Fostering Critical Thinking about Citizenship Education in Particular Contexts: notes from an Anglo-Turkish student teachers’ exchange programme

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ABSTRACT Student teachers and staff from three universities in Turkey and from Leicester University, England took part in an exchange programme in Turkey and Britain in 2008-2009. Funding for this from the European Union (EU) and Turkey was in part related to Turkey’s application for EU membership and currently contested discourses about the nature of citizenship, citizenship education and European identity. The views of participating student teachers’ on these topics were collected before the exchange visits, during the preparation phase, by a questionnaire and during the exchange visits by focus groups. Staff reflections on the programme were gathered after it was completed. Students’ understandings of citizenship, the education processes of the Other and their own definitions of appropriate pedagogy were challenged by their experiences during the exchange visits. They also questioned the construction of knowledge engendered by the programme choosing atypical school sites for their visits. Participating staff reflected critically on the impact of the programme on different institutional agendas.

Introduction

In 2008-2009 student teachers from three universities in Turkey and from Leicester University, England took part in an exchange programme focused on the nature of citizenship, citizenship education and European identity in the two countries. The project was jointly funded by the European Union (EU) and the Turkish government and led by staff of Uşak University, one of the three participating Turkish universities. As well as helping student teachers to gain some limited experience of schooling in another country, the project also investigated student teachers’ views of citizenship and citizenship education in a European context and how this was affected by their experiences on the exchange programme.

During the preparation phase of the programme, in Autumn 2008, a questionnaire was administered to primary and secondary student teachers attending the universities of Uşak and Leicester to find out their perceptions of their country’s relationships with the EU and their views on the importance of teaching citizenship in schools. As all teachers in Turkey have to teach citizenship, in Uşak University all 581 undergraduate and postgraduate student teachers completed the questionnaire. In the University of Leicester, which only offers postgraduate teacher education programmes, 85 student teachers from its primary and secondary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes elected to answer it.

In spring 2009, 14 British and 14 Turkish postgraduate student teachers, training to work in primary and secondary schools by undertaking master’s-level work in education, participated in the exchange visits. They visited a school in each other’s country, received a series of lectures on their host’s education system at their host university and took part in focus-group discussions. These probed emergent issues from the analysis of the questionnaire and students’ reflections on their experiences of education in the two countries and of the exchange programme. After the end of the
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exchange programme (summer 2009), university staff reflected on the value of the exchange programme.

The school that the British student teachers visited was a modern rural private primary school near Uşak in Turkey. It taught some 600 students, which it scrutinised carefully before admitting, and charged annual fees of £3000 a year. The school had only about 15 students per class, unlike the 60 per class that Turkish exchange students said were common in Turkish state schools, and had a range of audio-visual resources, including laptop computers, readily available to staff and students. According to Turkish exchange students, the school was very well resourced compared with state primary schools in rural areas. In the latter, teachers tended to use blackboards a lot, not to have access to laptops or projectors in the classroom, and to simply deliver the national curriculum rather than engaging in more active teaching approaches.

Turkish student teachers visited a sixth-form college (age range 14-19) of some 1000 students serving a multi-cultural community in the heart of the city of Leicester, England. Although the college is a state school, it is unrepresentative of state secondary schools because of its age range. The Turkish student teachers also noted the relatively small classes (14 students on average) compared with Turkish secondary schools, the extensive provision of computers, and that a lot of students in the school seemed to spend break times studying.

This article focuses on whether the exchange programme encouraged participating student teachers and staff to think more critically about the processes of education and the construction of knowledge in particular contexts.

Constructing a Conceptual Framework

The theoretical constructs that frame this article are threefold: the impact of national policy contexts on education, specifically citizenship education; the construction of critical thinking and reflection on practice; and the impact of strange encounters, such as exchange programmes, on developing people’s thinking – in this case, that of the student teachers and university staff taking part in the exchange.

Understanding Citizenship Education in National and European Contexts

Education is both a site and a conduit for struggles (Foucault, 1976) through which teachers and students (re)construct their identities (Kearney, 2003). The construction of self-identity is central to the development of agency through which people interact with others individually and collectively (Giddens, 1991). Constructions of self are affected by local, national and supra-national policy contexts, such as fears of world climate change, the post-2008 global economic crisis and the impact of globalization and regionalization at national and European levels (Dale, cited in Dale & Robertson, 2009). The student teachers in the exchange programme were at a critical point in their journey of identity as teachers, on the cusp of moving from being unwaged trainees to becoming income earning teachers.

The importance of schools and schooling in constructing national discourses of pluralism and social cohesion is acknowledged by EU governments (Dale, cited in Dale & Robertson, 2009) despite the decline of civic engagement and participatory politics, especially among young people (Citizenship Foundation, 1997) in the late twentieth century. Schools are sites in which different macro and local policy perspectives intersect to create micro educational policies and practices (Riley & Docking, 2002) that reflect the particular but contested values of their participants and stakeholders (Begley, 1999), and through which contestation participants and stakeholders can construct dynamic communities of learners (Starratt, 2007). This has led some authors to argue cautiously that teachers may develop particular nationally identifiable approaches to teaching (Givvin et al, 2005) through their ‘apprenticeship’ as students in their country’s schools. Haggarty and Pepin (2005) identified national traditions of teaching in their examination of mathematics textbooks.

State recognition of the importance of schooling as a site for identity formation can be seen in the detailed and broad citizenship curriculum which was made mandatory in secondary schools in England in 2002. Since 1997, England’s national education policies, whether originally highly
prescriptive (e.g. literacy and numeracy strategies) or, latterly, more flexible (e.g. school self-evaluation and individualized learning programmes), have been enacted through the performative culture of New Labour education governance (Troman et al., 2007) to help Britain compete in a world market place. The state’s normalizing gaze of high-stakes inspection has drawn education professionals into a panoptic self-surveillance, creating ‘coercive compliance’ with the state agenda (Wilkins & Wood, 2009). Changes in the British government in summer 2010 have begun to alter these public discourses to emphasize the scrutiny of parent-stakeholder perspectives of school performances.

Recent Turkish educational reforms also reflect wider political changes, such as Turkish candidacy for the EU, and the aspirations of the founders of the Turkish Republic to construct a modern secular ‘western nation’ out of a multi-national, predominantly Islamic ‘eastern’ society (Ortaylı, 1985; Lewis, 1991). The introduction of a new primary curriculum in 2004 focused on replacing ‘traditional behaviourist’ approaches to curricula and pedagogy with a ‘constructivist’ one (Yanpar, 2009). A more liberal citizenship curriculum, less narrowly rooted in the relationship between individuals and the nation-state (MEB, 2008), placed less emphasis on creating good citizens and more on empowerment by equipping pupils with skills of enquiry, critical thinking, evaluation, cooperation, reflection and presentation (MEB, 2004). As in England, however, the dominant rhetoric driving these changes remains one of increasing academic attainment, frequently drawing upon international standardized studies such as PISA and TIMSS (Olkun & Aydoğdu, 2003; MEB, 2008).

The Construction of Critical Thinking and Reflection on Practice

Encounters with the unfamiliar, or with the familiar perceived in strange ways, encourage participants to reflect on their practice and develop professionally (Schön, 1987). Experiential pedagogies focus on the need for learners to experience things directly in the construction of knowledge (Kolb, 1976). As well as generating more complex thinking about particular topics and practices, this can lead to participants questioning current approaches to action or practice and the values embedded in that practice. Critical reflection on practice, especially when carefully structured through the processes of action research (Somekh, 2000), generates developments in practice (e.g. a wider range of repertoires that people can use to construct practice – in this case, teaching and learning with school students).

The empowerment of teachers – in this case, student teachers – to think critically about their practice draws upon both the individualistic (Holt, 1987) and the critical (Ward & Mullender, 1991) traditions of teacher and student autonomy. It is primarily concerned with the development of critical skills in the individual so that teachers (and students) become ‘conscious of their agency to think and act in the interests of their own liberation’ (Swartz, 1996, p. 400) within limiting structural forces such as the national curriculum. However, empowering practices can be seen as central to the disciplinary regime of modern education (Hall & Millard, 1994), although they may also involve real freedoms for teachers to engage in progressive pedagogies, once in their own classrooms.

The voices of students (in this case, student teachers) are not always discussed in accounts of empowerment programmes, perhaps because liberatory and transformative approaches to education assume that dialogue between teachers and students is by its nature empowering of students (Fielding & McGregor, 2005). However, specific economic and regulatory conditions can make it difficult to promote a genuinely democratic dialogue in schools (Arnot & Reay, 2007), so other sites are needed, such as exchange visits or university seminars, to promote this. Student (and student-teacher) voices are often co-opted by educational leaders impelled – for example, by performative policy discourses – to assist drives to improve academic performance in schools (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006) or universities.

The Contribution that Exchange Programmes Can Make to Students’ Learning

Teacher education can be construed as state investment in subordinate ‘subjects’ in order to reproduce the material and social conditions of a hierarchically ordered society (Taylor &
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Robinson, 2009). In this view, schooling serves the ideological function of reproducing learners (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) to fit in with society as workers. They are the ‘objects’ of pedagogy oppressed by a limiting education (Freire, 1972) that depends heavily on a transmission model of pedagogy.

Student (teacher) exchange programmes fit into an alternative understanding of schooling predicated on helping learners to question given constructions of knowledge and to act together to come to new understandings of the social world to change it (Freire, 1972). Social constructivist notions of pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasize the social nature of teaching and learning and promote a form of pedagogy in which the student is as active a participant as the teacher in the co-construction of knowledge. Student exchange programmes provide a site for this through a series of critical encounters between students – in this case, student teachers – and others in unfamiliar contexts which encourage them to reflect on their own established values of and perspectives on practice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) – in this case, pedagogy and citizenship in different contexts. They also encourage students to work together in particular contexts to (re)construct their understandings of practice, and of the values embedded in practice, and to reflect on the appropriateness of those values and practices in particular (policy) contexts (McGregor, 2000).

Methodology and Methods

The study used an interpretative methodology based on mixed methods involving a questionnaire and focus-group interviews to construct credible understandings of participants' views of teaching and learning – particularly in citizenship education in EU contexts – and of the exchange programme. The student teachers who took part in the exchange were training at their universities to become primary or secondary school teachers.

Student teachers’ perspectives on the substantive issues and the exchange programme were gathered in two phases, through a questionnaire that was carried out before the exchange visits, and focus-group interviews that were conducted during the exchange. The questionnaire investigated student teachers’ perceptions of the relationship of their country with Europe, as well as their views on the importance of teaching citizenship in schools in various different ways. It was answered by all 581 undergraduate and postgraduate student teachers at Uşak University, and 27 out of 119 primary school student teachers and 58 out of 176 secondary school student teachers chose to respond at Leicester University.

The range of views expressed by Turkish and British student teachers, especially in the questionnaire, may have been affected by differences in their age and stage of educational experience. While some of the British and Turkish postgraduate student teachers who participated in the visits already had had some experience of working in schools in their own countries, others had not, nor had the undergraduate Turkish students who answered the questionnaire.

During the exchange visits, 14 British and 14 Turkish postgraduate student teachers training to work in primary or secondary phases of education took part in focus-group interviews to probe in more depth issues that emerged from the questionnaire and from students’ reflections on education in the two countries. The interviews were carried out separately for the two groups of student teachers in either Turkish or English, recorded digitally and later transcribed. The Turkish focus-group interview was carried out by two interpreters who were PhD students at Leicester University and was translated into English for analysis. Academic staff views were sought after the exchange (in summer 2009).

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using simple descriptive statistics to interrogate the proportion of each sample of students holding particular views for each question. This means that the proportion of students said to have given a particular answer to some questions may be very small, because a lot of students gave no answer to the question. Where students were invited to give more than one answer to a question, proportions are based on the total number of answers given. Qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and from the focus groups were analysed thematically. The data and methodology are reported in more detail elsewhere (Wilkins et al, 2010). Given the small number of questionnaire responses from British student teachers training to work in primary schools (p. 27), after careful scrutiny of the data gathered from all the British student teachers (p. 85) showed that
generally the views of student teachers training to work in primary and secondary schools (p. 58) were very similar, it was decided to amalgamate the data from the two groups.

Participants’ Perspectives on the Exchange Programme

Student teachers’ critical reflections on their experiences of education during the exchange visit are discussed under four main subheadings: different perceptions of citizenship education; different perspectives on pedagogy; the impact of policy contexts on educational practice; and questions about epistemology and truth. Staff perspectives are discussed subsequently to those of students, but under the same subheadings. The evidence of critical reflection comes from contrasting the views student teachers expressed in the focus groups that were held during the exchange visits either with the questionnaire data collected during the preparation phase of the exchange programme, or with views that students held on the basis of their educational experiences before the exchange programme. University staff perspectives are reported last.

Student Teachers’ Perceptions of Citizenship Education

Citizenship education and social justice. In the pre-visit questionnaire, Turkish and British student teachers thought that citizenship education was of major importance for their countries (Table I).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>No reply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkish students (n = 581)</td>
<td>549 (94)</td>
<td>17 (3)</td>
<td>8 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British students (n = 85)</td>
<td>66 (78)</td>
<td>10 (12)</td>
<td>8 (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Do you consider it important that citizenship education should be included in the curriculum of schools on your country? (responses to Question 16 of the questionnaire).

Turkish student teachers attached most importance to the knowledge base of citizenship, teaching the rights and responsibilities of citizens (Table II), while British student teachers also wanted school students to be aware of their global responsibilities and the cultures of other countries alongside that of their own (Table II).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish students (n = 581)</th>
<th>British students (n = 85)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship rights and responsibilities</td>
<td>326 (56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture, traditions, history and values</td>
<td>29 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National identity</td>
<td>29 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[School is a] crucial period [for this]</td>
<td>27 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights and democracy</td>
<td>17 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>124 (21.34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. The importance of education for citizenship (responses to Question 17 of the questionnaire).

To some extent the essentialist view of citizenship education was sustained during the exchange programme. In the Turkish focus group there was a broad consensus that citizenship education in schools largely focused on an essentialist view:

In the past, social aspect of the citizenship was lacking ... [but] it is also important to know the legal rights, for example even we do not know our consumers’ rights. (Turkish focus group)

However, British student teachers thought that the practices of citizenship should be embedded in teacher–student relationships, too, as a means of teaching it through practice.
In the UK we inform all our students of diversity and ... embrace it. I don't think the Turkish have grasped the idea of doing and making their students aware of the wider, like global context. (British focus group)

Turkish student teachers were also interested in the ways in which they observed some British teachers enacting citizenship:

[When] we wanted to take photograph of the [school] students and asked for permission from the teacher but she asked the students if they wanted to and 2 students put up their hand and said 'please do not take our photograph'. The teacher suggested us not to take those two students' photograph and we respected their choice. (Turkish focus group)

They argued that this indicated a respect for personal differences, such as religious perspectives, that applied not only in school but in social life, too, which they thought necessary in a multicultural society like Britain.

**Education and human and/or citizens’ rights.** In the questionnaire administered during the preparation phase of the exchange programme, Turkish and British student teachers perceived many similar benefits in teaching citizenship in schools (Table III).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice – freedom and fairness</td>
<td>530 (91%)</td>
<td>14 (2%)</td>
<td>13 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71 (84%)</td>
<td>6 (7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76 (89%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>525 (90%)</td>
<td>17 (3%)</td>
<td>16 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73 (86%)</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>521 (90%)</td>
<td>23 (4%)</td>
<td>13 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66 (78%)</td>
<td>11 (13%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>398 (68%)</td>
<td>108 (19%)</td>
<td>50 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 (59%)</td>
<td>26 (31%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>455 (78%)</td>
<td>60 (10%)</td>
<td>36 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56 (66%)</td>
<td>18 (21%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>354 (61%)</td>
<td>117 (20%)</td>
<td>79 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62 (73%)</td>
<td>15 (18%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>461 (79%)</td>
<td>59 (10%)</td>
<td>33 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70 (82%)</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>511 (88%)</td>
<td>19 (3%)</td>
<td>22 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58 (68%)</td>
<td>14 (16%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>247 (43%)</td>
<td>152 (26%)</td>
<td>152 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58 (68%)</td>
<td>15 (18%)</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Benefits of citizenship education for pupils (responses to Question 18 of the questionnaire).

This perspective was amplified in the focus groups held during the exchange visits. For example, both Turkish and British student teachers perceived the enactment of children’s rights in school as linked to issues of equity and human rights, with freedom of speech and thought a common theme (Turkish and British focus groups).

However, in the questionnaire Turkish student teachers interpreted ‘school students’ rights’ in terms wider than education, with many specifically referring to social rights such as health services (Table IV), while British student teachers focused narrowly on school students’ rights in school. British student teachers thought citizenship education helped school students and teachers to build more equitable and mutually respecting relationships that recognized their global and European connections (Tables II & IV).
Student voice, democracy and education. Compared with the teaching about citizenship rights, the encouragement of student participation in school governance drew a rather managerialist view from both British and Turkish student teachers in the questionnaire (Table V). Some Turkish student teachers thought that school students in Turkey had little chance of any active involvement.

However, in the focus-group interviews Turkish student teachers admired the freedom that school students had in England, noting, amongst other things, that they did not wear school uniform. Turkish student teachers perceived school uniform as a means of standardization through which teachers exerted control over their students. They thought the small numbers of students per class affected school student-teacher relationships because it allowed the relationship between teachers and students [to be] based on students’ rights and demands, which is quite good. (Turkish focus group)

British student teachers thought that Turkish school students’ rights were compromised because gender issues, amongst other issues, were not openly and critically debated in Turkey: the attitude that Turkish people generally hold in society was … clearly mirrored in their education, like gender issues they ignore, sexual orientation, homophobia … Even in the classroom they are just not addressed. (British focus group)

How school students are perceived by teachers, and vice versa, affects the relationships teachers and students construct with each other (Table VI). In the questionnaire, some Turkish and British student teachers thought that school students’ rights positively led to more cooperative relationships between school students and teachers, while others thought that they were a constraint on teachers’ actions.

On the other hand, in the focus groups British and Turkish student teachers offered a much more nuanced view of teacher-student relationships in different contexts. Some Turkish students acknowledged the respect some teachers in England appeared to have for their school students and recognized the contrast with practice in Turkey:

The basic difference between the UK and Turkey is the development of the ability of analysing and problem solving skills. What is important is whether students put forward and discuss their ideas … in the Turkish educational system students generally tend to be shy and have some doubts about their opinions. (Turkish focus group)
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish students (n = 581)</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
<th>British students (n = 85)</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderates classroom climate</td>
<td>36 (6)</td>
<td>Teachers need to be very careful/Students know their rights/Teaching is more challenging</td>
<td>19 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>20 (3)</td>
<td>Teachers respect individuals and help each child achieve its potential (mutual respect)</td>
<td>14 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the quality of education</td>
<td>20 (3)</td>
<td>Makes teaching more dynamic and creates better relationships (mutual respect) as teachers engage with pupils’ voices</td>
<td>12 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness their rights</td>
<td>14 (2)</td>
<td>Develop cooperative relationships/listen to their students/Look after their welfare</td>
<td>10 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciate the students</td>
<td>8 (1)</td>
<td>Teachers must be inclusive of all children/improve relationships with them</td>
<td>7 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>491 (84)</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>31 (36)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VI. The impact of children’s rights on student-teacher relationships (responses to Question 22 of the questionnaire).

Student Teachers’ Perspectives on Pedagogy

Some Turkish student teachers were fiercely critical of the constructivist approaches to pedagogy they observed in the English school they visited. In the focus group conducted during the exchange visit, they noted that some of the children they observed did not seem to be able to answer straightforward questions that the teacher put to them. They argued that it was most important for students to learn important facts, while acknowledging that Turkey was still fundamentally a credentialist society in which examination results were of crucial importance to people’s careers.

In their focus groups, British student teachers also noted different approaches to pedagogy in Turkish and English schools, and were surprised to see active learning in the primary school they visited. It led them to begin to theorize the causes of different teachers’ approaches to pedagogy, wondering whether these depended on teachers’ educational values and the resources available to them, rather than on nationality.

Both British and Turkish student teachers in their focus groups acknowledged the relevance of school culture in facilitating the relationships between teachers and school students, but acknowledged that these could also be affected by school and class size as well as by the values held and projected by staff and senior staff in schools.

Student Teachers’ Views of the Impact of Policy Contexts on Educational Practice

Turkish student teachers generally welcomed their government’s attempts to join the EU, not least because doing so would help the EU to become a genuinely multi-faith community rather than a ‘Christian club’, but they had some considerable concerns about its impact on Turkish society (Table VII).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive views Turkish students (n = 581)</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
<th>Negative views Turkish students (n = 581)</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>248 (43)</td>
<td>Cultural, social and religious deformation</td>
<td>188 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free circulation</td>
<td>60 (10)</td>
<td>Damages national identity and freedom</td>
<td>147 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement in social life</td>
<td>55 (9)</td>
<td>Unnecessary fixation and pressure</td>
<td>57 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful governance</td>
<td>30 (5)</td>
<td>Exploitation</td>
<td>26 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases personal rights and freedom</td>
<td>25 (4)</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>18 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>158 (27)</td>
<td>BLANK</td>
<td>121 (21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VII. The impact on Turkey of joining the European Union (responses to Question 12a of the questionnaire).

Contact with school education in England sparked off fierce debates amongst the Turkish student teachers in their focus groups during the exchange visits. One of these focused on the efficacy of constructivist pedagogy for imparting what some perceived as necessary factual information in an essentially credentialist society in Turkey, where passing national examinations vitally affected school students’ career opportunities. Although they noted that the new curriculum was part of Turkey’s EU membership project, they thought its implementation was not effective.
We shifted to Constructivist educational model in 2004. However, neither teachers nor learners were able to get to that model ... the model they use here in the UK is constructivist from top to bottom. (Turkish focus group)

Turkish and British student teachers in their focus groups also recognized that levels of resourcing made a considerable difference to school processes in the two education systems. Turkish student teachers were surprised at the relatively small number of school students per class in the English secondary school they visited (‘15 to 24 maximum in the classes I saw’; Turkish focus group). They thought it affected school student-teacher relationships because it avoided teachers having to focus on controlling large numbers of students, as happened in many Turkish schools, especially in rural areas.

British student teachers were surprised at the small numbers of school students per class they observed in the Turkish private primary school they visited (‘well there was about 15 [students] per class’; British focus group), and thought it influenced positively how learning took place. They observed participatory pedagogic approaches in the primary school that they had thought would be not possible in Turkish public schools, even if the teachers at them espoused the same values as those in the Turkish private school, because ‘in most [Turkish] state schools there is about 35 odd per class’ (British focus group).

Contact with the Turkish school ignited in the British focus group a debate, held during the exchange visits, about their prior knowledge of schooling in Turkey and educational practices in England. They noted that they had observed constructivist and didactic approaches to pedagogy in both countries, whose use might depend on factors such as teachers’ educational and social values, the (lack of) resources available for teaching, and the topic being taught. It led those in the British focus group to question whether there were nationally identifiable approaches to teaching or simply repertoires of practices from which teachers selected according to their educational knowledge and values and the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Student Teachers’ Views on Epistemology and the Construction of Truth in the Exchange Programme

The understandings that British student teachers gained of Turkish education came from two sources: discussion with the Turkish student teachers and university staff taking part in the exchange programme; and their school visit. ‘I know, from snippets with Turkish people, that state schools are nothing like [what] we saw yesterday,’ (British focus group). The atypicality of the school led them to question their construction of knowledge:

I don’t think I can make a judgment from seeing that school. It was so far removed from the schools I have been in to [in England] ... the schools I have been in are [in] deprived [areas].

(British focus group)

They recognized that in part this atypicality was due to the resources available in the school, because of the fees charged, which allowed teachers to work in a much more flexible way than they might in Turkish state schools, or in some schools in England:

Well there was about 15 [students] per class. (British focus group)

Anyway in our country ... it could be up to 70, but of course this is not the case in private schools. (Turkish focus group)

Turkish student teachers also queried whether they had sufficient time observing schooling to be able to form a reliable judgment about English school processes (Turkish focus group). Although some of these students also doubted that they had sufficient opportunity on the exchange visit to gain a view of British perspectives on Europeanness and European citizenship, others noted the opportunities they had to observe the multicultural nature of British society and schooling and how that contrasted with Turkey (Turkish focus group).

University Staff Perceptions of Citizenship Education

During the exchange programme, university staff developed a more differentiated understanding of citizenship education in England and Turkey than they had held formerly. British university staff
were surprised that the Turkish education system did not appear to engage with postmodern dilemmas of shifting, multiple identities, although both countries host important ethnic and religious minorities. Indeed, according to some Turkish staff, there were no ethnic minorities in Turkey – everybody was either Turkish or a foreigner – only religious minorities, whom they referred to as ‘ethnic minorities’, causing initial confusion for British exchange participants. British staff wondered whether this explained the reluctance of Turkish student teachers to engage in discussions on sensitive topics, such as gender and homophobia, especially in public fora. The rights of women also seemed more a matter of rhetoric generally except for women in certain influential social groups. However, British government policy and public discourses also present conflicting perspectives on social justice issues, such as how to handle women’s rights in a multicultural society, or the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.

Turkish university staff could not understand how British people were so sanguine about living in a multi-cultural city. They were surprised that different ethnic groups lived together in the same neighbourhood quite peacefully. A few thought that low-level racism was endemic in Britain and one suggested constructing separate ghettos for each ethnic group as the only way to resolve this. Maintaining law and order they considered more important than upholding equity and human rights.

University Staff Views on the Impact of Policy Contexts on Educational Practice

School-level education. Turkish university staff were surprised that pedagogy in England necessarily includes some strongly didactic elements, as well as constructivist ones, partly because of the tight control which central government in England exercises over education through its system of school inspection and its performative gaze on schools that requires school examination results to be published and compared with those of other schools in the country.

British staff were surprised that, in Turkey, despite the new primary curriculum of 2004, schooling was still used to generate a sense of Turkish national identity amongst children through the overt acknowledgment of Attaturk (statues, icons, written texts) in building the modern Turkish state and the daily recitation of the Turkish promise of allegiance. However, they acknowledged that the culture of schools in England is also heavily shaped by central government policy. They were also surprised that some Turkish student teachers expected to learn didactically through authoritative lectures on Education and European Citizenship during the exchange, rather than constructing theory through reflecting on their experiences of both topics during the exchange programme. However, many of these student teachers would have attended school before the Turkish curriculum reforms were introduced in 2004.

Developing academic practice. Turkish and British university staff perceived a shared need for academic outcomes (papers, relationships, new research projects) from the exchange programme that arose from the performative policy contexts of higher education in both of their countries. The construction of six joint publications or conference papers (Acun et al, 2009; Busher, Wilkins, Lawson, Acun & Göz, 2009; Busher, Wilkins, Warwick, Acun & Göz, 2009; Busher et al, 2010a; Busher et al, 2010b; Wilkins et al, 2010) was their response to this performative gaze by their central and institutional governments. However, extensive discussions between participating academics showed up major differences in their preferred research agenda and research approaches, as well as some micro-political barriers to continuing collaboration. The last can be categorized as: status differences between the institutions; internal institutional barriers and affordances to collaboration; and the policy systems and relationships surrounding the different institutions in the exchange programme.

Some institutions and people enhanced their reputations considerably through engaging with this project, gaining EU funding, successfully organizing it and international conferences that drew in key government speakers and sending personnel to various international conferences. However, status differences between the institutions meant that some institutions were unwilling to be anything other than the lead institution in future research bids. In part this was linked to expectations within institutions for people to be seen to be bidding for external research funding, and in part to people having the prestige through their institution to bid for certain types of
funding. In some institutions academic staff had difficulty gaining resources for continued dialogue and visits after the end of the exchange or support from senior staff to pursue further developments.

However, purposeful conversations between participants from different institutions in informal settings helped develop understandings of the ‘other’ and helped to strengthen collaboration. Positive interpersonal relationships between the partners in this project helped facilitate its success. There is ongoing collaboration through the development of a new journal at Uşak University. Members of the exchange team are members of the editorial board for that journal.

University Staff Views on Epistemology and the Construction of Truth in the Exchange Programme

The exchange programme allowed Turkish and British university staff to gain insights into the dilemmas confronting both education systems by visiting sites and by talking with each other in formal and informal arenas. Whilst their initial incomprehension and misunderstanding of the ‘other’ were discussed at first among the members of their own group, in due course, as trust grew between the two groups, a fruitful dialogue ensued across both groups. This was facilitated on both sides by participants being unwilling to be judgemental about ‘the other’ until they knew more, and by them regarding each other as equals, if somewhat different. However, as the schools that exchange participants visited were not representative of either system, participants only gained a very narrow view of each educational system. This raises questions about why such atypical examples of schooling were chosen, to what extent this inhibited the learning experiences of participants, and what the real purposes of the exchange programme were.

Conclusions

This student exchange programme gave its participants a partial view of aspects of each other’s countries. It seemed to help participants to reflect critically on the processes of education they experienced as student teachers and university staff and encountered in the other, and on the material and social conditions of society that teachers in primary, secondary and higher education are encouraged to reproduce (Taylor & Robinson, 2009) by the educational discourses in their own societies. The partial view of educational systems and processes that is presented by constructors of exchange programmes has to be carefully deconstructed by participants in those programmes to make sense of the multiple agendas that exchange programmes seem to contain within them. For example, this exchange programme appeared to help its constructors to, inter alia, develop their own institutions or advance their personal positions or present their own countries in particular lights. This raises epistemological questions about truth and the trustworthiness of what exchange participants are told and shown. Nonetheless, exchange programmes provide learners with sites and opportunities to question given understandings of practice, to act together to come to a new understanding of the social world (Freire, 1972), and to promote their own professional development (Schon, 1987) through this.

This exchange programme emphasized the social nature of teaching and learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and encouraged participants to reflect critically on their practice in pedagogy and academic work (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). It encouraged postgraduate student teachers alongside their supervising academic staff to consider critically the nature of education in particular contexts and the appropriateness of particular practices for those sites and contexts which they had experienced and for themselves. The student teachers and staff were equally active participants in the co-construction of knowledge and the consideration of the development of future practice.

Faced with different approaches to education in each other’s countries, Turkish and British student teachers and their supervising academic staff, during the exchange visits, questioned their own and others’ understandings of education and pedagogy, specifically in the arena of citizenship education. This led them to question the nature of schooling and the interpersonal relationships constructed through it by teachers and students in particular policy contexts. This illustrates how schools become sites in which central, local and institutional policy discourses (Riley & Docking, 2002) and cultures intersect with individual contested values, potentially giving participants the
opportunity to construct vibrant communities of learners (Starratt, 2007) reflecting on professional practice (Schon, 1987) in order to develop them (MUIJS et al., 2005). Such dialogues help people to question, to modify, as well as to reaffirm their identities (Kearney, 2003). In the case of this exchange programme, student teachers and their supervising academic staff were able to reflect on their practices in the particular contexts of their own institutions, countries and societies by scrutinising them in the light of those of others. The construction of self-identity is an ongoing journey that is central to the development of agency through which people interact with others individually and collectively (Giddens, 1991).

This study also shows how the constructions of self are affected by institutional, local, national and supra-national policy contexts, such as globalization and regionalization at European level (Dale, cited in Dale & Robertson, 2009). In this, the academic staff who took part in the exchange programme were no different from the student teachers whom they supervised. The constructions of citizenship education and pedagogy that the postgraduate students were questioning were being shaped by national educational policies, such as the new Turkish Curriculum of 2004, and the English National Curriculum. These, in turn, were shaped partly by supra-national policy contexts such as that of the EU, and partly by global commercial demands. The choices and actions of the academic staff in this exchange programme were being shaped by the policy discourses of their institutions which were, in turn, responding to expectations of them constructed through national policy frameworks. However, British student teachers questioned the extent to which these influences shaped teachers’ approaches to constructing teaching and learning. During the course of the exchange they came to better understand the cultural and educational contexts of the ‘other’ and recognized that, in certain personal, social, economic and policy contexts, similar pedagogical practices might be chosen by teachers in both countries. This challenges the tentative view put forward by Givvin et al (2005) that pedagogical styles are closely articulated with the discourses of particular national cultures. British and Turkish academic staff recognized the commonality of the performative demands on them, despite living and working in different policy contexts, and the similarities of the micro-political contexts with which they interacted that helped shape their constructions of identity as academics.

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