



Democratic Classroom Management in Higher Education: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine teacher candidates' awareness of the concept of democracy, how they describe this concept, how their perceptions relate to the democratic classroom management process in the faculty of education, and their opinions about the qualifications of faculty members. This research is a descriptive study. This study was carried out on 194 students who were studying in Eskişehir Osmangazi and Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education in the 2010-2011 academic year, spring semester. The study group was determined by using the convenience sampling method. In this study, the phenomenological pattern of the qualitative research method was used. For data collection, a semi-structured Democratic Classroom Management Interview Form developed through related literature was used. Data was collected through individual interviews by researchers. For analysis of the data, the content analysis technique was used and frequency values were also given using tables.

Key Words

Classroom Management, Democracy, Democratic Classroom Management, Faculty of Education, Teacher Candidates.

Democracy, from ancient Greek, is a term consisting of two words: *Demos* (public) and *kratos* (power) (Çiftçiyürek, 2007). There are many definitions of democracy written by authors from different literature (Chomsky, 2007; Dewey, 1996; Guyton & Rainer, 1999; Holden, 2007; Köker, 1992; Touraine, 2002). Democracy is defined as a form of government where the decisions and desires of the people themselves direct authority. In addition, the majority of minorities have the right to speak; people are allowed to use their rights and freedoms.

Also, it is described as a form of government based on sovereignty of the people (Doğan, 2005). Russell (2001) explains the purpose of education as giving ideas about the value of things apart from domination, and encouraging an integration of citizenship with freedom and individual creativity. In this context, schools' potential for creating democratic living spaces has become more important with each passing day. Democratic education creates public purpose and it is an educational administration's paradigm not to support the essential status quo (Mintrom,

* This paper was presented at the 20th National Congress on Educational Sciences, Burdur, Turkey, 8-10 September 2011.

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2001). At this stage, democracy emerges as one of the driving forces for providing change in the approach of management for schools and classrooms, one of the most important habitats for students. The classroom is a very important place in gaining an understanding of democracy because all educational activities are performed there (Cruikshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2003 as cited in Köse, 2009). In literature, there are some studies that reference the concept of democratic classroom management, the relationship of education and democracy, and the conditions needed for creating democratic schools (Anderson, 1998; Angell, 1991; Apple & Beane, 2007; Arabacı, 2005; Aydın, 2005; Aydoğan & Kukul, 2003; Başar, 1999; Çankaya & Seçkin, 2004; Demirtaş, 2004; Durmuş & Demirtaş, 2009; Duman & Koç, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Eikenberry, 2009; Glesson, 2011; Grandmont, 2002; Kayabaşı, 2011; Kesici, 2008; Millei, 2011; Oğuz, 2004; Pearl & Knight, 1999; Pryor, 2004; Riley, 2011; Sabancı, Şahin, & Fidan, 2007; Şahin, 2004; Yeşil, 2003; Yılmaz, 2011). The common emphasis of these studies underlines the need for developing an understanding of democracy in the educational environment, discussing the conditions for creating democratic classroom management, and for training teachers to have an understanding of democracy. Therefore, to determine teacher candidates' awareness of the concept of democracy, how they describe this concept, their perceptions relating to the democratic classroom management process within a faculty of education, and their opinions about the qualifications of faculty members are important and this current research's topics.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to find out teacher candidates' thoughts regarding democratic classroom management. In this study, a response to this question was required, "What are the opinions of Eskişehir Osmangazi, and Hacettepe Universities' Faculty of Education students about democratic classroom management?" In line with this purpose, the research questions for this study were as follows:

1. How do teacher candidates define the concept of democracy?
2. Which concepts does democracy bring to mind for teacher candidates?
3. According to teacher candidates, what are the characteristics of a democratic educational environment?

4. According to teacher candidates, what are the behaviors of democratic teachers?
5. What are teacher candidates' thoughts and reasons regarding what is to be gained from the qualifications of democratic classroom management?
6. What are teacher candidates' thoughts as related to the qualification of faculty members' democratic classroom management skills?

Method

This study was carried out on 194 students who were studying in Eskişehir Osmangazi and Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education in the 2010-2011 academic year spring semester. The study group was determined by using the convenience sampling method which is one of the purposive sampling methods in qualitative researches. To empower and support the subject being studied, samples are continuously renewed depending on the development of theory or subject (Kuzel, 1992). Therefore, in this study, interviews were continued to reach a required depth in the research data set. In this study, the phenomenological pattern of the qualitative research method was used. For data collection, a semi-structured Democratic Classroom Management Interview Form developed through the related literature was used. Data was collected through individual interviews by the researchers. For analysis of the data, the content analysis technique was used and frequency values were also given using tables. Reliability and validity studies were performed. To ensure the validity of the research results, the data analysis process was explained and all codes representing categories created in the research were given in the results section. In addition, validity is provided by citing from the students' opinions (Patton, 1987). Using Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula, coder reliability of the interview data was found to be 95%. In the process of content analysis, the raw data collected from field studies was converted into codes, and the codes created the categories. Categories were grouped under themes previously defined for the purpose of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 368).

Results

Findings Related to Teacher Candidates' Definition of Democracy

Teacher candidates' definitions of democracy were concentrated within these expressions: (1) to have

equal rights and freedom ($f=114$, 58.7%), (2) *self-government through elected representatives* ($f=33$, 17%) and (3) *a political system* ($f=28$, 14.4%). Equality, freedom, popular sovereignty, political system and human rights were expressed as the most emphasized codes by teacher candidates that studied in the faculty of education in both universities.

Findings Related to the Concepts of Democracy as Noted by the Teacher Candidates

The concept of democracy brought to the minds of teacher candidates these concepts mostly: (1) *freedom* ($f=126$, 64.9%), (2) *equality* ($f=115$, 59.2%), (3) *justice* ($f=63$, 32.4%) and (4) *rights* ($f=48$, 24.7%). The source of these connotations are seen to be the first things coming to mind as universal conditions, principals and values covered by the definition of democracy. It is also possible that freedom, justice and equality come to the forefront because they are the first expressed concepts coming to mind in all kinds of stages such as social, political and institutional.

Findings Related to the Characteristics of a Democratic Educational Environment

According to teacher candidates, a democratic educational environment mostly requires these kinds of characteristics: (1) *all students can express their thoughts without fear* ($f=92$, 47.4%), (2) *teachers and students have an equal voice* ($f=71$, 36.6%) and (3) *all thoughts are valued* ($f=67$, 34.5%). An environment where there is no fear or anxiety, no authority and hierarchy between teachers and students, where there is equal participation in the decision making process, and where the perception of values relating to rights and freedom of thought is high. These are considered to be democratic by the participants.

Findings Related to the Teachers' Democratic Behaviors

Teacher candidates mostly stated these expressions as a teacher's democratic behavior: (1) *to behave fairly and objectively* ($f=83$, 42.7%), (2) *to treat students equally* ($f=81$, 41.7%), and (3) *to provide student participation in decision making* ($f=73$, 37.6%). According to teacher candidates, fair, objective, equal and participatory management in particular define the democratic behavior of teachers. Other concepts traditionally forming the basis of democracy such as professional ethics,

efforts to expand areas of freedom, understanding the value of being an individual, actualizing a humanistic approach by viewing students as individuals, and being open to critical thinking were emphasized by a few teacher candidates.

Findings Related to the Gaining Level of Democratic Classroom Management Qualifications

It was found that 41% of teacher candidates thought that the democratic classroom management skills were gained to them. On the other hand 21% of teacher candidates thought that these skills were partly gained, and for 38% of teacher candidates that these skills were not gained. Participants who thought that their learning environments have democratic qualifications indicated finding professional knowledge courses in the faculty sufficient to transfer these skills. Participants who thought that they partly have these qualifications stated that theoretical aspects are not sufficient and practical examples are required for increasing the level. In addition, participants who thought that they do not have these skills explained their opinions by using negative impressions such as traditional behaviors, an affinity for criticism, and a lack of support for freedom of thought.

Findings Related to the Qualification of Faculty Members' Democratic Classroom Management Skills

It was found that 44% of teacher candidates explained that their faculty members had democratic classroom management skills. These participants described their faculty members with these qualifications: Stimulating, developing prestige and sensitivity, problem solving, analytical thinking, benefiting from multifaceted teaching methods and techniques, being fair in their assessment, implementing discussion techniques, and internalizing democratic values. On the other hand 19% of them said that they partly had these skills and 37% of them thought that they did not have these kinds of skills. The participants who stated negative impressions described their faculty members by using these concepts: discrimination, non-egalitarian, limited free speech, low competency in classroom management, traditionalism and conservatism are dominant, incongruity with behavior, discourse and attitude, a strong desire for control, obedience, not open to differences, and conformism.

Discussion and Conclusion

It was seen that teacher candidates defined the concept of democracy as human rights, the principle of equality, the consciousness of being individuals, and the people giving direction to management. These results were similar with the data obtained from Kınca and Işık's (2003) study on democratic values. In addition, teacher candidates were seen to perceive the concept of democracy as a structure on top of daily life practices and only as a political system. The concepts evoking the concept of democracy had parallels with the definition of democracy. In this context, expressed concepts such as peace, quality of life, socialization, and order and confidence might be interpreted as an indication of a positive attitude towards democracy. In addition, evocative expressions such as law, management and republic matched up with the description of democracy as a political system. Teacher candidates defined a democratic educational environment as a place where all students can express their ideas without fear, where teachers and students have an equal voice, where all thoughts are cared about, and where peaceful and safe communication processes are maintained effectively. When all findings related to the definition of democracy were taken into account as a whole, it was seen that the general definitions of democracy were integrated into the concept of a democratic classroom. In this study, it was seen that the codes expressed for the qualifications of a democratic educational environment such as critical thinking, intellectual competence, autonomy, active participation, power equalization, humanism, empowerment, social awareness, political awareness, rights and responsibilities, differences, equality, power sharing, supportive attitude, encouragement, problem solving, collaborative work, being student centered, consistency and free thinking showed similarities with other studies (Arabacı, 2005; Eikenberry, 2009; Glesson, 2011; Grandmont,

2002; Kesici, 2008; Millei, 2011; Oğuz, 2004; Riley, 2011) in literature. It was found that the research findings related to the democratic behavior of teachers had parallels with the qualifications of a democratic educational environment. The behavior codes expressed by the teacher candidates, such as information sharing, respect, developing different skills, empathy, being fair and equitable, creating a sense of trust, honesty, ethical norms, sharing responsibilities, creating alternative possibilities, cooperation and coordination, libertarian approach, developing sensitivity to social phenomena, and observing the common good also showed similarities with codes obtained from other studies (Angell, 1998; Aydın, 2005; Gale & Densmore, 2003; Leblanc & Skaruppa, 1997; Moller, 2006; Pohan, 2003; Pryor & Pryor, 2005) in literature. The responses of teacher candidates related to the level of gaining qualifications and their reasons were considered significant in terms of displaying successful practices and shortcomings in this issue. In this context, while some candidates stated that theoretical issues were transferred efficiently and good examples were generated, other candidates told that there were some shortcomings with this issue. In this context, while some candidates stated that theoretical issues were transferred efficiently and good examples were generated, other candidates stated that there were some shortcomings in terms of applications: theoretical courses meant nothing because of faculty members' attitudes, little attention was paid to training, and an inability to internalize theoretical knowledge. Therefore, it was found that the level of having these skills had parallels with the level of gaining qualifications. According to the expressions, it was stated that faculty members were insufficient in terms of having these skills. This finding showed similarities with the findings of other studies (Aydoğan & Kukul, 2003; Çankaya & Seçkin, 2002; Duman & Koç, 2004; Saraçoğlu, Evin, & Varol, 2004).

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