

# SIGNIFICANCE OF ESTABLISHING DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT AT SCHOOL

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## Abstract

Having democratic attitude is one of the best ways of living happily and peacefully in a modern society for individuals. Democracy is one of the most accepted ways of governing system in our modern world. In this case democracy education and establishing a democratic environment at schools are so significant for the students, teachers and administrators. Teaching democratic behaviors and attitudes and democratic management applications at schools are so important. Because these democratic gainings will be good examples for the students' future life. Because of all these reasons, one of the most important tasks of schools should be helping students to realize the values of democracy. Educational activities at schools are also extremely important for establishing democratic culture at schools. Behaviors of administrators, teachers, families, students and education programmes take place important roles during this process.

**Key Words:** Democracy, democracy education at schools, democratic education.

## INTRODUCTION

Democratic education is the process of educating society by means of education activities by transferring the principles and rules of democracy, human rights and freedoms being transferred into open or closed goals in the education programmes. In order that the culture of democracy becomes a way of life, it is important that individuals should be in the environment in which this culture prevails. Starting from the very early ages, students' manners and attitudes in their environment in which the students spent most of their time are quite important in the sense of interiorizing democracy. The basic term of being a democratic society depends on a democratic education (Edwards, 2008). The most important function of democratic education is to make the democracy natural attitude and way of thinking of man by developing the thought of democracy in human mind. Democratic education is a kind of education that depends on the power of individual's comprehension but not according to people's class, race, sex, diversity of thoughts (Gökçe, 2005). For this reason, democratic education is the guarantee of 'democratic order'. According to Dewey, an ideal democracy is in need of high level educated people so that they are aware of the consciousness of the social duties of political life and responsibilities (Gutek, 2001). Otherwise, as Plato said, 'when the education of people isn't enough, leaders' insatiable wishes that aren't depended on certain principles can convert democracy easily into demagoguery and despotism' (Gözütok, 2004).

Students, in the frame of democratic rules, should be provided to think, to argue, to criticise and to be criticised, to respect to different thoughts and majority, to act tolerantly, to reach an agreement. The individuals who live in the environment in which these activities are made, they can gain more easily and permanently by experiencing the attitudes and manners that democracy require (Yeşil, 2003). According to Chomsky (1997) two equally important goals should be determined; on one hand, the formation of wise and rational action; on the other hand the development of personal creativity and recognizing the other as a subject. As a result of democratic education, it is aimed that individuals internalize democratic values. If education is constituted on the democratic values, it is widely accepted that it should be a means of man's happiness and development (Garrison, 2001).

## PROBLEM

Democracy is one of the most accepted ways of governing system in our modern world. In this case democracy education and establishing a democratic environment at schools are so significant for the students, teachers and administrators. The aim of education should be that environment and freedom that are necessary for growing the

child's his own creative impulsion should be provided (Chomsky, 2007). This means that democracy can be learned with education.

According to Dewey, democracy and education go hand in hand and only democratic education can create a democratic society. In this sense, school should be a miniature society. So, children can obtain the basic principles of democratic life at school (Guttek, 2001).

The most important places where democracy can be learned are schools. Even though democracy is a learnable way of life, it is a system of values that are difficult to get only by education. It is not possible by putting lessons in the programme related with democracy and human rights. Because, putting the lessons related with democracy in the programme is meaningful to some extent (Cafoglu, 1997). School can be a sample of democratic culture by putting them into the environment where students learn by living a democratic life. Schools are, at that, expected to be democratic schools and for this reason, students at school have started to learn on their own, to communicate, to do wrong, to correct the wrong, to be stuck and to love (Harrison, 2003).

Democratic culture through democratic education will give the opportunity of educating students, starting from the early ages, that will have important places in the society in the future. In this context, to train individuals who have interiorized the democratic values will have an important place in dominating the society by developing the democratic culture.

### **Purpose**

The aim of this study is to show the effects and necessity of democratic education on students and society. It is also aimed to give information about the developing process of democratic education with the results of the researches previously done.

### **METHOD**

This study was designed in conceptual model. Democratic education is one of the most important concepts in our globalizing world. It can not be noted that the term 'democratic education' is examined and discussed sufficiently in the field of education administration. Within this perspective, this article is an introduction to the concept of democratic education. It aims to improve our understanding of democratic education. In this context, in this article, mainly the concept of democratic education has been described and related concepts has been introduced.

### **What Is Democratic Education?**

It is an indisputable fact that education is very important in understanding and applying democracy correctly as a form of life. Because democratic way of living can be learned by way of democratic life and schools (Ertürk, 1981). The aim of education should be that environment and freedom that are necessary for growing the child's his own creative impulsion should be provided (Chomsky, 2007). This means that democracy can be learned with education. According to Touraine (2004), it is evaluated that the most important indicator of democracy is the effort for forming citizens that have responsibility and look for the public's advantage.

Regardless the fact that education has many definitions, it can be stated that it is the process of getting skills which are necessary that the individual can continue his existence, that he can harmonise with his environment and that he can make himself real. That the education, although it exists in every part of life, is applied systematically and programmed with the help of experts generally happens in school environment (Arabacı, 2005). The aim of democratic education is to raise citizens who are quizzical and analyser in their world's view and besides this they know democratic rules and its applications deeply (Karakütük, 2001). According to Dewey, democracy and education go hand in hand and only democratic education can create a democratic society. In this sense, school should be a miniature society. So, children can obtain the basic principles of democratic life at school (Guttek, 2001). The principles of democracy and democratic way of life are interiorized and developed in democratic environments automatically. In an environment where human rights are respected, respecting human rights is learned and in an environment where there is tolerance, tolerance is learned. According to Yapıcı (2006) democratic attitude requires the acceptance of differences. In the societies where democratic education can be given, the individual must have the right of education, right of communication and right of rebel against the pressure and these rights must be used as required (Gözütok, 2004). In an independent society, education awakens the consciousness of democratic life, develops and provides the people to participate in democratic life effectively (Burton, 1968; Akt.: Gözütok, 2004). In democratic education, 'voting and being voted, criticizing and being criticized, the feeling of responsibility, the feeling of self-confidence, the feeling of cooperation, friendship, justice, mental education, social education, moral education' are very important concepts (Binbaşioğlu, 2000).

The most important places where democracy can be learned are schools. Even though democracy is a learnable way of life, it is a system of values that are difficult to get only by education. It is not possible by putting lessons in the programme related with democracy and human rights. Because, putting the lessons related with democracy in the programme is meaningful to some extent (Cafoglu, 1997). School can be a sample of democratic culture by putting them into the environment where students learn by living a democratic life.

Schools are, at that, expected to be democratic schools and for this reason, students at school have started to learn on their own, to communicate, to do wrong, to correct the wrong, to be stuck and to love (Harrison, 2003). In a democratic education, individuals who are respectful to traditions but they are not slave of them, who can think of developing better ones are educated (Karasar, 1984). Democratic education requires an approach that is suitable for growing individuals to gain the values of democratic culture. In a democratic school, facts are given very much importance; in this environment in which men are more important than rules, confidence has taken the place of fear (Dewey, 1965). In forming a democratic society, the importance of education is a fact that is accepted by everybody. Since the schools are the places where educational activities are given in a systematic and planned way, school and society influence each other constantly. In this sense, that schools reach a democratic structure has a very important place in society's interiorizing democracy. In a democratic school of a democratic society that prioritize men, student centeredness is essential. The individuals that are educated in schools like these has transferred the democratic culture into a way of life. Here are the some basic peculiarities of man who is equipped with a such culture (Dewey, 1965). He respects to others' thoughts, has got the ability of working in a group, is tolerant, is easy to get along with, is aware of his duty, performs his responsibility, has got an initiative in proposing and complies with majority's decision. To educate the individuals that have these peculiarities, democracy and education are necessary to be considered together. For this reason, we, as teachers, must interiorize a quizzical approach that is given much value in natural science and developed very carefully, is opposed to preconceived beliefs, traditions and institutions (Chomsky, 2007). In order to establish a democratic culture, it is important that education is a process that gives life to democratic culture. In establishing this culture, schools have got a very important role. That the democratic education in classes become a form of life will, substantially, contribute to that democracy will become a form of life in society.

#### How Is Democratic Education Environment Established At Schools?

In a contemporary society, the aim of a school is not to use up the existing knowledge but to raise individuals who can produce new knowledge, who use this produced knowledge in solving his problems, who can take independently a decision that is based on knowledge, who learn constantly and who are open to development (Doğanay, 2000). One of the goals of democratic education is to develop the students' skills for thinking, stating their thoughts freely, neatly, briefly and by respecting others' thoughts (Yeşil, 2003).

That a school can perform its duties wholesomely, especially by placing the element of human to the forefront, that it takes care of the psychologic and physical needs of the individual with democratic values that fit to the 3 individual is possible with exhibiting an understanding of management that is participative. In order to teach democracy it is important to apply it. One of the most important duties of schools is to make students grasp the democratic values as well (Bademci, 2000).

In establishing a democratic education environment, it is very important to be able to treat fairly, to incite the participation, to express the opinions sincerely, to secure the freedom of thought, teacher and student. That the administrator, teacher and students that establish the school society carry out the works of the school in cooperation is an obligation that democratic mentality requires. That the students take responsibility for the works that are related with themselves and their schools has got a very important place in providing the order and discipline at school. In this sense, that the activities such as the activities of students clubs at schools, the activities of school council, the election of student representatives, the election of class representatives are done by internalizing will contribute to the development of democratic culture at students.

The political system that is valid in democratic society and value philosophy base on 'human centeredness' and meet the necessity via educational institution. In such a society, the aim of education is to make the world more livable place for individuals. And also its aim is to establish an environment and opportunities, possibilities that are necessary means for human rights, freedoms, honors, happiness and development. Educational institution, in order to success this, both must have democratic features with its all components and must place democracy education in the content dimension. In our modern world, although people have different world views, they adopt the importance of equality of opportunity to lead a peaceful and happy life. This perception contains democracy in itself. The places where the democracy education is perceived the most efficiently are the schools. The schools in this sense have got a very importance as they are places where democracy is thought and applied.

In order that the students have democratic attitudes, the administrator must show democratic features. That the related partners participate in the administrative decisions and the administration can increase the partners' motivations, performances, loyalism and at the same time they are the basic principles of providing organizational efficiency and performance. Equality in education is not to ensure that everybody goes to same schools, but to make an equal contribution to that every student develops themselves in line with their skills and they become successful (Demirpolat, 1999). The democratic environment in classroom should improve students' mental skills such as understanding, thinking, questioning, criticizing, getting in touch, analyzing, synthesing, and evaluating (Güneş, 2007). Teachers should determine the classroom rules, the values and principles of the classroom with the cooperation of the students. It is difficult to make others agree with the decisions that are made by others. School rules shouldn't prevent the individual from the freedom of self-realization and learning (Arabaci, 2005). In learning methods, mainly the collaborative group works must be allowed.

In the educational activities, suitable learning environments for every student should be made by considering students differences. Educational organizations can not be perceived as the institutions that are similar to each other and produce clichéd brains. This means the end of the progress and creativity in thoughts. The education

that doesn't give the student the opportunity to learn actively is defined as the education depends on memorizing (Arabacı, 2005). The qualifications that the men of the 21st century must have are these: thinking creatively, making a decision, solving a problem, learning to learn, working together, cooperation and self-management (Bademci, 2000).

How Should A Democratic Education Programme Be?

While a democratic education programme puts individuals in the centre, at the same time it considers groups and cultures. Educators like Walker and Schwab don't consider the education programme as a list of goals and a list of activities that will reach these goals (Akt.: İşman and Eskicumalı, 2001). According to Walker, it is a series of decisions that makes the 'Programme Design' education programme and this series of decision have been chosen among a group of choices. Walker defines the process of decision as 'formulating the decision points and at these decision points being able to produce alternative choices and by developing arguments for and against these decision points, choosing the most defensible alternative' (Akt.: İşman and Eskicumalı, 2001).

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The goals and gains that are determined for a democratic education programme should take the individual differences into account (Burden, 1995; Gredler, 2004; Merry, 2002). It gets difficult to be successful in the classrooms which aren't formed according to students' interests and needs, being present and learning disabilities or where the goals which can't be reduced to this level are tried to be given to the student. In this process, taking the improving peculiarities of the students into consideration, the determined goals are essential to be given to the students systematically and in line with learning principles (Ertürk, 1982; Sönmez, 2007, Bilen, 1999; Varış, 1996). While the goals are being determined, that there will be individual differences should be considered. A contrary approach is not a correct approach from the point of equality of opportunity. The goals determined with the consideration that everybody is at the same level go away from both an educational approach and a democratic approach. The content of democratic education programme should be simply and easy so that every student can learn something. That the program of which content is very busy is tried to be taught is the indication of giving importance to speech more than needs (Duruhan, 2004).

The content also should be suitable for the student's readiness (Sönmez, 2007). With this side, the content should be improving and complementing the things that students bring to the learning environment (Campell and others, 1999; Merry, 2002; Gredler, 2004). A democratic education programme should have a content in which the students will answer not only the questions that are accepted to be important by adults but also the questions related with themselves. The content of a democratic education programme should balance the theoretical and practical lessons. An education programme of which content is very intensive overturns the theoretical-practical balance in their applications, therefore trying, observation, surveying that are very important in learning and the action of seeing their results cannot occur. A programme with an intensive content, when uniting with crowded classrooms, there is nothing left in favour of education. This point produces students who learns parrot fashion, who says over and over, who do not know the practical side of the lesson (Duruhan, 2004).

The content of a democratic education programme should present a structure that considers interregional social, economical, educational and life-sustaining priorities (Sönmez, 2007). The content of a democratic education programme should be based on scientific truths and should reflect scientific knowledge correctly (Smith and Rogan, 2005; Sönmez, 2007; Gutek, 2001). The contents that are the sources of the learning needs of the young generations should be impartial and clear so that it doesn't form a prejudice and it should reflects historical facts objectively without distorting them and it shouldn't waken historical enmities. A democratic education programme, taking the individual out of being a passive receiver, should make him an effective element of producing knowledge. The educational status or learning lives of a democratic education programme should be suitable with the level of each student's interests, needs and levels (Merry, 1995; Campell and others. 1999; Morrison and others 2004; Sönmez, 2007).

The educational status or learning lives of a democratic education programme should provide the efficient participation of students. The active participation is 'the degree of the participation of the students in the process of education explicitly or implicitly' (Marrison and others, 2004; Sönmez, 2007). Some activities should be planned in order that students should learn and improve the democratic relations. According to Güneş (2007) these activities should be activities such as 'discussion, voting and being voted, making decision, placing opposite views, solving problems etc.' and the participation of the students should be ensured. In this process, the teacher should be objective, act scientifically, and shouldn't support any views or thoughts.

Democracy bases on the common values of mankind and basic needs for a decent life. Since this feature makes democracy a common ground which has an equal distance from everybody and every part of the society, democracy focuses on the answer of this question 'What is true/good for everybody?' While organizing a democratic education program, it is necessary to consider the basic features of democratic education. These features can be collected generally under these sub-titles: 1- Mankind centeredness, 2- Student centeredness, 3- Human rights, 4- The balance of right-duty, 5- Respect to differences, 6- Individual improvement, 7- Value education, 8- The principle of Rationalism, 9- The training of kindness, 10- The dialogical training, 11- The authority of principles.

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**RESULT**

Democracy is a way of life and is a process which can be learned not with theoretical knowledge but by practising it. In the process of education, in the students' perceive and interiorize the democratic values and showing attitudes in line with attitudes and manners, the importance of in-classroom applications and in-school applications are great. That the students are in the process of a student centered education process in school environment is very important in interiorizing the democratic culture. On one hand, this type of environment improves the students' feeling of responsibility, on the other hand, it contributes to the development of democratic attitudes such as sharing, tolerance, respecting to others rights and agreement. Dewey has given importance to collective spirit in human attitudes. The more participation among the individuals there is, the more opportunities that are necessary for interaction and development of mankind there are.

Democratic culture through democratic education will give the opportunity of educating students, starting from the early ages, that will have important places in the society in the future. In this context, to train individuals who have interiorized the democratic values will have an important place in dominating the society by developing the democratic culture. Modern society occurs as a result of that people who have democratic consciousness are administered by democratic rules. School, as an institution that prepares individuals for the real life, should be equipped for the purpose of training individuals that have democratic skills, democratic practices during the education and the participation should be put in the center.

That the participation in the classroom is enabled creates a positive environment for both teachers and learners and provides the realization of the goals. That the other partners as well as the students of the school should be included in the process of school administration will ease the running at school and it will increase their loyalty. In this sense, the election of school representatives, the election of class representatives, the election of the head of the classroom, the election of the students to the social clubs are highly important. During the training, it is necessary to provide a structure that is democratic and takes care of students' improvement and running. The student centered training is the most suitable model to this structure and running.

With the student centered training, it is aimed to educate the individuals who have the skill of rational and scientific thinking, are researchers and questioners, who don't memorize the knowledge but can reach the knowledge, can able to share this knowledge, have the ability of communication, can use the technology efficiently, have improved themselves, and addition to this, have embraced the common values of mankind, creative, productive, give importance to team work, have learned to learn and interiorized the long life learning. At school and in classroom, that the student centered practices and activities that provide students' participation is concentrated will serve the aim of carrying out the education process with democratic values. It is important that school administrator and teacher training programmes should be organized accordingly and in this subject, in service training course should be given to the executives.

It is a clear fact that the understanding of democratic education cannot be given to the students with help of an authoritarian education approach. The training that will succeed this is the education process that puts the student in the center with its all factors, makes him active, causes the student to feel himself precious, bases on being sensitive for his rights and personality. In many countries, the need for the understanding of democratic education is as important and urgent as the solution of the primary problems of our modern world.

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