In Conversation with Kadir Beycioğlu: Engaging Critically with his Scholarship on Social Justice

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Abstract	Article Info
This paper pays homage to the late Kadir Beycioğlu's invaluable contributions to social justice and education. Beycioğlu crafted a reflexive narrative that uses philosophical methodologies to explore the concept of social justice within educational settings. In this brief article, we aim to engage in a dialectical and theoretical discourse with Beycioğlu's scholarship, expanding upon his arguments, critically assessing various aspects of his work, and providing responses to several of his assertions. By adopting the approach of conversationalism (Chimakonam, 2017), we create an intellectual space for critical, reflective, and productive dialogues among ourselves and in relation to Beycioğlu's later work and hope to enrich the ongoing discourse on social justice in education. Our intention is to honour the lasting contributions of Beycioğlu to education in Turkey by tracing his work into three distinct theoretical strands and engaging critically with his scholarship. These three strands are his conceptualisation of social justice, his contributions to critical policy-making and his later work on questioning gender equality and other intersecting inequalities in education.

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Introduction

Professor Dr. Kadir Beycioğlu (1968-2021) remains a prominent figure in critical educational research, leaving an indelible mark on the field. Both authors of this paper had the privilege of being in conversation with his critical ideas and benefited from his outstanding scholarship and vision for education. His early departure left not only us but many of his colleagues and students in immense sadness and debt. Therefore, in this article, we want to pay homage to him and his scholarship by engaging in a critical conversation. Although throughout his career he made substantial contributions to educational leadership, in this article, we situate Beycioğlu's research within the context of social justice and education, as our colleagues have covered his leadership work elsewhere (see Azorin & Morillo, 2023). We focus on three important aspects of his work: (i) conceptualisation of social justice, (ii) critical policymaking, and (iii) gender equality.

We trace these three strands of Beycioğlu's contributions to education and sketch out how these contributions establish a tradition of educational critique from the perspectives of critical theorists. We will argue that Beycioğlu's approach disrupts dominant and conventional ways of understanding educational inequalities by engaging in meta-level questioning. He examines the "what," "how," and "who" of social justice and addresses what the foundational premises of educational policymaking should be. This critical interrogation challenges the

status quo and provides a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding social justice in education.

Through this exploration, we aim to honour his legacy and further the discourse on social justice in educational settings. At the same time, we will discuss the ways in which these strands have contributed a particular configuration, or conceptualisation of the Turkish education system, with which the international field has engaged productively, as well as address some of the tensions present within his work.

Many of you may know that Beycioğlu was deeply invested in mythology and philosophy and greatly appreciated Socratic talks and critical dialogues. Therefore, we are engaging in a conversational thinking approach rooted in African philosophy inspired by J. Chimakanom (2017), based on questioning or inquiry that allows for the continuous development of ideas, knowledge, and creative engagement. While Socratic dialogue aims to structure rational thinking, distinguishing between good and bad reasoning with solid conclusions, conversationalism fosters open discussion that may not necessarily reach an end or conclusion, thereby cultivating a skeptical approach towards our ways of thinking. Moreover, the strategy of the conversational method is arumaristic, meaning it involves 'engaging in a critical exchange or conversation' rather than dialectical—where thesis and antithesis come together to form a synthesis (Chimakanom, 2017, p. 17). This approach is a rather complex, but such messiness and complexity is the creative form of thinking and engagement we desire in this conversation with Kadir, aiming to unpack many things he left unsaid in his work.

Beycioğlu mentored many PhD students and was also committed to writing outside academia, producing non-academic outputs where he shared his revolutionary ideas about education and social justice. His work had a strong focus on policy and practice but also transcended many disciplinary boundaries so his contribution cannot be isolated to one discipline alone. That is why, in this paper, we engage in a conversation with him to flesh out his contributions to conceptualising social justice in the Turkish education system, critical policy-making, and his later focus on gender equality concerns with some implications for intersectionality. Unfortunately, he could not publish much on this latter topic due to his unexpected death. However, we know it was an idea to which he felt deeply committed, marking a radical shift in his approach to the concept of gender in his papers.

Although Beycioğlu is mostly known for his work on educational leadership (Arar, Ogden, and Beycioğlu, 2019; Beycioğlu et al., 2019), his interdisciplinary contributions on the intersectionality of educational inequalities (Kesik & Beycioğlu, 2022) and critical policymaking (Beycioğlu et al., 2018) have significantly disrupted debates on policy and practice in Turkey. By highlighting the ways in which ideological shifts have shaped the policy landscape and transformed leadership, Beycioğlu's work locates these radical changes within a paradigm of social justice leadership (Beycioğlu, 2021). His scholarship critiques the prevailing frameworks but also offers a nuanced understanding of how educational inequalities intersect with broader social, political, and economic forces. This critical perspective has sparked a scholarly debate in redefining policy discourses and advocating for more equitable and inclusive educational practices.

The three strands traced in this article are integral to Beycioğlu's intellectual journey and his interpretations of social justice debates in education. Our engagement aims to sketch the conversations we had with him rather than presenting an exhaustive analysis. The first strand focuses on Beycioğlu's advocacy for educational policies that are equitable and closely aligned with social justice debates. His contributions to educational policy, guided by his understanding of the 'who' and 'what' questions of social justice, have significantly influenced the distribution of resources and opportunities. The second strand highlights his encouragement for scholars of critical educational policymaking to question systemic injustices. Beycioğlu's work aims to foster fairer, more equitable, and socially just societies by challenging the existing paradigms and advocating for critical reflection and change in policy-making processes. The third strand, which became more prominent in his later years, addresses his emerging focus on gender equality and other forms of intersectionality. Although less pronounced initially, this aspect of his work underscores the importance of considering multiple dimensions of identity and power in educational contexts.

Each of these strands challenges the canonical work in Turkey by boldly centering power, ideology, and hegemony at the core of the discourse on the educational landscape in Turkey. Beycioğlu's approach critiques the positivist construction of educational research and emphasizes the need to interrogate the underlying power structures that shape educational policies and practices.

The Conceptual Narrative of Social Justice: Exploring the 'Who' and 'What' of Social Justice

Kadir was one of the pioneers in Turkey in leading the literature on social justice leadership. While our focus is not to discuss the literature

on educational leadership, as noted above and has been addressed elsewhere, here we want to engage with his conceptual mapping and theorisation of social justice, and the ways in which he engaged with these concepts in his work. In doing so, we focus on two questions he addressed in his publications: the "what" and "who" of social justice. The former captures the conceptualisation of social justice and his interpretations of it, including where his theoretical stances lie. The latter concerns those who often remain outside the social justice claims and raises the question of who social justice is truly for.

The term 'social justice' is too broad to be encapsulated by simple, broad brush strokes indicators, it belongs to a highly conceptual body of literature that revolves around different schools of thought. Here, both normative and critical theories, including indigenous and decolonial thinking, aim to enrich the understanding of what counts as just. Whether the term "just" represents the ultimate meaning we wish to highlight when talking about equality, equity, and justice as concepts that are NOT interchangeable but nuanced and distinctive in what they aim to achieve. An important part of Beycioğlu's work focused on socioeconomic inequalities in the education system, particularly engaging in a critique of how, at schools, especially by teachers and school leaders, the understanding of social justice revolved around issues of economic injustice and the problems of poverty that lead to disadvantages for students from low-income families, rather than addressing more political and social issues related to recognition and participation (see Arar, Beycioğlu & Oplatka, 2017). For Kadir, although socio-economic inequalities were important and formed the basis of many inequalities faced in schools, this narrative was surely incomplete. There was also a tacit understanding in his writings that these should be considered in relation to other social and

political inequalities as such intersectionalities were likely to exacerbate the inequalities experienced in Turkish schools. Building on this critique, he later on, inspired by the Greek mythology of Themis and Dike, he defines social justice as (Beycioğlu, 2021, p. 2)

> *"…let's say, current understanding of justice, for the reason that her (Dike's) way could be considered as the starting point of justice concerns, ranging from distributive justice, procedural justice, social justice, equity issues, and so on to recognition. Hence, in this article, I prefer to consider justice as a matter of redistribution, equity, and recognition."*

Later in this article, we see that Beycioğlu has been significantly influenced by Nancy Fraser's (2010) work on the three-dimensional social justice model, which includes redistribution (economic), recognition (cultural), and a principle of representation (political). By embedding these values into the educational setting, he champions the values of "honesty, democracy, equity, inclusiveness, sustainability, transforming the school with regard to injustices, and respect for race, class, language, sexual orientation, and cultural diversity as daily practices of leaders and other members" as the core principles for socially just schools (Beycioğlu, 2021, p. 8). His later work remarkably extends beyond the existing literature on social justice in education, addressing issues of distribution, recognition, and representation while adopting a more decolonial perspective. For instance, he questions the foundations upon which the concept of social justice in Turkey is constructed, critiquing its heavy reliance on Western concepts that fail to fully capture the unique challenges of educational policymaking in Turkey (Kondakci and Beycioğlu, 2020). In the article, we do not often hear what those offering alternative perspectives or the values and local knowledge that could enrich social justice debates

215

in Turkey could be. However, he initiates important discussions for social justice researchers in Turkey to explore, leaving us with further food for thought on how to address more contextualised issues of social justice: "For one, the pedagogy of social justice begins with the development of an enabling dialogue…. For another, the pedagogy of social justice was a 'shared walk'" (Arar, Ogden, & Beycioğlu, 2019, p. 62).

His writings on social justice also address the 'who' of justice. This question centers on those whom the subjects of social justice debates should be and argues for a politics of equitable learning outcomes, with resources distributed not equally but according to the needs of those who are marginalised. For instance, one of his latest writings argues:

> *...to develop an IE (inclusive education) system that goes beyond integration, firstly, the term inclusion should be considered as an issue of social justice, and a more holistic IE definition and model consider the needs of all dis-advantaged groups, not just the specific groups, such as students with disabilities and Syrian refugee students should be adopted. (Kesik & Beycioğlu, 2022, p. 12).*

Influenced by the recognition dimension of Nancy Fraser's work, Beycioğlu has challenged the narrow definition of disadvantage in social justice debates, particularly in the perceptions of school leaders who were mostly concerned with providing equal opportunities and resources but failed to fully acknowledge the importance of integrating pupils from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to eliminate the feeling of otherness among minorities (Beycioğlu & Ogden, 2017). For him, the 'who' question was as significant as the 'how' and 'what' questions due to the conceptual diversity of the social justice question in education. He argued that a mono-dimensional approach to justice

was insufficient and would lead to "diminishing the challenging effects of injustice and inequitable and undemocratic school cultures" (Beycioğlu, 2021, p. 8). At the time of his death, and still today, the literature on social justice in Turkish schools predominantly focuses on refugee education (Çelik & Icduygu, 2019; Cin & Dogan, 2021; Kondakci et al., 2023), and this explains why his later work concentrated more on the 'who' question, aiming to explore and broaden the social justice agenda and challenge the boundaries that reproduce inequalities. Therefore, the special issue he co-edited in 2020 on multicultural contexts stresses that social justice debates should consider "educational opportunities and experiences provided to students with different backgrounds in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, social class, wealth, gender, family structure, sexual orientation, disability" (Gumus & Beycioğlu, 2020, p. 237).

This brief intellectual genealogy of his work on social justice demonstrates that Beycioğlu was engaging with critical questions of equitable education and beyond. By tapping into different questions of social justice literature, he sought to rupture the taken-for-granted understanding of inequality research within the educational context of Turkey and challenge existing paradigms on how educational inequality is addressed.

Critical Education policy making

Beycioğlu's substantial contributions to critical education explore ideological shifts within educational systems, emphasizing how politically motivated hegemonic discourses can instigate changes in school contexts. Drawing inspiration from Gramsci's concept of hegemony, below we argue the interconnectedness of social justice, politics, and educational policymaking. Gramsci's ideas are grounded in Critical Theory, which has its origins in the Frankfurt School, largely

deriving from Marx's critiques (Beycioğlu et al., 2018). Critical Theory questions notions of "power", "dominance", "hegemony", "ideology", "class", "gender", and "race" to understand how more powerful groups control public discourse (Beycioğlu et al., 2018). These notions are also fundamental to principles of social justices to create more equitable, inclusive, and just systems.

While the use of social justice in educational studies has proliferated, a universally agreed-upon definition remains elusive and dynamic (Pijanowski and Brady, 2021). Despite this, the focus of social justice in education consistently centres on enhancing opportunities for underrepresented and marginalized groups, ensuring equal chances for everyone regardless of their backgrounds (Azorin & Murillo, 2023). As Kondakci and Beycioğlu (2020) aptly express, social justice encompasses the comprehensive effort to address the needs of disadvantaged groups in society without exclusion based on their backgrounds. To utilise social justice as a framework in critical educational policymaking and examine issues such as policy, inequality, and gender in education, scholars often rely on a toolbox of various concepts. Beycioğlu's theoretical framework for social justice aligns with critical theories of education, reflecting a commitment to dismantling systematic inequities within education systems. Critical theories, as demonstrated by scholars like Paulo Freire (1970), Michael Apple (2012), Peter Mayo (2014), and Henry Giroux (2018), who draw upon Gramsci's theories, illuminate the inequalities in schools and the politically motivated nature of education systems. Those employing critical theories assert that education policies are linked to hegemonic agendas or political ideologies (Karlidag-Dennis, 2018). Critical Theory facilitates an examination of "the way the broader social, economic, and cultural context gives rise to particular state politics and

education policies" (Simons, Olssen & Peters, 2009, p.21). Critical Theory remains a key theoretical framework for critical educational scholars who research in equity and social justice (Strunk and Betties). Beycioğlu's contributions to critical educational research in Turkey have been significant, questioning existing power structures and delving into the root causes of educational disparities. For instance, Kondakci and Beycioğlu (2020) discussed how Turkey lacks a broad definition of social justice in educational policy, encompassing every institution in the country. Policies rooted in social justice prioritise equitable access to quality education (Tikly & Barrett, 2011), challenging prevailing hegemonic discourses by addressing educational disparities. In one of his latest works, published right after his death, Beycioğlu questioned the inclusivity of educational opportunities for students in Turkey (Kesik & Beycioğlu, 2022), critiquing the ignorance towards ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences. He highlighted that the hegemonic culture, resistant to change, seems to still be promoting and reproducing a neoliberal model devoid of concerns for social justice. While educational policymaking was not Beycioğlu's main focus in his research, the relationship between educational policy making and the institutions' hegemonic role was illustrated in some of his work. For example, Arar and Beycioğlu's (2018) research highlights that, in educational settings, the vision for social justice often originates from individuals rather than institutions. Therefore, there is an absence of formal policies integrating social justice understandings into education. The prevailing hegemonic system has turned education into a primary tool for constructing a new common sense (Gramsci, 1971). The dominant class strategically employs schools to secure societal consent (Said, 2003). This influence is evident in the selection and assignment of school principals in Turkey, where power dynamics and governmental

policies play a pivotal role. This process has resulted in the emergence of a singular type of organic intellectual dominating the school context. As Gramsci (1971) described, organic intellectuals, aligned with the dominant class, act as deputies responsible for maintaining the hegemonic system (Simons, 2015; Karlidag-Dennis et al., 2019). Discussing the hegemony of central organisations, Beycioğlu and colleagues aptly characterise the crafted selection system for school principals as nepotism, describing it as "(glacial) maladministration," wherein the interests of the dominant class shape and define school culture under the prevailing state hegemony (Beycioğlu et al., 2018, p. 147). Significantly, this study reveals the hegemonic approach of those responsible for schooling, who actively work towards "adopting the ideology of the government and the elimination of opposing it" (Beycioğlu et al., 2018, p. 142). This again emphasises that education can become a battleground for politics, as politics and education are closely intertwined and can support hegemonic discourses of the state (Karlidag-Dennis, 2018). Kondakci and Beycioğlu (2020) stated how "key educational practice in Turkey rests in the hands of the central authority, the Ministry of National Education which formally leaves less room to school-level constituencies for developing and implementing social justice practices" (p. 314) and create more ideology-free education policies. For example, Beycioğlu's work in 2010, in collaboration with colleagues, indicates that teachers in Turkey possess a positive attitude toward is educational research, valuing its contribution to classroom practices. Having teachers more active role in educational policy and reform changes could support a more transparent and just education system. This also resonates well with Gramsci's understanding of "civil society" Gramsci regarded civil society as an integral part of the state (Buttigieg, 1995) and scholars believed education is a key competent of civil society (Mayo, 1994).

Education serves as a key mechanism through which the ruling class maintains its hegemony by shaping the beliefs and values of individuals. Civil society institutions, including educational institutions play a crucial part in disseminating ruling-class ideology and securing consent to the status quo. If we want to create education systems that are inclusive and not based on the ideology of the governments, we need to involve key actors such as teachers in policymaking. Both Beycioğlu et al. (2010) and other existing research (Everton et al., 2002) underscore the importance of considering teachers' involvement in shaping educational policies. Involving educational actors such as teachers, teacher unions, and academics would leave more room to create more inclusive education system and create a "bottom up" approach when making decisions regarding education. Beycioğlu's work is another reminder that strengthening the participation of key educational actors in educational policymaking would make the education system more democratic and just.

Gender Equality in Education

The third strand of Beycioğlu's work on social justice marks a notable shift in his engagement with the concept of gender. Given his engagement with critical schools of thought during the last 10 years of his career, it does not come as a surprise that his work also denotes a critical change in his approach to gender equality. Although gender, has never been his main focus of work and only his late work has tapped into this idea as a response to anti-gender movement going in Turkey and its ramifications in education system. In our conversation, his interest in this body of work was evident, particularly noting the persisting gender inequalities within the system. So, it was important for us to also pay tribute to his emerging passion for addressing gender

inequalities in Turkey as a male academic. We see a dramatic transformation of how he engaged with the concept of gender in his work – while earlier work would reflect seeing gender as a more binary variables in his work (see Beycioğlu, 2009), his later work reflects that he moves beyond the numerical and descriptive values typically associated with gender to engage in a deeper conceptual exploration of gender equality within the education system. Rather than merely focusing on gender parity, his work looks into the nuanced aspects of language, course materials, curriculum design, and teachers' expectations, examining how these elements contribute to the creation of gender inequalities. This is not to say that gender parity is not important. He frequently mentioned the 'achievement gap as a challenge in accomplishing gender-based education equity in the country' (Kondakci & Beycioğlu, 2020, p. 321), and highlighted girls' hidden disadvantages, such as lower schooling rates than male students as they get older (Siyez & Beycioğlu, 2019). Rather, what we aim to suggest is that he has also acknowledged the idea that such quantitative indicators reflect only one side of the story. The central concern, and sadly most of the time the only concern, of the Ministry of National Education is reflected in these indicators (Cin et al., 2020).

He particularly views gender equality as a broader issue within the context of socially just schools in one of his works dedicated exclusively to exploring gender equality in education systems (Siyez & Beycioğlu, 2020). He argues that feminism is not merely an issue of feminist theory (Verloo & Lombardo, 2007) and implicitly invites its incorporation into educational policymaking and research in Turkey. Building on Cin's (2017) work on Turkey, Beycioğlu addresses the more subtle and ingrained ways that gender inequalities manifest within educational institutions, touching upon a variety of concerns

from masculinities at schools, curriculum and stereotypes, and joins the assertions of Cin et al., (2020, p. 244-245) that the concern for gender equality should beyond "the evaluative measurement of gender equality has exclusively focused on the quantifiable indicator of closing the gender gap":

> *In Turkish context, gender equality remains blind both in educational policy and practices in schools. Turkey's ministry (MoNE) tries to stay stable at the levels championed by international agencies that rank any country's human development indexes, etc. The MoNE does keep the level quantitatively. But when the quality issues considered in case of gender equality, the picture gets foggy. Because there are still traditional stereotypes towards girls and women and expected roles and responsibilities from them, mostly related to caring children, doing housework, taking a follow behind men, etc. However, the policies and practices implemented by the MoNE are supposed to be much more willing to create not only equal conditions for boys and girls but also justice and equity in school environment, especially for girls (Siyez & Beycioğlu, 2019, p. 19).*

Despite being aware of the lack of intentions at the policy level to tackle the issues gender inequalities, he was also cognisant that gender equality has never been the main focus of social justice discussion in Turkey which are dominated by poverty and economic concerns (see Beycioğlu Beycioğlu & Ogden, 2017). Although even within the poverty and education literature, women and girls are much more affected and makes up the most fragile group (see Yunus, 2021). While the above-mentioned work demonstrates that he has developed a conceptual understanding compatible with feminist theories, some of his work, albeit not directly, underscores the roles that women teachers and leaders can play in schools to foster socially just environments. His

research (see Arar, Beycioğlu, & Oplatka, 2017) acknowledges the importance of women teachers in creating more socially just settings, particularly in highly patriarchal societies where women tend to face more unequal practices. This work highlights their capacity for displaying more compassion and empathy in striving for greater equality, and aligning with Cin's argument (2017, p. 175) that sees women teachers as contributing to "the enactment of an ethical/imperfect obligation to work for the social good."

Conclusion: Intersecting Paths

As outlined in the introduction, we have crafted this piece as a tribute to the enduring memory and remarkable legacy of our colleague. Our aim is not only to celebrate his intellectual contributions but also to guide the next generation of researchers and to illuminate the key arguments he brought into social justice debates in Turkish education system, showcasing the depth and breadth of his thought. While the narrative and conversation outlined above capture only a fraction of his extensive contributions, as researchers, we have chosen to highlight those arguments that have most resonated with us and in which we have actively engaged, both through his work and in discussions with him. These issues, significant to our own research interests, have been the subject of ongoing dialogue with him over time. It is important to acknowledge that his influence extends far beyond the scope of our discussion, touching numerous aspects of the field that others may find equally compelling. Our reflections, therefore, are a glimpse into the vast expanse of his intellectual legacy, emphasizing those areas that have deeply impacted us and our conversations with him.

His innovative application of intersectionality—encompassing education, gender, policy, and Critical Theory—stands as a testament

to his belief in the transformative power of education. Beycioğlu's work, particularly in advocating for teachers' active participation in social justice, underscores a vital pathway for enhancing the educational landscape. It is a call for policymakers to embrace more inclusive and transparent decision-making processes, ensuring that education serves as a beacon of equity and inclusiveness.

Echoing the sentiments of Azorin & Murillo (2023, p. 294) in their tribute to Beycioğlu, we too affirm that "the use of collaborative networks in education can make a positive contribution not only to the improvement of schools but also to increasing their social justice levels." This principle, which he championed tirelessly, remains a guiding light for all of us committed to advancing the cause of social justice within the educational field and beyond.

In honouring his legacy, we continue the work he so passionately pursued, inspired by his dedication to creating a more just and equitable society in Turkey through education.

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