'Powerful' human rights education's curriculum problems

In an effort to support the curricular institutionalisation of human rights education (HRE) as a school subject, Walter Parker has proposed a curriculum model based on powerful knowledge (PK) thesis developed by a group of social realist educators. This article aims to contribute to this worthwhile endeavour to develop a consensual HRE curriculum model by identifying four issues with Parker's proposition. While Parker argues the prevalence of constructivism impeded the development of an HRE, I argue that the negative implications of constructivism for traditional subjects are not true for HRE. After expanding on the other two issues, I bring in empirical evidence from an HRE textbook, in use in Turkey, to support my fourth point that what is key to a powerful HRE is political support. The article ends with a call to the HRE community to contemplate on political impediments that risk making HRE an ineffective enterprise at schools.

Keywords: human rights education; powerful knowledge; social realism; Council of Europe; Turkey.

(1)   Introduction

The concept of human rights increasingly appears in education policy and curriculum documents and the titles of school subjects (Moon, 2013; Ramirez, Suarez, & Meyer, 2007; Rauner, 1999; Suárez, 2007). While human rights are taught as a theme or discrete course in some context; in others, human rights are recognised as a guiding principle for the whole schooling or an implicit component of school culture. The different ways of incorporation of human rights in education signal the level of variations in pedagogical approaches to human rights education (HRE). Therefore, researchers often work with a loose conceptualisation of HRE in exploring it in informal settings, such as training by non-governmental organisations or community education (Bajaj, 2011; Coysh, 2017; Tibbitts, 2017). There is not convincing evidence to arrive at a conclusion that formal education institutions effectively equip learners with human

rights knowledge and competencies. Rather, the implementations are patchy and piecemeal ranging from the rhetorical mention of human rights in policy documents to the introduction of HRE curricula which contain statist, nationalist and even militarist perspectives that may be found contrary to human rights principles (Cardenas, 2005; Sen, 2019; Sen & Starkey, 2017).

Despite that, there is an expanding community of HRE advocates who interact on online/offline platforms and contribute to the development of a shared understanding of HRE (Suárez, 2007). Discussions in that community signal that HRE has evolved from an 'unrealistic' to 'concrete and ambitious' endeavour (p. 64). In fact, leading HRE advocates have made important attempts to strengthen the theoretical and pedagogical basis of the field (Alderson, 1999; Bajaj, 2011, 2012; Osler & Starkey, 2010). Osler (2015) has admitted that HRE is under-theorised and suggested to draw on post-colonial scholarship in strengthening the field's theoretical foundation. Subsequent to that call, Osler (2016) has entitled her latest book as *Human Rights and Schooling: An Ethical Framework for Teaching for Social Justice*. As her book's title makes it clear, Osler (2016) argues for making human rights an ethical framework of schooling.

From a similar standpoint, Starkey (2018) has presented a convincing example from UNICEF's rights-respecting schools in the UK to demonstrate ways in which human rights can be effectively embedded into all aspects of school life. These advocates demonstrated how formal education can teach human rights but not conceptualised it as a subject with a set of established content and pedagogies. Other advocates developed typologies to capture different conceptualisations of HRE (Bajaj, 2011; Coysh, 2017; Tibbitts, 2017). The typologies identified by these researchers differentiate along the lines of goals and ways of delivery, which supports the view that the form and substance of HRE vary with setting, purpose, ideology, and target

audience. More importantly, the typologies did not include a curriculum theory specifying what should be taught through HRE courses in formal education.

Parker (2017) is the first scholar who thoroughly addressed this important issue in the final chapter of the book edited by James A. Banks, *Citizenship Education and Global Migration*. One year later, Parker (2018) furthered his argument that HRE could not secure a stable curricular place because it lacks a consensual curriculum, comparable to that of established subjects. Taking inspirations from Young (2013a)'s proposition that the field of curriculum studies stopped valuing its raison d'etre: knowledge, Parker (2018) put forward that HRE could not be consolidated because the community of HRE experts did not develop a consensual curriculum model that contextualises the disciplinary knowledge of human rights for pedagogical purposes. On that basis, he made suggestions to develop an HRE curriculum model.

As an advocate of HRE, I believe that Parker (2018)'s scholarly effort to identify reasons for the underdevelopment of HRE as a school subject is a very valuable contribution to the development of HRE in formal education. In the spirit of constructive criticism, this article intends to maintain this fruitful discussion by identifying four issues with the Parker (2018)'s proposition. The article proceeds with two main sections following an outline of the development of powerful knowledge (PK) thesis. The first part expands on how Parker (2018) draws on the PK thesis in developing the component of a curriculum model, then lists three of four issues with his proposition. The second part lays out the fourth issue by relying on empirical evidence from an HRE textbook in use in Turkey. It illustrates that the curriculum problems of HRE are mostly political. The article ends with a call to the HRE community to address political impediments that undermine the effective provision of HRE at schools, which is key to the development of a powerful HRE curriculum.

(2)   Powerful knowledge thesis

The unprecedented accumulation of information and the rapid spread of innovations in information technologies have created far-reaching implications for society and education (Kress, 2008). One basic question posed by these changes is that if young people can now easily access any information that they are curious about, what would be the essential function of schooling in future? This question urges curriculum experts to re-define the purpose of education in accordance with the demands of the contemporary world in order to keep education relevant under the changing conditions.

In the past, education was not available, adaptable and accessible to all, but appealed to only elite students of privileged background (Young, 2008). In a time when knowledge production was slow, education was seen as a mechanism of knowledge transmission through teacher-centred instruction and rote-learning. It was characterised by authoritarian teachers who were capable of communicating objectified knowledge to recipient students. The dominant epistemology permeating that model of education was positivism or empirical realism, which was premised on the idea that knowledge exists independent of a knower and is worth transmitting to future generation through an effective channel of transmission, that was, education (Larochelle & Bednarz, 1998).

That sender-receiver model of education was challenged from several fronts. One strong reaction to this model came from critical educators who acted with a social justice agenda in exposing the characteristics of traditional education that perpetuated inequalities for the interest of the powerful (Apple, 2004; Young, 1971). Another group grounded their opposition in a set of ideas which can be gathered under the umbrella term constructivism (Larochelle & Bednarz, 1998; Terwel, 1999). Constructivist educators criticised traditional education for being premised on a fundamentally problematic theory of learning. They put forward that children and adults alike are

learners who are capable of experiencing and making sense of the world in their own way. The constructivist school's discrediting of the entrenched convictions of empirical-positivism led to a move away from a didactic teacher-centric instruction to a student-centric pedagogy of knowledge construction.

Critical and constructivist educators, which represent two prominent paradigms in educational thinking, united to dismantle the hegemony of authoritarian and knowledge-centric traditional education. While critical educators, mostly from the sociology of education, was primarily concerned to make education an effective tool for social transformation towards a more equal and just world, constructivist educators were interested in making learning processes as effective and participatory as possible (Fleury, 1998). The coalition between critical and constructivist educators was successful at weakening the prevalence of traditional education. Nevertheless, that coalition has proved untenable since it did not put an end to the reproduction of social inequalities through education. This dark side compelled critical educators to oppose to the prevailing curriculum model developed in reference to the constructivist convictions on the grounds that it has paid lip service to the transformative power of knowledge and failed to help moderate socio-economic inequalities.

In this debate, a group of social realist theorists developed a critique of constructivism, which remarkably differs from the contentions of critical educators. Social realism can be described as 'a coalition of minds' whose defining characteristic is to contribute to the attempt to reclaim knowledge in education (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 10). By focussing on the transformative powers of knowledge, social realist theorists managed to carve out a niche in the terrain of major educational theories. For them, the traditional curriculum was based on an 'under-socialised' epistemology favouring the transmission of 'objective' knowledge (Young & Muller, 2010, p. 14).

Unlike this view, constructivism is subscribed to an 'over-socialised' epistemology rejecting the objective foundation of knowledge (p. 14). Recognising knowledge as dynamic and the teacher as a facilitator of knowledge construction, constructivist educators paid their attention on the learner and learning-related issues. They advocated a learner-centric curriculum approach on the rationale that when one is equipped with necessary skills, she can access any information she needs. In this way, they overlooked the question of what kind of knowledge can transform the lives of young people and minimise socio-economic inequalities. Social realists argue that the constructivist obsession with learning engendered a long-standing negligence of knowledge that inhibits education to accomplish its equalising social justice mission (Young, 2013a).

For social realists, the dichotomy between the foundational epistemology of traditional curriculum and non-foundational epistemology of constructivist curriculum is simply 'a false dichotomy' (Morgan, Hoadley, & Barrett, 2017, p. 1). This is because, when properly synthesised, these supposedly opposite epistemologies form the components of a stronger social realist theory of knowledge. This theory proposes that 'knowledge is *emergent from but irreducible to* the practices and contexts of its production and recontextualization, teaching and learning' (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 5). Rejecting the binary 'either-or' view, this 'both-and' epistemology recognizes objective and social foundations of knowledge (Young & Muller, 2010, p. 14). Knowledge is 'provisional' and 'fallible' because it is produced socially, and it 'can be judged on its truthfulness and explanatory power' since what people know is built on a common foundation (Morgan, Hoadley and Barrett, 2017, p. 1). Knowledge also might have a currency and value beyond the location of its production and independent of those who produce it. These qualities of knowledge may enable to distinguish between

more and less powerful form of knowledge by judging its potential to bring about progress and social justice and unpack the intellectual capacities of those who have it.

This social realist theory has been particularly strengthened after the incorporation of the concept of PK. While the term was first used by Wheelahan (2007), Michael Young, either alone or with his colleagues, has substantially contributed to its elaboration and refinement (e.g. Muller & Young, 2019; Young, 2013a; Young & Muller, 2010). In the past, Young (1971) advanced the critical education tradition which regarded the curriculum as a proxy for power relations in wider society. Now, as a PK theorist, Young (2013a) discredits his previous Neo-Marxist position by admitting that the premise of critical theorists that curriculum is a means in the reproduction of social inequalities unintendedly contributed to the constructivist paradigm becoming hegemonic, which in turn undermined the salience of knowledge in education.

In an effort to strengthen the epistemic foundations of PK thesis, Young (2008) enhances the distinction originally made by Durkheim between profane and sacred knowledge; and, by Vygotsky, between every day and scientific knowledge. By aggregating these four types into two, he argues that the first type is acquired from everyday experience, which is untestable, contextual, limited, and powerless in the sense that it does not have the potential of making an intellectual improvement in the lives of those who have it. On the contrary, the second type of knowledge, which he calls powerful, 'provides the best understanding of the natural and social worlds that we have and helps us go beyond our individual experiences' (Young, 2013b, p. 196). PK enables to make informed predictions and explanations that cannot be made based on everyday knowledge. It empowers learners to think beyond their everyday life experience and broaden their horizons by taking them beyond their immediate contexts.

In an interview, Prof. David Lambert further characterises PK as follows: 'evidence based, abstract and theoretical (conceptual), part of a system of thought, dynamic, evolving, changing but reliable, testable and open to challenge, sometimes counter-intuitive, exists outside the direct experience of the teacher and the learner, discipline-based' (Stoltman, Lidstone, & Kidman, 2015, p. 3). For example, children have a general knowledge of cities from their everyday life experience, which is very likely to be limited, contextual and non-generative. Powerful geography knowledge should enable students to answer questions like 'in what circumstances do cities grow (or decline)? How are cities organised? Can cities be regulated, planned and controlled? What is the ideal city? What are "sustainable cities?"' (p. 3). It should help unpack the intellectual potential of students, so they could understand, explain and analyse geographical issues (Maude, 2018). PK about cities can be generatively used to understand the intricacies of growth and decline of all cities.

Advocating a subject-led curriculum development approach, PK theorists argue that education can maintain its significance in future by giving students equitable access to PK that they cannot learn outside school. What follows from this consideration is that the selection of educational knowledge must be done on an intellectual and academic grounds as the qualities, structure, production and implications of knowledge are seen key to the transformative power of education. The main concern of curriculum designers must be to give 'epistemic access to specialised knowledge' (Morgan, Hoadley, & Barrett, 2017, p. 2). To achieve this, they must derive PK from its disciplinary field and re-contextualise it in consideration of pedagogical setting, purpose and target audience (Bernstein, 2003). Here, Young (2008) makes use of his mentor Basil Bernstein's concept of re-contextualisation in explaining the transfer of PK from the disciplinary field where it is produced to the curriculum where it is taught.

Overall, PK has been developed as a key concept of the sociology of education and an organising principle of curriculum development. It is a response to the concerns to keep curriculum relevant under the changing conditions and functional in the reduction rather than reproduction of socio-economic inequalities. However, the extent to which the PK thesis has achieved these goals remains highly contentious. For example, White (2018) argues that the PK theorists purport an essentially conservative view of education by advocating that knowledge must come first in curriculum development. This proposition runs the risk of strengthening the hands of right-wing reformers who advocate a return to traditional subjects. If this is the case, then the PK thesis is likely to yield counterproductive outcomes in terms of the elimination of inequalities. In fact, PK theorists have been concerned mostly with the qualities of knowledge. They have not properly addressed the issue of accessibility and adaptability of PK in contexts where there are barriers to the participation of students from disadvantageous backgrounds. As these criticisms illustrate, the PK thesis has proved divisive and led to the publications of many studies looking at its implications in various subfields of education (e.g. Hordern, 2018; Rudolph, Sriprakash, & Gerrard, 2018; White, 2018; Whitty, 2010). I will draw on some of these criticisms in explaining the issues with Parker (2018)'s proposition, which comes after an outline of how Parker (2018) makes use of the PK thesis in proposing an HRE curriculum model.

(3)   Powerful human rights education

Parker (2018) believes that once a consensual HRE curriculum model is developed, the struggle for securing a curricular space for an HRE subject will be more effective and purposeful. With this motivation, he identifies three factors that have hindered the curricular institutionalisation of HRE in the USA. The first barrier is that HRE is a cosmopolitan, not a nationalist project, and such internationalist projects are not valued

in the USA. The second barrier is that the best curricular space to teach human rights is social studies curriculum which is dominated by nationalist civil rights discourses. The third one is the lack of consensus among HRE advocates on a theory of HRE curriculum. Setting aside the first two problems, Parker (2018) pays his attention on the third in helping to solve the curriculum problem of HRE. It is where he refers to the PK thesis. He agrees with Young (2013a) that the obsession of curriculum experts with learner- and learning-related issues weakened the knowledge basis of curriculum, which by implication resulted in the underdevelopment of an HRE curriculum model.

Departing from this diagnosis, Parker (2018) puts forward that the first precondition for developing a consensual HRE curriculum is to build a content selection theory. In accordance with the premises of PK thesis, Parker (2018) offers a characterisation of powerful human rights knowledge. According to that characterisation, powerful human rights knowledge must be a product of the epistemic community of human rights studies. It must be generative, esoteric, disciplinary, organised, differentiated, transformative and specialised as well as facilitating the inclusion of marginalised students into their national polities. In selecting that type of knowledge, the curriculum experts must look at the potential of knowledge as to whether it can enable students to think the not-yet-thought, go beyond their contextual limitations and broaden their horizons. Subsequently, the curriculum experts should pedagogically re-contextualise knowledge that they select and make it the basis of HRE curriculum. In so doing, they must recognise that equitable access to PK is a human right itself as it is closely linked to the social justice goal of education.

As for pedagogical re-contextualisation, the selected powerful human rights knowledge must be classified into core/substantive and peripheral/syntactical concepts. Core HRE concepts may include human rights, human dignity, universal respect,

struggle, freedom, peaceful coexistence, justice, dissent, activism (Parker, 2017, 2018). The curriculum must be spirally organised around the core concepts, while peripheral concepts are used to reinforce the acquisition of core concepts. Their acquisition can be also reinforced by teaching human rights principles, the historical development of human rights, provisions for the implementations of human rights, strategies of an effective campaign or protest, key human rights struggles and activists. A powerful HRE curriculum should also include references to human rights documents and examples of rights struggles from students' own contexts and elsewhere. It must ensure a conceptual progression from 'a preliminary grasp of the subject' to 'a more advanced grasp' (Parker, 2018, p. 14). Finally, it is teachers' responsibility to make powerful human rights knowledge contextually and culturally relevant to all students.

Below, I argue that Parker (2018)'s curriculum model has four main issues. I explain three of these issues drawing on theoretical perspectives from relevant literature and illustrate the fourth one through the analysis of an HRE textbook from Turkey.

Issue I: Does constructivism undermine the development of HRE as a school subject?

Parker (2018) draws on the PK thesis in arguing that the prevalence of the constructivist curriculum model undermined the development of an established HRE curriculum. This diagnosis is problematic because the negative implications of the constructivist approach may be true for traditional subjects, not HRE. This is because the PK thesis advocates the tightening of the link between school subjects and academic disciplines. Such an attempt may improve the curriculum of traditional subjects whose knowledge foundation has been neglected due to the popularity of the constructivist curriculum. Nevertheless, this proposition is potentially negative for HRE considering that HRE is neither an established subject nor is it grounded in a single academic discipline. Even

though there is a possibility that human rights may be recognised as an independent academic discipline in future, it now stands as an interdisciplinary field.

The intent to reclaim the importance of knowledge in education, to strengthen the knowledge basis of curriculum, may be seen laudable. However, the PK theorists' advocacy for subject-led curriculum development may hinder the curricular institutionalisation of HRE. Departing point for HRE curriculum development should not be disciplinary knowledge produced in academic fields, but it must be well-defined goals as to what kind of citizens education should strive to raise. From the standpoint of goals, the knowledge foundation of curriculum can be better determined and strengthened. Instead of subject-led curriculum development approach, an aims-led curriculum development is more likely to support the curricular consolidation of HRE. This is because HRE can be better advocated highlighting that education must cultivate individuals who live up to human rights principles. Starting HRE curriculum development from well-defined aims can better achieve the goal of liberal education, which is to enable learners to live an autonomous and flourishing life (White, 2018). An aims-led curriculum development contributed to the development of citizenship education (CE) in England since it supported the inclusion of non-specialist content (White, 2005). Considering the similarity between CE and HRE, adherence to subject-led curriculum development has the potential to shrink the curricular space of HRE.

In fact, the PK literature predominantly shows how the PK thesis can improve the curriculum of established subjects, such as music education (McPhail, 2017), history education (Ormond, 2014), history education (Nordgren, 2017), and physics education (Yates & Millar, 2016). These studies show that the PK thesis may be beneficial for subjects whose content is derived from established academic disciplines which have strong procedures of knowledge production. As these studies imply, the PK thesis may

inhibit the curricular development of interdisciplinary subjects that are not linked to a single academic discipline, like HRE (Hordern, 2018). Unfortunately, Parker (2018)'s curriculum model does not explain the incompatibility between the disciplinary focus of the PK thesis and the interdisciplinary nature of HRE.

Issue II: Is academic knowledge equally powerful for everyone?

Parker (2018) holds an uncritical view of academic knowledge as value-free, powerful and potentially-liberating. From a post-colonial perspective, what is considered as powerful knowledge may be viewed as knowledge supporting or condoning 'the epistemic formations of colonial-racial hierarchies, dispossessions, and violence' (Rudolph, Sriprakash, & Gerrard, 2018, p. 27). The PK thesis proponents do not sufficiently attend to this post-colonial criticism that academic knowledge has been historically produced by white elites in western universities where marginal sexual, racial and religious identities were suppressed. Without paying attention to this criticism, some PK thesis advocates have even argued that the PK thesis can help better achieve the goals of liberal education (Deng, 2018) or the teaching of 'abstract objectified ideas' may bring social justice for disadvantageous students (McPhail and Rata, 2016, p. 59). However, these arguments fail to recognise the fact that the epistemology of social realism on which the PK thesis relies is not attentive to the issues of power relations and inequalities (Huckle, 2017).

Instead of recognising academic knowledge as the credible source of curriculum, a powerful HRE curriculum must ideally problematise the supposedly 'objective' nature of academic knowledge. This is because the PK thesis has an explicit potential to engender an 'inaccessible, irrelevant and disengaging' curriculum for disadvantageous students (Wrigley, 2018, p. 21). For example, adherence to academic knowledge in the case of physics might undermine the chances of disadvantageous students due to the

fact that students from wealthy classes are better equipped to acquire such knowledge (Yates & Millar, 2016). In fact, the acquisition of academic knowledge 'requires prolonged initiation' and some degree of mental preparedness (Beck, 2013, p. 187). Therefore, a renewed focus on academic knowledge in curriculum development may magnify the unfair advantage of 'a well-endowed familial and class' background and exacerbate educational inequalities (p. 189). Although this post-colonial criticism on the nature of academic knowledge is hugely important to address in the case of HRE, Parker (2018) remains silent on that what is considered as powerful academic knowledge may be Western-centric, canonical and counter-productive for HRE.

Additionally, the PK thesis emphasis on academic knowledge may be problematic since HRE is not a field whose main objective is merely the cognitive or intellectual development of students. HRE is widely recognised with its tripartite conceptualisation as education *about, through* and *for* human rights (Struthers, 2015). This holistic conceptualisation pays equal regard to the cognitive, affective and practical components of HRE. The holistic development of students in HRE entails learning about human rights, developing a sense of solidarity with those from disadvantageous parts of society and taking part in human rights struggles for the betterment of society. Therefore, the over-focus on the acquisition of knowledge in Parker (2018)'s curriculum model runs the risk of neglecting the other two crucial components of HRE.

Issue III: Can teachers do the cultural contextualisation of HRE?

The problems of charging practitioners with the task to teach students PK are well illustrated in Whitty (2010)'s scholarly critique. In his fine-grained and eloquent critique, Whitty (2010) drew on Bernstein's concepts of 'classification' and 'framing' (p. 37). Classification refers to boundaries between school and non-school knowledge, while framing encapsulates the level of hierarchical relationship between teachers and

students/parents. The traditional curriculum favoured thick classification boundaries between school and non-school knowledge and thick framing boundaries between the teacher and the student/parent. On the contrary, the constructivist curriculum advocated weakening both classification and framing boundaries. The PK thesis is revisionist in that it advocates to strengthen classification but loosen framing boundaries. Whitty (2010) cast doubts on the plausibility of that proposal noting that, if that is not achieved, the emerging curriculum would not be any different than the traditional curriculum. By this critique, Whitty (2010) underlines the difficulty of making academic knowledge relevant to all learners. While Young (2013b) too recognised the significance of this problem, he contended that engaging teachers can make PK accessible to students.

Similar to Young (2013b), Parker (2018) relegated that significant task to teachers. Nevertheless, leaving the articulation of PK with students' socio-cultural backgrounds may jeopardise the possibility of powerful HRE because this difficult task may not be achieved by teachers alone. The difficulty of making HRE culturally and contextually meaningful to students lived experience is clearly recognised in the literature (Bajaj, Cislaghi, & Mackie, 2016; Keet & Carrim, 2006; Sainz, 2018; Suárez, 2007). If that is left to teachers, the entrenched nationalist discourses that run contrary to human rights discourses could easily distort HRE. Therefore, the specialist community should develop pedagogical tools for cultural re-contextualisation of human rights. This is firstly because human rights are essentially abstract principles that could be easily manipulated and misinterpreted. A teacher might promote a nationalist discourse in teaching the women's rights movement when she highlights that women's rights are first recognised in a particular country, instead of emphasising the vitality of women's struggle in gaining their rights. Or that topic might be taught without linking it to contemporary right struggles or glossed over through examples from other contexts.

However, the specialist community can increase the chance of a powerful HRE by developing contextually-relevant learning activities. This is significant considering the fact that HRE is largely taught by social studies teachers who do not often receive an adequate quality of college training about HRE pedagogies.

(4)   Democracy and Human Rights course in Turkey

This section presents an analysis of an HRE textbook, in use in Turkey, in order to highlight that the primary issue that impedes the development of a consensual HRE curriculum is political. This signifies the fourth issue with Parker (2018)'s proposition, which is the insufficient recognition of the importance of political support for a powerful HRE. To draw attention to this central problem, I analyse the intended curriculum of the HRE course, which will show that powerful HRE requires not only the presence of an expert community and a consensual curriculum model, but curriculum authorities supporting that endeavour. That political dimension, which I think is the most crucial precondition, is not sufficiently recognised by Parker (2018). As posited by Osler (2016), 'human rights are an expression of the human urge to resist oppression' (p. 119). Without political support, it is unlikely that nationalist curriculum authorities would support HRE since it goes against the interests of dominant groups. What I mean by political support is whether or not a political power gives assurances to curriculum designers, decision-makers and practitioners that they will not face anything negative when they develop or teach powerful HRE.

On the one hand, a supportive democratic culture may facilitate the provision of a powerful HRE. On the other, the building of a democratic culture entails a quality HRE. That paradoxical relationship between the culture of democracy and HRE is the biggest challenge to the provision of powerful HRE in illiberal democracies. HRE's curriculum problems stemming from this paradox are political and must be recognised

as such. In Canada, for example, human rights are interwoven into the promoted notion of national identity, and the tension between the universalist human rights discourses and particularistic nation-state ideologies is minimised (Bromley, 2011). In the conflictual context of Cyprus, human rights discourses counterproductively served to strengthen the negative representation of the other, the Turkish, instead of promoting intercultural dialogue (Zembylas, Charalambous, Charalambous, & Lesta, 2016). In the ideologically-polarised context of Turkey, human rights discourses were weaponised by the military-controlled authorities against the dissident Islamist and Kurdish groups in the 1990s (Sen, 2019). These cases demonstrate the vitality of political power for a powerful HRE. Here, I bring in more empirical evidence to show what is crucial for the curricular institutionalisation and effective provision of HRE is political support.

In Turkey, middle-school and high school HRE courses were introduced in 1995 in response to the UN Decade for HRE initiative (National Committee on the Decade for Human Rights Education, 2001). The middle school courses were repealed in 2005 (Ministry of National Education (MoNE), 2005), but the high-school course, *Democracy and Human Rights*, still remains in force (MoNE, 2018). The curriculum of this course is important firstly because Turkey is one of the first countries introduced HRE as a discrete subject; and secondly, the latest curriculum of the course under investigation was developed in 2013 with the contributions of the Council of Europe (CoE) experts as a part of a joint project funded by the EU (CoE, 2012; MoNE, 2013).

Textbooks represent the key material used in education across Turkey. Since textbooks are centrally produced and distributed free of charge by the MoNE, one can find only a few versions of a particular course's textbook. As for *Democracy and Human Rights* course, I accessed two textbooks in use (Işıklı, 2017; Tüzün, 2018) via the official textbook-sharing platform (MoNE, 2018). After a preliminary analysis, I

selected one of them for analysis because it reflected the optimal one as it included the structural human rights issues from Turkey and the names of collective identities like Alawite, Kurdish and Leftish (Işıklı, 2017). The other one did not mention diverse collective identities besides being silent on human rights violations in Turkey (Tüzün, 2018). Secondly, I selected the one written by an author, about whom I could find some information, which is significant for the strength of my argument.

The analysis of the textbook is driven by an intent to support the argument that HRE curriculum problems are mostly political. It is guided by the conviction of critical educational thinking that textbook's official knowledge embodies and legitimises the power hierarchies in the wider society (Apple, 1993). In line with this conviction, the textbook analysis drew on the conventions of critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1998). The analysis is focused on revealing discourses in the textbook that are tailored to advance the interests of dominant groups in power. Following a close initial reading of the textbook, the third and fourth examinations aimed to identify discourses that are skewed or distorted due to political reasons. Subsequently, the identified parts were taken out, coded and classified into three categories. The following section outlines the categories emerged from the analysis. The excerpts from the textbook are purposefully selected in order to best exemplify and support the arguments.

Textbook Analysis

Although the programme of study of the course was developed with the contribution of international consultants from the CoE, the course textbook was written by an author, who is not an expert in HRE (CoE, 2012; MoNE, 2013). The textbook author is an academic at the department of journalism with expertise in the area of philosophy teaching (Marmara University, 2018). His employment shows that, no matter how strong the expert community is, the power lies with curriculum authorities. The hiring

of particular textbook authors is a political choice made by the MoNE that lies behind many of the curriculum problems identified through the analysis of the textbook.

1- Bias to portray governmental actors and state institutions in a positive light

The whole narrative of the textbook is arguably intended to portray the state institutions and governmental actors in a positive light in order to discourage criticality towards public authorities (Işıklı, 2017). The textbook narrative sounds personal, lacking a scholarly foundation as though the author defines concepts in his own way. For example, the definition of key concepts, such as citizenship, reflect that intention:

> Citizenship refers to the official status of individuals before a state in democratic regimes. That status looks like the consideration of individuals as subjects in kingdoms (Işıklı, 2017, p. 21).

> Republic meaning 'majoritarianism' is derived from the word 'majority' meaning public. Republic as the ruling of majority refers to the formation of a cabinet by a party having the most member of parliaments, or somehow the ruling of a state by a party that secures the majority of votes (…) Democracy differs from a republic, which is the ruling of a state by a political party that secures the majority of votes, in terms of being a way of ruling besides being a way of life (Işıklı, 2017, p. 25).

The first excerpt gives a narrow definition of citizenship which can be considered as an example of canonical and ahistorical knowledge transmitted by the traditional curriculum. The author's resemblance of citizenship to subjecthood is bizarre since subjecthood may be considered opposite to citizenship. The second excerpt reflects an ambiguity by defining a republic with no reference to a monarchy. The vagueness is further sustained in distinguishing democracy from a republic. Even though the textbook includes some up-to-date information on the types of democracies, such as paragraphs on participatory democracy and presidency system, those part lose their

force within the condensed narrative of the textbook:

> Participatory democracy that relies on the ideal of making collective decisions is defined from two angles. 1. The participation of all segments of society in decision-making processes, 2. Ensuring that all public institutions are democratically run. The first angle encourages the disadvantageous segments of society like women, old people, disabled people, minorities (religious or ethnic), immigrants etc. to take part in democratic processes, such as casting a vote, electing and getting elected, getting nominated, stating an opinion and affecting public opinion. It aims to remove traditional, cultural and legal barriers to this. (…) Participation entails the preservation of minority rights, not the domination of the majority (Işıklı, 2017, p. 25).

The excerpt provides a thick characterisation of participatory democracy but does not expand on examples from the democracy struggle of disadvantageous groups. PK on democracy in the Turkish context may include information crucial to understanding the problems of Turkey's democracy, such as coups, civilian-military relations and election systems. However, the textbook does not mention any of these topics even though the military has acted as an informal political actor and carried out two direct, three indirect and one failed coup attempt since 1960.

A learning activity asks students to identify which rights are violated in a given case (Işıklı, 2017, p. 52). According to one of the given cases, an individual was tortured under police custody, his family and boss were intimated and threatened. The individual went to a prosecution office to report what had happened, but the prosecutor did not accept his petition, the individual eventually reported what had happened to the Prime Minister Office's Human Rights Headship. The narration of the event implies that, while the police and the judiciary officials violated the human rights of the victim, the Prime Minister Office took care of the situation and justice prevailed. The learning activity sends a political message that the government in power upholds human rights

even though the police and the judiciary do not fulfil their duties. The learning activity does not encourage critical thinking as it disregards questions, such as what would happen if the Prime Minister Office too ignores the complaint or will the state officials who violated the human right of the victim face any punishment?

Campaigning and protesting are mentioned as a way of standing against injustice, but strategies for effective campaign and protesting are not included. Moreover, examples of effective campaigns and protest are overwhelmingly from outside Turkey. One example negatively portrays protestors in a way that protesters commit violence and abuse the permission of state authorities (Işıklı, 2017, p. 50). That narrative does not problematise police violence or wrongdoings of public authorities but tends to portray protesters as culprits with malign intentions. 'What would be my reaction' activity gives a scenario that goes 'if we, as a group of friends sharing the same political view, gather to protest the decision of a company to search mine in our region and the police take us under custody by force because we ignore warnings…' (Işıklı, 2017, p. 53). The way the incident is narrated implies that the protesters deserved to be taken under custody since they ignored the police warnings. Another scenario goes 'if I see a group of young people was handing out pamphlets and hanging placards that disparage our spiritual-moral values like patriotism, tolerance and benevolence' (p. 53). Again, the scenario presents distributing pamphlets and hanging placards in a negative light, which may be presented as exemplary acts in a powerful HRE curriculum.

Examples of campaign and protest from Turkey seem to be deliberately chosen not to upset people from the ruling party. With that concern, the only example of a protest from Turkey included is a photo of a protest of headscarf ban by university students (Işıklı, 2017, p. 93). The caption of the photo highlights that democratic actions eventually yield positive outcomes. Given that the headscarf ban is not now in force, the

inclusion of the photo from headscarf ban protests is completely in line with the fact that the whole narrative of the textbooks and the learning activities reflect a deliberate intention to portray the governmental actors and the public institutions in a positive light. Secondly, the headscarf ban in question mostly affected observant Muslim women. Considering the fact that a political Islamist party has been in power since 2002, the inclusion of the headscarf protest is not against the wishes of those in power, but contributes to the strengthening of political discourses of Islamist groups in power.

2- Concealment of structural causes of systemic human rights violations

In many parts of the textbooks, human rights and democracy are presented as finished-business, not ongoing struggle. The conceptualisation of democracy and human rights in this way leads to a deliberate avoidance of structural human rights issues:

> In the past, some people were often regarded as more valuable and honourable than others because of some qualities which they acquired or were born with. For example, poor, un-powerful, people, peasant, woman, disable, refugee, subjects or slaves were treated as second-class humans as compared to rich, powerful, noble, townsman, male, adult, able-bodied, native, king or masters. However, with the development of human rights and freedoms along with democracy, all these distinctions disappeared. This is the genuine victory of the ideal of human rights. There are neither king and subjects nor master and slave in democracies. This is because everyone is equal, and everyone is free in democratic societies (Işıklı, 2017, p. 34).

> In many places in the world, it can be come across many personal or official attitudes and practices that are not equal and fair and hurt human honour and dignity. What lies behind these practices is poverty and uneducated-ness. This is proof of the fact that everyone is not at an equal in social and cultural terms (Işıklı, 2017, p. 35)

The first excerpt is a vivid demonstration of the fact that the textbook presents inequalities as a problem of the past. It sends a misleading message that everyone is now equal since democracy and human rights prevail in the contemporary world. In the second excerpt, inequality is presented as an instance that is caused by socio-cultural and economic underdevelopment. This narrative does not recognise the underlying structural reasons behind inequality, such as race, gender, ideology, ethnicity, religion, and social class. It glosses over one of the most important topics of HRE by linking inequality to 'poverty and uneducated-ness'. In this way, the textbook presents a minimalist conception of democracy (Mclaughlin, 2000), a depoliticised account of human rights and an individualistic notion of citizenship (Biesta, 2011).

Systemic human rights issues and structural causes of human rights violations are not brought to students' attention. One promising learning activity urges students to examine the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and identifies articles advocating equality or freedom in terms of language, religion, gender, ethnicity, cultural difference and socio-economic status. Another one asks students to draw a caricature, prepare a banner, find a slogan or write an essay about an article of the UDHR. However, these learning activities do not mention any systemic human rights violations from Turkey. They send a message that individual human rights violations may be rarely seen but are immediately fixed as soon as authorities are notified about them.

On exceedingly rare occasions, systemic human rights issues are touched upon with sweeping statements. The textbook comes close to recognising the women's rights issues with the following statement: 'Gender discrimination is to a great extent committed against women in all societies. In many societies, the word of women connotes cheap workforce, easy management, second-class citizens, weakness, a loss for home economy' (Işıklı, 2017, p. 97). However, the excerpt generalises the issue and

does not give a sign of women's rights violations in Turkey. A learning activity compiles sexist sayings like 'A woman is the devil of a man; Do not leave a woman without beating and a baby in her tummy' (p. 99). The inclusion of these sayings is positive as they encourage to become critical of cultural beliefs regarding women's rights. Another learning activity presents statistics on violence against women in Turkey. These activities are the only occasion in which the textbook touches a systemic human rights issue from Turkey noting that human rights issues concerning other sexual identities are not recognised at all. As these examples suggest, the textbook avoids addressing the structural human rights problem that has to do with ideological, sexual, racial, ethnic, religious, and social class identities of people.

The textbook does not provide enough information on human rights activists, rights struggles and historical development of human rights. Strangely, an information box in a learning activity considers the code of Hammurabi as the first written document of human rights, while another one presents the Farewell Speech of Prophet Muhammed as a human rights document (Işıklı, 2017, p. 41). The textbook mentions Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Yunus Emre, and Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, Emmanuel Kant and Leo Tolstoy as key figures in the development of human rights. A singer, Barış Manço, is ironically mentioned as the only contemporary human rights activist.

3- Avoidance to mention diverse collective identities

In Turkey, the issues of diverse collective identities are consistently excluded from textbooks since the Constitution prescribes the undifferentiated notion of Republican citizenship. This citizenship theory urges all to become loyal to the state's civic creed by confining their ethnic, racial and religious characteristics into the private sphere. However, the imposition of 'a single undifferentiated model of citizenship on all individuals' works in practice as a cover for inequalities (Kymlicka, 2018, p. 100).

Rather than suppressing diverse opinions and identities, powerful CE or HRE would help young people embrace values, skills and knowledge essential to talking, negotiating and resolving differences through the language of human rights and democracy (e.g. Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Osler & Starkey, 2010; Parker, 2003; Sears & Herriot, 2016). In fact, a consensus panel laid out the key principles and concepts of CE in 2005, which recognised human rights principles as the main framework to discuss and resolve the issues of unity and diversity (Banks et al., 2005). Despite that, the textbook attempts to teach human rights without mentioning the issues of diverse collective identities. In this way, it promotes an undifferentiated notion of citizenship and de-politicised understanding of human rights.

One learning activity, entitled 'living together in peace', advises students to fight prejudice, exclusion and discrimination. In this activity, the name of collective identities, such as leftish-rightist, Alawite-Kurdish, veiled-unveiled, Turkish-Kurdish, religious-secular, easterner-westerner, peasant-townsman, are mentioned (Işıklı, 2017, p. 93). This is a progressive step in comparison to the past civics textbook given that the previous research found conclusive evidence that textbooks made no reference to diverse collective identities (Çayır, 2014; Üstel, 2004). Nonetheless, a single time mention of collective identities marks an ironic contrast to the fact that one of the five themes of the textbook is 'a pluralist look at diversity'.

(5)   Conclusion

The analysis of *Democracy and Human Rights* textbook suggests that political support is key to the development of powerful HRE as a school subject. The systemic problems of Turkey's HRE curriculum, such as the bias to portray governmental actors and state institutions in a positive light, the concealment of structural human rights issues and the avoidance to mention diverse collective identities, do not result from whether or not the

curriculum authority of Turkey follows the traditional or constructivist curriculum model. They emanate from the fact that the curriculum authority is designed to build a homogenous nation in accordance with a dominant ideology of nationalism. It is naïve to expect a powerful HRE curriculum from this authority whose main duty has been to foster oblivion and justify the state's wrongdoings for the sake of nation-building.

However, this is not to say that a powerful HRE is impossible in countries where illiberal political forces control the official curriculum. On the contrary, I draw attention to the political nature of HRE curriculum problems as I believe that a powerful HRE is possible anywhere if the scholarly community develops relevant strategies to persuade decision-makers and develop content knowledge and instructional tools in consideration of political impediments. Giving due considerations to political impediments is likely to contribute to the development of a consensual HRE curriculum and the curricular institutionalisation of the subject. It may even help to improve the quality of HRE by disentangling nationalist and statist discourses from the HRE curriculum.

In the USA, Parker (2018) views the contextualisation of HRE within the social studies curriculum as an impediment to HRE. This is a significant problem, but the whole education might be nationalist and hostile to cosmopolitan projects of HRE in some countries. Therefore, powerful HRE that goes against the core of nation-state projects may not be possible without strong political support. The priority of curriculum authorities to serve nationalist goals may be the underlying reason why HRE is underdeveloped in the curriculum. Some state actors might see their interests, state authority and social order in danger when the universal human rights discourses are powerfully taught in their educational systems. Decision-makers may be concerned that the internalisation of human rights by young people will make them critical of public institutions and undermine the state authority. Out of these fears and concerns, even

when the epistemic community of HRE reaches a full agreement on the form and substance of an HRE curriculum, a nationalist curriculum authority may ignore experts' recommendations and follow a non-participatory curriculum development process. Therefore, the HRE community must address political impediments in the way of the effective provision of HRE. Subsequently, relevant strategies and perspectives can be developed to persuade decision-makers about the vitality of HRE.

In summary, the reliance on the PK thesis may be potentially negative to the curricular institutionalisation of HRE because it advocates a tight connection between school subjects and conventional academic disciplines. Secondly, the PK thesis is uncritical of the nature of academic knowledge that may lead to the exacerbation of educational inequalities. Thirdly, teachers may find it difficult to make PK culturally relevant to all learners. Lastly, HRE's curricular institutionalisation needs a sustained political backing. In fact, the vitality of political support is well illustrated by the fact that the spread of HRE has been achieved by the pushing of international organisations (Moon, 2013; Rauner, 1999). Consideration of these issues by the epistemic community of HRE field may contribute to the curricular consolidation of HRE in formal education.

Empirical evidence from Turkey's HRE curriculum suggests that even when all preconditions Parker (2018) has identified are met, a lack of political support may turn HRE into a powerless subject, if not repeal it altogether. The Turkey's HRE curriculum vividly demonstrates the paradox of teaching HRE at nationalist settings. Therefore, the debate on a powerful HRE curriculum must concern itself with political impediments. If political impediments are not given due regard, the emergent curriculum model may become counterproductive even in case HRE secures a strong place in the curriculum.

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