

Evolving Teacher Education Programs in Turkey: A Research Project and Adventure
Brooke Franklin & Brooke Siegler

The Middle Eastern Studies grant allowed us to partake in a research adventure to Istanbul, Turkey in June of 2013. Little did we know the adventure that was set out before us. The purpose of our research was to collect information to conduct a comparative study on international teacher education programs. Our areas of focus included government standards and implementation, incorporation of technology in the classroom, optimizing education of students with disabilities and diverse learning needs, and effective teaching styles. As we were sitting on the runway in New York preparing to take off and fly directly into Istanbul we received a news alert reading that violent protests had broken out in the streets of Taksim Square- the heart of Istanbul. We landed in Istanbul on a Sunday afternoon with our first research appointment that following Monday morning. Following the written directions of “friends” we had made in a local carpet store, we began our first day of confusion. Turkish, in no shape or form, resembles or sounds like English- so we mostly relied on pointing, dramatic hand signals, and looks of frustration to navigate the many modes of transportation our “friends” directed us to take. We finally reached our first research destination after walking 2 miles to take a tram, and then a ferry across the Bosphorus Strait, and then a bus with literally 41 stops (ours being the very last one), walking through a local produce market, being questioned by security, and then walking around the campus lost for 30 minutes before being found by someone who spoke English. After that it was smooth sailing- until we had to travel back to the hotel. Our second altercation occurred when Brooke Franklin attempted to break the law at a candy store. Trying to minimize our vulnerability as foreigners we kept the cash we carried on hand to a minimum, consequently we had to visit an ATM in the historical district to get our Lira for the day. We took a brief break from our busy research schedule to stop into a small candy store and picked out chocolates, taffies, and some Turkish coffee. Brooke took her purchases to the counter and handed the clerk a 50 Lira note to pay for them, which he immediately looked at and then started shouting excitedly. After a brief five minutes of confusion, yelling, and elaborate hand signals we learned that the money was counterfeit. So there we were, in Turkey, trying to buy candy with counterfeit money that we got from a Turkish ATM. Luckily they accepted credit cards and we were able to escape freely without having to explain ourselves through mime-like hand signals before the Turkish police. Miraculously we made it back to the United States a week and a half later. Despite the hardships of being a foreigner, the information and knowledge that we gained through this project is invaluable. The opportunities that the Middle Eastern Studies committee and the ASU History department have given us have made us better individuals, scholars, and future teachers.

