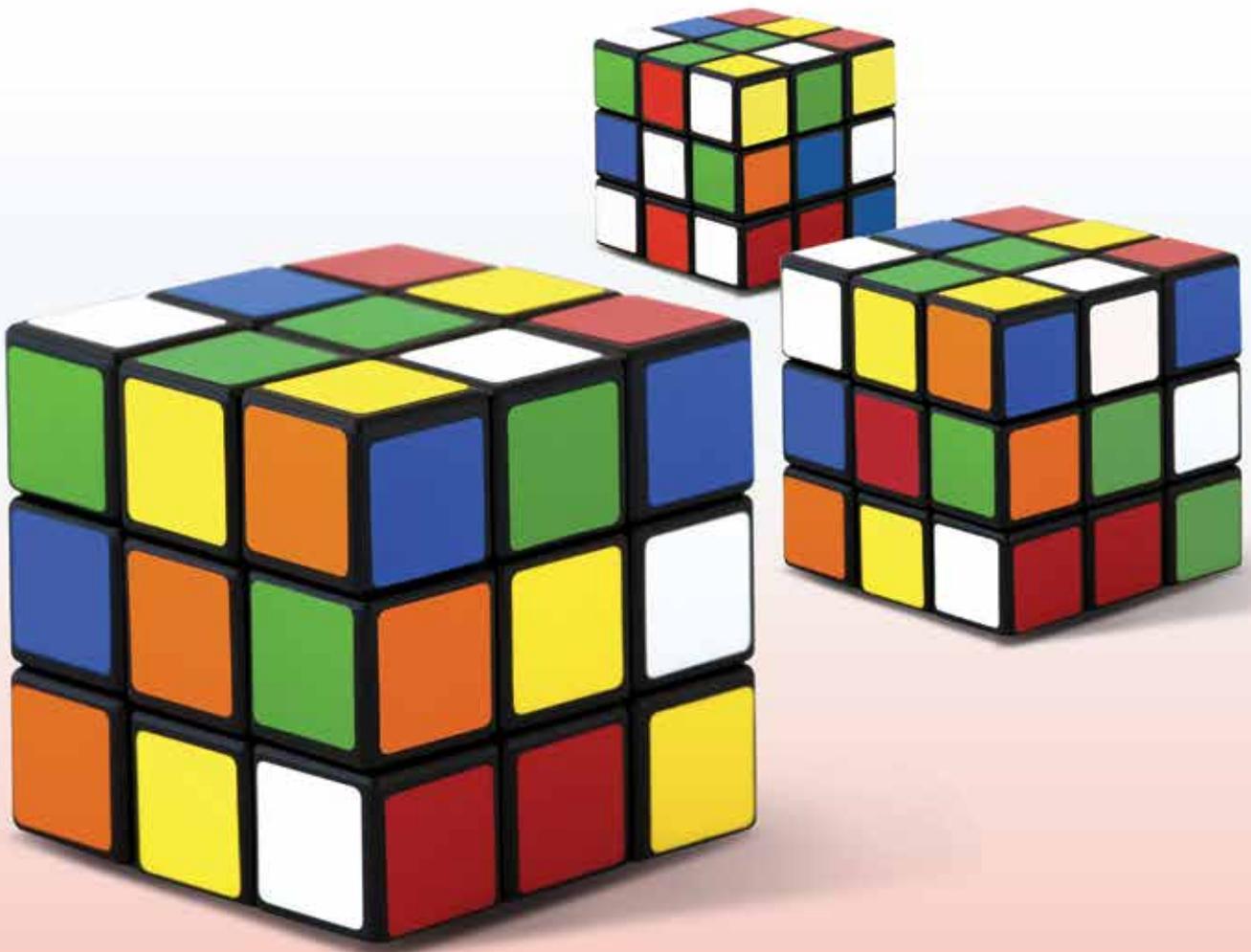


# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: SCHOOL PRACTICES, TEACHERS' NEEDS

MÜGE AYAN CEYHAN





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***MÜGE AYAN CEYHAN\****



ERI, is an independent and not-for-profit think-and-do-tank that contributes to systemic transformation in education for the benefit of the child's and the society's development through sound evidence, constructive dialogue and innovative/critical thinking. Evidence-based decision-making processes in education concerning stakeholder engagement and ensuring the access of all children to quality education are the key elements of systemic transformation. ERI, established in 2003, is a good example for the Turkish civil society, since it is an initiative supported by leading foundations in Turkey. ERI carries out its' research and education activities through ERI Education Observatory unit and Education Laboratory, a collective initiative with ATOLYE Labs.

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# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: SCHOOL PRACTICES, TEACHERS' NEEDS

*"We are supposed to be there for the students. This is a fact often missed. A common assumption is that 'students are there for us'."*

**A public high school philosophy teacher**

*"My feeling is that teachers need to be exposed to varying points of view rather than a distant command of a superior. For instance, at school we can't even discuss day-to-day events happening there. Perhaps, what we need are environments that will enable confrontations and encounters through such daily discussions."*

**A public high school philosophy teacher**

This report is intended to present the data gathered through one-on-one interviews conducted with eleven minority school and public school teachers.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with its objective of attaining in-depth data, the study does not in any way concern itself with representation. In line with this focus, criteria such as field of study, age and gender of teachers were not taken into consideration for their selection. The only common characteristic of the teachers chosen is that they have given thought to how an inclusive education construct may actually be realized and have made an effort to shape their daily teaching practices through such an understanding. The study has essentially been conducted to seek answers to the following two research questions:

1. What kinds of opportunities do teachers create to enable inclusive education practices?
2. What are the needs expressed by teachers for making inclusive education possible?

Conducted through the mutual efforts of UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) and ERI (Education Reform Initiative), this study does not focus on discrimination at school, but rather aims to reveal what teachers need in order to make inclusive education possible. Therefore, the first question to be tackled aims not to put forth the constraints and negativities encountered, but rather to put a spotlight on the opportunities teachers have created to enable inclusive education in their day to day practice and reveal the implications of these opportunities in realizing the potential of inclusive education. In other words, the first question solely serves to elaborate the second one, which in turn constitutes the main endeavor of this study. Essentially framed to convey what teachers are in need of, the report will at times refer to specific examples of the aforementioned opportunities they create and attempt to relate them to the needs of inclusive education. Finally, several teachers' narratives regarding some of the opportunities made available will be presented in the appendix.

The types of schools the interviewed teachers teach at and their respective fields are as follows:

- Religious vocational high school, English teacher
- Armenian high school, Philosophy teacher

<sup>1</sup> Teachers who were interviewed for this study were selected from those who participated in the "Teacher's Workshop: Discussing Controversial Issues in an Educational Setting" Certificate Program that ERI and SECIBIR organized together in 2013. This was preferred because these teachers are informed about inclusive education issues and practices and thus could give relevant and useful answers.

- Armenian high school, Turkish Culture teacher
- Three different public high schools, Philosophy teachers
- Public primary school, 1<sup>st</sup> Grade teacher
- Public primary school, English teacher
- Public primary school, Turkish teacher
- Public primary school, Science teacher
- Public primary school, Social Studies teacher

The time and place of the interviews were up to the teachers to decide, while extra care was taken to conduct the interviews at places where teachers would feel at home.

Research findings reveal teachers' needs to be as listed below.

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## WHAT SHOULD TEACHER TRAINING BE LIKE?

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**Attributes of the teaching staff.** Without exception, all teachers seemed to complain about the rather casual approach of the Ministry of National Education's (MoNE) in-service trainings. In order for teachers to have a sincere interest in the trainings offered, teaching staff should exhibit the following attributes: Firstly, it is known that teachers have a need to feel that they are valued and their experiences are appreciated. While this common concern of teachers should be taken to heart, the work SEÇBİR (Center for Sociology and Education Studies) and ERI have carried out with the participation of teachers also reveals the significance of teachers' accumulated experience in their fields. Ultimately, teachers are the ones who will have a one on one relationship with students, design the lessons they teach, and will both be influenced by school practices and also have an impact on them. In this regard, it is important to question the hierarchical relationship present in a great majority of teacher trainings. Academic knowledge is widely assumed to be more important and valuable than knowledge attained through practical school experience, whereas they should actually be approached as two different ways of knowing instead of being hierarchized.

The interviewed teachers pointed out that the teaching staff of any possible teacher training program should firstly be experts in the related subject. Another essential attribute for teaching staff is "field knowledge." It is clear that the education the interviewed teachers received at faculties of education has not proved adequate for them. The following account of an English teacher reveals that their education faculty training was based more on theoretical knowledge and thus failed to sufficiently empower them against the problems they have to deal with in practice: "We took all those English literature classes and what was the use? Personally, I now find myself having to deal with challenges of quite a different nature." Teachers have underlined the importance of having trainers who will "touch upon their day-to-day life," which in turn supports the findings indicating that teachers' experiences should not be trivialized. One of the teachers narrated a conversation they had had with an academic who had been invited as part of a project:

*I said to her, "When I really pay attention to a hyperactive student, I sometimes end up forgetting about the rest of the class or just being preoccupied with that kid alone, depending on my mood that day. If I'm preoccupied with that one kid, I end up forgetting about the other kids and then suffer the regret that follows, the whole thing just gets me down, you know." The academic replied, "Why are you taking on all this work? It's not your problem!" I said, "But I*

*feel as though it is.” “That’s a very wrong way to go about it,” she said. “You need to get support. The school counselor should be supporting you, the administration should be supporting you.” “Very well said,” I replied, but there is no support whatsoever. What am I supposed to do then? There you have a dead end.”*

This narrative suggests that the academic in question was not sufficiently informed of the limitations of teachers’ daily school practices, and clearly reveals the feeling of desperation of teachers caused by the lack of a much-needed support mechanism for them. Although teacher training is essential for enabling inclusive education at schools, teacher training clearly cannot suffice on its own.

**Teachers to participate in potential trainings.** Teachers suggested that the trainings should be supported by MoNE, taken by all teachers, and be available continuously. Another point underlined by the interviewees was the need to demonstrate to teachers who have internalized discrimination that an alternative inclusive approach is, in fact, possible. It was stated that such trainings usually bring together “an almost homogenous group of teachers,” and that in reality, there are a great number of teachers who think the students are “hopeless” and “not worth the effort”, or that “such and such student is of no use; (s)he should be left aside so that (s)he doesn’t spoil the others,” whose approach to disabled students is one of “I’ll let them pass, their situation is already difficult, let’s not make things harder for them”, who immediately categorize their classes as “good, bad or ill-behaved” and share these thoughts with their colleagues causing other teachers to form prejudices, “who come to class 10-15 minutes late”, “who are not even aware that there are problems related to discrimination,” and that there needs to be a way to provide them with these trainings.

**Needs regarding the content and method of teacher trainings.** ‘Teacher-student communication’ is a topic that should definitely be included in teacher trainings. There is no doubt, however, that inclusion of issues regarding ways of forming an effective communication between teacher and student in teacher trainings will not alone suffice to keep the communication channels wide open or enable inclusive education. The restrictions imposed by the education system as well as the schools’ administrative issues are in fact directly related to the role teachers cast for themselves and the way they act it out.

*Let’s say it [school] finishes at 11:40; by 11:41, everyone will be out of the door. We don’t even speak to each other. So, who is supposed to provide guidance to these kids? School is the place where they should be able to become aware of things, but in reality, nobody becomes aware of anything at school. All they do is whizz through crash courses. They just come and go.*

As it is apparent from the quote above, the problem lies not only in the inability to form an effective communication with the students but also in the lack of dialogue among teachers regarding the students. This self-critical comment indicates that teachers are positioned in a way to support a type of education that does not go beyond the transmission of curriculum content to students, where students ‘just come and go’ and ‘whizz through crash courses.’ However, teachers also state that they have the ability to transform the students, and that this could be a positive or a negative transformation. Several of the interviewed teachers also pointed out that forming a strong communication with the students as well as being “the students’ favourite teacher” will serve to make this transformation a positive one, thereby setting the ground for inclusive education.

*I think we have the students graduate without even getting to know them. We don't even ask ourselves 'what's this kid like?' (...) For example, a student's end of year paper may come as a complete surprise to me leading me to think 'Was this [student] really like this all the time, did they really have these sort of problems, then why didn't I speak to them?' I did, as a matter of fact, go out for coffee with a small group of my students and they told me about their problems. I can't say I do this very often, but even that single occasion influenced our dialogue at school dramatically. Once you initiate that foundation with a student, you will be able to build on it together. This will be possible as long as they don't see you as the enemy line and they can build awareness with your effort. Otherwise, things will continue to be this way, the strong will win.*

Under a teacher training program with a focus on inclusive education, 'teacher-student communication' should go beyond a focus on development of communication skills only. As the quote above indicates, such a program should be of guidance to teachers in unearthing students' existing abilities, skills and tendencies. This need is clearly stated in the quote below:

*Each kid is different. So, I think exposing all of them to the exact same education is not the best thing to do. Teachers could be provided with the knowledge and skills related to an inclusive model of education for instance, but they aren't. The logic of education currently is the following: 'What you have here is a group of kids who are quite similar, all at point A, and what you have to do is take them all to point B.' The same logic applies at university too and once they start working as educators, teachers follow this approach anyway.*

We have mentioned above that strong communication may form a ground for inclusive education, but that it would not, on its own, suffice to enable it. Another reason for this is the uncertainty as to whether teachers will use this communication to maintain inclusiveness, social justice, and equality, or to impose a monolithic model of understanding.

The account below of a non-Kurdish teacher who has been teaching in the city of Urfa and learnt the Kurdish language is significant in that it summarizes the issue brought to attention above:

*I'll give you an example of a problem I had to deal with while I was teaching in Urfa. I used to talk to kids. I allowed them to speak Kurdish in class and we used to have conversations about almost anything in Kurdish and Turkish. I personally thought this was a good thing to do, so when I sat down with my colleagues, I would mention it proudly. The following break though, another teacher would come up and talk about how he "made the kids recite the national oath," looking as proud as I did.*

It is at this very point that the need for **strengthening teachers' perspectives** arises. Interviews indicate a strong need for teachers to strengthen their perspectives in a pluralistic way. The interviewed teachers believe that there needs to be a program discussing the ways to fight discriminations faced by groups who have been excluded from the dominant majority and who are in some way alienated or trivialised, to say the least.

However, teachers also believe that this inclusive understanding should not be confined to the classroom, emphasizing the significance of a perspective that can become widespread throughout the school. As one of the teachers suggested, inclusive education is not a 'lesson' but an 'understanding'. Coming from a science teacher, this comment is quite noteworthy. The same idea is supported in the account below by a philosophy teacher:

*I think it is not really possible for a maths or a physics teacher to take time off of their lessons to organise such events, and it wouldn't make much sense anyway. What matters is their ability to infuse this understanding into their classroom content and their general discourse.*

In that case, just like structuring lessons with an inclusive understanding, the relationship between teachers and students, parents and teachers/administration, as well as all school space and school practices should be organized in a **holistic** way, keeping the concept of inclusion in mind. Otherwise, a sufficiently effective practice will be out of the question, and more importantly, unless this understanding is internalized, practices will be bound to remain superficial or limited, to say the least. The program would surely be more effective if teachers were incorporated into the thinking process regarding the types of practices that will ensure that this understanding is reflected in all areas of school life.

The interviewed teachers attended the teacher training events held by SEÇBİR and ERI and made some observations. For instance, it has been seen that addressing delicate issues through real world examples makes it possible to discuss them, since when real world examples are in question, people are able to approach matters from a non-defensive, unbiased perspective. Therefore, once a common ground is established, it would be possible to discuss delicate matters specific to Turkey. Observations regarding methods were likewise made on the basis of the functionality of methods followed during SEÇBİR and ERI's teacher trainings: Methodically, training programs are expected to be **interactive**, inclusive of teachers and practical. By 'practical', it is meant that the lesson is applied in a way that would make it possible to be applied in class. As a matter of fact, one of the teachers admitted that after taking part in such an interactive training session, they realized 'why the students were not following the lesson, why they were distracted, and how they could be interested'.

These training programs are also significant for facilitating 'contact among teachers'. The assessment made by a teacher who attended the training program offered to the entire teaching staff at their school as part of ERI's 'Thinking School, Thriving Students' project is quite noteworthy in this regard. This teacher believes that in order for a particular school to facilitate inclusive education, all of its teaching staff must go through training. Although it may not be possible to offer training to all teachers at all schools for logistical as well as other reasons, it is still possible to undertake various activities. Other teachers have also made comments supporting this. For instance, having several teachers from a school attend the training could make educational attainments far more likely for that school. The conducted interviews demonstrate that when teachers gain a perspective with a potential of creating a space to fight the monolithic understanding underlying the existing education system and practices, they end up becoming alienated at school. Development of strategies for dealing with this alienation should be regarded as an important step for teachers to be empowered in a way they can support inclusive education. Teachers need in-house presence of colleagues whose perspectives will nurture them, with whom they can exchange ideas about their classroom practices, who take turns and help each other out in order to make inclusive education a widespread concept in school practices.

A great majority of teachers are unable to receive support from their school's administration, counsellors and other teachers. The desperation and alienation arising from being deprived of this much needed support soon leads to their discouragement, having an adverse effect on their teaching. The image of the 'ghost teacher' coined by one of the interviewed teachers is worth noting in this regard.

*When you are on your own, it's very difficult, very frustrating. I have been a teacher for 15 years. During the first five years, I was really enthusiastic, but then I had a burnout. Until last year, I was dragging myself back and forth to school, like a ghost teacher. After the training<sup>2</sup> I regained hope. I saw that there were others like me and started having faith that this could actually get us somewhere.*

The needs other than those related to teacher training will be dealt with below.

## FLEXIBILITY

It appears that teachers need the school curriculum, and consequently their daily schedules, to be more flexible. In fact, activities held during the free hours at the end of the year, or activities that take place when the teacher is on sick leave, prove to be opportunities to apply inclusive educational practices. During these flexible time intervals, activities such as film screenings are held. Here, students are shown films that will evoke an understanding of inclusive education with discussions that follow the screening. Some of the films mentioned by the interviewees include 'Taare Zameen Par,' which tells the story of a child who is mistaken as 'lazy' and 'ill-behaved' by all his teachers until his art teacher discovers he has a learning difficulty, 'Buka Barane' which is about a group of friends who grew up in the city of Hakkari's Befircan district during the war environment of the 1990s, and the documentary titled 'My Child' about the struggle of families of LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex) individuals. After the screening of 'My Child' at one of the schools, an interview was held with the director Can Candan. There, some students admitted to have realised their own prejudices, making the importance of such events more evident.

Students themselves have admitted the transformative effect of such activities encouraging an inclusive understanding. On the other hand, a student's comment on the scarcity of hours allowed for such events is also noteworthy. 'Student-teacher communication', which has been discussed in detail in the previous sections of the report, is also considered among the essentials of inclusive education. Teachers believe that in order to allow for effective communication, day-to-day functioning needs to be more flexible. An essential requirement for creating an environment of education where all students are included is, without question, for teachers to have the time to produce and share thoughts on students' capabilities. Breaks limited to five or ten minutes in order to allow for dual education, however, pose a concrete obstacle to achieving this. The teaching topics imposed by the curriculum prove to be yet another impediment. Teachers first need to cover textbook contents that do not present an inclusive understanding since space for activities devised through an inclusive understanding can only be created after these are covered. In addition, teachers will need time to collect the theoretical background knowledge and materials necessary to devise such activities. Thus, teachers with a lighter weekly workload are naturally able to spare more time to activities organized with an inclusive understanding.

As mentioned above, teachers are able to enjoy the flexibility they need only at times when the daily school routine is somehow disrupted, for instance when a teacher is absent, or when it is the end of the year; whereas, daily school practices should already be organized in a way to allow for such flexibility. Therefore, inclusive understanding in curriculum development and methods for

<sup>2</sup> The training referred to here was titled 'Teacher's Workshop' and was held by the mutual efforts of ERI and SECBİR.

providing teachers practicing an inclusive educational understanding the flexibility that can be reflected in their daily practices, should be the two foremost points of focus here.

In addition to these, non-credit courses such as 'information theory' offered as an elective course in high school may also provide a similar space. The interviewed teachers further suggested that Philosophy, Democracy and Human Rights, as well as Psychology courses provide more room for topics intersecting with the idea of inclusive education. However, it should also be noted that in practice the courses other than the compulsory Philosophy lesson offered to 11<sup>th</sup> graders (Psychology, Sociology, Information Theory and other such elective courses) cannot be elected unless the school administration takes initiative.

## NEED FOR EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

The need for materials that will enable inclusive education outcomes appears to be one of the most commonly mentioned needs by teachers. The very limited amount of available materials are extremely inadequate but extremely valuable for meeting the needs of teachers who wish to adapt an inclusive understanding in planning their lessons. "Pusulâ" [Compass] and "Ayrımcılık: Örnek Ders Uygulamaları" [Discrimination: Sample Lesson Practices] are the two sources, for instance, the interviewees have said they refer to. Teachers' immediate need is for materials they can use for lessons of their own design, rather than entirely pre-designed ready to use lessons (lesson plans). Therefore, an accessible pool of materials where various films, visuals, texts, etc. are listed would provide a significant source of support for teachers.

## PARENTS' PARTICIPATION

According to the interviewed teachers, parents should definitely serve as a vital component of inclusive education, as inclusive education would be out of the question in a structure where there is no support from or active participation of parents. However, the vast majority of the interviewees also complain about "parents' indifference", "their negligence to even attend parents' meetings", and consequently, "school's inability to cooperate with the families" and "parents' general absence in school matters, especially in state schools." One of the teachers' take on the matter is quite noteworthy indeed:

*Let alone the parents' meeting, students were not even mentioned at the board meeting. The word 'student' was used only once by the deputy head in his "advice to lady teachers" -'lady' here being his word of choice- "Lady teachers should better have teargas with them to use against students in a negative situation. This is our advice for them." Yes, students were only mentioned in this sort of a statement, and nowhere else. With such a structure in which students hardly have any role, it is only natural to expect parents to be non-existent.*

Teachers seem to attribute more responsibility to the school than parents. In one's view, one of the apparent obstacles to parents' participation is the school's treatment of parents solely as a means to contribute to their finances rather than making an effort to encourage their active participation, thus causing parents to avoid coming to school as they worry they will be asked for money. The same teacher also claimed that he hasn't had any problems with parents' attendance in school meetings. Our efforts to find out how this happened revealed that this particular teacher

established one-on-one relations with the parents, showing interest in them and personally calling them up to invite them to the meetings. This teacher also stated that when parents notice the affection shown to their children, they never hold back their support. The prevalent mentality at school, however, is one that does not include the parents:

*My teacher friends were seriously annoyed even at parents' going in and out of the school. They were saying things like "Let's employ security and not let the parents in by any means".*

An inclusive understanding of education certainly necessitates school practices that will relate children's life outside school to the education designed for them in school. In that sense, the sort of strategies to be developed for including parents is yet another point that should be a part of this discussion.

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## CONCLUSION

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Interview findings may be summarized as follows: It appears that in order for teachers to internalise the attainments of a possible teacher training program regarding inclusive education, they *must* first feel that they are being valued. In addition to this, the teacher trainers' knowledge of the field should suffice for the training to "touch upon the day-to-day life" of teachers. It was observed that teachers need a certain flexibility in their day-to-day schedule and the pace at which they apply the curriculum, both to enable an 'effective communication between teacher and student' -put forth as a fundamental requirement during the interviews- and to create overall space for inclusive education. Another issue voiced during the interviews was the widespread abundance of teachers who have internalized discrimination in the education system. It was stressed that these teachers should also be included in the program, as this is the only way teachers' perspectives can develop to enable social justice and equality. Parents' participation is yet another aspect to be considered: It is possible to say that an educational understanding which misses the fact that teachers "are there for the students" can also overlook the benefits of parent participation to inclusive education. A proper focus on students requires inclusion of their lives outside of the school, which further proves how crucial parent inclusion is.

Interviews reveal that teachers who are making an effort to configure their day-to-day education practices with an inclusive understanding are apparently 'sailing against the wind' in their attempts. In that case, it is necessary both to devise training programs that will enable a mentality of transformation for all actors of the education practice and to conduct a thorough study on the kind of support that must be provided to teachers, other than training. Need of support from school administration, counselling department and teaching staff, as well as need for materials are among the top on the requirement list. A comprehensive practice including all of the above would truly support inclusive education. Otherwise, teachers become alienated and feel seriously demotivated. Teachers who have colleagues they can partner with at school, on the other hand, are usually able to make more room for inclusive education.

Examples that interviewed teachers provide to discrimination at their schools include religion-based, ethnic-based, gender-based, sexual orientation and general identity-based discriminations, alongside various other types of discrimination related to disability, headscarf use, poverty and ableism. Upon confronting such discrimination, and while establishing school practices through an inclusive understanding, teachers were seen to develop various strategies, which created some opportunities for inclusive education. The report deals with these opportunities in several

instances. Examples of some of them have also been directly provided in the appendix. Directly conveyed in the first person, these examples are intended to establish a ground for discussing how such teacher narratives can be integrated into a potentially inclusive teacher-training program. The 'Teacher's Workshop' event held as a result of SEÇBİR and ERI's mutual efforts has clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of such examples of available spaces for sharing among teachers. Besides, it is apparent from the interviews that in order to feel sufficiently empowered, teachers need such meeting opportunities. Creating space for such sharing by teachers in the training would make the program not only more effective but also more realistic.

# APPENDIX: SOME ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES CITED BY TEACHERS REGARDING THE SPACES THEY HAVE CREATED TO ENABLE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION<sup>3</sup>

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## ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE #1: GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY-BASED INCLUSIVENESS

(An Information Theory class)

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Starting off by asking what gender really is, I gradually move beyond the biological definitions of what we call 'man' and 'woman' to explain that apart from these, there are also different sexual identities. First, I explain gender. In other words, how the notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' have in reality been established in society... I talk about colours, about how "pink is feminine and blue is masculine". From here, we gradually move on to 'sexual orientation'. There is a short video titled "What is homophobia?" shot in Taksim. Before that, a few other videos titled "How would you define your sexual identity?" Afterwards we have a discussion on a few examples that will not mess with the kids' psychology, looking at how people actually define themselves. After we get that part straight, I ask the questions "what does gay mean?", "what does lesbian mean?", "what does bisexual mean?" Once these terms are clear, I ask "what do you think?" to try and elicit if they see it as an illness or a choice... They usually call it an illness. For example, there have been students who said something like: "One of our neighbours had transsexuals living next door, so their son became like them". (. . .) Or, "We have an awful lot of those where I live". They say that these people should not actually be a part of society. My aim at this point is to make it clear to them that: "I'm not going to tell you that this is 'normal' or 'not normal'. I just want to say that these people have as much right as you do to live in this society comfortably." So we arrive at the question of how to break this homophobia. We need to because, for example, after discussing all of this, one of the kids asked, "Why bother with all this?" I hadn't had them watch 'My Child' yet. I said, "Do you know the real reason why we're learning about all this? You know how we look aside when we pass by them, maybe we can change that and learn not to. Then, we watched the documentary and after he saw what those families are going through, he said "OK, I take it back, I see now that it is not as easy as it looks". That moment (of realisation) was really important for me and this was coming from a kid with a really patriarchal family who believes that "girls do housework and marry the people we choose for them". It was such a big deal for this feeling to change with a film. (. . .) The kid actually made a confession, saying, "Actually yes, I really do feel disgusted when they pass by me", "but" he added, "I now learned that I shouldn't be, at least, I should accept that they too exist".

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<sup>3</sup> Interview findings reveal that teachers are more focused on ethnic, religious, gender, sexual orientation, and sexual identity-based inclusiveness. Issues such as disability, ableism, ageism are dealt within narratives of discrimination but have not come up in examples of creating space for inclusiveness.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE #2: SEXUAL ORIENTATION-BASED INCLUSIVENESS

(An English class)

I now use [images of] two women in wedding dresses to illustrate terms related to marriage. A wedding ceremony with two women.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE #3: RELIGION-BASED INCLUSIVENESS

(A Social Studies class)

[I play a short video from Youtube.] It takes place in a small bakery in Texas. There is a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf. You can tell that she has Middle Eastern origins. She comes into the bakery to buy bread. The salesperson says, "I don't want to sell bread to you". The woman and the salesperson are both actors. There are hidden cameras around. What they are trying to do is observe the attitude of people around them towards discrimination, see who reacts how... Very interestingly, a big majority remains silent. Some even support the salesperson, saying things like "You're the man!", "Good job, they deserve it anyway!", while some strongly object and some even argue with him saying things like "You can't be human, you disgust me! How can you behave like this? Why can't you treat her like a human being? Why do you feel the need to degrade a culture just because it is different?". I played ten minutes of this video to the kids, stopping at certain points such as when the man says "I don't want to sell bread to you." [I ask the students] "Does a salesperson have a right to act like this?" or "How did this bit make you feel, what did you think?" So we broke the video into parts and discussed the issue through it during the first hour. In the second hour, I gave some examples of Anatolia region's religious and cultural diversity. We listed and counted maybe more than twenty different religious beliefs and put them on the board. I asked the class "What would happen if there was such a salesperson in a country with such an intricate religious structure?" They said things like, "People would have trouble getting a job, they would be scorned, beaten, even killed." Then, without going into much detail, I asked them, "Do you think this may have happened in Turkey?" That's when they paused. And then we talked a little about that...

## ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE #4: RELIGION-BASED INCLUSIVENESS

(English class)

What can you find in a city? The book says "You can find a mosque" but it doesn't say "you can find a church". So we go on to discuss this. "There are churches in Istanbul for example," we say... "Where are you from?" [I ask one of the kids]. Let's say, he is from Yozgat. I ask him "Is there a church in Yozgat?"; "There isn't."; "But do you think there could be?"; "Well, yes."; "How about a djemevi?"; "Sure". So I put those on the board as well. We add them to the list of things in a city.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE #5: ETHNIC-BASED INCLUSIVENESS

(A Social Studies class)

For instance, last semester something happened in a class with 5<sup>th</sup> graders: You know how during class students sometimes talk about their problems, about what bothers them. So one of them said something like: "You know those Gypsy kids are giving me a hard time." And then another one barged in saying, "Yeah, yeah! Gypsies are so and so, we have them in our neighbourhood too, they constantly pick fights." [The Romani kids in class] became almost invisible while listening to them. Cringing with embarrassment after each comment, I watched those kids gradually become invisible. It was so apparent. Afterwards, I myself started to comment on the matter. As I spoke, I watched the kids become visible again, they literally started glowing, and then I noticed that the kids who were making negative comments about Gypsies became slightly embarrassed, realizing what they had done was wrong. But of course, this is also about whether students like the teacher and have faith in him/her to tell right from wrong. If this is the case, then the teacher's words can be really effective. I could have said something very negative about gypsies back then, but they would still be influenced, believe it and think it is true. So, there is a downside to it as well. But if you can take a positive note, you do have the -excuse the term- 'opportunity' to seriously influence and guide the students. (. . .) So when for example they said "Gypsy kids are giving me a hard time," I asked them "Why Gypsy kids?", I asked them something like "if a friend with a different ethnic identity did the same thing, would you still feel this strong a need to emphasize their ethnic origin?". Of course, these conversations were spontaneous and what I said was not always preconceived. And then I talked about Romani people's history for a while. For example, I talked about how they ended up migrating from India... I said their migration from India was probably due to Mahmud of Ghazni's invasions of India etc., and concluded that they as a people are in fact devoted to their freedom and independence... When I put it like this, the Gypsy kids started to feel honoured and experienced something quite different, so it was very effective. For example, I told the students where the term 'Romani' is derived from. 'Roman,' to be precise. 'Rom' means 'human' in the Gypsy language; the suffix -an makes the word plural. They have suffered so much, they have been oppressed and abused for so long that they started calling themselves 'Roman' meaning 'Humans', so they stood up and started saying 'We are human beings, too'. I also made the class question what kind of a community, or people would call themselves, define and designate themselves as 'Humans'. It is very beautiful, if you think about it. The reason behind it is not actually pleasant, but I still tried to guide the students to see the other side of things. At the end of the lesson, some students came up to me to talk about the positive points they could think of, others started saying things like, "I too witnessed my friend behaving in such and such way and it bothered me," but the Romani kids really started looking up to me after that day. They would come up to me all the time asking me how I am, would try to start a conversation with me etc. (. . .) As I said, even though we didn't really plan or devise a way to teach about these issues, we somehow got the opportunity through someone at some point.

## **ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE #6: LANGUAGE-BASED INCLUSIVENESS**

**(During the Language and Expression class offered as part of the 'Turkish Culture' program at an Armenian school)**

You know how characteristics of the Turkish language are explained in Language and Expression classes, things like how suffixes and prefixes work. So I said in one of these lessons: "I don't know anything about the Armenian language. How does it work in Armenian?" Students were surprised of course, asking each other "How come?" And then they started comparing, saying things like "It is like this in Turkish, but different in Armenian." They really started to enjoy it. For example, during the exam, I asked one characteristic of Turkish and one of the Armenian language. I tried out simple methods in my own way, like asking them "How do you write your name in Armenian?" Soon, they were really amused that I had a hard time writing my name in Armenian. I found the letters quite difficult to learn. They were correcting me all the time and I could tell that they were pleased about the whole thing.

## **ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE #7: ETHNIC-BASED INCLUSIVENESS**

**(A Social Studies class)**

The Armenian issue is one of the most critical issues in the country, and the way it is narrated in textbooks is truly horrendous... I never had the class study that section. It is described as simple deportation and the reason provided for this is something like "Armenians in the East acting in unison with Russians during World War I"; this is how it is described in the textbook... I, however, additionally went over generally how several ethnic communities were seriously oppressed throughout the final days of the Ottoman Empire, how they finally revolted against the Ottoman Empire in order to gain their independence, and that this should not be seen as betrayal etc. For instance, at this point, part of what I say might spark a [negative] reaction. So, from there, I immediately switch to Central Asian Turkish States, talking about say the second of Gokturks; I say: The first of Gokturks, after they came under the rule of the Chinese, as you know Turks are a people devoted to their independence and honour, therefore they cannot live in captivity, so after a period of captivity, they established their own state and revolted against the Chinese, founding the second Gokturk State. So since in our retelling we seem to be honouring the Turks who were the actors of this particular moment in history, it must be a positive development right? Then why couldn't we think the same for other nations?

## **ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE #8: LANGUAGE-BASED INCLUSIVENESS**

**(A Social Studies class)**

It was the International Mother Tongue Day, and I had said a few words about the subject. After speaking about the differences, the students were not hesitant or afraid but keen to say, "My mother tongue is this, my mother tongue is that". We then talked a little about how important it is to know your mother tongue. For example, I had asked the Romani kids to "learn ten words

each day, then come and teach them to me”, and they really started doing this every day. It is very important to bring certain subjects up for discussion. Constantly ignoring the matter affects kids. Lack of acquaintance, lack of ‘contact’ may cause them to believe everything that’s been said. So it is important for a kid to be able to get up and say “this is my mother tongue” etc. in that it affirms “there really is such a language”.

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## **ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE #9: ETHNIC-BASED INCLUSIVENESS**

**(A Philosophy class)**

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In the last 4 to 5 years, I have centred the Political Philosophy lessons around the notion of ‘power’ and going through ethics and religion approach the main topic. In fact, “NGOs” is not a title included in the chapter itself, but since I would be introducing “the relationship between the individual and the state” through the problem of the use of power [I’d discuss NGOs too]. For their written exams I would give them a text defining NGOs, as well as the disadvantaged groups, and ask and give full points to everyone who answered these questions: “If you were to form a NGO, who would you do it for? Explain the reasons why you believe they are disadvantaged.” These questions are actually intended to demonstrate how the work we have done throughout the year has reflected on the students and quickly take the pulse of the class. I remember, while answering the questions with the whole class once, I had asked the students: “Who would you like to establish an NGO for?” One of them had knowingly and wilfully said out loud: “I’m Kurdish. If I were to establish an NGO, I would do it for the Kurdish people.” Actually this kid had expressed thoughts of this nature in class before as well. I think this has been so partly because I use all those unutterable concepts such as ‘Alawi’, ‘Kurdish’, ‘Armenian’, ‘gay’, ‘atheist’ as normally as I use any other... I would respond to every given answer with the same reaction. If I asked “Why?” I would ask everyone. If I said “good,” I would say it to everyone. I don’t remember any particular class reaction to this kid’s answer. But let’s say, at that point someone said “I would form an NGO for the families of those who were martyred in the Southeast,” I would ask them the same questions in the same way, depending very much on the amount of class time left of course.



