

CONCLUSION

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF THE TURKISH CURRICULUM STUDIES

One can truly appreciate the lived experiences only by situating them in their historical contexts and interpreting them through a historical lens. History does not only help us by depicting events and phenomena of the past, but also by allowing us to reach deductions and make sense of them. In writing this book, I have applied the historical perspective as the primary method of analyzing the curriculum theory and curriculum studies in Turkey. I strongly believe that past events can only be interpreted by considering their historical and philosophical contexts, which has led me to write this text from a holistically historical standpoint.

The first two chapters of this book focus on “religion” as the major factor shaping curriculum theory. Islam rapidly spread from the Arab peninsula to Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, Africa, and Europe. At the same time, education began to be institutionalized in the various nation-states in these regions of the world. During the Umayyad and Abbasi periods, this institutionalization was further strengthened. An unprecedented progress and cultural movement in the fields of physics, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and technology, not only in religious sciences, reshaped the geography of Islam. Giving it the crowning touch, the Andalusian State established in Spain was the peak of this progress. In addition to the work done in the field of

philosophy, the roots of modern science can also be found in Andalusia. The emphasis placed on knowing, learning, and thinking by Qur'an and hadith (the words of the prophet) which are the two sacred sources of Islamic religion had a great effect on Muslims, and they tried to tap into the cultural riches of the newly conquered lands, which yielded a richer cultural heritage for the subsequent generations. The majority of the Islamic scholars of this period wrote in detail about the significance of education and learning, whereas some wrote only about the teacher-student relationship. The questions of "What kind of person do we want," and as the most critical question of the curriculum theory, "What knowledge is of most worth?" were extensively debated and reflected on, which resulted in a significant pedagogical fund of knowledge. Among the basic tenets of these early Islamic scholars were being fair in the teaching process, teaching the students morality through courtesy, not beating them, and not using any foul words. It seems that education is focused on raising individuals who have developed good habits that are self-ethical and can use their minds well. The Ottoman Empire, which was established on the legacy of the most important states of Islamic civilization, namely the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Seljuk, developed this legacy even further. This process of development was in the context of the institutionalization of the higher education system in particular. The number of the madrasas increased, and especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the madrasa system became a very large and complex system. The madrasa system itself formed a bureaucratic structure and was fully integrated with the state. The curriculum and education system of the madrasas in the early Ottoman period was inspired by the Seljuks. During the reign of Sultan Mehmed II, the Ottomans introduced an official regularization for the madrasa curriculum for the first time and took important steps towards institutionalization. Most notably, the Sahn-i Seman Madrasa, which was established during this period, it became the highest education institution of the state, and on the invitation of the Sultan, the most important Muslim scholars of the time lectured in this madrasa. When the curricula of the madrasas of this period are examined, they are observed to include a strong philosophy and mathematics education in addition to the traditional Islamic education. It is also interesting that, except for the Sahn-i Seman Madrasa, the other madrasas also included the courses of "teaching methodology" and "rules of discussion." Madrasa was not only a source that produced lawyers and teachers,

but also the imams (Islamic preachers) who worked at mosques. At the same time, these imams served as teachers at the village and neighborhood elementary schools which had a curriculum comprising courses like literacy and mathematics. Therefore, for those madrasa students who were not planning to go on studying at more advanced levels, they were taught these two fundamental courses considering that they would also be required to teach. Another key characteristic of Ottoman madrasas was that they had a systematic approach to curriculum design, in which their curricula not only covered the course syllabi, but also why and how to teach the course contents. An analysis of these curricula reveals that most were natural followers of the past Islamic civilizations and drew on a rich intellectual tradition. Burhaneddin Zernuci, Ghazali, and Ibn-i Sina (Avicenna) were often cited by the Ottoman madrasa scholars as important Islamic scholars, which is one of the most important reflections of the classical curriculum theory.

In spite of all this influence of the madrasa, some problems that appeared over time became increasingly chronic, and the madrasa gradually turned inward and became a closed system. Studies on the discussion and reasoning in the early period madrasa of Islamic history or Sahn-i Seman madrasa slowly became ignored. Nevertheless, the madrasah was able to carry out the work of educating religious officials (Muslim clergymen) and lawyers effectively. Especially toward the end of the 1600s, after some battles that the Ottoman armies defeated, leading statesmen or bureaucrats began to question the military training system. Although the education given by the madrasas was also questioned, the criticisms were mostly directed at the training provided by the military organizations. As a result, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, a European-style military education was adopted. The traditional Ottoman army relied on a master–apprentice relationship as its basic educational approach, but the eminent statesmen of the period became aware of the need to turn it into a more systematized schooling instead. This period led to the emergence of the science paradigm, rather than the religion paradigm, as the driving force behind the theory of curriculum. However, about a hundred years would pass before a paradigmatic transformation of science occurred. In this process, as two distinct paradigms, religion and science continued to transform and preserve education in two parallel worlds. In the mid-nineteenth century, establishing an education bureaucracy had become inevitable for the Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen. The emphasis put on education as the major cause of

European progress and development by the European-educated intellectuals, the belief that the basic condition of scientific development is a strong educational organization, and the first bureaucratic mechanisms related to education appeared in this period. This bureaucratization process naturally brought with it the process of preparing curriculum and writing textbooks. In the period of Abdulhamid II, the curriculum commissions established, and the work of commissions to examine textbooks is a reflection of this bureaucratization process. Therefore, it was during the period of Abdulhamid II that first systematic curriculum studies aiming to modernize the country emerged. In this period, the state used education as an ideological tool to raise religious and obedient individuals, while the military schools taught modern science. It is no coincidence that the officers who were raised in these military schools would later lead the foundation of the new Republic.

During the period of Abdulhamid II, Ottoman intellectuals began to see education as the basic prescription to achieve social liberation. In particular, the increasing prominence of Germany and Japan in the world politics, Germany's changing the European map and establishing its union by defeating Denmark in 1864, Austria in 1866, and France in 1870, and on the other hand, Japan's ability to modernize its education in a relatively short period of time, and defeating Russia in 1905, affirmed Ottoman intellectuals' belief that education was the only ticket for salvation. The only way to make modern science and technology prevalent in the country was reforming the schools in a comprehensive way. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, some of the Ottoman intellectuals tried to explain the progressivist education philosophy through the concept of the New School, and the new education thought began to burgeon in this period. Although this idea of the New School remained only as a theory, it was still important in that the new and different aspects of education were being discovered by the Ottoman intellectual. With the liberal environment it brought, the Second Constitutional Monarchy declared in 1908 allowed the diversity of pedagogical ideas and perspectives. It could be argued that the ideas and theories put forward in this period constituted the foundations of the educational thought of the Republic.

With the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, the Ottoman Empire was officially abolished, and the Republic of Turkey was established in its place. The priority of the new regime was education. Just as it was in the

Second Constitutional Monarchy, Republican intellectuals and administrators were the ones who believed that education would be the main factor in the emancipation of the nation. Mustafa Kemal Pasha's vision of education was quite broad and farsighted. He had led the country in its independence from the enemy invasion during the War of Independence and was elected president as a national hero. To honor him, he was given the surname "Atatürk" by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, with the surname law enacted in 1934. The teachers' congress he organized in 1921, despite the ongoing violent assaults by the Greek army, and his invitation of the American philosopher John Dewey to the country in 1924 are but two examples for how visionary his approach to education was. As early as 1924, Atatürk had formed a deep perspective on education, which he expresses as follows: "the method to be applied in education and training is not turning the information into a decoration or a means of domination, but something applicable in life." Thus, he underscores the need for a pragmatic approach to education. Seeing education as the key to the rise of a poor agricultural country, Atatürk's most significant reform in education was the Law of Unification of Education passed on March 3, 1924, putting all the schools under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education, and closing down the millennium-old madrasas. These institutions, which produced great scientists in their heyday, unfortunately could not renew themselves and were drowned in the scholastic thought. The Republican administration failed to achieve a vision of education similar to the idea of the new school, which appeared towards the end of the nineteenth century. The most important breakthrough in the field of higher education was the restructuring of The University of Istanbul with the German scientists who had fled Hitler's oppression in the post-1933 period.

In the post-1935 period, Atatürk's pragmatist vision of education began to be implemented. Especially the Village Institutes opened in 1940 were an important step in the fight against the challenges brought by the Depression. Most of the villages had no school or teacher, and the illiteracy was a bigger problem. Another problem was the economic hardships. The government did not have the budgetary capacity to build a school for every village. Under these difficult circumstances, in order not to put a burden on the state budget, and to educate qualified teachers for the villages, serious measures were taken after 1935. Trainer courses and Village Institutes were the result of this effort.

Some important thinkers also influenced the development of the early Republican period educational theory. Ismail, Baltacıoğlu, Halil Fikret Kanad and Ismail Tonguç are the leading thinkers of this period who are studied in this book. Generally speaking, although stronger during the period of Second Constitutional Monarchy, the pedagogical thought of the Continental Europe was an important influence in Anatolia. Baltacıoğlu, with his social pedagogical philosophy he developed by drawing on Bergson and Durkheim, Kanad, by drawing on Kerschensteiner and Pestalozzi, and Tonguç, with his more diverse perspective including the ideas put forward by pedagogues like Kerschensteiner, Hugo Gaudig, Booker T. Washington, and P. P. Blonsky, tried to synthesize the Turkish curriculum theory with that of Europe. Furthermore, the broad-field design adopted in the 1926 curriculum, and the inclusion of the social studies course in the elementary school curriculum were some other developments in this period.

I believe that the historical perspective is invaluable to truly appreciate the curriculum work (both theoretical and practical) in Turkey. However, my work in this book only aims to lay the groundwork for the analysis of curriculum studies. The development of classical curriculum theory and the paradigm of religion, the phenomenon of modernization, and the emphasis on ideology and the science paradigm in the Republican period, can only serve as a basis for the understanding of the post-1950 period. The full history of the curriculum studies in Turkey cannot be truly grasped without a close examination of the period between 1950 and 2017. The post-1950 period is not included in the analysis presented in this book, written by considering the religious, scientific, and ideological contextual factors. But it can be said that whereas until 1950 the Continental European pedagogies were dominant in Turkey, in the post-1950 period a rapid Americanization began, and “curriculum development” instead of “pedagogy” became the preferred term, especially in the 1960s. The Second Constitutional period and the early Republican period were quite fruitful in terms of the internationalization of the Turkish curriculum theory. This period of heated debates on Western pedagogical discourse began to be shaped by the American educational sciences discourse in the post-1950 period. This shaping process made the discourse of positivist research methodology as the sole dominant discourse, while the tendency of applying historically, sociologically, and philosophically

grounded theories gradually weakened. The most important indicator of this weakening can be found in the positivistic nature of the curriculum and instruction theses written at Turkish universities. This positivistic emphasis can also be seen in the published articles in this field. So much so that, the scientific validity of the studies without any statistics is questioned. Yet, establishing a sound theoretical basis can only be possible through an analysis of history, philosophy, sociology, literature, etc., in an interdisciplinary way, with the support of statistical studies. However, the method of choice in Turkey is mostly statistical. Even when they satisfy the requirements of the qualitative research methodology, qualitative studies are usually judged by the way they resemble quantitative research.

The question of how moving from developing the curriculum toward understanding it will unfold in Turkey is very hard to answer. To tell the truth, there has not been much progress to inspire hope. Some studies conducted in the field clearly show how deep this problem is. The most obvious indication of this is the status of postgraduate theses in the field of curriculum. Hazır Bıkmaz, Aksoy, Tatar, and Atak Altınyüzük (2013) studied 263 doctoral dissertations completed in Turkey in the C&I field between 1974 and 2009 and found that the highest number of the dissertations focused on the effects of learning-teaching approaches on academic achievement and retention, followed by those focusing on the use of learning styles and strategies, and finally, on teacher education and curriculum evaluation. In a similar vein, Gömleksiz and Bozpolat (2013) found that the postgraduate theses in the field of C&I mostly focus on curriculum evaluation, teaching approaches, models, strategies, methods, and techniques. They strongly recommend that the research questions and functional issues be chosen based on their contribution they will make to the field (Bümen & Aktan, 2014). Whereas learning and teaching strategies, academic achievement, attitudes, and teacher or student opinions are the most popular keywords of research in these curriculum theses, the subjects such as feminism, curriculum as a political text, phenomenology, and curriculum as a theological text are viewed as the research interests for political scientists rather than those working and studying in the field of curriculum. This leads to the tendency to see the curriculum field as a technical expertise rather than a theoretical academic field. The recent publication of studies and articles examining the historical development of the

curriculum in Turkey (Aktan, 2014, 2015; Bümen & Aktan, 2014) and the translation of some comprehensive curriculum books into Turkish is encouraging, but leaves much to be desired. The Turkish C&I academics' lack of interest in the problems of curriculum history and curriculum theory could be stemming from their undergraduate and postgraduate background in which the positivist philosophy of science plays a major role. The foreign language proficiency needed to study the extensions of the roots of the field in American education and European pedagogy (English, French and German), and the firm scientific background required to understand the seminal works in philosophy, history of pedagogy, political science, and sociology can also be given among the reasons for such an apparent disinterest. Dewey and Kilpatrick are still not widely known in the curriculum studies circles in Turkey. The pioneering founders of this field in Turkey, Selahattin Ertürk and Fatma Varış, have yet to be fully studied. The Turkish curriculum field still maintains its ahistorical stance. The *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* by Ralph W. Tyler, whose contributions to the field are remarkable, was translated into Turkish 65 years after it appeared in print in 1949, and *The Curriculum* by Franklin Bobbitt, considered as the founder of the field, was translated from English in 2017, 99 years after it was published, which are significant yet quite slow steps for Turkish curriculum. At a time when internationalization (replacing reconceptualism) is much discussed in the curriculum studies, such delayed translation of the fundamental curriculum books which subscribe to the developmental paradigm is a problem that is worth deep reflections. The exact form the future curriculum studies will take in Turkey largely depends on the academics of the next century. I think that, in order to save the curriculum from the developmental paradigm and to make it a field based on philosophical understanding, a broad social science culture and a deep philosophical perspective are necessary. Furthermore, without understanding both the evolution of curriculum in the USA and its pedagogical transformation since the nineteenth century in Turkey, the Turkish curriculum field cannot be introduced fresh and fruitful perspectives.

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