the students how they can create students, how they can change society, and how they can be politically influential. The curriculum of political education should involve what needs to be done for protection and development of democracy, what elements they should be careful about when voting as a voter; and also have a form teaching several paths to political influence like party activism, organization, direct action and informal contact (Børhaug, 2008: 579).

International researches on political education in the school are mostly limited to curriculum and course book analyses. There are only a few studies on what happens in the classroom. Teachers in these studies are inclined to minimize education on political life, and instead to focus on how to live together in the classroom and school in a respectful and tolerant way (Børhaug, 2008: 583). Harwood (1985) thinks that teachers resist the idea of political education; that they do not conceive enough the targets and purposes of education, and that they do not trust their knowledge and skills in the field; and that they belittle the level of political knowledge of children. "For many of them, this is because they would (correctly) regard the notion of politics as being necessarily concerned with dissent, conflict and a lack of consensus, and feel that such harsh realities have no place in the comfortable view of the world that their primary schools propagate to children" (Ross, 1984: 131).

Nevertheless, political socialization literature suggests that the ages when children start to form political concepts are primary school ages, and several children may be in their most receptive ages to learn at least some socio-political concepts in primary schools. However, most primary school teachers never think of giving political education to children. The reason for that is, as

Ross (1984: 131) says, is perception of the concept "politics" as opposition, conflict and lack of agreement, and the opinion that this has no place in the worldview propagated by primary schools to children. Thus, politics is something teachers wish to avoid. As a matter of fact, teachers refusing to allow development of political opinions falsify and deny several political experiences children take every day to the school (Harber, 1980; Akt: Ross, 1984: 131).

There is a concern in schools that political education can be an instrument to teaching certain political beliefs to children and youths (Jones, 1980). Although political education requires more debate than several subjects, it is considered "out of topic" as a general skill of life. Besides, political education is considered as a feature of hidden or informal curriculum, assumed a biased, ideological tool of brainwashing giving educators much more power on the youths particularly. Perhaps the conclusion to be drawn from such evaluations is that political education should be made in social organizations/structures such as "parties, pressure groups, social movements, interest groups and other social organizations" rather than schools and private high schools. However, in the event that political education is realized in political organizations only, then only a certain number of citizens will have passed political education. Furthermore, the education in question will not be very systematic, which, in fact, is not the main duty of political organizations (Frazer, 2006: 49).

At this juncture, it is a point of curiosity how early political concepts and phenomena develop or from which age those can be developed or what kind of political concepts primary school children use and when they start to appear. However, this is very hard to determine. Piaget concluded that primary school children cannot understand the concept of nationality and a political unit like nation, that children at this stage cannot evaluate different explanations about society, that they are unable to make generalizations or establish hypotheses (Ross, 1984: 132). There are also researches suggesting that political and social concepts develop very early. The research by Stevens (1982; Akt: Ross, 1984: 132) revealed that children have some fundamental political information, opinions and vocabulary as of the age of seven; and as their ages advance, this becomes both more specialized and diversified. Stevens concluded that several children reach a level of confidence enough to be interested in political matters; hold a political perspective by the age of 11, associate matters with principles, and are aware of political processes, activities and objectives. Similarly, Greenstein (1965) or Hess and Torney (1967) determined that political concepts and phenomena developed in very early stages (eight / nine to 17 years of age). As a matter of fact, a research (Jackson, 2006) on

Table 1. Stages in the development of political belief (Connell, 1971; as cited in Tomlinsen, 1975: 253).

Interpretations		Stances	
Stage	Characteristics	Stage	Characteristics
1 Intuitive thinking	Confusion of political and non-political material; wild leaps in narrative and argument, fantasy	1 Politics not problematic	Most judgments ad hoc, unqualified, not consistent. A few stable attitudes formed under adult instruction
2 Primitive realism	Disappearance of fantasy; identification of a distinct political world at a remove from the self; appearance of task pool		
3 Construction of political order	Division of task pool; expansion of concrete detail about politics; perception of the multiple relationships among political actors	2 Politics problematic	(a) Positions taken on issues; preferences expressed ↓ (b) Alternative actions considered and sometimes undertaken
4 Ideological thinking	Use of abstract terms in political argument; conceptions of societies and polities as wholes		
		Ideologies	

168 children with ages varying between four and eight (36 four years old, 33 five years old, 29 six years old, 37 seven years old and 33 eight years old) has shown that children have positive orientation to political persons and symbols, and that such orientations came before the cognitive knowledge of political persons and symbols. As to Denver and Hands (1990) they took into consideration three aspects in analysis of political knowledge and sophistication: *Phenomenal knowledge*, *subject awareness* and *ideological awareness*.

As for Connell (1971)'s study, it is based on interviews with 119 children whose ages vary between 5 and 16 on various political matters (watching political perception of children over state hierarchy and personages, political parties and conflict, international politics, parents and media, particularly television). With this study, it has been revealed that children do more than just reproducing the

opinions of adults and that political thinking forms pass different stages and grades. Connell determined four stages in development of political belief and established three stages in revelation of political standing (Table 1). According to Connell, the stages of development of political belief are as follows (as cited in Tomlinson, 1975: 252-4):

- a) Children at the stage of conceptual thinking (5-6 years of age) are aware that there are special people, bad people and good people, but they do not know any political structure to put them in.
- b) Children at the stage of pure realism (7-9 years of age) deduce from certain real persons and functions they may hear, and attach themselves to any figure considered politically significant.
- c) Children at the stage of third development about 10-11

years of age transition from a unilateral political power opinion to a vertical political role arrangement. At this stage, children are aware of political conflict; but awareness of political conflict takes place about 12 years of age. Children consider power institutionalized starting from the age of nine, and notice that people undertake roles by voting of people. Acquisition of the concept of domination by Connell's subjects goes as far as 16 years of age. Development of the party system understanding is a good model in formation of the political system image. There are four aspects to children's conceiving parties: They are interested in elections, they experience conflicts among themselves too, they bring out leaders, and produce a form of government. Those points or some of the same can be understood fragmentally starting from seven years of age; however, they form a relatively standard political party understanding as of the age of 12, and parties are considered competitors in earning the right to exercise power.

d) Connell has found out that political thought, interestingly gains comprehensive logical integrity between the ages of 13 to 16. It has been found out that young teenagers make more and more connections every day and that they form hierarchical thought on generalizations and root reasons. Most children, as of 15 or 16, will have formed "a political appearance that is and may qualify as a whole despite some inconsistencies and conflicts" in their minds. Connell uses the term "ideology" in the meaning of conscious political opinion, according to which most teenagers and adults do not have any ideology.

The three stages in development of political standings in response to such cognitive-developmental background of political belief are more easily conceived. In the first two cognitive stages up to 9 years of age, politics has no alternatives, thus there is no election problem. As different opinions are formed on political area, choices develop and positions are taken. This is first realized relatively in isolation and fragments and then in a more interrelated and probably in a way to go as far as open ideologies (as cited in Tomlinson, 1975: 254-5).

The research by Adelson et al. coincides with the research of Connell. Adelson conducted a research with 450 teenagers from varying social classes and three nations, which are, USA, Western Germany and Britain involving both sexes whose age ranges between 11 to 18, and who are both normal and highly smart. The objective is to explore the political action world of teenagers of different ages and how they form a political philosophy. Adelson et al. thought that the best methodology is to avoid talking about up-to-date political realities with the subjects. Therefore, they benefited in their interviews fundamentally from a hypothetical condition whereby they asked the subject to imagine a group of a thousand people on an island in the Pacific

forms a political order and law system, and in general encounters numerous government problems. As a result of the research, no difference on sex basis was found; however, only tiny and expected differences were found out in connection with intelligence and social class. National differences are obvious, but not considered too significant. It has been determined that there is a major shift in the character of political thought at the ages of 12, 15 and 16; however, it was thought to arise from the age factor (as cited in Tomlinson, 1975: 254-5) (Table 1).

Prasad (1975) specified that political education has five dimensions (Table 2) and those five dimensions should be functionalized in a holistic approach (as cited in Pandey and Kumar, 1977: 519):

- 1) Political awareness,
- 2) political articulation,
- 3) political participation,
- 4) political involvement,
- 5) political judgement.

According to Ross (1984: 134-7), political education has aspects related to several social research projects; for example, common titles such as examination of friend groups (leadership, rules), games (making and implementation of rules, justice), examination of work places (power and authority, hierarchies, ownership and distribution) or police. Political education in primary schools can be made both in official curriculum and within the general operation and atmosphere of the school. It is not obligatory that the curriculum consists of a list of titles to be studied. It is adequate instead that the desired competences consist of a series of agreed concepts and skills. Ross defends political education also for improvement of covert political values in the school and classroom management and atmosphere. For him, both school and classroom are micropolitical organizations, and children notice their differences in power relationships with their experiences of belonging to such groups first. Children notice the hierarchical relationships among the personnel even in a tiny school.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, education is not analyzed enough as a political reality in Turkey; however it is dealt with on the basis of a reducing approach being considered a subject of politics² (Özsoy, 2012). Therefore, political education is a subject by some not conceived, by some, considered unnecessary to discuss, and by some abstained to deal with. We should tell this once more; wherever there is a

²Thinking of education as a political reality is seeing education as an "area", a "relationship" and a "process" rather than an "epiphenomenon" a "tool", a "means", a "thing" or a "state" (Özsoy, 2012: 98).

Table 2. Dimensions and indices of political education.

Dimensions	Indices
Political Awareness	Election Awareness Candidate Awareness Party Awareness Issue Awareness
Political Articulation	Candidate Orientation Party Orientation Issue Orientation
Political Participation	Participation as a Voter Participation in Campaign Participation in Strategy Formation
Political Involvement	Electoral obligation Interest in politics Political Commitment
Political Judgment	Individual Judgment Communitarian Judgment

relationship of director-directed (state-school, senior-junior, executive-teacher, teacher-student, guardian-student, school-family, school-society etc.), there is a political relationship and wherever there is a corporate relationship, there is also a political organization. Thus it can be said that school is not a suprapolitical being but rather a political organization, because it is an organ of the state. It can also be said that school relationship, because among more than one people, is a political one (Gümüş, 2006: 259). Besides, schools are political organizations because they are where political existence is constructed, political reactions, political opinions and political skills are developed.

Political education, which is in direct relationship with the political function of school also constituting the subject of this article is, to generalize, a process whereby children and youths internalize the value set of the political system, evaluate political concepts and phenomena through political education at mental, relational and perceptual scale, and form a state of awareness and consciousness to transfer what they learned into practice. What political education wishes to succeed in is to support the children in realization of their political existence and political subjectivity; to develop their political awareness; to ensure that they are raised as individuals with political awareness required for a freer and more democratic future; to assist their organization around participatory lines allowing them to become effective citizens, and to contribute to their shaping the political culture of the future.

Political education is a phenomenon whose formal aspect is neglected because we encounter it at a rather informal context. Our fundamental thesis and suggestion

on the matter is integration of political education to the currently applied educational programmes rather than its inclusion in educational programmes as a separate discipline. In other words, political education should become a natural, organic and spontaneously developed process turning it into a cross curriculum area like citizenship, entrepreneurship, human rights, media literacy, career awareness by way of ensuring both cross curricular and cross topical associations. Integration of political education into educational programmes as a cross curriculum both makes it possible for children and youths to think in a holistic and multidimensional manner, and supports the experiences of the concerned course contributing to their perceptual, affective, social and operational consistency and balance.

If school is indeed “not preparation to life but life itself” as Dewey mentioned, the primary duty of education would be to ensure that children and youths face, mingle and live side by side with life and the realities, problems and forms of relationship of life. On the other hand, the real world is a political one. Pretending to be outside of what is political although life itself is political would create a state of alienation, which we, as the society, have to face (Gümüş, 2006: 261). It should be remembered that displacing or postponing political education with paranoid discourses like “Keep politics away from education” would aggravate that state of alienation.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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ⁱ Politics is “the art of doing something for the good of the people”. That definition of politics comes from its Greek origin. As to “siyaset (Turkish word for politics), it comes from stableman in Arabic. This is the source of the difference of perception of politics between the Eastern and Western worlds (Yetkin, 2013: 128). Politics originates from Greek while “politics” from Arabic.

ⁱⁱ There are no doubt some distinctive features. Although the primary category of politics is the society itself, the primary category of education is the individual within the society. Although politics know about the tension between societies, it is unaware of the tension between the individual and the society. Nevertheless, education is aware of the tension between the individual and the society, and tries to form a balance in between. While politics is a tool of governing, education is a tool of shaping (Rotenstreich, 1952).