Transformation of the Turkish Vocational Training System: Capitalization, Modularization and Learning Unto Death

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Abstract

This article scrutinizes the transformation of vocational training in Turkey. Entertaining the question, "Why did the vocational high schools become an issue in the country all of a sudden?", it aims to cover the social and economic dynamics behind this transformation. Establishing the link between Turkey's integration with the global economy and the general trends in global economy and education, it lays out the motive behind the attempts of capital to transform the current system towards a modular one, based on lifelong learning. Questioning the meaning of concepts such as "knowledge economy" and "lifelong learning", it seeks to decipher the implications of the creation of modular, lifelong learning blue-collar workers. The article aims to challenge the mainstream functionalist perspective on the vocational training system and underlines the political character of education in general and vocational education in particular. Based also on a field work carried out in Istanbul, the essay also seeks to find out the techniques and strategies used by capital in order to train loyal technicians. In this regard, this research suggests approaching the current integration of corporations and vocational schools within the context of the internationalization of capital, increasing demand for qualified labor and flexible markets which certainly require a cultural transformation of the minds of the youth and the normalization of social inequalities in their perception. Consequently, I argue that the current transformation represents nothing but a political integration of industry with education, driven by the desire of capital to train blue-collar workers in line with a flexible capital accumulation regime. Requiring a flexible and lifelong learning subjectivity, the changes in curriculum and training structure need to be understood as a class act rather than a neutral attempt to increase efficiency and prepare students for life, which already is discriminatory for the working class students under consideration.

Introduction

Vocational training in Turkey is one of the central educational issues. The terms of the debate regarding this issue, like many others, is discussed in relation to the dichotomy between secularism and religion. This stems from the fact that *imam-hatip* schools[1] belong to the category

[1] These schools are designed to train *imams* and the conflict stems from the fact the girls attending these schools – even though they cannot be *imam* – wear headscarves and it is against the law for them to attend university as they wear headscarves. Also, the issue of quotient when entering the university entrance exam is a matter of debate. The quotient conflict has recently been resolved to the benefit of graduates of these schools.

of vocational schools. In a country with such a tense secular-religious divide, the recent interest of the business world into this specific field of education is easily ignored. Additionally, just because vocational education is designed to train the intermediary workforce of the economy, its political character is easily dismissed. Thus, the discourse of efficiency, profit maximization and economy as a neutrally functioning mechanism leads to the marginalization of the voice of vocational high-school students. In this perspective, the school is considered to be a black box whereby "one measures input before students enter schools and then measures output along the way or when adults enter the labor force … the concrete experience of children and teachers – is less important in this view than more global and macro-economic considerations of rate of return on investment, or more radically, the reproduction of the division of labor" (Apple, 1990, p. 25). In a similar vein, I argue that it is imperative that we ask such questions as 'Who attend these schools?' or 'What is taught in these schools?' in order to be able to account for the political character of education in general and the recent transformation of vocational education in Turkey in particular. Therefore, in this article, I will first discuss how global economic changes have impacted education and vocational education. Then, I will provide a short account of how the Turkish vocational education system has been transformed first legally and then on a project and curricular basis. This will be followed by the narratives from a field work conducted in a vocational high-schools, which reflects a micro picture of the system that is increasingly driven by industry-school partnerships and curricular reform based on market demands that promise working class students nothing but a blurred future based on self-responsibility of renewal of skills or elimination from the 'market', namely another version of Social Darwinism.

Economy and Education: Global Trends

Those who have watched *Modern Times* will all remember Charles Chaplin, desperately working on an assembly line. The movie magnificently demonstrates how the worker is dominated by a labor process which does not require 'high' skills. Despite the alienation, his work on the assembly line is one that can be performed throughout one's life time. Nowadays, life certainly is not as easy as it used to be for those without high skills. As far as individuals are concerned, they are supposed to behave like chameleons, adapting to the changing market conditions.[2] Education

[2] This applies to nation-states, as well. Former US president Bill Clinton once warned that what they earned would depend on what they learn and how they could apply these to the workplace (Halsey, Lauder, Brown, & Wells,

is central to realizing this flexibility.[3] Thus, so as to be able to train the required workforce, the educational realm itself needs to reform itself and adapt itself to lifelong learning. Today, the methods to cultivate the skills suitable for a 'closed' economy need to change because "employers want people who are digitally literate, self-motivated and good team players and who possess soft skills, employability and entrepreneurship" (Huws, 2006).[4] To sum up, the more complex economy becomes, the more skills are demanded from employees.

Another major reason for education to become central to economy was the capitalist accumulation crisis in 1970s and the internationalization of capital, heading towards a flexible accumulation regime (Harvey, 1990). In order to overcome the crisis and also compete with other countries within the global economy, the productive nature of education – as a mechanism to foster variable capital – has been increasingly stressed. Hence, education has become a new gospel (Brown et al., 2001). The vitality of education is such that "at no time in the history of capitalism has the education and training of the workforce assumed such widespread importance as at the present conjuncture" (Ashton & F. Green, 1999).[5] In this respect, Turkey is no exception.

Vocational Education and Its Transformation in Turkey: The socio-economical context

It is this global context and its own peculiar conditions within which Turkey is trying to adapt its VTE system. Under these circumstances, important keywords to be emphasized include flexible, modular and employability.[6] However, these are only key words. That is, each country determines its own model. As far as Turkey is concerned, its peculiar conditions are as follows: its bid to join EU and desire to become a learning society; the structural transformation of its

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1997). Similarly, Tony Blair would state that "fail to develop the talents of any one person, we fail Britain" (Brown, A. Green, & Lauder, 2001).

[3] So many reports have been prepared as to how education should be reformed. One of the pillars of this direction is lifelong learning. For a summary of such reports, see (Jarvis, 2004).

[4] Huws's following statement is quite revealing in terms of how the nature of work has changed. According to Huws, the worker can no longer sit back and say 'At last, I am trained. I have a recognized job. Now I can relax and just get on with my job'.

[5] It should be noted that this process was accompanied by human capital theories that date back to 1960s. For a history of the concept and the history of the institution where it flourished (Department of Economics at University of Chicago, which was founded by oil giant John D. Rockefeller), see (Peters, 2001). For a critique of the theory in relation to the concept of commodity fetishism, see (Ashton & F. Green, 1999).

[6] For an account of the debates regarding flexibility, see (Nijhof & Streumer, 1994).

manufacturing industry since 2001; the desire of capital to integrate with the global economy to produce high quality products; its young population and the high rate of youth unemployment**.** Additionally, since its inception, Turkish vocational education has structurally been disorganized and there was a pressing need to reform the system. The first serious attempt to organize the system and establish school-industry partnership took place with the enactment of apprenticeship law no 3308 in 1986.[7] This law has also brought about the concepts of research and development. Yet, the difficulties in reaching the goals stated by the law resulted in 16th National Educational Council (1999) which – only for that year – specifically focused on vocational education.[8] After the Council, it was decided that the system would be transformed into a modular one with international standards. Moreover, the existing capacity would be utilized 24 hours while the training structure based on just one single skill would be dismantled. The Council also decided that the system would be revised in line with regional demands and advice to be taken from experienced people in the business world (Tarcan, 2001).[9]

These represent the legal aspects of the reform but we need to mention the socio-economic dynamics behind the most recent reform paradigm, which is directly tied to Turkey's attempts to become a member of the EU. While this process is generally discussed as a democratization process, I argue that it needs to be understood within a political economical context and Turkey's desire to be integrated with global economy. After Turkey became a part of Customs Union in 1996, there has been an increase in the share of medium and high technology manufacturing sectors in aggregate exports. In a document prepared by State Planning Agency (DPT) it is stated that "the EU process determines the external framework of the Turkish manufacturing sector and is vital in terms of sustainability of economic modernization". (DPT, 2007a, p. 59). Another

[7] The aim was to integrate those left out of the formal educational system with an education of apprenticeship; *to give the students of VT schools the chance to upgrade their skills in the real work environment;* to prepare the youth without vocational requirements for employment with vocational courses; to provide financial sources for developing and spreading VTE services; to continuously support VTE with research; *to provide the basis for the participation of business life in planning, developing and evaluating VTE;* to develop production activities with educative aims. Here, with the Law No. 3308, we see that "vocational education has begun to function in a dual manner and its relation with the market has reached a structural model" (Aksoy, 2005).

[8] For a discussion of some of the themes of the Council, see the preparatory documents in (Kadı, 1998) and (Kılıç, 1998).

[9] These decisions were materialized with another law, passed as 4702. This new law would allow horizontal and vertical transfers and also aim to train a workforce that is good for team work, oriented towards problem-solving, open towards communication. The law also affected certain preexisting laws, among which were Law No. 2547 (Higher Education), Law No. 3308 (Apprenticeship) and 4306.

significant factor for Turkey to reform its vocational education system is the structural economical change it has been witnessing since 2001 crisis. It is even argued that before 2001, such an economic climate prevailed that companies did not have to maximize their efficiency for survival (DPT, 2007a, p. 21).[10] Yet, after 2001, it was stated the economic parameters enabling these companies to survive had changed. So, where does Turkey stand socially and economically in this process? What are some of the figures?

During 8th Development Plan (2001-2005), "the share of food, textile, iron-steel have maintained their share, whereas automotive, machine, electronics, metal goods, petroleum products have increased their share as far as export is concerned" (DPT, 2007b, p. 41). As a result, "the share of medium and high technology sectors' share in manufacturing industry has increased between 2002-2005" (DPT, 2007b, p. 42). Within this ongoing transformation, it is argued that Turkey has such advantages as "the flexible structure of SMEs, the ability for medium-level technology production, the capability to adapt to demand fluctuations, *human resources which have the potential to become qualified*" (DPT, 2007b, p. 55).

Despite these steps 'forward', there are structural problems of the manufacturing sector including the deficiency to produce technology, lack of qualified labor force, the inability to spread modern technology utilization, the limited production capability in terms of high value-added goods (DPT, 2007b). These factors are counted among the barriers hindering competitiveness of Turkey. Even though there is some improvement, it seems that there is much to be done and the attempts to reform the vocational education system need to be understood within these economic conditions.

The structural transformation of the manufacturing sector towards value-added products requires a qualified workforce. Within this context, "rising sectors need a more qualified workforce when compared to traditional ones" (DPT, 2007a, p. 16). The State Planning Agency (DPT) report further stipulates the approximation of education to a position where "it will raise employees

[10] Gains stemming from inflation, generously allocated incentives and restricted international competition enabled the maintenance of the weight of traditional sector as opposed to the modern sector. In this traditional sector; small-scale, low technology companies employing unqualified labor and the majority activities of who were informal could survive in this way.

who are able to respond to the needs of private sector … The educational system should be structured not on helping students acquire specific skills and knowledge but teaching them skills including problem-solving and relating different concepts, which can be adapted to various jobs" (DPT, 2007a, p. 16).[11] In this respect, one of the priorities of the report includes solving the problems of VTE system since the competitiveness of Turkey is now said to depend on different factors. In 1980s, whereas high exchange rate and low wages were the factors that contributed to the Turkey's competitiveness, this is no longer sustainable (Saygılı, Cihan, & Yavan, 2006). In other words, the sustainability of growth depends on the extent to which your educational system can raise qualified labor and the extent to which your educational system is related to industry. Thus, what actually matters for Turkey in its attempt to reform its VTE seems to be its desire to produce high value added products in industry and services, sustain its growth and consequently establish a successful global integration. For example, when signing the 'Vocational Education is *the* Issue of Our Country' [*Meslek Lisesi Memleket Meselesi]* protocol with the Ministry of Education, Mustafa Koç (CEO of the influential KOC group in Turkey) argued that the objectives of Turkey are much higher:[12]

> Turkey has entered the same fast track with the advanced countries and the current aim is to bridge the gap ... Turkey, within its perspective to join EU, has to achieve a sound, structural transformation, at the basis of which lies producing and exporting high value added goods. One of the primary conditions for achieving this goal is qualified labor force. That is why we announce that Vocational High School is the problem of this country.

These all indicate that moving ahead in global competitiveness graphic necessitates a qualified labor force, since "human capital has increased in economic significance to the point where it has become as important to contemporary society as land was to feudal society" (Brown et al., 2001, p. 6). The global economic trends were also emphasized by influential authorities, including

[11] In order to cope with the changing technology, the report also suggests strengthening on-the-job training services.

[12] Retrieved from: http://www.meb.gov.tr/haberler/haberayrinti.asp?ID=1058 . Mustafa Koç also wishes to create awareness throughout the society with regard to the significance of vocational training. In this respect, Koç Group's aim is to spread the seeds of cooperation between the state and business world, to contribute to raising qualified labor force and promote vocational training.

Minister for Industry and Commerce (from 2002 to 2007)[13] or the Chairman of The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey. The latter's comparison between the 'old' and the 'new' economy in Turkey requires attention:

> In many sectors, the profit margins of the past have gone. The era when people used to think "I can sell whatever I produce" has closed. This new economic climate requires the implementation of new policies regarding the manufacturing sector … On the other hand, Turkey strongly needs a mobilization in terms of skill transformation. If competition is becoming more and more based on knowledge, we have to adjust the qualities of our workforce accordingly. The way to create more value-added depends on a more qualified, more equipped and knowledgeable workforce. *The source of unemployment today stems from the fact that what the industry needs and the skills our schools produce do not correspond to each other* (Hisarcıklıoğlu, 2006).[14]

In that sense, the industry strongly recommends that links with the world of education must be strengthened.[15] This applies to both general education and vocational education. As far as Turkey's case is concerned, the need to raise the level of workforce in Turkey is of utmost importance, because in 2005, the composition of the workforce was as follows:

> % 67,3 consisted of people below high school level or illiterate people. Graduates of higher education amount to % 11,5. These levels are higher when compared to 2000 but well below EU level (Kayır, Karaca, & Şenyüz, 2004).

In this social reality and the global economic trend of knowledge economy, the economy is projected to become one that "possesses high technology capability, qualified labor force; one that swiftly *adapt*s to changing conditions" (DPT, 2007b, p. 72). In addition to that, the government aims to make Turkey a production center at the level of medium and high technology which include automotive**,** white durable goods**,** machinery, and electronics (DPT, 2007b, p. 87).[16] Along with these, the overall system has structural problems. The most

[13] For an account of this, see (Coşkun, 2005).
[14] Emphasis is mine.
[15] The concept of entrepreneurship is of utmost importance. The Ninth Development Plan complains about the educational system and argues that it does not promote the spirit of entrepreneurship. It also suggests universities should design new projects which support entrepreneurship and creativity.
[16] In automotive, the objective is to create an industrial structure which produces high value-added, has a sustainable competitive edge, targets to export to the developed markets and has a sound R&D ability. See (DPT,

influential business organization, TUSIAD, argues that vocational high school graduates, apart from their technical knowledge, do not possess skills such as group work, economic thinking, communication and foreign language (DPT, 2001; Şimşek, 1999). The report of Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (ITO) considers the vocational education and market to be two different worlds (Alpaslan, 2007). A study regarding industrial high school graduates carried out by METARGEM (Research and Development Center for Vocational and Technical Education) in 1991-1992, indicates that 48 % of the employed ones were working at non-related jobs (Bircan, 1997). Then, the central message of the reports prepared by the government and the corporate world is clear: The system needs to be reformed. It is one of these most recent projects that we now look at.

MEGEP (Project for Strengthening Vocational Education)

Background and Mission

Supported by the European Commission, the general objective of MEGEP (2002-2007) is to develop a modern, flexible and high-quality vocational education with a lifelong learning perspective that can respond to the socio-economic needs of the country. The reasons behind this reform initiative are said to include globalization, technological change and the new structures of working organizations; transition to a society of knowledge and skills; developments in labor market such as decrease in permanent employment and instability of jobs; unstandard working styles; increasing dependence on external job market; increasing comprehensive unregistered economy in some countries. Moving from towards a paradigm of employability, demand based education based on multiple skills, MEGEP aims to solve the requirements of the labor market, to review occupational standards, to prepare the modular programs, to establish a national proficiency system, to create a lifelong learning policy, to develop a quality security system. Along with this aim, VTE will be restructured as a flexible and modular one in line with EU countries. So, what reforms are proposed by MEGEP? The above mentioned developments result in the proposition of certain reforms: modular education, education directed by demand, competition and market orientation, focus on basic skills and capabilities, more harmonization with the needs of the market, change in finance: shared finance, stronger participation of private sector, new systems for career guidance.

2007b, p. 88). Iron-steel sector is among the targets, whereas textile, garment industry, leather, furniture are said to require peculiar designs and product differentiation, through which a stronger competition can be maintained.

These tendencies raise a question about the structure of the school. What will the new school look like? A school in MEGEP should be sensitive to local educational needs and determining the needs; have a stronger cooperation with others, be able to use initiatives and authority at a local level, have the ability to develop modules in parallel with needs, enable the education to become operative according to occupational standards and certification, have the capacity to prepare instruction materials in line with individual learning, make the students become aware of business life and university life; follows its graduates, utilize the resources efficiently and in a fruitful manner; can create new resources, provide continuous education for the personnel, restructure its system according to the principles of lifelong learning.

In order to support Turkey's EU efforts, in Helsinki Summit in 1999, it was decided to allocate Turkey a certain amount of MEDA funds. Turkey has consequently developed certain project ideas so as to close the gap between the output of VTE schools and the required workforce of the economy. As a first step of this process, Turkey and EU agreed on MEGEP on 4 July 2000. With a budget of 52.8 million Euros; the project, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, is carried out by a consortium of eight companies with the leadership of DHV Consultants. MEGEP proposes a modular system so as to harmonize Turkish VTE with EU. What does that mean? What is a modular system and what is the motive behind that?

Modular System

A document by General Directorate for Girls Technical Education [*Kız Teknik Öğretim Genel Müdürlüğü*] clearly puts it that "it is important to develop programs which could enable us to raise individuals who can adapt to the age of technology, who can think and decide, who can design and solve problems. Since it is flexible, can respond to changes quickly and enables individual progress and transitions, modular approach is being preferred in VTE" (Çiçekçi & Mutlu, 2004, p. 1). In a modular system, a flexible framework program has been developed whereby "a student leaving school at any time can complete a certificate program with his/her skills or additional modules ... As time passes, unnecessary modules or knowledge and skills will be discarded, hence the addition of standards and behaviors in line with new technologies and processes" (Çiçekçi & Mutlu, 2004, p. 1). What a module includes will enable a student "to

make research, to communicate with other people and institutions, gather information, file the information, to make experiments, comparisons and critique; to make cost accounting, design new products, to prepare graphics and market" (Çiçekçi & Mutlu, 2004, p. 2). When compared with the traditional one, "modular students can manage more than one job at a time; the student or a group of students (as opposed to the whole classroom) answers the exam questions" (Çiçekçi & Mutlu, 2004, p. 9). In this system, "vertical and horizontal transitions are possible; skills and knowledge are taught bit by bit ... The student learns in an individual manner. When s/he feels it's time, the student can take the exam" (Çiçekçi & Mutlu, 2004, p. 10). In this system, the student is not restricted to the knowledge resources in the school environment and the system enables an updated, intense flow of information. A modular system sets the ground for individual learning, and the student can transfer what he has learned and experienced outside the school into the classroom and share it. Here, the student can get in and out of the instruction program at different times and there is an opportunity to be transferred between different programs. As for the teachers, "their classical role of transmitting knowledge has changed and they are required to orient the students; to have information about business life behaviors; if necessary, they have to be proficient to prepare modules" (Cicekci & Mutlu, 2004, pp. 12-13).

Modular Man and Lifelong Learning

With this project, we witness the creation of modular man (Gellner, 1996).[17] The concept of modular man comes from modular furniture. As opposed to modular furniture, the old kind of furniture forces you "to make an irrevocable commitment" (Gellner, 1996, p. 97). It is hard to add new pieces to this kind of furniture. However, when one buys modular furniture, you can add other pieces if there is a need. Likewise, modular man is capable of "combining into effective associations and institutions … and is able to combine into specific-purpose, *ad hoc*, limited association, without binding himself by some blood ritual" (Gellner, 1996, p. 100). As Ercan (2006) also states, the changing mentality demands people to add new qualities to themselves: to manufacture themselves.[18] Ercan (2006) enumerates four indicators which affect education and employment policies, among which changing meaning of knowledge/education and lifelong learning are of our primary concern. He states that the demands of the capital have

[17] I want to thank Fuat Ercan for bringing this concept to my attention.
[18] Retrieved from http://www.sendika.org/yazi.php?yazi_no=6197.

changed to the extent that they no longer need knowledge. They just need skill. As far as work is concerned, they are not interested in whether the student/employee has knowledge into history or is talented in art. Added to this is the concept of lifelong learning. Ercan (2006) states that lifelong learning means non-stop adjustment to the demands of the business world. With reference to Foucault, Ercan (2006) argues that the employees will be people who invest in their own workforce and manufacture themselves. In other words, if one wants to find a job, s/he has to upgrade his/her skills and educate himself/herself within the framework of the daily demands of the market. People have to educate themselves everywhere, outside universities, high schools, at home, in the street; in every realm of life (Ercan, 2006).

Learning is loaded with positive meanings. Lifelong learning, on the other hand, sounds quite positive. It is, almost as good as "peace in our time" (Rikowski, 2004). Yet, if we listen to Ünal, it becomes clear that learning does not require specific conditions and corresponds to a natural process. Human beings actually go on learning throughout their lifetime. What makes this new lifelong learning project different and even tricky is that it is "guided by the neoliberal society project and activities, the content and conditions of which have been predetermined and called 'learning' and thereby hiding this aim" (Ünal, 2006). As Ünal implies, education is one of the main pillars of the capitalist society, the latest stage of which forces individuals to continuously renew themselves. Thus, the concept of lifelong learning "involves a pedagogical misbelief which holds that everything related to life can be taught with educational programs and has the aim to uniform and control social life" (Ünal, 2006).[19] This control is achieved because the unemployment phenomenon and the insecure working conditions are unaccompanied by the "rising lifelong learning sector which forces the adoption of risky working environment" (Unal, 2006).[20] Within the framework of this sector, it can easily be guessed that education will become "a tool in the fetishisation of certificates" (Olssen, 2006). In this new social reality, "lifelong learning replaces school and continuous surveillance replaces examination. This is, the securest way of transferring school to corporation" (Deleuze, 2006). Education, supposed to be the main pillar of enlightenment and emancipation, is transformed into lifelong learning which stands as

[19] This concept of learning does not concern only formal education. We are told that we can learn democracy, human rights, social relations, speaking properly and even love with the help of courses. Access to these courses is, of course, achieved with money. We are unable to find the truth. The experts have it. We can buy the cure!
[20] As Ünal puts it, taking a risk has become an indispensable quality to be possessed.

the Sword of Damocles, reminding the individual that he/she can any time become unemployed and therefore has to refresh his/skills. Departing from Michel Foucault, it is easily understood that lifelong learning constitutes a form of bio-power in that "it aims to discipline subjects" (Olssen, 2006, p. 223). Disciplining oneself and adjusting to the changing conditions of the labor market requires one "to learn to learn, to reorient and even to forget, when new circumstances demand it" (Tuschling & Engeann, 2006). To succeed in the labor market, one has to become competent and "to be competent is to acquire the capacity to constantly recycle oneself, to have the ability to be permanently retrained" (Stoer & Magalhaes, 2004). And in this kind of an approach, "pedagogy's impact on the educational process (namely the effects of the basic assumption that the main goal of education is the development of the individual independently of its social and economic relevance)" is ignored (Stoer & Magalhaes, 2004, p. 42), whereas the concept of performance is foregrounded. According to Olssen (2006, p. 221), the discourse of lifelong learning "constitutes a specific technology which makes both the tertiary and non-tertiary labor force subject to a new form of flexible rationalization". In that sense, I argue that it is now the individual who is to be held responsible for his/her education/success/failure; in other words there is "the individualization of responsibility for education" (Olssen, 2006, p. 221) and "responsibilising of the self" (Peters, Marshall, & Fitzsimons, 2000). It is the individual to blame. As we have also noted before, what we have been talking about is nothing but "both a legal and institutional transformation and a change in our educational practices, the meanings we attach to education and our relationship with education" (Ünal, Tural, & Aksoy, 2005, p. 136). What leads to this transformation is the radical change in the structure of the economy and a transition to flexibility. Presented with slogans including "lifelong education, individual learning and individual development; the new approach does not create an employment guarantee and expectation of employment; it makes people believe that this new model leads to an increase in employability" (Ünal et al., 2005, p. 144). In other words, "lifelong learning structures hide the corporation-dominated education agenda, which emphasize employability skills at the expense of free education. Because lifelong learning is about regarding the flexible organization of labor market and flexible working conditions as inevitable, accepting external surveillance and buying education packages in order to survive in the market, is about seeing life to be nothing other than business life and internalizing all of these" (Ünal et al., 2005, p. 147). However, capitalism – by its very nature – is a system based on changes and crises and it is not viable to create an

educational system in capitalism where there is a win-win situation. However, if we remember the statements of the business circles, it becomes evident that their discourse tries to normalize capitalism and hide the intrinsic character of unemployment it creates and desires to discipline the labor power and wage relations. In the new modular system, "the task of schooling is increasingly subject to the logic of industrial production and market competition" (Ball, 1990). It is nothing but the curriculum being "prespecified and tightly controlled by the purposes of "efficiency, cost-effectiveness and accountability" (Apple, 1986). With a stronger market intervention in VTE, it is claimed that the system will be rational, supraideological, devoid of any political content and therefore be successful. Yet, we should also bear in mind the lack of cultural capital and linguistic capital of the working class students to express, 'market and articulate themselves' with the market. After all, these students are coming from poor districts and working-class backgrounds. In that sense, it is even doubtful whether the project is going to satisfy the demands of capital, let alone provide a good future for the students. Therefore, it seems logical to take MEGEP as a project within the context of new vocationalism.[21] With reference to Brown (1987), I argue that this new reform paradigm in Turkey will rather reproduce the existing social inequalities rather than preparing students for adult life. Moreover, the discourse of MEGEP is some kind of a reproduction of the modernization theory and maintains the linear relationship between education and development. Even though the discourse of learning and lifelong learning is loaded with many ideological implications, the dominant agenda hides this and the hegemony over the kids of lower classes is being established with a discourse of modernization, development and global competition. Isn't it the modernization theory itself which defines a prescribed route and in this way hides the logic of capitalist accumulation regime which is based on social and economic inequalities? All in all, what we witness is the capitalization of human beings (Ercan, 1998) and as Rikowski puts it, "what is required is a critique of all human capitalist social life, the attempt of which pushes to the fore the negativity of all passes for the positive in the capitalist society" (Rikowski, 2004, p. 568). If the ideological implications of lifelong learning "as a kind of learning unto death" (Rikowski, 2004, p. 568), cannot be properly understood, working class kids will be the new Chaplin on

[21] In the British context, new vocationalism refers to the attempt of the Thatcher government to restructure the educational system to meet the demands of the industry. According to Phillip Brown, this approach in education has manifested itself in a number of recent programs such as the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative, the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) and City Technology Colleges. See (Brown, 1987, p. 2).

their way to become the screw we have mentioned at the very beginning while trying to adapt to the market, even if lifelong learning is supposed to be lifelong learning.

School-Industry Relationship: The Case of Sisli Industrial High School

In this last section of the essay, I will present a micro picture of how vocational training is being transformed. This part analyzes a field work conducted at Şişli Industrial High School. In this school, there are private laboratories founded with the partnership of Ministry of National Education and five automotive companies. These partnerships are realized with the help of protocols signed between these two parties. The field work was carried out among the junior and the senior students. It aimed to discover how the entrance of private companies has transformed the school physically and what the implications of management ideology are. Within the framework of my study, I conducted more than a hundred questionnaires[22] and about thirty interviews.

The first protocol was signed with Toyota in 1992-93 and was followed by Tofas, Mercedes, Volkswagen, Harley-Davidson and Fiat. The school is unique in the sense that quite a few protocols have been signed. As far as the procedure is concerned, it is the school that applies to the companies to form partnerships. The school provides space to the companies whereas the companies provide educational support and employment chance for the graduates, even though there is no guarantee.

Selection Criteria: Discipline and Loyalty

Then, who is eligible to use these laboratories? Bearing in mind the fact that attendance and discipline problems are not rare in vocational high schools, it becomes evident that entrance to a private laboratory is not that easy. One of the students, for instance, underlined the notion of presentable, as a criteria, stating that "They select students with a nice face. They do not accept those who look bad. They think they will violate the order there". This statement was echoed by a teacher, who said that "the candidate student cannot stammer, since he will deal with the customer and perhaps be promoted to the position of service consultant". Representatives of the

[22] Most of the questions in the questionnaire were borrowed from the M.A thesis of Dilek Kayaalp. See (Kayaalp, 2002).

brands are also invited to participate in recruitment interviews and they fulfill these desires. Regarding the role of school, the same teacher compared it to HR department of a company and maintained that HR departments do not have the opportunity to get to know the employee for a long time, whereas the school is the place where the students spend their three years. Thus, actually, the school here begins implicitly (and perhaps explicitly) to act as human resources department. The teachers working in these privarte laboraties are excited to become partners with the companies and try to cultivate brand loyalty among students, by taking them to lunch together, having them wear the shirts of each brand or use the textbooks with the brand symbol of the company

Educational Differences and Management Discourse

So, what is different in these laboratories in terms of education? What makes these students more qualified? They are, first of all, provided with computer support through which they learn MS Office applications in order to prepare reports, make tables and presentations. Moreover, they are supposed to get acquainted with Internet since engine test equipment is updated not with CDs but over the Internet. The second thing is vocational English. In order for the students, perhaps not to speak but, to understand technical matters by looking at the pictures on a book in English, they provide vocational English courses. Last but not least, the students of these private laboratories are required to read some of the books included in the 100 essential works of the Ministry so that they can develop their social skills. As far as these social skills and communication skills are concerned, students are also taught how to welcome customers, to establish communication and learn concepts like customer, quality and total quality. Nevertheless, the innovative thing about this particular kind of education is that it is brand-based. Seeing the brand's name at each entrance to the laboratory, the student has an intensive training, under the umbrella of the specific brand. The idea that they are selected students and the company is a family renders a message to the students, as one of the teachers state:

> The student is motivated in such a way that and they are inculcated such beliefs that they assume that the brand will collapse were it not for them. In other words, they are told that they are significant and they are the ones to improve Toyota or they are the ones to increase the quality of Toyota. You are a part of this system … A state of belonging is inspired and the message that they are a member of a big family is conveyed. This, of course, directly binds the student. Their shirts are

> different. Volkwagen or Mercedes is written on their back. The color is different. They are perceived in a different way at school.

Until now, I presented the general perception of the management. Now, let's see how the students perceive the industry-school partnership[23] with the guidance of some questions: "By what means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies is authority constituted and rule accomplished" (Dean, 1999, p. 31)? In other words, how are discipline (which is a real problem in vocational high schools), efficiency and brand loyalty maintained in Şişli Industrial High School? What kind of techniques do the companies resort to? "What forms of person, self and identity are presupposed by different practices of government and what sorts of transformation do these practices seek" (Dean, 1999, p. 32)? One of the teachers, when mentioning about the selection criteria, gives a hint:

> If he has a good score and is also successful in the interview but has written my laboratory as his fourth preference, a student with a lower score but who has chosen my laboratory as his first preference was accepted though the former one was not. *In other words, he will love it. The student will want Fiat, Toyota or Harley Davidson.*

Here, one answer is love, but not love for learning or the love for solidarity. It is the love for the brand. Love becomes the tool for having a privileged identity at school and position at labor

[23] I want to present some brief demographical information about the students. I have interviews students only from the engine department, who were all male. More than 100 students (freshmen and senior students) participated in the questionnaire stage of my field work. I take 100 of them into consideration. Among the students, 43 % have a family of four people. Sixty-seven percent of them live at their own house. Nearly half of the male parents are primary school graduates, whereas this amounts to 55 % regarding the mothers. The answers to "What's your father's occupation?" include doorkeeper, cook, worker, cleaner, retired, artisan, officer, bus driver, driver, worker in a car-body shop, teacher, police, and mostly occupations related to engine repairing and maintenance. As for the mothers, the striking thing is that 80 % of them are housewives. The other answers are cook, cleaner, janitor, administrative chief, employed at a ready-made clothing shop and textile. These categories reveal that the kids mostly belong to working class families. Moreover, the findings reveal that 60 % of the students previously worked and they state that they have worked near their father, in a grocery, Internet café, carpenter's shop, steel door manufacturer, restaurant, coffee house, lathe shop, hairdresser and so on. In other words, the students can be said to be already used to working before they enter labor market. More strikingly, they are almost divided as far as their thoughts regarding child labor is concerned. The answers are as follows when asked whether children should work or not. Namely, 47 % of the participants said children should work, whereas 53 % were against the idea. As far as failure is concerned, the students either blame themselves or the educational system. While 45 % of them assume that they are the ones to blame, 30 % put the blame on the educational system for a person's failure at school

market. One might even face a situation, where he (for instance, a student from Fiat) has to choose between his wife and brand, the two beloved:

> They asked why I chose Fiat. For example, Fiat was my first preference. They asked me whether I would go to a distant place if they sent me. They said that my future wife might not like me because of the job I do. It seems that they liked my ideas and accepted me.

Let's turn to the first question. What about the rhetoric and techniques with regard to forming the loyal technicians of the future? Now, the black box speaks. A student, who tells me that his father only decides to work when he is in good spirits, replies by telling us what his company, Volkswagen does:

> They brought a bag, they brought notebook. Here, even though other workshops do not give anything to the other workshops, Dogus congratulated our religious holidays and sent us boxes of candies. They did such a favor. They endorse us.

Another student joins the conversation:

> For instance we didn't pay anything for the shirts, books or notebooks. We had no expenses. They sent a bag, a small bag like a pocket book diary.

Yet Volkswagen has its demands, since the student who mentioned the candies, talked about a change in apprenticeship policy. Moreover, what Emre tells below signifies that the kids are actually being indebted to the company by means of resorting to what is morale for them:

> They try not to take any money from us, so that we can be [fruitful] to them ... Normally, we do not have to attend apprenticeship training next year but they call as for the training. We were not going to have apprenticeship training but it is said that we should.

When a student from Volkswagen was describing their practices, he told me that it is difficult to see the students outside the laboratory. I replied by saying that students in the normal laboratories (penal-colonies in students' discourse) were just dying to get out when the bell rang. At that particular moment, one of the students said that they were just hanging out. Why is that

the case? First of all, they can stay in because there are computers and the teachers let them use the PCs. On the other hand, even though there is no sharp class-difference between the two groups, we can resort to Pierre Bourdieu in order to have an evaluation of why this is so. According to Bourdieu, "whether students stay in school or drop out, and the course of study they pursue, depends on their practical expectations of the likelihood that people of their social class will succeed academically" (Schwartz, 1997, p. 197).

There is also the distinction between the strict teacher and friendly boss/teacher. Whereas the teachers of the normal workshops are strict and sometimes ruthless towards the kids, the teachers of the laboratories are quite 'student-friendly'. Moreover, as the instructor of the Fiat company states, the brand acts as a mechanism for observation since the students of Fiat cannot play long donkey[24] in the school due to the fact that "Fiat" is written on the shirts they wear. As we see, with the techniques the capital resorts to, a blue-collar subjectivity based on brand loyalty is produced. The students, given a chance to study in much better conditions, position themselves as technicians of this or that company and differentiate themselves from the other students.

What follows is an example as to how the brand image has indeed penetrated to the minds of the youth:

> My father is a taxi driver. The car is Fiat Albea. All the drivers at that taxi station chose Fiat. Fiat Doblo, Fiat Albea, Marea. Fiat has many advantages. All measures have been taken in that car. There is the comfort of the passengers. Those who buy it are content with the comfort. That's why everybody uses Fiat.

When I asked the same student where he was living, he gave the following answer:

> I live in Kuştepe, Şişli. And there is Gülsu Automotive at where Kuştepe begins. Then come Birmot, in Zincirlikuyu. There is Deha in Çağlayan. I visit these places, they are nice services.

As the examples above demonstrate, the educational attempt of the companies to raise a qualified workforce and loyal technicians seems to be working. Reminding us of total quality management

[24] A popular game in Turkey, especially among male students.

systems which aim to reduce the errors to zero, the target is "to integrate the subjectivity of the working individual into the objectives of the organization" (Zeybek, 2006, p. 117). I have observed that the discourse of efficiency and development is used and the discourse seems to have been adopted by the students as well, in the sense that one student mentioned the difficulties that compnaies face in finding qualified workers.

The superiority of the brand-based training was not always welcomed by 'other' students. A student from these normal workshops, for instance, told me that these practices were discriminatory, while also blaming himself for his own 'failure':

> The fact that students here do not attend classes stems from not teachers but students themselves. It is because of our blind behaviors. It is because we do not want to study. Yet, we will regret soon. The problem lies within the students, thinking about other things. They assume they will be happier outside but they are unconsciously ruining their lives. If they attended classes, it would be different. They reject the idea of spending half of their lives at school.

Moreover, on this other side of the coin, not total quality management but strict discipline speaks. Whereas members of the penal-colony receive an education of "punctuality, neatness, respect for authority and other elements of habit formation" (Apple, 1995, p. 62), the brand students – they also learn these but not explicitly I guess – learn how to be flexible, team work and solve problems. This dividing practice of the brands, based on the "knowledge and practices drawn from the educational sciences provides modes of classification, control and containment, often paradoxically linked to humanitarian rhetoric of reform and progress" (Bernstein, 1975, cited in Ball, 1990). This rhetoric of reform in vocational education, on the other hand, seems to disguise the capitalist accumulation logic, which in turn works itself out in such a manner that the students regard themselves as deviant.

When we look at the narratives of the students, we understand that the "human psyche itself has become a possible domain for systematic government in the pursuit of socio-political ends" (Rose, 1989). As Nikolas Rose puts it, the shaping of the private self to achieve a socio-political aim is achieved not directly, since it would be an "illegal invasion of privacy in a liberal

democracy" (Peters et al., 2000, p. 120). In other words, the capital has understood that the aspirations, desires of working class kids can be worked through and in this way, productive, loyal technicians can be achieved within the process of both national and global competition. In this context, in line with Foucault's bio-power whose target is the body, capital resorts to another thing, which is busno-power (Peters et al., 2000). It is "directed at the subjectivity of the person not through the body but through the mind, through forms of educational practice and pedagogy so that people come to accept certain "truths" about themselves" (Peters et al., 2000, p. 122). This busno-power, establishing a 'meritocratic' system within the school, first selects the bodies and than tries to influence the minds with certain techniques. Here, the discourse of a neutral, ahistorical educational system forms the legitimacy of the selection process and the aspirations of the working class kids to get a decent job become the target of the brands.

Conclusion

It is clear from the ongoing transformation that the new blue-collar worker is assumed to be qualified, flexible, keen on learning and adapting himself to the changing market conditions and loyal to the brand for which he\she is going to work. Within this process, it is also evident that the school is transformed to be an extension of private companies and match the right students to the right companies. For one thing, they have to, because the existing system is such that 'the least successful students' of the system are attending their schools. After all, this is a matter of legitimacy. Why do these schools exist? Therefore, entrepreneurial headmasters are taking initiative and trying to get companies invest in their school. As the 'quality' of the students has decreased and there is the issue of university entrance exam quotients, the companies are more willing to participate in such partnerships.

The strategy of the companies seems to be working through the aspirations of the kids; they aim to create the subjectivity of the technician they require. However, we should note that there is no official guarantee of employment, even though most of the kids are employed by these companies. Moreover, the companies might withdraw from the partnership when they fill the empty positions. In this process, the school becomes implicitly accountable to the company and the market in terms of the quality of the students. What is more important, in my opinion, is that through the selective mechanism, the meritocratic ideology is maintained. In this respect, an

implicit naturalization of the market economy, which entails promoting failure/success narrative and glorifying the power of the individual to solve problems takes place (Agostinone-Wilson, 2006). The problem is, even though this mechanism provides – perhaps better – employment conditions for future blue collars, "the cost of creating such workers of efficiency will be a loss of autonomy, non-participation in decision making, a denial of democratic freedom, and a lack of personal development through work" (Robertson, 2005). Moreover, for the sake of creating docile, qualified graduates, the educators seem to be neglecting the fact that "the power of corporate culture, when left to its own devices, respects few boundaries and even fewer basic social needs, such as the need for uncontaminated food, decent health care, and safe forms of transportations" (Giroux, 2000). Furthermore, what kind of a language, as Terry Robertson states, do these educators use? Does this language of efficiency also refer to "the truth about the world in which we live (Yates, 2006), as Yates asks when he evaluates his personal story from a working class kid to become a professor.

This discourse of loyal technicians and efficiency[25] actually assumes that "education can be conceptualized and managed like any other service or institution and it homogenizes all technical or institutional problems as *management* problems" (Peters et al., 2000, p. 112). A reproduction of the modernization paradigm, this reform discourse – based on competition, productivity – imposes "a whole set of presuppositions as inevitable: it is taken for granted that maximum growth, and therefore productivity and competitiveness, are the ultimate and sole goal of human actions; or that economic factors cannot be resisted" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 30). As Bourdieu very aptly posits, "there is a radical separation between the economic and the social, which is left to one side, abondoned to sociologists" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 31). Moreover, this discourse considers educational realm as one where all actors are playing the game on equal terms. In that sense, it "lacks the ability to acknowledge students' histories, the stories that inform their lives" (Giroux, 2000). If this kind of an inadequate approach were that successful, a senior student from the school, who claimed to shake Turkey with what he would tell me, would not ask me whether I was there just to complete an assignment or to make their voices heard. If I have ever come close to achieving that, I will assume that I have done something.

[25] Here, it might be useful to remember Gaye Yilmaz's remarks that efficiency cannot be shared; it is not efficiency if it is shared. See (Yılmaz, 2002).

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