The purpose of this study was to investigate Turkish pre-service teachers’ beliefs about social studies in order to expand upon a debate that has been ongoing for the last few decades. While there always have been various definitions since the inception of the field, to date, no single, official definition has been agreed upon among social studies educators. The study indicated that there are a wide variety of beliefs regarding social studies exist among Turkish pre-service teachers. The vast majority of the participants characterized social studies as an integrated field of study, although what they included as tenets of this field varied widely. The majority of the participants cited either “preparing informed citizens” or “improving communication skills” as the sole purpose of social studies.

Keywords: Social Studies, Civics, Teachers Beliefs, Turkish Pre-service Teachers, International Perspective, Teacher Education

Introduction

Conflicting views about the nature and definition of social studies have existed for the past few decades (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1978; Evans, 1988; 1989; 2004; Evans & Passe, 2007; Nelson 2001; Singer, 2005). Many scholars agree that social studies is not an easy subject to define (Dynneson, Gross, & Berson, 2007; Evans, 2004; Maxim, 2010; Nelson, 2001). Thomas L. Dynneson, Richard E. Gross, and Michael J. Berson (2007), for example, state, “As a comprehensive label or umbrella term that included several disciplines, social studies is not easily defined and, to date, no single, official definition has been agreed upon among social studies educators” (p.34). While Ronald W. Evans (2004) hoped for a more open dialogue about the nature of social studies, he expected more debates and struggles in the future before a definition of this subject would be reached. In a recent paper, Ronald W. Evans and Jeff Passe (2007) created an open dialogue among twelve social studies educators, including themselves, to discuss many aspects of the field and to end the “social studies wars”. The results of the discussion were disappointing as they failed to lead to any kind of agreement. The authors, nevertheless, were hopeful, stating that agreement may be possible on some areas of dispute, but developing a new consensus will require hard work and compromise. If people within NCSS [National Council for Social Studies] have difficulty finding common ground, it will be even more difficult in the larger arena (p.255).
Thus, it looks like this debate will not be over soon, with more struggles before reaching a widely accepted definition of this field.

In Turkey, social studies education as an integrated field of social sciences and civics is in the initial stage of its development (Açıkalın, 2011). Social studies as an independent course became part of the elementary and middle school curriculum at the beginning of the 1970s in Turkey. The social studies course initially was developed only as a combination of history and geography courses without an integrative approach (2011). There have been many changes in the social studies curriculum in Turkey since then, and even these early courses were abolished and replaced with discipline based courses (national history and national geography) in the middle school between 1985 and 1997 (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2008). In 1998, social studies courses were reinstated in the middle school curriculum and, with the recent curriculum reform movements in Turkey, they have become integrated courses, encompassing a variety of social science disciplines and civics (Açıkalın; Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Talim Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı [TTKB], 2009b; 2009c). It is clear that there have been difficulties in defining social studies and placing it as an independent course in the elementary and middle school curriculum in Turkey. Considering that this debate has been going on for over a century in the United States (Beal, Bolick, & Martorella, 2009), it is inevitable that these struggles and discussions will arise in Turkey as well. William T. Owens (1997) pointed out that

Although the history of social studies is replete with conflicting views about its nature and definition, pre-service elementary teachers should fundamentally understand that it is a field of study that draws content from a variety of sources, predominately from the social sciences (p.115).

It is fundamentally important for pre-service teachers to understand the nature of the field they are going to be teaching. It also is crucial to have an understanding of Turkish pre-service teachers’ beliefs about the nature of social studies, especially as it is at the development stage.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate Turkish pre-service teachers’ beliefs about both the purpose of social studies, and the course content that should be taught. On one hand, the findings of the study have importance in terms of contributing to discussions on the definition of social studies in Turkey. On the other hand, considering that social studies first emerged, and has mostly been debated in, the United States (Dynneson et al., 2007; Hawe, Browne, Siteine, & Tuck, 2010), the findings can add culturally oriented perspectives to the debate regarding the nature of social studies. It is my hope that this study may bring another perspective to this debate through a consideration of the way it arises in a very different culture.

**Literature Review**

**Defining Social Studies**

Social studies first emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States and, by 1916, it was recognized (Dynneson et al., 2007) “as an acceptable term among educators as it was applied to teaching of history and related subjects within the school curriculum” (p.34). There has been a variety of definitions and categorizations (Nelson, 2001) attempting to unify the field and clarify the terms since the inception of social studies (Beal et al., 2009, Dynneson et al.; Maxim, 2010).

In one of the pioneer studies, Robert Barr, James L. Barth, and Samuel S. Shermis, (1978) described the three major traditions of social studies as “citizenship transmission”, “social sciences”, and “reflective inquiry”. Rod Janzen (1995) proposed six social studies education approaches including “cultural transmission”, “social action”, “life adjustment”, “discovery”,

Volume 6 Number 3 Winter 2011
“inquiry”, and “multiculturalism”. In a recent book, Evans (2004) described various social studies camps, including “traditional history”, “social sciences”, “the mandarins”, “education for social efficiency”, “social meliorism”, “critical or social reconstructionist”, and “eclectic.” Although these studies aimed to categorize different conceptualizations of, and approaches to, social studies, it is clear that they propose very diverse categories for the subject. According to George W. Maxim (2010), “Such disagreements cannot be quickly resolved; years of controversy, disagreement, and debate are to be expected” (p.13).

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) (1994), a leading professional organization for social studies educators in the United States, took the initiative to reach a general definition that addresses the nature and purpose of the field, defining social studies as:

…the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. (p.3)

With this NCSS initiative, social studies now is defined by the leading professional organization and set apart as a viable school subject (Maxim, 2010). However, Candy Beal, Cheryl Mason Bolick, and Peter H. Martorella (2009) indicate that keeping up with the ongoing debate can expand the NCSS definition and social studies standards in order to achieve powerful social studies teaching and learning. The NCSS recently has revised and updated social studies education standards.

Although the NCSS plays a role in unifying social studies and reaching a commonly accepted definition among social studies educators, a number of research studies have pointed out that teachers from very different countries around the world found the content and purpose of social studies to be elusive when compared to other disciplines, that they were generally confused about defining the component or content knowledge of social studies, or that they had misconceptions about it (Demircioğlu, 2006; Jasmine & Sim, 2008; Owens, 1997; Prior, 1999; Stodolsky & Grossman, 1995; Tay, 2009; Torney-Purta, Richardson & Barber, 2005). A major concern, then, is how social studies can be taught purposefully and successfully as an integrated part of the social sciences and civics when its basic nature is not comprehended by those who are responsible for teaching it (Demircioğlu; Owens).

Although research studies have indicated that social studies pre-service and even in-service teachers from diverse countries have been struggling to define the field, a number of accepted characteristics of social studies have emerged. The following areas were the most cited categories by social studies pre-service teachers in terms of the content of the field: (a) history (McCormack, 2006; Ross, 1987a), (b) social sciences (Wunder, 2003), (c) issues - civics - attitudes (Adkins, 1999; Adler & Confer, 1998; Goodman & Adler, 1985; McCormack; Ross; Wunder, 2003), (d) human relations – understanding society (Adler & Confer, 1998; Demircioğlu, 2006; Goodman & Adler; McCormack), (e) integrated (Goodman & Adler; Ross), and (f) multicultural (Adkins, 1999).
Redefining Social Studies

There is a growing body of research indicating that social studies education is disappearing from elementary schools, as standardized tests have come to dominate education in the United States since the No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act (2001) came into effect (Leming, Ellington, & Schug, 2006; Mathis & Boyd, 2009; McGuire, 2007; Passe, 2006; Sunal & Sunal 2008). Even before NCLB, Mary E. Hass and Margaret A. Laughlin’s (1999) study, conducted on 43 experienced social studies professors, foresaw social studies as a diminishing field of study indicating that “the diminishing and fragmentation of social studies as a field of study” was one of the major trends expected in the 21st century.

The prospect of social studies diminishing and disappearing from the curriculum brings the discussion back to defining social studies. Cynthia S. Sunal and Dennis W. Sunal (2008) stated that

In this new century, the meaning and the role of social studies in elementary education likely is being redefined. Such a redefinition is impacted by factors internal to schools and internal to our society, as well as to factors external to schools and to the society (p. 46).

It is clear that the definition and the purpose of social studies have changed over time to reflect society’s interests and concerns (Dynneson et al., 2007). As Sunal and Sunal (2008) pointed out, the second decade of the 21st century could be another defining point for social studies in the United States. In contrast, social studies education in Turkey as an integrated study of social science and for civic competence is only at the beginning stage (Açıkalın, 2011). As stated above, after many changes and redefinitions for over forty years, social studies in Turkey has only just reached such a point in the last decade. The discussion about the definition and role of social studies in Turkey has not ended, and it seems that it is not going to be over soon. Thus, it is crucial to investigate Turkish pre-service teachers’ beliefs regarding the field that they are going to be teaching because the findings of the study may contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding the definition of the field in Turkey.

From the literature it would appear that teachers’ personal backgrounds, values, religions, life experiences, and early family socialization are among factors forming their beliefs and perspectives about the nature of social studies (Adler, 1984; Johnston, 1990; Mathews & Dilworth, 2008; Ross, 1987b; Schugurensky & Myers, 2003; Virta, 2002). Teacher education programs may reinforce and refine pre-service teachers’ prior beliefs about the field (Angell, 1998; Doppen, 2007; Johnston, 1990), but not necessarily change them (Adler & Confer, 1998; Mathews & Dilworth; Schugurensky & Myers). Although these issues are worth investigating, they are beyond the scope of this paper. It is clear that the cultural background of a teacher seems to be a very powerful influence on a teacher’s beliefs. As social studies mostly has been discussed only within an American context to date, it is of value to examine Turkish pre-service teachers’ perspective on social studies since they come from a very different cultural background compared to their counterparts in the USA.

In order to investigate Turkish pre-service teachers’ beliefs regarding the content knowledge and purpose of social studies, the following research questions were generated:

1. What are the beliefs of Turkish pre-service teachers about the content knowledge of social studies?
2. What are the beliefs of Turkish pre-service teachers about the purpose of social studies?

Content knowledge refers to the various social science disciplines and topics making up social studies. The first research question basically is searching for the answer to the question of
“What should be taught in social studies?” The second research question concerns the purpose of teaching and learning social studies in elementary and middle schools (Kindergarten-8) in Turkey. Essentially, the second question is searching for the answer to the question, “What is the purpose of social studies?”

**Background Information about Social Studies Education in Turkey**

Although social studies as an independent course has been recognized in the elementary and middle school curriculum for the last four decades in Turkey, with the recent curriculum reforms of 2006, it has only recently become an integrated course encompassing a variety of social science disciplines and civic education (Açıkalın, 2011). According to the current curriculum in Turkey, social studies education is an interdisciplinary field (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c). The subjects of social studies include history, geography, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political science, law, and civics (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c). Social studies courses are taught under two different titles in elementary and middle schools from the first through seventh grades in Turkey. In early grades (grades 1-3), the course is called Life Studies (see TTKB, 2009a) and, from grades four through seven, it is called Social Studies (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c). At the high school level (Grades 9-12), social studies subjects are taught as discipline based courses such as history, geography, sociology, psychology, and philosophy.

The life studies course is an integrated course, consisting of three learning themes: the individual, society, and the environment. The purpose of this course is to prepare the individuals for life, help them improve their personal skills to be better people, and create base knowledge and skills for later science and social studies courses (TTKB, 2009a). The social studies course has nine learning themes: (a) the individual and society, (b) culture and heritage, (c) people, places, and the environment, (d) power, governance, and society, (e) time continuity, and change, (f) production, consumption and distribution, (g) science technology, and society, and (h) global connections. As stated in the curriculum, the purpose of this social studies course is to prepare Turkish citizens who can embrace the principles of Ataturk (the founder of modern Turkey), understand Turkish history and culture, grasp democratic values, respect human rights, care about the environment, know about their rights and responsibilities as a citizen, and think critically and creatively in order to make informed decisions (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c). Both courses are interdisciplinary, focusing on skills and values that promote effective citizenship for the Turkish nation.

Pre-service social studies teacher education is a four-year undergraduate program whose students are accepted to the program based on their scores on the national university entrance exam, which is held once a year. As social studies education curricula have been revised, teacher education programs have been reorganized accordingly. Social studies teacher education programs were re-established in 1997 during the teacher education reform movement. Before then, social studies courses had been taught by history or geography teachers (Açıkalın, 2011). The last revision in the social studies teacher education curriculum in 2006 was based on the Kindergarten-8 life studies and social studies curricula. According to the current version of social studies teacher education, the curriculum includes social science courses (such as history, geography, anthropology, sociology), civics, education and method courses (i.e. educational psychology, social studies methods, educational technology and materials development), field experiences, and a few elective courses (Istanbul University Social Science Teacher Education Program, n.d.).
Methodology

Setting and Participants

The data were collected in one of the largest Turkish universities located in the northwest of Turkey. The participants were 30 senior year pre-service elementary social studies teachers (18 male, 12 female) with an average age of 22.9 (range, 20 to 28 years). The majority of the participants (27 of 30) were Muslims, while two of them labeled themselves as atheist. One participant refused to answer this question. The participants came from different regions of Turkey. Two of the participants were born outside the country, one in Bulgaria as a minority Turk, and the other in Germany as the daughter of Turkish immigrant worker. Pseudonymous Turkish names were used for the participants in this study to conceal their identities.

Some of the participants speak local languages in addition to Turkish. Four participants speak Arabic, and three speak Kurdish. This heterogeneity mostly is a result of the structure of the university entrance system in Turkey. Because there is a centralized university entrance exam in Turkey, all high school graduates are accepted to a university based on their scores on this exam. Any high school graduate from any region in Turkey could be placed in any university across the country. As teachers’ personal backgrounds are seen as significant elements that influence their beliefs about social studies (Adler, 1984; Johnston, 1990; Mathews & Dilworth, 2008; Ross, 1987b; Schugurensky & Myers, 2003; Virta, 2002), the expectation was that the heterogeneity of the participants in terms of their cultural diversity would increase the reliability of this study.

Data Collection

An open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix A) was developed by the researcher for data collection. The questionnaire had two sections. The first section included demographic questions about the participants, including age, gender, place of birth, religion, and languages spoken. These questions were asked to ensure the cultural diversity of this group. The second section contained four questions designed to evaluate the participants’ beliefs about the content knowledge and purpose of social studies education.

The data were collected in the Fall 2008 semester. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants during one of their class periods. Students were told that their participation in the study was voluntary. Thirty out of 51 students agreed to fill out the questionnaire. The participants completed the questionnaire in approximately 30 minutes. Then, the questionnaires were collected, and the initial data analysis began.

Data Analysis

A descriptive approach was employed to analyze and summarize the demographic questions first. This approach incorporated several methods of descriptive statistics including frequency count determination, mean calculation, and range identification.

Analyzing the qualitative part of the data started with initial readings and exploring the data corpus (Creswell, 2005). Accordingly, the author read all questionnaires as the first step of analyzing the data, writing notes and highlighting possible key quotes during the process. The next step in analyzing the data was the categorization of responses. Through reading the data corpus, notable words and repetitive phrases were used to create coding categories for the content knowledge and purpose of social studies. Four categories emerged for the content knowledge aspect of social studies: (a) social sciences and civics, (b) everything about life, (c) social sciences, and (d) activity-based / reflective inquiry. For the purpose aspect, four distinct
categories were also identified: (a) preparing informed citizens, (b) improving communication skills, (c) preparing informed citizens - improving communication skills, and (d) socialization. These categories will be presented in tables and discussed in the next section.

Each participant was subsequently categorized under these items in terms of his or her beliefs regarding content knowledge and the purpose of social studies. In order to increase the accuracy and credibility of this categorization, the “member checking” technique (Creswell, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used. Each participant was interviewed individually in order to enhance the credibility of the categorizations made by the researcher. The participants were shown the category under which they had fallen and asked whether the labeled category was accurate. Notes were taken by the researcher during these sessions. Some small modifications were made within the categorizations as a result of the member checking process.

After the categorization process had been completed, the number of the participants for each category was counted. Using descriptive statistical methods, the frequency of each category and the ratio of frequencies were calculated. These findings – along with example responses from the participants – were presented in tables in order to establish a foundation for discussion.

Findings

Turkish Pre-service Teachers’ Beliefs about the Content Knowledge of Social Studies

The data analysis indicated that an overwhelming majority of the participants (90%) believed social studies should be considered an integrated field of study. As evidenced by Table 1, “social sciences and civics”, “everything about life”, and “social sciences” emerged as the three categories that indicated a strong leaning towards social studies being viewed as integrated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs about Content Knowledge of Social Studies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Ratio - %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences and Civics</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything about Life</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity-Based / Reflective Inquiry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other / Outlier</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social sciences and civics.

While the vast majority of the participants agreed that social studies is an integrated field of study, they had different views about content knowledge as it relates to this field. Of the different integrative categories produced, a large percentage (40%) of the participants fell under “social sciences and civics”. This category refers to the idea that social studies is a combination of various social science disciplines (i.e. history, geography, psychology, sociology, and anthropology) and the study of civics. Aysu’s response exemplified this view of integrated social studies: “[The content of social studies should be] a combination of social sciences such as history, geography, sociology, and civics.” Similarly, Buket stated that social studies “is an interdisciplinary field that includes history, geography, sociology, psychology and civics.”
However, Eda went beyond such views and expressed the importance of world cultures within the content of social studies. She stated that

In addition to history, geography, and civics, social studies should encompass the information necessary for individuals about world cultures and connections as we live in a global world. I mean, besides the topics about our own national cultures it should also contain topics that reflect world cultures … It should also include contemporary issues within global perspectives.

Unlike the other participants in this category, Eda considered social studies not only as a combination of social sciences and civics, but also one that acknowledges the place of world cultures in social studies content. It is important to note Eda’s view as it both shows a distinction within this category and is also mentioned by another participant from a different category, which will be discussed below. Data analysis provides a clear indication that this category corresponds to the general social studies definition of the NCSS (1994) as well as the current social studies curriculum (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c) in Turkey since the NCSS guidelines were taken as a model by Turkish educators during the recent social studies curriculum development (Açıkalın, 2011).

**Everything about life.**

Participants in this category had a much broader perspective about the content of social studies. This category essentially refers to social studies content as being everything that influences an individual’s life, with the subject’s content not necessarily being derived from formal social science disciplines. Exactly one-third of total participants (n=10, 33.5%) believed social studies content extends beyond social science disciplines and civics, deeming social studies content as “everything about life.” Oya stated that “In fact, it [social studies] is everything about life … Its topics are as broad as life. The topics include human relations, the environment, and nature…” Filiz expressed much broader perspectives about the content of social studies:

> It [social studies] should be interdisciplinary. It should encompass themes and issues that reflect the needs of society. It should contain daily and contemporary issues and problems. It also should focus on an individual’s own environment. It should help individuals to be aware of their status in a society.

Similarly, Nur stated, “The content of the course [social studies] should be completely based on the information that is required for the contemporary world.” Like these participants, Ali also had a very broad perspective about the content of social studies, suggesting that “Everything about social life can be considered within social studies,” and “Social studies should provide a world view and global perspective which could provide different points of view. If social studies is taken away from nationalistic perspective and focused on world cultures, it would be a more successful [better] course.”

It is clear that this group considered “everything about life” as the central idea of social studies. Nevertheless, each participant in this group explained “everything” based on individual knowledge and experiences. In most cases, they failed to explain of what “everything” is comprised. Thus, it could be argued that they were unclear relative to the scope of social studies. A few participants acknowledged that it was difficult to define the content of social studies education. Hakan, for instance, said, “It is impossible to define the content of social studies because the area is too broad.” Oya agreed, stating, “It is too difficult to draw strict lines for the content of social studies education.” As these participants pointed out, and as other participants’ responses clearly indicated, it was difficult to define the content of this field.
Another interesting finding was that two participants (Ali and Eda) from different categories hold similar beliefs about the role of world cultures and global issues in social studies. Although only two participants expressed this belief, it is worth highlighting since the current social studies curricula (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c) in Turkey, as with the NCSS (1994) criteria, reflect on global issues and world cultures. Unlike earlier versions of the curriculum in Turkey, the current version has one unit in each year from grades four through seven that focuses on global connections: “My Far Away Friends” (grade 4), “Our World” (grade 5), “Our Country and the World” (grade 6), and “Bridges between Countries” (grade 7) (Açıkalın, 2010). As the curriculum becomes more globally oriented, it is imperative that pre-service social studies teachers acknowledge the significance of global perspective in social studies education.

Social sciences.

The last integrated category was “social sciences”. This category refers to social studies as an integrated study of various social science disciplines including history, geography, philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology and so on. This view excludes the study of civics from social studies and only focuses on various social science disciplines. Five participants (16.5%) viewed social studies as an integrated field which draws its content solely from social sciences. The following responses exemplified this view clearly:

Social studies is an integrity of various social sciences such as history, geography, psychology, sociology, philosophy, economy, law, and anthropology. Social studies education encompasses all social science disciplines. (Selin)

Disciplines like history, geography, anthropology, sociology, psychology should come together under one umbrella and have an interdisciplinary approach. (Sami)

The content of social studies encompasses history, geography, philosophy, sociology, and other similar social sciences. (Fatma)

As the data indicated, a majority of the participants thought of social studies as an integrated field of study. The data, however, showed that it was still difficult to define the borders of this field, which may explain why some participants hold a very broad definition about the content of social studies. However, the participants in the “social sciences” category were able to define the borders of the field as they specified the social science disciplines. Although “social sciences” is a major tradition (Barr et al., 1978) in the field, it is interesting to note that only a few participants supported this tradition.

Activity based – Reflective inquiry.

Participants expressed very different perspectives about the content of social studies. Two participants (6.5%) pointed out that social studies content should be activity-based. This category of response considered social studies to be focused on inquiry and the kind of problem solving that requires critical thinking and decision making. These are the responses of these two participants:

A human being is a social entity. Thus, [social studies] should mostly focus on individuals’ problems and issues, and it should help them to make their life better. The idea in social studies should be about providing an environment for individuals in order to help them to think and analyze … Other courses are mostly based on memorization, but social studies courses should not be this way. (Baki)
Social studies should be activity based rather than content knowledge based. Students should do projects [in this course]. Students should know issues and problems more than content knowledge. (Mahir)

These participants gave much more emphasis to the issues and problems rather than the content of social studies. This is why they affiliate more closely than other participants, with the “reflective inquiry” tradition (Barr et al., 1978). Although only a few participants expressed this view, it was an interesting finding considering the majority of the participants saw social studies as content based.

**Other / Outlier.**

Finally, there is only one participant who did not fall under any category. This participant stated that social studies content should be based solely on civics and citizenship education, consisting primarily of learning an individual’s rights and responsibilities as a citizen. Ziya stated that, “I think it [social studies] mostly should be composed of civic issues to make people understand rules and regulations and be aware of what is going on in their surroundings.”

In conclusion, although what most of them included in this field varied widely, the vast majority of the participants believed that social studies is an integrated field of study. In addition, some participants hold very diverse views regarding social studies content, such as “activity–based/reflective inquiry” and “civics/citizenship education”, which contradicts the mainstream social studies perspective in Turkey.

**Turkish Pre-service Teachers Beliefs about the Purpose of Social Studies**

As indicated by Table 2, two major categories emerged from the data regarding the purpose of social studies education. These categories constitute almost three-quarters of total participants (n=22). While more than 40% (n=13) of the participants cited “preparing informed citizens” as the purpose of social studies, almost one-third (n=9) pointed to “improving communication skills” as the subject’s primary objective. Slightly more than a quarter of the participants (n=8) fell into the remaining categories. Although the vast majority of the participants came into either the “preparing informed citizens” or “improving communication skills” categories, only four participants (13.3%) considered these two items together as the purpose of social studies.

**Table 2**

*Turkish pre-service teachers’ beliefs about the purpose of social studies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs about Purpose of Social Studies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Ratio - %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparing Informed Citizens</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Communication Skills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing Informed Citizens – Improving Communication Skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other /Outlier</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparing informed citizens.

The data analysis indicated that preparing informed citizens was considered to be one of the major purposes of social studies education in Turkey. “Informed citizen” refers to an individual who knows his/her rights and responsibilities, thinks critically, and makes informed decisions. A number of participants (n=13, 43.3%) pointed out that the role of social studies is to prepare informed citizens. Table 2 shows that other categories were involved with citizenship as well. When all categories involved with citizenship were combined, it became evident that more than half the participants pointed to the purpose of social studies as being to prepare informed citizens. Here are selected responses showing the purpose of social studies as citizenship:

Purpose [of social studies]: As a citizen, learning about all fundamental information about your country and being an individual who can protect his/her rights in any area [ground]. (Nur)

Preparing individuals who can recognize his/her rights and responsibilities and status in the society and the status and value of their nations within the world. (Aysu)

Primarily [the purpose of social studies] is preparing competent citizens who are self-confident [and who] know their environments and responsibilities. (Oya)

Social studies help to prepare individuals to be active citizens, to think critically, and to look analytically at the events around themselves. (Elif)

The participants within this category focused on preparing citizens as the primary purpose of social studies education. This finding is consistent with the current social studies curriculum in Turkey (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c) and the NCSS (1994) guidelines. The current curriculum gives special emphasis to citizenship education and considers social science disciplines as contributing factors in the development of individuals as informed citizens.

Improving communication skills.

The second major category for the purpose of social studies was the “improving communication skills” category. Nearly one third (n=9, 30%) of the participants pointed to the sole purpose of social studies as being to improve individuals’ communication skills. According to Baki, “Social studies should focus on human interaction and investigate how people communicate and what their communication problems are.” Akif stated, “It [social studies] should facilitate communication between individuals and improve their communication skills.” Naci took this view further stating, “It [social studies] investigates the interactions and communication not only between humans, but also between humans and nature.” Similarly, Mert stated, “The purpose of social studies is to nourish the communication and interaction skills among people and between the individual and the environment.”

While these participants may have focused on different aspects of communication, all considered improving an individual’s communication skills as the sole purpose of social studies. This finding also is consistent with the current social studies curriculum in Turkey, where communication is one of the fourteen skills that are cited in the current social studies curriculum (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c). According to the national curriculum, communication as a skill includes listening, expressing personal ideas, discussion, understanding others’ ideas and feelings, and looking at things from different points of views.
Preparing informed citizens and Improving communication skills.
While the majority of the participants (n=22, 73.3%) saw the purpose of social studies as being either to prepare informed citizens or to improve citizens’ communication skills, only four participants (13.3%) stated that both of these items could be the purpose of the field. Filiz said, “[The purpose of social studies is] preparing social individuals and informed citizens who have advanced communication skills.” Similarly, Mahir saw “preparing social citizens and improving communication skills” as the primary purposes of social studies education. This was an interesting finding because only a few participants combined these two major categories into one. As noted above, almost three quarters of the participants either fell under the “preparing informed citizens” or “improving communication skills” categories. Only four participants (less than 15%) thought to combine these major categories.

Socialization.
The next category was “socialization”, which in the context of this study, refers to the skills and habits necessary for individuals to blend with their society. Three participants (10%) considered the purpose of social studies as socialization. “To assimilate in society and to stay together” forms the basis of socialization according to Fatma. Similarly, Orhan stated, “[The purpose of social studies is] to socialize the individual.” As these responses clearly stated the importance of socialization, it was difficult to draw a line between the “improving communication skills” and “socialization” categories. It seems that there exists a close relationship between the two. Fatma’s response may suggest that improved communication and interaction within society can be the base for socialization and for living together as a unity.

Other / Outlier.
On the other hand, only one participant stated “citizenship transmission” as the sole purpose of social studies. Citizenship transmission refers to the passing on of a generation’s values, traditions, customs, and other cultural aspects to the next generation without any changes or with few modifications. Kadir stated that, “We learn social studies to learn about ourselves, our traditions, past and present.” Although only one participant stated this view, it is also worth mentioning it as it represented a major tradition of social studies education in this study (see Barr et al., 1978).

In conclusion, there was a variety of beliefs about the purpose of social studies among the participants. Nevertheless, “preparing informed citizens” and “improving communication skills” were the two major categories cited by the participants as the main purpose of social studies.

Discussion
The study indicated a range of views exist regarding both the content knowledge and the purpose of social studies among the Turkish pre-service teachers in this study. This range may suggest that the participants had difficulties in defining the boundaries of the field. In addition, there were responses specifically pointing out how difficult it is to define the content of social studies. Prior studies in various countries also have indicated that the content of social studies was not well defined, and that it was difficult to reach a clear definition of this discipline (Demircioglu, 2006; Jasmine & Sim, 2008; Owens, 1997; Prior, 1999; Stodolsky & Grossman, 1995; Tay, 2009; Torney-Purta et. al., 2005).

Turkish pre-service teachers are struggling to define the field as are their counterparts in other countries. With one-third of the participants in the “everything about life” category can be
considered as clear evidence of this struggle. I argue that the participants were not sure about the content of the field, so a considerable number of the participants fell into this category. This struggle brings another dimension to this discussion. As Owens (1997) and İsmail H. Demircioglu (2006) have pointed out, it is a major concern that pre-service teachers, who will be responsible for teaching the subject in their future careers, have trouble comprehending the basic nature of social studies. Teacher education programs should address this issue helping pre-service teachers understand and define the borders of the field based on the current social studies curriculum.

Although the participants had trouble defining the borders of the field, a number of categories emerged from this study. Some of the categories have already been cited in prior studies, including “social sciences” (Barr et al., 1978; Wunder, 2003) and “activity-based / reflective inquiry” (Barr et al.; Goodman & Adler, 1985). On the other hand, “civics/citizenship education” is cited to define the border of social studies in a number of studies (Goodman & Adler; McCormack, 2006; Ross, 1987a), although it is cited only by one participant in this study. These Turkish pre-service teachers, despite their lack of definition, integrated a variety of social science disciplines with civics since the majority of the participants fall under this category. This finding is consistent with the definition of the NCSS (1994) and current social studies curriculum in Turkey (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c), which may explain the tendency of the participants toward this belief. According to the current curriculum in Turkey, social studies education is an interdisciplinary field drawing its content from various social science disciplines as well as civics (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c). As stated above, social studies teacher education programs are designed based on Kindergarten-8 social studies education. Thus, a fellow social studies pre-service teacher must be familiar with the current social studies curriculum. This may explain why a majority of the participants indicated that social studies is an integrated field of study.

The categories regarding the purpose of social studies also varied but, two major categories emerged from the data. Almost three-quarters of the participants cited either “preparing informed citizens” or “improving communication skills” as the sole purpose of social studies. Susan Adler and B. J. Confer’s (1998) study also indicated that “citizenship” was among the goals of social studies, although it was cited only by a few participants. Likewise, in one of the other early studies, Jesse Goodman and Susan Adler (1985) cited “citizenship” and “human relations” as being among the six major perspectives of social studies. As discussed above, citizenship and communication issues are addressed specifically in the current social studies curriculum in Turkey (TTKB, 2009b; 2009c), which may explain the tendency of the participants towards citizenship and communication as they were being educated based on the current social studies curriculum in their teacher education programs.

Although the “citizenship transmission” represents a major tradition of social studies education (Barr et al. 1978), was only cited by one participant in this study. Likewise, Wayne Ross’s (1987a) study also indicated that few participants believed that the purpose of social studies was to pass on cultural content to the next generation. Unlike other social studies camps that refer to citizenship, this camp gives special attention to the traditions and customs of a society. It must be noted that citizenship education received much more attention than citizenship transmission itself among the participants, which may suggest these Turkish pre-service teachers focus on more universal citizenship values than local and traditional values.

While major categories emerged from this study, there were still other existing beliefs about the content knowledge and purpose of social studies that were not evidenced in this study.
As teachers’ personal background, values, religion, and life experiences (Adler, 1984; Johnston, 1990; Mathews & Dilworth, 2008; Ross, 1987b; Schugurensky & Myers, 2003; Virta, 2002) can influence and shape pre-service teachers’ beliefs about social studies, it does not seem that we are close to arriving at a widely accepted definition of the field. Similarly, Judith Torney-Purta, John Schwille, and Jo-Ann Amadeo (1999), who conducted a multinational survey in twenty-four countries about civic education, stated that, although there has been wide agreement regarding the principles of civics in these countries, “civic education is deeply embedded in a political and historical context unique to each country” (p.30). As Evans (2004) pointed out, there will be more debates and difficulties in the future in order to arrive at a definition of this subject, and it is hoped that this study may bring a culturally oriented perspective to these ongoing debates and struggles.

Implications and Conclusion

Given that this study indicates, that this sample of Turkish pre-service teachers have been struggling to define the boundaries of social studies, it is clear that the teacher education programs in Turkey might need to address this issue and provide an environment for pre-service teachers and teacher educators to discuss the future of social studies education. As integrated social studies education is quite new in Turkey, these discussions may help the understanding of pre-service teachers regarding the nature of social studies and contribute to the development of the field in Turkey as well as around the world. Such discussions could be part of the courses in social studies education programs, or designated courses that focus on the nature and understanding of social studies could be added to teacher education programs.

As it is a newly introduced field in Turkey, the development and future of social studies education needs to be discussed beyond the teacher education programs. Although a social studies education association, the Association for Social Studies Educators, has just been established in Turkey, there has not been any conference with a specific focus on social studies education at which to discuss these issues in the nation. In order to discuss the future and the development of social studies education in Turkey, various meetings, including conferences, forums and workshops, must be organized. Teacher educators, in-service teachers, and other stakeholders such as representatives of the Ministry of National Education in Turkey should participate in these meetings to improve and develop social studies education in Turkey.

This study is limited to its design and participants, and it is intended to give an initial insight into the current status of social studies education in Turkey and the beliefs of a group of Turkish pre-service teachers about the field. Generalizability is a debated issue in the qualitative research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998), and there is no consensus as to whether the findings of qualitative research can be generalized. Thus, as a limitation, it must be noted the findings of this qualitative study are not generalizable; they only represent this particular group of pre-service teachers.

In conclusion, this study indicated a wide variety of beliefs regarding the content and purpose of social studies among Turkish pre-service teachers. The study further indicated that these Turkish pre-service teachers characterized social studies as an integrated field drawing its content from a variety of social science disciplines and also civics. The majority of the participants cited either “preparing informed citizens” or “improving communication skills” as the sole purpose of social studies.

As this study only aimed to give a glimpse into the beliefs of Turkish pre-service teachers about social studies, it is evident that a need exists for more in-depth research studies to
investigate this under-researched field in Turkey and other countries in order to create widely acceptable foundations and principles for social studies education. These research studies should not only be in-depth, but also longitudinal, interviewing and observing pre-service teachers throughout their college education and early in their careers. A follow up study would also provide valuable information about the participants’ developments or changes regarding their beliefs and practices about social studies.

References


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**Web-Based References**


Appendix A

An Open-ended Questionnaire for Pre-service Teachers’ Beliefs About the Nature of Social Studies

SECTION I:
Name and Last name:
Gender: □ Female □ Male
Age:
Place of Birth:
Religion:
Local Languages:

SECTION II:
1. How do you define social studies education?
2. What do you think the purpose of social studies education should be?
3. What do you think the content of social studies education should be?
4. Why do we learn social studies?

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