

Promoting Human Rights in Primary and Secondary School Textbooks: A Human Rights-Based Textbook Analysis

The Economic and Social History Foundation of Turkey (History Foundation of Turkey)

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

BASIC PREMISES

There is an intimate connection between the transition to a knowledge-based society, the fostering of a pluralistic cultural climate, the institution of a culture of peace and aims of democracy, on the one hand, and the modernization of our educational system and instructional materials in compliance with human rights criteria, on the other. Raising active, responsible and participatory citizens presupposes that the educational system and textbooks are brought in line with these aims.

- i) A modern and a democratic society can only be constituted by citizens who can establish realistic relations with their environment, and who can reason in terms of causes-and-effects.
- ii) We believe that a society and mode of production founded upon science, technology and communications also call for such individuals.
- iii) A didactical approach to education is unable to provide the skills demanded by a knowledge-based society.

In the course of the "Project on Human Rights in Textbooks," textbooks in current use and the present educational practices have been scrutinized on the basis of the above assumptions, and criteria developed during the project. A discussion of the criteria is to be found in the Introduction of *Human Rights in Textbooks*, (in English) introduced and edited by Prof. Gürol Irzik and Dr. Deniz Tarba Ceylan (Tarih Vakfi Publications, Istanbul 2004). For a complete list of the survey criteria please see Appendix, *HRITB*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a series of recommendations based upon the findings of the textbook survey. The recommendations are organized under the headings of

A. Textbook content

- i) Basic pedagogical approaches
- ii) Human rights education context in school curricula
- iii) Human rights education content of the textbooks
- iv) Peace and human rights

B. Curriculum reform

C. School environment

D. Respect for the "right to a good education"

A. Textbook content

i) Basic pedagogical approaches

***Recommendation 1.** We recommend that special care be taken to put social phenomena and historical processes in their proper, historical context and that the causality relations between events, trends, etc. should be emphasized and discussed; it should be stressed that societies are subject to change and transformation under both internal and external influences and interactions. Views maintaining that social and historical phenomena emanate in some inescapable way from innate attributes (essentialism) form systems of belief closed to scientific criticism and scrutiny, and therefore should be avoided in textbooks.*

An essentialist approach ignores the existence of societal and historical processes and offers ahistorical “explanations” of social phenomena, denies that society and the world can be changed by the interaction and participation of citizens, and presents change as degeneration and a form of moving away from the “true essence.” It thus fosters individuals who are authoritarian, insular, and who are not at peace with themselves and others, and who lack the capacity for consensus seeking and flexibility.

***Recommendation 2.** We recommend that the very widespread didactic approach based on impressing the “right thoughts” on the student (rather than fostering careful and critical thinking habits) should be abandoned. Great care should be taken to distinguish between expressions which contain moral, religious, emotional, political, ideological opinions, wishes, suggestions, value judgments, from falsifiable assertions that have a claim to being scientific, or have an empirical or logical basis. The presentation of various articles of belief –religious or nonreligious- in the guise of objective information should be avoided.*

The course on "Religion and Morals" should be reformed in such a way that it imparts information on the various belief systems in the world.

***Recommendation 3.** We recommend that information should always be presented in a way which is well motivated, and should rest on empirical facts or logical reasoning. Material in the textbooks must be accessible to the student; it must be well grounded and testable, at least in principle. The presentation should take into account a student’s language skills or the conceptualization ability appropriate to the student’s age. Arguments should not make references to some higher “authority” to establish the legitimacy of a claim.*

ii) The context of human rights education in the school syllabus

The aims of human rights education are the strengthening of the respect for human rights and basic freedoms, to promote democracy, social justice, solidarity and friendship between peoples and countries, to foster active citizenship, and to establish a culture of peace resting on universal human rights values.

These aims should be pursued not just in the course on human rights education or in civics, but also throughout the rest of the curriculum.

Recommendation 4. Textbooks should embody and transmit the image of a pluralist society and a world model which perceives diversity as an asset, and not as a threat.

Students should learn to resolve conflicts by mutual understanding and negotiation, in ways which benefit all sides and avoid rigid and unproductive dichotomies.

Empathy between individuals and between social groups should be acquired by the student, as well as the social skills to facilitate the coexistence of diverse groups in equality, in peace and mutual respect, rather than "tolerance," implying an "implicit hierarchy."

Feelings of solidarity and justice, which underlie human rights values, should be given their due.

Recommendation 5. Human rights education is indissolubly coupled with civic education. In the text books, civic duties should be framed in a participatory, creative, productive and transformative context.

In a modern society, the measure of love for one's country should not be to "die and kill for the motherland." Instead of such simplifications which exalt death and killing and which prejudice the culture of peace, textbooks must serve to raise an awareness that individuals can positively change their lives and environments through active participation while respecting democratic values and human rights. Instead of blind obedience, critical reasoning and democratic participation should be encouraged.

iii) The content of Human Rights Education

The definitions of human rights and freedoms are enshrined in international documents. The definitions and interpretations given in the textbooks should be in accordance with these basic documents.

Recommendation 6. Civics instruction is based upon duties and responsibilities as much as rights and liberties. However, the stressing of the duties and responsibilities at the expense of the rights and freedoms, in such a way that the latter are reduced to a secondary or subordinate status, comes into conflict with the aims of human rights education. Moreover, the arbitrary definition of some duties as "rights," thus creating semantic confusion in this way, should be avoided in the textbooks.

Human rights cannot be abridged at the discretion of the state, or their enjoyment arbitrarily limited to given areas recognized by the state. Human Rights should not be de-contextualized from their historical framework. Rights and liberties should not be represented as if they were the antithesis of security and stability.

Recommendation 7. Textbooks should be freed from violations of the liberty of religion and of conscience. A close relation between secularism (laicism) and human rights should be established and secularism should be elaborated as a universally accepted political and philosophical value instead of a matter of historical or national convenience.

Recommendation 8. All forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, cultural identity, class, religion, language should be eliminated.

Textbooks must be purged of all kinds of usage and applications which associate only a certain, restricted, set of social roles with women.

Expressions that may cause a general hostility against a religious, ethnic or cultural group must be avoided.

All statements that may cause a discrimination against the members of minority groups must be avoided.

All forms of xenophobia must be avoided.

iv) Peace and human rights.

Peace is the precondition for the enjoyment of human rights. Human rights education therefore has to be coupled with Peace Education.

Recommendation 9. *Overtly or covertly, textbooks must not glorify assumed “national values,” presumably pertaining only to “us,” at the expense of “other” societies and cultures; condescension and enmity towards “others” must be avoided.*

Interest, curiosity and respect towards the common cultural heritage of humankind and towards different cultures should be fostered.

More space should be reserved for the history, geography and cultural studies of countries other than Turkey, especially its neighbors. Information regarding Turkey should be placed in its proper context within Europe and the world, so that the student can form a balanced sense of belonging at the local, national, European and world level.

Recommendation 10. *Construction of the national identity on the assumption of ever present external threats and references to eternal and immutable “friends” or “foes” are obstacles on the way towards the establishment of a culture of peace.*

The recent past should be taught in a way that it transmits the common will for living in peace with Turkey's neighbors, on the basis of a capacity for negotiation and mutual accord among equals, respecting the interests of all parties.

Depicting Turkey as if it were always surrounded by enemies, or a part of the citizens as “internal enemies” is not to be allowed in any textbook.

Students should be helped to achieve a consciousness of being a member of a complex, pluralistic world and of “being an equal member in the family of humankind.” The love of one's country tempered with such feelings of belonging and solidarity are the only basis on which to build greater security for our society.

Recommendation 11. *The content of the course on National Security, which comes into conflict with the above stated guidelines, should be reevaluated. Ways should be sought to*

implement a peace education based upon the principle of "peace in the country, peace in the world," with the aim of safeguarding and deepening peace as the way to achieving security.

B. Curriculum reform

There is a close relationship between the school context, educational aids, the Ministry of Education, school administration, teachers and students, and the curricula. It should be our aim to improve the performance of this whole, not just textbooks.

Recommendation 12. *The curriculum, which is the basis of the textbooks' general design, must be prepared as a short, flexible guiding text, in line with the educational approach outlined in the above paragraphs.*

Recommendation 13. *Course materials other than textbooks, especially parallel "teacher's guide books" specific to each textbook must be produced in keeping with the above educational tenets.*

Recommendation 14. *The relation of the Ministry of National Education with the community of education must allow participation, be dynamic and open to changes. It must provide for continued "on the job training" of teachers.*

C. The school environment

Recommendation 15. *The school environment must be as equitable and innovative as possible, so that students have the opportunity of expressing themselves, and establishing relations of respect and trust with their surroundings. There must be laboratories where they can perform experiments. Such an environment should provide them with the chance to develop projects and to take responsibility.*

Recommendation 16. *The relation between parents, teachers and school administration should be revitalized, enabling parents to actively assist the achievement of universal standards in education. The "Parent and School Associations" should make a contribution towards educating the parents as well as the children, especially with regard to human rights values.*

D. Respect for the "right to a good education"

Recommendation 17. *In addition to the above outlined improvements regarding human rights in textbooks, all kinds of outdated information, tautologies, contradictory statements, incorrect definitions/explanations, inconsistent and irrelevant conclusions, false premises, questions and tests based on rote learning, visual materials unrelated to the text, out-of-context tokens or symbols of an ideological nature, and mystification and obfuscation in general should be eliminated from the text books.*

The expertise of university professors should be called upon to ensure the factual correctness of the textbooks.

Textbooks should be printed with proper attention to quality. To affect the above improvements, a reasonable amount of subsidy by the Ministry of Education, rather than an artificial ceiling on the textbook prices, may be called for.

CONCRETE GAINS AND SUSTAINABILITY

In the course of this project, several positive developments have taken place on the education front.

One of the concrete, and very important developments accompanying the Human Rights in Textbooks project is enshrined in the **Amendments to the Ministry of Education Regulations on Textbooks**, (Official Gazette 17/3/2004/25405) Article 6, paragraph a-3), which now stipulates that textbooks may not contravene the basic tenets of human rights, and may not harbor discriminatory elements based on gender, religion, denomination, language, color, political persuasion, philosophy or similar grounds. This condition should be complemented with the inclusion of this criterion in the evaluation form for the textbooks.

The Rules and Regulations on Primary Education have also been amended (Official Gazette 21.10.2004/ 25620), and now it is stated that among the aims of primary education is to impart to the students an awareness of human rights, children's rights, and their rights under international agreements, and the skill to use them. The new Rules and Regulations also stress that the student should acquire the skills and habits of actively taking part in collective projects to benefit her/his society and environment.

Beginning in August 2004, the **new primary education curriculum** was made public and a lot of the pedagogical concerns voiced in the course of the Project are echoed in the new curriculum. The present changes are toward greater autonomy for the teacher, a more loosely structured program, with many "activities" involving the students in the learning process, and a departure from rote learning, towards a more creative and less book-oriented approach. Moreover, teachers' books, and supplementary material for the students, are being made into an integral part of the educational materials. (The Turkish Academy of Sciences has published its opinion on the new curriculum reform at the web address <http://www.tuba.gov.tr>, in Turkish.) In the light of these developments, it was deemed necessary to formulate the supplementary recommendations presented below:

SUPPLEMENTARY RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE CURRICULUM REFORM

Suppl. Recommendation 1. *The effective participation of all concerned parties of the educational community should be secured in the formulation of the curricula, textbooks, teachers' books and other instructional aids.*

Suppl. Recommendation 2. *Greater funds should be set aside for the continuing education of the teachers, in order for the curriculum reform to be successful.*

Suppl. Recommendation 3. *It is clear that human rights education cannot be accomplished just by means of a single course. It is indeed appropriate that the concern for the acquisition of the skills and attitudes intended by the Human Rights Education Course should permeate the whole curriculum. However we believe it would be detrimental to human rights education to take this course off the program. The content of Human Rights Education is just as*

important as the general context. Taking this course off the program will create an essential gap in this regard.

Suppl. Recommendation 4. *It is of the utmost importance that all the textbooks, teachers' books and other teaching aids developed in the course of the present curriculum reform be surveyed by teachers, parents and other members of the educational community, in accordance with the guidelines and the criteria elaborated during this Project. Such a follow-up and wide-spread evaluation is indispensable for sustaining the awareness brought about by the Project.*