Experiencing Human Rights in the University Classroom in Turkey

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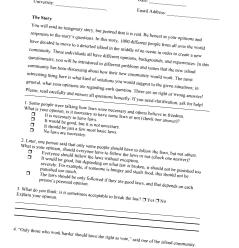www.mandry.net/toni/presentations.html

Introduction

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Preamble, UDHR

- UDHR (1948) explicitly enjoins states to educate for human rights (Article 26, 2).

- *The intersection of citizenship and human rights*: Shifting concepts of identity, both globally and in Turkey, range from a nationally-bound concept of citizen to a transnational concept of individual identity with attendant human rights.

- Taking a look at Turkish education as a whole, three major paradigms of education have emerged to address the role of the individual in the state, in the world and in their community
  - Citizenship Education
  - Human Rights Education: "The long term aim of such [human rights education] programmes is to establish a culture where human rights are understood, defended and respected." (Compass, 2002, 17)
  - Civic Involvement/Social Responsibility

The Study

Research Question: How are human rights concepts, knowledge and skills perceived by students and instructors in human rights and citizenship education courses at the university level in Turkey?

Study the students and teachers at a given university which offers creative academic approaches to teaching about human rights and citizenship and examine their perceptions of human rights and citizenship.
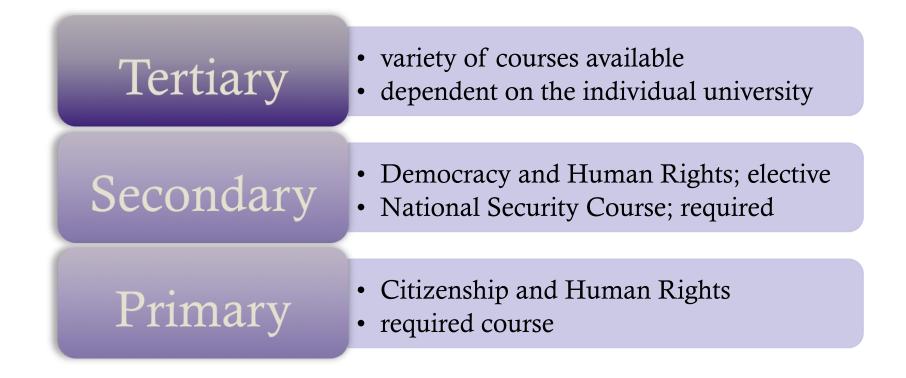
- Administer a questionnaire in which students can respond to a fictional scenario gauging perceptions of human rights and citizenship.

- Engage them in conversations about themselves and these concepts in relation to them personally, academically/professionally and theoretically.

- Observe them engaging with each other about these topics.

Context: Education for Human Rights and Citizenship

Tertiary
- variety of courses available
- dependent on the individual university

Secondary
- Democracy and Human Rights; elective
- National Security Course; required

Primary
- Citizenship and Human Rights
- required course

Snapshot on Primary & Secondary

- Citizenship Education and the National Security Course (1923)

- Human Rights Education Committee (1998-2007)

- Government recommendation for civic involvement projects (2005)

Snapshot on Tertiary

Site	Ankara	Bilgi	Sabancı	Gaziantep
Course Title	Human Rights Education	Social Responsibility	Civic Involvement Project	Civic Involvement Project
Type	Elective; 1 semester	Elective; 1 semester +	Mandatory, 2 semesters	Mandatory;
Framework	HRE	HRE	Mixed	Unknown
# of Sts	50	100	900+	Unknown
Age	Undergraduates in education	Undergraduates	Undergrads; 1st years	Undergrads; 1st years
Institution Type	State	Private	Private	State
Transmission Type	T → Sts	T → Sts	Sts → Sts	Unknown

Research Context

- Civic Involvement Projects (CIP) "are hands-on learning program for understanding participatory democracy, where students take active roles in civil society, dealing with various problems and working in cooperation with national and international NGOs and state institutions. CIP is a program believing that individuals are responsible for the society and the world they are living in; CIP provides the necessary tools for people to realize themselves; CIP believes that security concept should not be state centralized but individual centralized; CIP strives for internalization of participatory and democratic values; CIP is aware of the fact that there is a basic link in between poverty-income distribution, food reliability, health, education, access to information, gender equality, human rights and environment. Therefore CIP believes that all these issues should be undertaken as a whole considering participatory democracy. CIP is also aware that only this realization could provide a person to exist as a dignified being. In this context, CIP substantiates projects within a wide range; about child development, human rights, environment, consumer responsibility, handicapped people." *–mission statement of CIP*

Projects-based Course

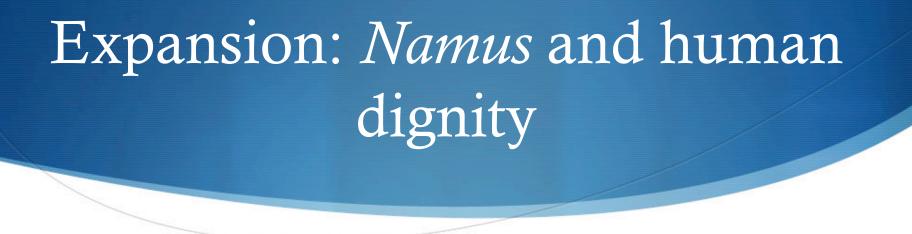| Selections for Academic Year 2010-2011 CIP (Number of Sections):		
Deprem Eğitimi (Earthquake Education)	*Yaşlı Proje (5) (Elderly Projects)*	*Cocuk Okul (27) (Schoolchildren)*
Mülteciler (Refugees)	*Engelli Projeleri (4) (Disabled Projects)*	Çevre Projeleri (5) (Environment Projects)
Bilişimde Genç Hareket	Cinsel Sorumluluk (Sexual Responsibility)	Kurum Çocuk (Orphanage)
Toplumsal Cinsiyet (2) (Gender Issues)	*Insan Haklari (2) (Human Rights)*	Hayvan Haklari (2) (Animal Rights)
Kültürel Mirası (Cutlural Heritage)	Bağımlılık Projeleri (Addiction)	
	Total:	54

Italics indicate projects observed by the researcher from October 2010-January 2011.

Emerging Themes

- Citizenship and Human Rights: Tracing the Abstract
  - Duties versus Rights, or "The Duh Factor"
  - Voting as an elite right
  - Cultural Concepts, *Namus* and Dignity, Volunteerism

- Human Rights as Violence and Violations in Turkey
  - Through the State and the Military
  - Perceptions of East and West
  - The Gender Aspect
  - Through History-Education and the Outside

Expansion: Duties and Rights

- Students discuss citizenship and human rights:
  - Words occurring with frequency when talking about *citizenship*
    - Duty, responsibility, have to
  - Words occurring with frequency when talking about *human rights*
    - Rights, universal
  - Rights & Responsibilities are taught as something separate and not linked

- When asked to expand on their ideas, Turkish students talk about what it means to be a Turkish citizen:
  - "Askerlik olması zorunlu" – "You have to do military service." (SUs1025)
  - "Türkçe konuşması gerek var" – "You have to speak Turkish." (SUs1105)
  - Several students expressed discomfort with this; they knew that there were people born and raised in Turkey who did not fit these criteria.

Expansion: *Namus* and human dignity

- "When I start each class [every semester], I start with a discussion of human dignity … Because they don't understand." (Participant BUi014)

- "It's bad … Because it's an issue of health." (Participant SUs1019) *in response to a primary student claiming that sexual abuse is bad because it effects the victim's namus (in the context of a human rights class)*

- "What is it?" (Participant SUs1023) *when asked what they understood by human dignity*

Expansion: The Threat of Violence

- "My uncle was executed because of his involvement [in a leftist political group]." (BUi010)

- "My grandfather was arrested." (SUs1111)

- "You know the *darbe?*" (SUs1009)

- "In the 1980s, my father and mother were, like, communists … [when the military coup happened] one of her [my mother's] friends, she was raped, and another was tortured [by the state]" (SUs1055)

- "In Greece, they are always making protests." (SUs1054)

Expansion: *Şımarık*, an Awareness of Privilege

- "I'm lucky, I'm happy, I have my family, I have money…" (SUs1109)

- "I always knew I would go to university … it was so simple … [but] they [the primary school students] do not know this." (SUs1115)

- "Here [on campus at the university] is different [it's better], but on İstiklal Caddesi … I'm not comfortable." (SUs1054)

- "There is so much the students don't know; they're not aware of – they live in this bubble … [We want to teach them] to be more aware of the world around them, but you can't say 'You should be more aware.' You have to do it more indirectly." (SUi011)

Expansion: Gender & Ethnicity in Discussions of Human Rights

- "They [Kurds] should learn Turkish … Just like Italians should if they live here." (SUs1105, Human Rights Project)

- "They [men in villages in the southeast] are lazy. They sit in tea houses all day while their women and children work … The women want to have too many children." (SUs1136, Human Rights Project)

- "Kurdish women have more babies than *us* [Turks]. In 10 years there will be more Kurds than Turks." (SUs1137, Gender Project)

Snapshot on a Project: The Gender Project

- Goals
  - Project, University, Country

- Expectations
  - Take Action
  - Collaborate on a National Level

- Needs
  - Safe places to talk

- Issues
  - Honour Killings (*namus cinayeti*)
  - LGBT issues
  - Stereotypes in education and media

2 sections	30 members
2 supervisors	22 men, 8 women
1 advisor	

What is spoken in this project that is not spoken in others?

Thank you

- Words like *freedom, justice, democracy* are not common concepts; on the contrary, they are rare. People are not born knowing what these are. It takes enormous and, above all, individual effort to arrive at the respect for other people that these words imply. (James Baldwin, 1985, p. 156)

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