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Transformation of Democratic Participation Because of the Neoliberal Policies in Schools and Cities

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Abstract

This study aims to expand a small piece of my doctoral thesis topic**. My goal is to focus on introduction of 'participation' into schools through neoliberal policies. It is argued that due to the smaller state policy of neoliberalism, public services have lost their economic resources and power, and democratic participation in schools is equated with economic participation and contribution, in this part. The writing draws a similarity between cities losing their importance as social and cultural life moved to isolated luxury sites in neoliberalism, and public schools where economic participation is encouraged. It is wanted to say that neoliberal participation is encouraged in every sense, and emphasis is placed on transparent management and entrepreneurial school management. It is intended to emphasize that the relations between education, school and democracy should be re-established and defined in accordance with the importance and essence of the subject, outside the framework of 'democracy' and 'participation' imposed by neoliberalism.

Keywords: *Democratic participation, neoliberal policies, participation in schools and cities*

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Introduction

In recent years, neoliberal policies adopted by world capitalists as a savior have brought the phenomenon of 'participation' into education studies. This concept was visible in schools, as in other fields. In the period of neoliberal policies, capitalist states have agreed to find new ways to face unresolved problems. The first two of these unresolved issues are the increase in income distribution inequalities and the rapid enrichment of the minority. The sustainability of the welfare state conditions is at the risk of not going on anymore. The most important conclusions of this agreement are the failure to provide equal and minimum conditions in the basic life services and the increasing impoverishment of the majority. At the same time, these services required and used as application areas by neoliberal policies, have been the basis of this agreement. Consequently, based on the decisions taken at the international level neoliberal promises under these policies made were put into practice at the national level. One main result of this agreement is the displacement and privatization of important public areas such as education and health. Because neoliberal policies have reduced the democratic control by citizens both in civil society and public areas. Citizens and national institutions have less power than the powers of the state and global capital (Olssen, 2018). Hence neoliberal policies have weakened citizens and public areas in terms of democratic participation. Also, both citizens and these public services have lost their economic resources and powers because of the small state policy of neoliberalism. As a necessary consequence of these policies, the economic participation of the citizens in the public sphere has replaced their democratic participation and has become more important. Because of these changes, the democratic participation of the citizens in public services has declined. Also, this period has reduced and equalized democratic participation in education to economic participation and contribution. As a result, it must be said

that economic contribution has been obligatory to even for ostensible democratic participation with neoliberal policies.

Especially in capitalist countries like Turkey, public service areas such as education and health, which are among the minimum rights to life, became the implementation bases of privatization, flexible working, withdrawal of public services, marketization and commercialization policies. Neoliberal capitalism existed with some new conceptual innovations such as decentralization, total quality management, governance, transparency, accountability, participation, and community involvement. The meaning of these new politics and discourse was “we are not giving up on higher rates of profit and exploitation, but we are giving you free-roaming and many”. Capitalists are saying that they offer a huge neoliberal playground and a fun game of “democracy” where you can seize the opportunity! For this reason, the policies behind the development-oriented 'participation' projects and participatory democracy discourses carried out in areas that concern public life such as the environment, the city, health, and education are neoliberal's policies. These projects are under the leadership of the United Nations and sponsored by the World Bank in underdeveloped or developing countries (The World Bank Participation Sourcebook: Environmentally Sustainable Development Publications, 1996; Community Participation, 2005).

The most concrete indicator of neoliberal education change can be the bills that fall on university students in America. For instance; the tuition for an undergraduate at the University of California was \$150 in the 1970s, from less than \$2500 in the 1990s to \$15,000 today. In America, students are trying to continue their education as debt slaves with 1.6 trillion education debts on their shoulders (Wendland-Liu, 2020). Under neoliberal capitalism, the cost of education surpassed all its other features (quality, yield, content, etc.) and gained more importance. Thus, "education" has become a commodity that may or may not be bought at its price. This situation caused the crisis to deepen in schools and led to more marketization, privatization, and increased inequalities (Hill, 2016; Apple, 2017). For this reason, the destructive effects of neoliberal policies were seen more in the field of education, which is the main axis of world modernization. The repercussions of these influences have drastically changed

educational processes in school and the way school components participate in school.

Transformation of Democratic Participation in Schools as Similar to the Cities

Cities have a particular place in the thought of democracy practices in the Western World. Also, city dwellers, like most of the world's population, have various potential democratic spaces due to the characteristics of the cities (Low, 2009). This relationship is based on the concept of citizenship revealed using democracies. Citizenship and cities as two linked concepts have been used to define building blocks of the modern world. Citizens of the city have had the opportunity to participate more in city decisions, thanks to the close interpersonal relations that are facilitated by cities and the democratic practices required by city life. In addition, there is a hope of using this opportunity within the legal framework given by citizenship rights and responsibilities (Holston & Appadurai, 1996). Perhaps this hope has also led to the definition of the relations between citizenship, city, and democracy. Educational institutions, which became widespread with industrialization, served as a constructive mortar in the establishment of these relations. In other words, in the capitalist development processes of the societies, schools have become a very important tool and focal point for urbanization, the formation of citizenship consciousness, and the development of capitalist democracy.

The critical role of schools in urbanization and democracy processes can be led to a relationship between the schools and the cities in capitalism, continuing with neoliberal policies. The relationship between schools and neoliberal educational policies can be compared to Harvey's capitalism and cities relationship. Cities have become places where neoliberalism has risen, and sharpening contradictions in cities revealed their real faces. These spaces became venues for hopes consumed in lives that had to reproduce every day. Harvey builds his work *Rebel Cities* on the idea that cities and urban life are consumed. Cities are both the product of capitalism and on which modern capitalism is built. Nevertheless, according to Harvey, the same cities that transform into

consumption and misery systems with neoliberal policies are justifying revolt against the system (Harvey, 2013).

The owners of the capital had promised a comfortable urban life by transporting their workers from mass housing to factories established near the cities. Unfortunately, with the neoliberal policies, the transfer of resources to the shantytowns or undeveloped areas of the cities became impossible. Policies were implemented that supported the idea that economic resources should transfer to 'dynamic' and 'entrepreneurial' speculators, traders, or contractors. Thus, problems such as regional, spatial, and urban inequalities and injustices, access to clean air and water, climate and environmental problems, quality and unequal health care, and neglected education were imprisoned in the fast-consuming lives of cities. Neoliberalism has left those who experienced these problems to their own devices and without finding solutions. Therefore, it can be said that the glittering cities of industrial capitalism stood up with their factories and workers' quarters and raised their skyscrapers, which are the apple eyes of the capital. On the other hand, neoliberalism has pushed the slums, poor segments, and productive forces which built further out of the city and have magnified their inequalities.

The educated and skilled workforce obtained by education systems of capitalism enlarges the capital and causes it to increase capitalist accumulation, as the same in cities. The skilled workforce contributed to increasing capital accumulation more than the factories and the cities that developed around them. Hence, fast progress in information and internet technologies with the development of industry and technology has developed with the workings of scientists, technocrats, and bureaucrats who have grown up in the capitalist education system. In other words, capitalism has benefited and continues to enjoy the flashy and useful part of education as well as cities. However, in the neoliberal era, it does not have to worry about offering all the possibilities of this development and prosperity to everyone. It does not need so many trained workforces and qualified personnel anymore. With enough technological tools and equipment, it can reach the desired production conditions and quantity with less qualified employees. For this reason, the necessity for education systems that should bring large masses of people together with qualified education has

decreased. Accordingly, neoliberalism, while saying "education for all" with noise and ostentatiousness, simultaneously diminishes the role of the state in education. In fact, for "education for all" everyone just makes sacrifices and participates financially (Kumar & Hill, 2008). It is enough for a smaller and elite group to receive the desired training for the wheels to turn. The fate of the remaining people was left to the free market and the shrinking neoliberal state. As a result, it can be said that the favorites of capitalism social and cultural aspects of city life and state schools have lost their former importance in terms of capital and states in neoliberalism. Instead of this, participation and competitiveness were presented to them as a way and a goal to stand on their own feet.

As a final word for this part, people are compelled to compete and participate in education and living conditions or spaces in this neoliberal age. At the same time, they must try to reach the best for their own lives by showing all their participation and contribution skills and must not expect much from the state.

Reflections of Neo-liberal Policies on Education Accompanied by Moderate Islam and Conservative Democracy in Turkey

In the aforementioned new political environment, it is seen that the power centers that have a say in the society or that have started to have a say, have also increased the areas and rates of intervention in education policies. Critical educator M. W. Apple (2017) says that the biggest problem in the field of education is "conservative modernization" and that neoliberalists are at the forefront of the hegemonic groups that determine education policies. This group is advocating the competitive development of education in the market and market economy. They defend that success must be determined with standardized test exams. These changes also indicate that being educated and finishing a qualified school alone could not be enough to have a good job and income. Therefore, it means that the linear relationship between education level and economic income disappeared. Whereas, this relation has been the subject of research in the field of educational economics for many years. Its positive effects have been seen in the planned development periods of capitalism. Now it disappears and leaves its place

to uncertainty. So, this view which is also the basis of the Human Capital Theory is losing its effect.

According to some economists, the education-productivity-income relationships should be approached from the perspective of 'education' as a consumer good, not that perspective of more education leads to more economic income (Carnoy, 1995). Thus, it should be said that more income leads to more consumption of 'education' (Carnoy, 1983). Indeed, in neoliberalism, the desired education service can be obtained by spending more. In addition, in these market conditions, training should be taken to use the qualifications and achievement certificates obtained after the training in a competitive market in an income-generating manner. When this skill is not demonstrated, education cannot turn into a more income-generating form. As a result; In the process of competition between individual capitals, education is an investment area on the one hand, and on the other hand, the knowledge produced through education becomes a determinant in competition as a commodity (Ercan, 1998).

In this process, with the increase in inequalities between schools in neoliberal market conditions, the public meaning and function of education gradually decreased. At the same time, the public area becomes open to the private, as the local to the global (Aksoy, 2018). On the other hand, neoliberal policies started with changes such as the opening of national capitals, the development of international trade, and the conclusion of customs union agreements. And, they have existed with the policies of conservative governments that gained weight in the countries where they were implemented (Hill, 2014). As in Turkey, these policies were tried to be adopted into the society and integrated into social life under the scope of conservative Islamic democracy discourses. Besides, their acceptance was tried to be facilitated by highlighting the local, national, and religious elements of these policies.

Thus, apart from a small minority who can access quality education, as a result of a decrease in education and culture level and economic impoverishment, the large segments of the population have tended more towards these conservative values. At the same time, they have strengthened their belief that is done under the

name of religion without questioning that political power is right and good. As this tendency gets stronger and impoverishment increases, quality education, critical inquiring, self-development, awareness of civic rights, seeking and getting one's rights, and shows are also decreased. These circumstances have resulted in a closer approach to and commitment to the conservative power. Consequently, countries like Turkey where neoliberal policies are implemented have moved away from education and become more conservative. This situation comes with a decline in the quality of education and public education services. Besides, this decline has been enlarged by the Islamic approach, and it is continuing to affect the masses. As a result, it can be said that neoliberal politics and the Islamic approach are feeding each other like a vicious circle.

State-owned schools providing education services have been privatized and commercialized in terms of their many functions. Nevertheless, their official name and framework have not changed, and they continued to provide public services. Apart from teachers' salaries, which are the most basic and compulsory expenses for schools, and the school's electricity, water and heating expenses (although also there are schools that cannot pay these bills), other school expenses are expected and charged from students, parents. If the school's expenses and needs can not be met, local governments, people, or institutions that can sponsor the school in the region can also be applied. The cleaning, canteen and food works that need to be done in schools were tendered to private companies. These services have also become paid for by students. Expenses such as educational equipment and activity expenses were covered by students and parents. The state funds allocated to public schools were reduced, and the problem of finding economic resources for the school was left to those who work at the school and those who receive an education. However, at the same time, national values and religious education were brought to the fore to make this neglect forgotten and to cover it up, and also the importance of values education was emphasized. Participation in every sense such as "democracy", and "advanced or participatory democracy" was encouraged, and transparent administration and entrepreneurial school administrations were featured. For this reason, school models that existed and

developed with their environment were put forward and supported as steps appropriate for the era.

As a result, neoliberals have shown that they glorified and protected traditional and conservative values on the one hand and that they do not hesitate to take a step in line with the era, on the other hand. What is done only thing was not to give up on neoliberal policies. Therefore, in reality, this new situation in the education system and schools serves as a cover for the neoliberal policies implemented in the field of public service education.

Education and Democracy in Neoliberalism Era

In the neoliberalism era, while education as a public service has been moved away from the state, the ground for reconciliation of the conflicting parties weakened involved in education. According to one basic view, the state is a product of society at a certain stage of development, and hence, it has a public function (Engels, 1884). Unfortunately, it has forgotten this function in the neoliberal era. In this case, communities who have lost the conciliatory ground of the state prefer to act more with their interests in schools. Therefore, education more often experiences the state of being a field of political struggle. On the other hand, the neoliberal economy is being needed 'rapport' more than democratic policies, collaborations, and compromises (Giroux, 2007). Here, 'rapport' also means obedience. The important thing about neoliberalism is that everyone is compliant and consumers alike. For this, while the social existence of conscious citizens is prevented, consumerism and compliance are supported. While education is privatized and the public support of the state decreased in schools, the state is isolated from democratic policies and turned into a company state (Hertz, 2003; cited in Giroux, 2007).

If states were formed as a result of social development, similarly, schools are the products of developing social and economic production processes. On the other hand, the state took on duties to recognize and observe the rights of its citizens by developing the social state features, and similarly, education systems also have new goals and objectives other than the aim of producing a qualified workforce for capital. For instance, schools have gained different qualities that

can also have features that enable people to live their lives better, freely, and independently, and their multi-faceted development. Thus, besides the functions of the schools related to the reproduction of sociality and life, new educational purposes have emerged in areas such as the realization of themselves and the liberalization in line with their abilities and interests. However, it should be questioned how these vital tasks can be fulfilled by schools together with the neoliberal policies implemented in education. Because, as mentioned before, neoliberalism has caused the crisis to deepen in schools and has led to an increase in marketization, privatization, and inequalities in the field of education (Hill, 2016; Apple, 2017). The effects of these policies have been more destructive in schools, which is one of the important pillars of world modernization.

Despite all these developments and conditions that changed in the field of education, schools did not give up on improving themselves and they had new goals. The most important factor that causes schools to acquire new goals by expanding their missions is the idea that realizing that education includes dynamic processes that will also lead to social changes, and that defends the regenerative and transformative power of education. For this reason, education has been an institutional structure that is handled and used primarily for societies that want to realize a social renewal or establishment. The obvious examples of education systems in historical processes can be seen in the Industrial Revolution and the change and development in Europe. In addition, the importance is given to education and the role it played in the founding years of the Turkish Republic and the revolution and establishment processes of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) should be emphasized.

Realizing that the field of education includes dynamic processes that can lead to social changes, and defending the regenerative and transformative power of education, educational thinkers have developed theories by focusing on this transformative function of schools. The most important point that these thinkers have in common is to include democratic participation practices in education to reveal the transformative and developing power of education, and to ensure the democratic participation of school components such as teachers, students, and parents. For example, Apple and Beane (2011) emphasized the implementation of

both democratic structures and processes at school and an education program that will provide students with democratic experiences to democratize education or create democratic education processes. Thus, the positive contributions of democratic participation to education can be benefited more and the transformative power of education can be revealed. As can be seen, democratic education has a wide scope and meaning that includes all school processes (Korkmaz & Erden, 2013). The other one of this important thinker, John Dewey, believed that the potential power could be revealed more in education combined with democratic processes and life practices. John Dewey had trusted the transformative power of education too and argued that this power should be intertwined with life. For this reason, he explained that the school can play a progressive role depending on its relations with society and democracy. Explaining his views on the relationship between school and society in the context of progressivism and democracy, he saw progress in democracy in the activity of individuals (Dewey, 2010). These activities are the individual or group activities presented and provided by the school organizations. Because of this, the schools for social development to continue positively should become guiding and self-developing democratic institutions. So Dewey is discussing his views on education, democracy, and freedom in the context of democracy and democratic education principles (Dewey, 2004). To conclude, just as the school had emerged as a result of social developments, after that it should continue its development by having democratic qualifications to undertake the function of being the pioneer and maintainer of social developments.

According to Dewey, education should combine knowledge and life activities in schools. The child should participate in the work at school by establishing relationships between lessons, information, and jobs and using them in practice. The school should be organized by establishing relational integrity among all its activities and the child should be involved in the work. Dewey's view of democracy is also in this framework. Democracy is a common life experience realized through relationships (Ottekin Demirbolat, 2012). Democracy should have a vital and holistic counterpart, rather than formal and operational rules, committees, votes, or numbers. So, according to Dewey, participation and

democratic participation should aim to do the work consciously at the maximum level and to conclude it (Dewey, 2010).

Another conclusion drawn by John Dewey is to have these qualifications in school and society, it is necessary to adopt and apply the principles of democratic education (Dewey, 2004). Democracy can only be applied and lived in life through education. In this view, each bases his actions on those of others and must consider that he will direct others. The continuous activities of people that related to each other in common action are reasoning to the destruction of class, race, and nationality walls that prevent from thinking about their actions and feelings, and the disappearance of their distinctions. Therefore, Dewey had seen as democracy much more vital to life than a form of government.

It is seen that; the concept of democracy was important and indispensable for education and schools even before neoliberal policies. The need for democracy and democratic participation did not emerge with neoliberalism. The concepts of education and democracy have always been in close relationship with each other in the context of the roles they play in the development of societies. However, since "education" and "democracy" are concepts that each individual, society, or political administration can define and shape according to themselves, the relationality established with the society and the individual is important. Therefore, the relationship between education, school, and democracy needs to be re-established and defined in the political conditions of neoliberalism. This must be done outside the framework of 'democracy' and 'participation' offered or imposed by neoliberalism, following the importance and essence of the issue.

Neoliberalism and Democratic Participation in School

While the current neoliberal policies are being implemented, different segments of society can come together in schools. However, school components that come together in private schools or public schools of different socio-economic levels cannot experience democratic experiences in the school atmosphere and educational processes. On the contrary, due to their conflicting interests, points of consensus and commonality may decrease and conflicts may increase. For example, selecting students through central multiple-choice tests and enrolling

them in better-educated schools magnifies competition and conflicts of interest. For this reason, schools that remain in this conflict of interest and hegemony become more open to social and environmental interventions and contributions. At the same time, greater financial or intellectual involvement and intervention are needed, from within or outside of schools.

As a result, schools turned into institutions that demand more environmental participation. After that, they were more open to interventions, with their management approach claiming to be "entrepreneurial", "transparent" and "participatory". However, the democratic functioning is not certain, and clear in matters such as how, from whom, and how much the intervention and contributions will be received, how many rights or authority will be granted to whom, and who will be a partner in the business. This uncertainty has prevented the participation process that should be experienced as democratic citizen participation. Compulsory participation experienced in question remains mostly at the level of economic contribution and participation. In conclusion, these types of participation, which do not have the characteristics of democratic citizen participation, turn into forms of participation that are directed, demanded, and made obligatory by neoliberal policies.

Conclusion

The need for participation under neoliberal capitalism is used not as a requirement of a democratic society, but to fill the gaps arising from the crises and changes in social and economic life. Neoliberalism, which shines individual competition and increases economic sacrifice and participation, builds all kinds of participation by taking or giving shares. The way to participate in a subject, a decision, or an activity in a living space thoroughly depends on the economy. However, democratic citizen participation must mean a voice in decisions based on equal rights. Defending the living space or fundamental rights should not be limited to economic contribution or based on having a share at the same rate. If it is, the principle of 'one who cannot be a stakeholder economically cannot get a

share' replaces democratic participation. Here, it is a monetary reward expressed as a 'share'. It is not a right to participation or decision-making.

Thus, the concept of "participation" is reached to the concept of "stakeholder participation". Participation has included different dimensions (social, political, cultural, etc.) in its broad sense. However, reducing it to the economic field and narrowing its meaning to the concept of "stakeholder participation" means that only those who can have a "share" can be a stakeholder. So, as the nature and type of "participation" are defined on the economic axis, it turns into "stakeholder participation". Neoliberal policies fill the economic and social gaps with the concepts they have created. In the end, in cases where democratic participation cannot be realized in public spaces, stakeholder participation fills in democratic participation's place.

In summary; the state in the neoliberal era is insufficient about social welfare state rights. The new state does not want to be sufficient, does not want to be able to be sufficient to provide services such as health and education. However, these rights should be provided in the public interest and publicly, to everyone without discrimination and with equal access. In this case, it becomes necessary to develop active, democratic, and conscious citizen participation in quantity and quality. Participation should provide to make public services based on vital rights accessible to all segments of society. Participation should provide to make public services based on vital rights accessible to all segments of society. Besides, participation quality should be improved for the benefit of society and citizens. There are important factors to consider for this. Because desired participation does not occur in an independent space, in a vacuum isolated from society, or in a pure way. Many factors may affect participation socially and contextually. Considering these factors, the form of participation that should be targeted; should not be within the limits allowed and required by neoliberal policies, but by the principles of democratic participation and in a nature that is intertwined with life. To this end; that must be seen as a necessity to clarify the answers to the questions of for whom, where, how, and in what form the democratic participation will take place at the level of institutions and living spaces, and develop practical solution proposals in life.

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