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Service learning in Turkey: yesterday and today

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Abstract

Academic learning with community service experiences, community service-learning which is accepted as a learning-teaching approach establishing significant links between personal development and citizen consciousness is a product of the effort to merge the theoretical knowledge acquired by the learners in classroom with the real life outside of the class. Having implemented effectively and commonly for over a century in many parts of the world, particularly in the United States, community-service-learning could enter in Turkish education system just in 2006 in higher education level. Educators expect this course to enhance the teacher candidates in social, academic and affective aspects and to gain awareness of social responsibility. In this study, the implementations of community service-learning which are fairly new for Turkish teacher training system are examined and discussed the realizability of its objectives.

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1. Introduction

Being a kind of experimental learning, “community service-learning” (CSL) can be defined as a learning-teaching method which develops learning by combining community service work with the educational works in school, teaches citizen responsibility and strengthens the community (Abravanel, 2003; cit. Erjem, 2004).

CSL, whose theoretical foundations based on American philosopher Dewey’s Progressive Education current, addresses to the students in all the of the instructional level as a instructional method combining the community needs with the program-based teaching implementations. The basis of CSL implemented most commonly in United States is considered “School and Society” written by Dewey in 1903. Accepted as a pedagogical method which can carry out democratic citizen by educators, CSL has become widely used in all instruction level in all over the world (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, and Brahler, 2004).

Although CSL is mentioned as a course, it has an objective to create a awareness to the society oriented problems and increase sensibility in view of the problems. This course is important for the purposes of candidate teacher’s recognizing of professions and social conditions and learning to tackle with the problems (Dinçer, 2006). CSL is accepted as a product of conception trying to find a solution to the social activities outside of the class with the theoretical knowledge obtained in class (course) (Speck, Hoppe, 2004).

Duckenfield and Wright (1995) define community service-learning as a method establishing significant links between personal development and citizen consciousness. According to Barber and Battistoni (1993), it can be said that community service-learning is a product of a new pedagogical conception with its some aspects.

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The course CSL vary from the other courses in program not only in terms of its purposes but also its process of instruction. It is required that the course should be evaluated as a opportunity which render them to have social sensibility and gain the emotional dimension of their profession and be implemented suitable to the objectives of the course. If the course is executed according to these principles, teachers will develop self-confidence and their professional satisfactions. In addition, becoming a functional course, teacher candidates will find the opportunity to dealing with social problems prior to service and find a solution to these problems, contribute to obligation of serving to society one of the main duties of such universities. *Purpose of Study:* The purpose of this study is to extend previous research on service learning to the context of Turkish experience, and discusses the pros and cons of the course which is assumed to be crucial for creating a more alerted democracy in the country.

2. CSL in Turkey

In parallel with the works to update primary education program of Ministry of Turkish National Education in 2005, academic programs of Faculties of Education were revised also in 2006. A course under the name of “Community Service- Learning” has been added to the academic program of Faculties of Education during such works conducted by HEB.

CSL course is a course obligatory which is taught in every department for a period 1hour theory, 2 hour practice, totally 3 hour/2 credits for a week. This course is usually taught in third or fourth class in fall or spring semester according to educational and instructional plans of the departments. This is a kind of course during which a combination of theoretical and practical studies take part, the student is active with the guidance of the instructor; the instructor observes, orients the students’ studies by being a guidance (HEB, 2011).

Course activities should be performed in society itself rather than in class. The course is considerably convenient to choose and to implement the issues especially preferred by the students for the reason that they want to do and learn which are believed to be able to obtained efficient results. It lays the groundwork for acting the students’ own initiative due to the fact that it doesn’t put the student intra muros. Thus, the students will intensify the theoretical knowledge obtained in class and will put together the life and the school and they will have made also a significant contribution to society. In this context, community service-learning will the students enable to use what they have learned in course to solve the problems and matters in a particular community.

In this context, a number of basic principles for CSL activities be carried in Faculties of Education were determined (MU., 2009; HEB, 2011):

- Implementations in this course should be aim to develop teacher candidates’ social sensibility and awareness, cooperation, solidarity, effective communication and self-evaluation skills, social responsibility and self-confidence.
- The activities defined in CSL projects should be incentive to read regardless of negative and insufficient conditions in target audience; be supportive scientific, critical, creative thinking and self-confidence; be motivational in issues such as learning, investigating, examining and developing.
- The activities defined in CSL projects should be original activities except the activities pre-determined and planned to take part in the teacher candidates’ own academic program (teaching practice) and in institutions where the target audience exist.
- CSL projects consist of many activities. Each project is designed with an activity-based approach. Teacher candidates must be take part in one of the activities which they proposed or declared by faculties in projects.
- The objectives, the attitudes adopted and the messages given should be protective Ataturk’s principle and revolutions, in accordance with science and senses, being supportive national unity and integrity.

2.1. The Objective of the CSL Course

The aim of the CSL course is the realization of a variety of services for understanding the concepts such as voluntary, society, individual, socio-economic problems, discrimination and social justice, for contributing to broaden the students’ horizons with social and academic activities, for improving their self-confidence and make the individuals work effectively within the group.

With the course CSL, It is aimed that the teacher candidates serve to community by showing their sensibility to the social problems through activities which they will prepare and implement. It is expected from the teacher

candidates to be participatory and democratic individuals, reinforce solidarity and cooperation, be more enterprising for the subject taking responsibility and developing and implementing a project; in brief they are expected to be experienced for becoming a modern individual. In this context, CSL focuses on the subject such as education, peace, security, climate, energy, water, employment, culture, language, unemployment, violence (Coşgun, 2009).

At the completion of the CSL course, teacher candidates are expected to have gained the following qualifications:

Being sensitive to local and global problems and be find the solution, be able to active for solving the local and global problems, be able to develop self-evaluation skill, be able to use creative thinking skills in all of these activities (HEB, 2011), *be able to comprehend the individuals and social benefits of community-service, be able to perceive on which issues related his/her field, he/she can serve to community, be able to regulate activities oriented to community-service in issues related his/her field, be able to develop the community-service efficiencies by the activities regulated* (Yaşar, Gültekin and Kaya, 2009).

Teacher candidates will face with the social problems such as unemployment, street children, elderly people, people need special education, hospital and prison conditions, environmental problems, honor killings, blood feuds, sport fanaticism, traffic accidents..., they can perceive the source, dimensions and results of the problems, will think about these problems, be able to find his own solutions. Thus, teacher candidates can be find one hand the opportunity to be interested with the social problems and find solutions to these problems; on the other hand the universities can be effect the community-service obligation which is one of their basic missions (EU, 2008).

2.2. Service Areas and Target Audience

Principle issues closely related with CSL can be listed as general education, vocational education, habituation of reading, art, sport, employment, globalization, language, foreign language, disabled people, leisure time, industrialization, housing, technology, health, information technology, migration, urbanization, violence, transportation, drought, climate protection, and energy fields (Coşgun, 2009).

In this context, some agencies and organizations where community-service implementations may be executed can be listed as follows (HEB, 2011): Schools (private education schools and rural schools with combined class)–Hospitals –Children’s orphanage - Museums - Galleries and libraries – Youth and cultural centers- Scouting clubs - Municipalities – Soup kitchen, social service areas like nursing home–Universities - NGOs - Prisons and children’s correctional homes – Professional associations and syndicates- Organized-industrial zones- Headmen – School-family units...etc. The main objective of the course is to contribute teacher candidates’ recognition of the society before graduating, to perceive what’s going on around him, to be educated as an individual having the ability to solve the social problems encountered, so it can be useful for all sections of society. But, selection of the target audience of CSL implementations from the disadvantage groups in society will contribute to achieving principle objective of the study and its significance. These can be; elderly people, needy children, women affected by violence, housewives, martyr families, street children, prisoners, disabled people, the illiterates, people who are not the opportunity for adequate education, foreigners, unemployed youth, maybe resident of the slum.

CSL course instructional process is composed with the phases *planning, implementation and evaluation*. Accordingly, making the following process by the order are foreseen for that the activities can be carried in a suitable manner: **Research Phase** At this stage the training needs of school, students and families and potential obstacles should be identified. Educational suitability of the activities be realized is fairly important. **Planning Phase** At this stage, the activity be realized should be decided, the objectives activity oriented, educational status, and evaluation activities should be determined. In addition to these fundamental aspects of the activity, student characteristics, timing, location, training equipments and facilities should be taken into account. **Implementation Phase** The activity executed should be applied in the light of pre-determined principles and forecasts. Making a plan for implementation will enhance the success of the study. **Evaluation Phase** whether the objective of activity has been achieved or not should be evaluated (Yaşar, Gültekin and Kaya, 2009).

In instructional process, in the process of planning up to evaluate the following operations are performed:

- Project consultants are appointed to advise to a certain number teacher candidates related with the activities.
- Project consultants inform to teacher candidates for whom they are responsible at the beginning of the semester about the objective of community-service implementations, general principles, works expected to made, the scope of the project, and the evaluation criteria of the course.

- Project consultants determine the project groups and the project issues with the teacher candidates. Project issues; can be proposed by teacher candidates originally - can be chosen from the projects declared by faculties- can be chosen among the projects progressing in institutions and organizations determined by the faculty.
- Each project team selects a teacher candidate as a project leader to ensure coordination of the activities to be made in the scope of project.
- All of the activities which will be realized within the scope of the project, implements by considering *Project Implementation Manuel*.
- Project teams meet regularly with project consultants and share their experiences, discuss about the problems encountered and suggest the solutions.
- Each project team prepares a file related to the activities made within the scope of the course community-service learning and in line with the project and document the activities performed.

Project teams deliver their portfolio file after its completion and these files are used for evaluating teacher candidates' performances. Project teams present at the same time the activities made by them after the project to share with the other project teams. Course is evaluated by this portfolio file. When the CSL course is evaluated, the student's work during a semester are evaluated by the instructor according to the pre-determined criteria and the student's note is rated as midterm and final grades (EÜ CSL, 2008; HEB, 2011).

This process displays the objectives, fundamental principles, target audience, function of course process and evaluation of CSL in Turkey. Teacher training institutions have to plan all of the activities which will be made within the scope of CSL course according to this process. The structure of education system doesn't allow to act much more flexible within the scope of this course. It is seen that CSL studies declared by the Faculties of Education in their website are composed of the "charity" themed activities being similar to each other, which doesn't allow using generally the project and problem based-learning- approaches, being "charity" themed. The serviceable of this situation for the objectives of CSL course is quite controversial.

3. Conclusions

It is possible to say that the process of CSL in Turkey described above overlap theoretically with the implementations in U.S. A. having much more experience in this subject. However, the results of applied research are needed to decide the effectiveness of CSL in Turkey. In this context, when the related literature is examined, it is seen that the studies relating to CSL are quite limited. This situation can be explained with the fact that the academic circles haven't considered this course sufficiently because of its being a new course. However, although the first researches relating to implementations realized in the name of CSL are quietly new, they give the important clues regarding CSL.

In one of the these research, teacher candidates express that the CSL course is a required course for training teacher and the course adds them social sensibility, awareness and responsibility (Özdemir and Tokcan, 2011). Similarly, Dinçer, Ergül, Şen and Çabuk (2011) have ensured the results designating CSL experiences develop the awareness of social responsibility of the teacher candidates in their researches. It is possible to obtain the clues that CSL help the teacher candidates to develop their social and emotional qualities and contribute the settlement of citizenship awareness at the same time support academic development beyond these personal acquisition it develops the consciousness of citizenship in terms of the ones taking this service (Küçüköğlü, Coşkun, Köse and Taşgın, 2011; Dinçer et al., 2011; Uğurlu and Kırıl, 2011; Gökçe, 2011).

Likewise, this research shows that CSL course may help pre-service teachers gain individual, social, academic skills. Furthermore this research find that pre-service teachers believe that CSL course provide them with opportunities to collaborate and encourage them collaborate to solve problems. Pre-service teachers also report that they realized the importance of their social responsibilities towards their environment. All of these findings may suggest that this CSL course provide students with unique and valuable gains. The findings of this study are similar to other findings mentioned above. The present results suggest that CSL has the potential to meet expectations in teacher education (Kucukoglu, 2011).

However, despite these positive findings, there is still room for improvement in planning, teaching and evaluating CSL courses. For example, the legal foundations of the course, how to ensure cooperation between programmes and social institutions and how to finance social projects should be specified (Kucukoglu, 2011; Yılmaz, 2011; Özdemir, Tokcan, 2011).

It is true that CSL is perceived not as an effective citizenship education but as a “charity” and it is face to face with the risk of moving away from its objective when the studies of the teacher training institutions under the name of CSL are examined. In this context, it can be said that Community Service-Learning in Turkey with its current form isn't based on philosophic substructure, isn't be overlapped with educational programs, isn't in cooperation with NGOs sufficiently and isn't be executed objective evaluation criteria. Coşgun (2009), who holds a similar point of view, also draws attention to what is lacking in CSL courses but claims that these courses are expected to contribute greatly to the formation of teachers with democratic attitudes. He posits the questions stated below:

- *Will we be able to train teachers who view educational institutions, in-school training and out-of-school CSL courses as components of the teacher training process as a whole?*
- *What role will the CSL course take in this process?*
- *Will the CSL course become institutionalized as soon as possible?*
- *To what extent are teacher-training programs ready to implement a CSL course effectively?* (Coşgun, 2009).

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