AN ASSESSMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN TERMS
OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY

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Abstract

How a person actualizes democracy as part of his/her life style is highly correlated with how that person perceives democracy. The perception of democracy by teachers who bear the responsibility of raising individuals believing in democracy and internalizing it into their life styles and teachers' practices led by this perception are tremendously influential over how the students—future adults—will perceive democracy and how they will practice it.

The purpose of this study is to determine the instructional practices of teachers who are in charge of raising individuals who apply and sustain democratic understanding in their lives during the process of creating a democratic society, and also to assess teachers' practices in terms of democratic participation, freedom, and autonomy.

Qualitative research design has been employed in this study. Semi-structured interview forms have been used, and the data have been analyzed through descriptive analyses. Majority of teachers who participated in the study have been evaluated as individuals who internalized democratic education and management, liked their jobs, had mature thinking skills, who were energetic, tolerant, unbiased, and respectful against others' opinions. Teachers' practices in their classes were determined to be compatible with democratic and participatory understanding.

Key Words: Instructional Practices, Democratic Participation, Freedom, Autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals who were brought up in a democratic educational setting are building blocks of a democratic society. Democracy education can simply be termed as the process during which individuals are equipped with democratic values, which eventually turn into behaviors and are applied in daily life. It is possible only through democracy education to raise active individuals who are aware of individuals' rights and freedoms in a society, who adopt them, and who both respect and defend others' rights and freedoms as well. There is no denial that educational institutions bear a crucial importance in this sense, and primary education has special significance among all the schooling system.

Democracy education in primary schools can only be meaningful by providing free, participatory, and autonomous learning environments and opportunities to students because democracy training cannot be

conveyed to the students by simply instructing them about the rules and theories in a manner isolated from daily life. Democracy education should be administered through a pluralistic and participatory approach that targets to convert information into internalized behaviors rather than just pouring loads of information over students. In order to increase the number of democratic citizens who will undertake effective roles in the society, students should learn the related knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for democracy through experiencing (Farrel, 1998).

Instructional activities should be practiced in accordance with democratic principles in order for democracy education at school to be effective and applicable. Needless to say, teacher's role is vital in this sense. Teachers should not only know what a democratic society is and how it functions, but also should be models in terms of the values and behaviors related with democracy in order to enhance those values and behaviors (Ravitc, 1991). In the end, teachers will be the determiners of students' democratic understanding and practices. Research indicates that the type of leadership presented by the teacher has a powerful impact on creating a democratic and tolerant classroom environment where differences are welcome and conflicts are solved through democratic methods, and on developing similar behaviors among students (Allman-Synder, 1975; Hawley, 1977; Hepburn ve Radz,1983, Levin, 1998). Teachers' perception of democracy, freedom, and autonomy may be sated as the cause to how they instruct in the classroom. Therefore, how primary school teachers working in Turkey perceive these concepts and how they apply them in their classes will form the basis for how future individuals of Turkish society will perceive, think, and live.

The purpose of this study is to determine the instructional practices of teachers, who are responsible for raising individuals who practice and sustain democracy, and to assess those practices in terms of democratic participation, freedom, and autonomy.

Accordingly, answers to following questions have been sought.
1- What are teachers' opinions regarding the concepts of democracy, freedom, and autonomy?
2- What do instructional practices contribute to democratic participation?
3- How free are students in the classroom?
4- Do the instructional practices support students' autonomy?

METHOD

This study is a descriptive qualitative research which is designed in accordance with its paradigm. In this study, qualitative research is preferred because of its paradigm of educational pattern, strategy, methods, techniques, meanings, concepts and special languages that teachers use. Hence, this makes it possible for teachers to determine themselves in their inner worlds and the meaning of their own experiences. In this case, creation of these patterns makes a holistic view of the research context through making analyses and understanding them.

Participators
Totally, 12 primary school teachers have participated in the study. 5 of the participating teachers are female while 7 of them are male. Average for teachers' professional experience and age are 7 and 30 years, respectively. The shortest term of work experience is 1 year whereas the longest one is 21 years. The youngest teacher is 23 years old, and the oldest is 45. All the teachers are graduates of primary education programs of Education Faculties. Class size at the schools where participating teachers work is 30 students.

Data Collection Process and Instrument
In this research, the semi-structured interview technique is used as data collection method. This method is not configured as solid or fully structured interviews. Hence, the interviews are flexible enough (Karasar, 1995). This method has been preferred for study because of it makes the researcher flexible and control over research.

Researchers prepared interview questions compatible with both the purpose of study and the nature of semi-structured interview technique. Literature review shed light on the question formation process. Interview form is of two parts; one containing descriptive information about the participator, and the other bearing the

questions. Questions are organized under 1-definitions, 2-participation, 3-freedom, and 4-autonomy; furthermore, several inquiry questions were added to some of the questions in order to get detailed answers. Two experts examined the questions to see if they were direct enough to produce relevant answers and if they supported each other. All the questions were tested to see if they were clear enough during a pilot application, and necessary arrangements were carried out subsequently. These trials were also conducted to check the internal validity of the research. Moreover, directly quoting from what the participators stated and announcing the results based on them are both important for validity (Wolcott, 1990). In the quotes by the participators, codes were assigned first, then their opinions were typed in italic form, and lastly line numbers were given in parenthesis. Within the last step of data analysis, findings were announced, and relevant interpretations and results were noted.

During data collection phase of the study, firstly appointments were arranged with voluntary teachers. Interviews took place on the arranged day and time of the appointments in the second researcher's office at the university. A voice recorder was used to record the data obtained during the interviews. The first interview took place on 4-2-2010 whereas the last one was conducted on 4-9-2010. The interviews lasted between 20 to 35 minutes.

Data Analysis and Interpretation
The data gathered through interviews was analyzed and interpreted through descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis method dictates to summarize and interpret the data obtained in the study in accordance with some predetermined themes. The data can be organized in accordance with the themes outlined by the research questions, or can also be presented under the guidance of the questions and aspects employed during the interviews and observation process (Yıldırım and Şimsek, 2000). In this study, the data was organized and presented according to the themes shaped by the research questions. A different code was employed for each participator. Each interview record was also coded from 1 to 12 as O1, O2,…O12; and each reply was marked with the corresponding code of each teacher. All the coded data was cut and the ones with different codes were filed in separate folders. Analysis of the data led to organization of opinions under related themes, which in turn led to the identification of sub-themes. The frequency of sub-themes in each opinion was determined and presented. Some opinions containing more than one theme were coded in different themes. The codes assigned to teachers were employed during the presentation, and a few direct quotes were made from some of the opinions.

FINDINGS

This part presents findings organized in accordance with the themes outlined by the research questions. Following are the 4 themes outlined after the interviews:
1- Definitions regarding the concepts of democracy, freedom, and autonomy.
2- Contribution of instructional practices to democratic participation.
3- How free are students in the classroom?
4- Contribution of instructional practices to students' autonomy.

Definitions Regarding the Concepts of Democracy, Freedom, and Autonomy
Participating teachers were asked what the concepts of democracy, freedom, and autonomy meant to them and how they defined those concepts.

Assessment of opinions regarding democracy pointed that *participation in decision making* was the most underlined theme (9 teachers) while 4 teachers emphasized *equality* in their definitions. Other themes mentioned in the participators' definitions were *government by the majority*, *art of loving humans and humanity*, *resisting against violence*, *respect for differences*, and *freedom of expression*. Themes identified upon analysis of the concept of freedom were *inexistence of pressure* (4 teachers), *power to make one's own decisions* (3 teachers), *living without harming the others* (4 teachers), *expression of opposites of commonly accepted thoughts and behaviors* (1 teacher), and *living as one likes* (1 teacher). Although dominant themes determined for the concept of autonomy were *ability to make decisions* (8 teachers), *inexistence of pressure* (1 teacher), and *the right given to a person or group* (1 teacher), there were also some other themes normally not

included in the definition of autonomy such as *having privacy for one's life* (2 teachers) and *expressing oneself under an indiscernible watch* (1 teacher). According to Kongar (1997) and Buyukkaragoz (1989), democracy actually means respecting people and regarding them as values. Findings obtained from the interviews support these definitions.

Participator **O2** said, "*To me, democracy is a system where each student has a say, and a system that respects and values students' desires*" (line 18-19). **O3** stated**,** "*Democracy is the government of the minority by the majority. It's really hard to reach consensus in democracy. The drawback of democracy is that it doesn't take what the minority says into consideration but that of the majority*" (line 16,-18) **O10** mentioned the following; "*Democracy is participation and respecting different thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. It is the opportunity to freely express oneself. Democracy is the chance to speak free from fears and influences by other people*" *(line 22-24).* As underpinned by O2 and O10, democracy is a system of values. These values are honesty, tolerance, human rights, effective participation to management, social justice, equality, security, health, and education. Democratic growth can hardly be mentioned for a country where citizens do not have and live by these values. As Karakutuk stated (2001:35), democratic education is the one that respects an individual's personality and honor, and that provides opportunities for everybody in accordance with their interests and skills without any discrimination based on gender, race, religion, and creed.

Regarding the theme of freedom, **O3** said, "*The limit to freedom is the discomfort of others*" (line, 22); and **O7** verbalized, "*I think freedom is to live without harming anything or anybody around*" (line, 23)*.* Freedom can be defined as the use of personal rights without harming the others' rights. In this sense, democracy does not mean unlimited freedom, but a system of rules. Only exact application of these rules can keep democracy alive. Mesquita and Downs (2005) define democracy as a concept in between responsibility and freedom. This definition is consistent with the participators' opinions.

What some of the participators stated about autonomy is as follows: **O5**, "*Auto (self) and –nomy (system of laws) are generally used for governments. –nomy represents the power to rule. So, autonomy is the self-power one has*" (line 27-29); **O8** stated "*… the ethnic structure of our country is truly suitable for that. Autonomy is the freedom that each ethnic group such as the Kurds, the Shia, and the Circassion has to express their own cultures and traditions*" (line 29-30) thereby linking the concept of autonomy with the concept of freedom necessary to acknowledge, protect, and improve the cultural variety and to prevent any sort of discrimination. Cultural diversities and varieties within a nation should not be ignored and destroyed in a country ruled by democracy. Social peace cannot be actualized through insulting or ignoring different identities. Citizens having differences in terms of language, religion, and culture should not be converted into a homogenous group that can wear the same uniform; different thoughts and opinions should be welcome and threshold for tolerance should be increased (Tacar, 2004).

Novak (1994) and Osler & Starkey (1994) state that the fundamental blocks of democracy are justice, equality, and freedom. Precise understanding of the fundamental blocks of democracy bears a crucial role in building a democratic culture within educational institutions, like in any other organization. A genuine democratic management and life style can only be achieved through exact understanding of democracy and internalization of values and attitudes identified with democracy. Sendil (2009) states that if autonomy is regarded as "setting one's own rules", then we can see "free" individuals who ignore any rule apart from the ones determined by themselves. It is impossible for such an opinion to prevail in collectivist countries such as Turkey. There is a society apart from the individual.

Contribution of Instructional Practices to Democratic Participation

Several questions conceived to be related with the concept of democracy were directed to teachers during the study. Some of these questions concerned if students' ideas were asked for the seating plan in the classroom, for the outcomes of the courses, for the exam types and evaluation procedures, and if everybody followed the decisions made by the majority. Following presents the findings reached after the analysis of the answers given to the aforementioned questions.

5 of the participating teachers stated that they didn't cooperate with students during planning the seating organization of the class, and pointed that it was the teacher, not the students, who determined the seating plan. 3 of them answered that they absolutely considered students' opinions about seating plan while 4 teachers emphasized that they did ask students' opinions, but they were the one to make the final decision in accordance with their professional experience. **O1**, "*I don't talk to students about the seating plan because I try hard to make the most effective and beneficial seating plan for the class*" (line63-66). **O2,** "*…my opinion comes before their opinions, of course I ask them, but I set priorities such as health and physical conditions. Also, I take precautions to prevent emergence of groups and to change the strict rules of the environment such as seating girls and boys next to each other*" (line 24-30). **O3**, "I ask their opinions at the beginning of the term. I let them sit where and with whom they want to. If any disturbances occur in time or I get distracted, I make small changes" (line 32-34).

The number of teachers who think that students should not be let to determine what to learn in the classroom is 8. These teachers believe that students are not mature enough to decide on their developmental needs. Besides, the existence of a curriculum to be followed also prevents teachers from asking students' opinions about what to learn. 2 teachers stated that students could decide on their needs if they were informed about the outcomes. 2 other participators also pointed that students could sometimes, though not always, determine what to learn.

O2, "*…I think they can't decide. Students can't know what their developmental needs and can't udge what to learn. Therefore, letting students decide what the outcomes will be may result in unwanted behaviors"* (line 63-65). **O5,** "*Students are not that much conscious. They are not aware of what they should learn*" (line 68-69). **O7**, "*Students may at least choose what to learn if we give them the options*". **O6,** "*The outcomes are already identified in the curriculum. So, they have to learn what the ministry of education thinks they should*" (line72-76).

Teachers who stated that students' ideas about the activities, homework assignments, and subjects to be covered in the classroom are important, and they always consult with them form the majority of the participators (9 teachers). On the other hand, the number of teachers who mentioned that they consulted students' opinions about what to do in the classroom, but their own opinions mattered more is 3. Teachers also underlined that consulting with students increased the students' motivation and participation. Teachers pointed that the predetermined list of homework assignments is what mattered about the activities; however, they let the students choose whenever possible.

O2; "*… I value what the majority think during deciding on something in the class. In this way, students feel that they have a say in the class, and they become more confident. However, students may not always be able to make decisions compatible with their developmental characteristics; thus, teachers may sometimes feel the urge to make relevant directions. Shortly, teachers should have the big say in decision making*" (50-52). It wouldn't be wrong to judge that hidden curriculum is in charge in classes if teachers make decisions on their own and practice a strict authority in the class although they believe in the importance of consulting with students and democracy is the best system for that (Doğanay, Çuhadar ve Sarı, 2004). Students are generally influenced by what teachers do rather than what they say; therefore, the implicit program in the class may impede the development of a democracy culture even though the formal curriculum sets it as one of the purposes. Related research underpins the importance of democratic understanding at schools in equipping students with values associated with democracy (Gundogdu, 2004; 24-26; Gerzon, 1997; Parker, 1998).

Almost all the participators (10 teachers) stated that they never consulted with students about the types and dates of the evaluation procedure because students would never want to be tested and the individual differences among them would never lead to a consensus. Yet, 2 teachers said that they asked students' ideas about they type of the exams, and they made necessary arrangements accordingly. Again almost all the participators underlined that exams were administered on dates approved by the students, and one teacher pointed that examination dates were determined by the school administration and students only had the chance to discuss about them.

O3, "*I don't ask students because they always want to postpone the exams. It is again me who decides on the type of the exam according to the type of the course*" (line 43-48). **O5,** "*I don't ask them. I don't ask about the date neither. The type is also determined by me*" (line 50-51). **O10,** "*The board of teachers set the type of the exam*" (line 65). Teacher's authority is required for the application of pluralistic and participatory democracy in the classroom. However, an authoritative teacher usually unconsciously dictates, patronizes, forces, asks for cooperation rather than cooperating, advises, dominates, criticizes, spots mistakes, and punishes (Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982). Findings of this study indicate that teachers are generally authoritative and behave undemocratically about the aforementioned instructional practices.

When asked if the decisions of the majority were followed in the classroom, 8 teachers stated that generally everbody followed them. On the other hand, 3 teachers pointed that rules set by students were not always practiced and final decision always belonged to them. Furthermore, another finding indicated that few dominant students in the classes affected the decisions of the majority. **O3,** "*Dominant students have a major role in my class. Succesful students who have leadership qualities greatly influence the other students*" (line 52-53). **O6,** "*We set them together, but the final decision is mine*" (line 61-62). **O5,** "*Of course, we negotiate, but it is always me who makes decision finally…*" (line 58). **O8,** "*You can't leave entire course to students. Also, teacher should not be the only person directing the class. Everybody should behave as a team in the class*" (line 58-60). **O3**, "*Successful ones with leadership qualities drastically impact the other students*" (line 52-53). Rights, responsibilities, and duties of each student should be clear to everybody in a democratic class (Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcalf, 2003).

How Free are Students in the Class?

6 questions conceived to be related to the concept of freedom, which was defined as thinking or behaving without any restrictions or pressure, and as an individual's ability to make decisions solely based on his/her own will free from any outer source of influence in the dictionaries of Turkish Language Society, were directed to the participators.

One of those questions asked if students had the opportunity to express their opinions openly in the classess without fearing from anybody. A majority of the participators (8 teachers) stated that their students felt free in expressing themselves while 4 of them pointed that their students occasionally hesitated when talking about their opinions sometimes because of peer pressure, sometimes because of the teacher. Teachers attribute the hesitations displayed by their students to their families, especially the ones coming from rural areas. Another theme identified at this point was individual differences that students displayed. All teachers underlined that the atmosphere in their classes was supportive of free expression.

O1, "*My students can precisely verbalize what they think without hesitating and fearing from anything in my classes*" (line123-124). **O2,** "*…Students can freely speak out what they think in my classes. They already know that I'd never react negatively even though they say something wrong. I work at both village and downtown schools, and I can say that students in village schools do not behave like that. Those students almost always feel shy when talking with their friends or teachers due to the fact that they are often ignored by family members*" (line71-76-73). Studies conducted in Turkey pinpoint that opportunities to communicate and discuss cause and effect relations that would foster children's mental and linguistic development are scarce in rural areas with low economic income. Parents in low income families are generally not educated, and they generally do not have the vocabulary necessary to engage in verbal discussions (Kâgitcıbasi, 1990:48).

Just like O8, participator O3 also associates students' freedom to say what they think with their young ages. **O3;** "*They don't have any mechanism for censor since they are too young*" (line82). **O4,** "*As a teacher, I put no limitations, but most of them are shy to express their opinions. They can't openly communicate because they are afraid of what their peers will think about that or their peers will misunderstand them*" (line 82-85). If the communication between the teacher and the students is good, there will be a positive learning atmosphere in the classroom. If the communication and relation are bad, then the learning atmosphere gets damaged, and it becomes difficult to reach the educational goals. One can state that the atmosphere in the classroom is highly dependent on the attitudes and behaviors of teacher (Ergün&Duman, 2003). The German proverb, 'Classroom is the mirror of the teacher', clearly supports this.

Following is what teachers stated as the reasons. **O9,** " …*I link that to families because what children think is ignored and children are not accepted as individuals in some families*" (line 74-75). Being autonomous and initiative for a child is highly correlated with the interaction between the child's family system and other social institutions and cultural factors. Being autonomous starts with the identification of a self. The first and the most important physical and social environment that determines the creation a self identity is the 'family'. Being a major factor in forming one's identity and socializing, family conducts socio-cultural characteristics of a society to an individual. Thus, family is a social environment that shapes an individual's behaviors. People have hard times making decisions about even their individual lives, and they often seek for advice from those they believe and trust. In this sense, family members have major influence over an individual's decisions. According to Tezcan (2009), there are several Turkish family types varying in size, type, and characteristics. Authoritative and patriarchal understanding is still common for all the family types. However, the family relations of the future should be egalitarian and participatory.

8 teachers emphasized that there were several influential factors when asked if students were willing to accept different opinions in the class. Analyses revealed that those factors were attitudes of families, student's personal features, and the education provided to the student. Especially, familial atmosphere and the attitudes of parents are highly effective for children to develop self confidence. Families should furnish their children with active, verbal, and social habits necessary for adaptation to society, and should stimulate and improve their skills needed to be successful at both school and social life (Yavuzer, 1996). If parents do not support their children's opinions, ignore the fields that they are successful, and constantly criticize their children, children cannot size the limits of their own power (Erdoğdu, 2006). O12 pointed that students did not easily accept opposing ideas, but start to think that opposing ideas may also be true if asserted by someone they trusted and loved. However, it was also mentioned that egocentric thinking style pushed students away from respecting differences.

All the participating teachers underlined that they valued their students and their opinions. Anaylses pointed that teachers perceived valuing students as presenting positive feedback only when wanted behaviors were displayed by their students. Teachers who follow the traditional approach employ rewards and punishment effectively in shaping students' behaviors (Nieto, 1992). Some teachers, on the the hand, think that they prove if they value students' opinions or not by directing them to make some choices. **O5,** "*I'm doing, but do they really think? They will notice when they are old enough. I remember warning one of my students in a Social Studies class, I said 'You shouldn't have done that, it never suits you', and s/he replied 'I'd never do that if I knew you thought like that…'* (line 88-89). Students sometimes feel the urge to say what their teacher wants to hear during some instructional activities such as research, project, and building a personal folder that are commonly used in democratic educational settings; which, as stated by Gore (1993), can be termed as concealed authority of the student centered classes. In this way, the power hid inside the teacher's authority manifests itself more implicitly and different from the one observed in classes where students gather simply as listeners. This silently instructs the obedience culture praised by the authoritative teacher, and sets the 'obeyer' and the 'obeyee' apart, which can only be tackled through democratic acts displayed by the teacher (Şahin ve Çokadar, 2006).

Participators were asked if they let the discussion of marginal behaviors in their classes, and how they reacted if they saw such a behavior. All teachers mentioned encountering with marginal ideas and behaviors in their classes. A majority of them said that they started a discussion about the behavior and encouraged students to think about and question it. None of the teachers was identified as bearing dismissive or assimilative behavior, but displaying accepting and tolerating behaviors.

O1, "*…yeah, I face with marginal behaviors...I start a discussion about the behavior, and try to direct the kid from the wrong behavior to the the right one by questioning*" (line 153-154). **O8,** "*…like always said, suppressed behaviors and ideas may suddenly emerge from somewhere else*" (line 128-129). Different opinions should be valued to reach new ones within the contemporary educational approach (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Moreover, the aim is to develop students as a whole together with cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic aspects (Shor, 1992). It is not possible to have information about everything anymore. In the classroom, it is necessary to

teach opposing ideas, how to compare the proof that these opposing ideas base themselves, and that no idea is absolute.

Researchers noticed that participating teachers did not practice the opinions of the minority in their classes. The number of teachers who think that the opinions of the minority are also worth practicing and who provides opportunities to practice them is only 2. **O6**, "*what the majority think is not necessarily the right one. Especially, the students coming from the villages have really low levels. We should value their opinions as well*" (line 123-124). Participator O9 expressed that s/he paid attention to the opinions in the minority because s/he did not want students to feel incompetent, and accordingly s/he provided opportunites for those activities reflecting minority opinion. As a matter of fact, the philosophy of liberal democracy clearly declares that *the worst pressure is the pressure exerted by the majority*, and points that the most vital quality of a democratic system is the protection of each individul's opinions, no matther how few in number they are. So, findings indicate that participating teachers do not adopt liberal democracy approach.

Contribution of Instructional Practices to Students' Autonomy

Meaning independent management or setting one's own rules and regulations free from others, the concept of autonomy can be conceived as students' ability to take care of themselves in accordance with the rules they set along with sticking to a higher authority. In order to assess the instructional practices in terms of autonomy, participating teachers were asked if they included group works in their classes, what they considered during the planning of group works, if they preferred vote by secret ballot for the election of class perfect or other social teams, and how they decided about the rules to be obeyed in the class or the school. Analysis of the answers showed that a majority (10 teachers) of the participating teachers included group works in their classes because they had a socializing impact and they fostered love, respect, and tolerance in the classroom. **O9,** "*Group activities are one of the most effective tools to develop and foster tolerance, respect, love, cooperation, trust, solidarity, sharing, and responsibility*" (line 118-119). The participators who stated that they did not have the chance to include group works pointed the size of the class and the heavy curriculum as reasons. Moreover, students' being at the early stages of primary education makes it difficult to arrange group activities in the classroom. All the teachers take students' opinions into consideration while forming the groups. Besides, all teachers also mentioned that they took some precautions to from heterogenous groups as well. **O2,** "*Exchanging students across groups for different group activities affects the class environment and the quality of the product positively. It is better to have mixed groups*" (line145-146). **O9,** "*I let students to decide the groups. However, if I notice that they always form the same groups, then I interfere because this same group does not only pertain the class work, they always hang out together*" (line 110-113).

All the participating teachers expressed that they employed vote by secret ballot for all types of elections done in the class. They also stated that all the votes were counted one by one after the election, and a total democratic election was carried out. **O7,** "*We had a vote by secret ballot for the election of school representative*" (line 134). Including students into decision making processes and providing the opportunity to experience democracy are both duties of teachers. In this sense, participating teachers were determined to fulfill this responsibility.

Participators were asked about how the rules to be obeyed in the classroom and the school were determined. 3 of them said that students had no say in this process while 9 of them expressed that all the rules were determined together with students. Participator O2 also mentioned that the principal of the school, parents, and other teachers were also included in making decisions about the rules. On the other hand, participator O4 stated that there was an established system at school and all the rules were already determined by written regulations. Participator O5 emphasized that rules were set by only the teacher and students did not have anything to do with it. **O5**, "*There is something we call school culture. Each institution may have their own rules. It's not the administration, but the teacher that sets the rules, and of course, each teacher has their own rules. Students are informed about the rules, but they don't pay much attention*" (line 143-149). Gordon (1996) points out that strict behaviors displayed by teachers and school administration may construct the source of several problem behaviors. Furthermore, students are easily affected by the practices and politics applied at schools. Being generally in a passive perceptive mode at schools, students should be consulted about the instructional

practices as much as other ones. If not, the expectations of the constructivist approach, accepted widely throughout the world, cannot be met (Corbett and Wilson, 1995).

O3, "*Students do not have the slightest role in deciding about the rules. Routine rules generally prevail. Even teachers do not know the rationales behind some rules. Teachers bear either very little or no significance in terms of rule setting, let alone students*" (line 104-107). "*I set the rules in my classes, but all of them favor my students. For example, there is no dress code in my classes. Sometimes, my students show up in shorts or undershirt in classes*" (line 114-116). Participator O3 stated that their school system did not allow democratic participation of neither students nor teachers. On the contrary, the same participator's perception of freedom was found to be limited with dress code. Some clichés heard among teachers, administrators, and teacher candidates serves strengthening the authoritative approach and turns it into a common value; some of these clichés are *democracy is not suitable for our social structure, our society is not mature enough to be governed by democracy, democracy is totally incompatible with our students,* and *democracy does not do any good to our students* (Şahin and Çokadar, 2006). Democratic life style is to predict the participation of the society into some important managerial decisions. If students are not involved into making important decisions in the classroom, they, themselves, may be at extreme ends of either being authoritative or obedient in their future lives (Ergün ve Duman, 2003).

RESULTS AND SUGGESTIONS

This part of the study includes results deduced from the findings and interpretations, and suggestions based on these results.

Majority of teachers who participated in the study have been evaluated as individuals who internalized democratic education and management, liked their jobs, had mature thinking skills, who were energetic, tolerant, unbiased, and respectful against others' opinions. This result is crucial in terms of teachers' skills to practice and sustain democracy in their classes.

Moreover, the definitions provided by the primary education teachers for democracy, freedom, and autonomy have been found to be mostly consistent with the literature. Concerning these definitions, themes of loving humans and humanity, resisting against violence, respecting differences, and freedom of expression have identified. In this sense, teachers' knowledge and awareness about these aforementioned concepts have been determined to be sufficient.

The study has indicated that teachers have a democratic approach in arranging and organizing the classroom environment, providing opportunities to discuss marginal behaviors, in paying attention to the opinions of the minority, selecting the themes of homework assignments and class works, planning and forming group activities, employing vote by secret ballot for elections, and determining the rules to be obeyed at school. On the contrary, findings have also showed that teachers are the primary determiners in setting the learning activities and outcomes and deciding on the types and dates of exams although students' opinions were noted. In spite of the fact that teachers want their students to have a say in instructional practices, they still believe that their students are not competent enough to make those decisions. Analyses have also pointed out that teachers believe that they should be the ones making some decisions, and at the same time that they try to grow confidence in students by convincing them those decisions are of great importance. This is a prerequisite in creating the student profile accepted by democratic approach since democratic life needs individuals that search, question, and discuss rather that obey and accept.

An examination of both positive and negative behaviors displayed by teachers in terms of democracy has revealed that the positive ones outnumber the negative ones. However, some teachers have been identified to display undemocratic behaviors especially about the administration of instructional process.

Teachers have tried to create a free atmosphere where opinions are openly discussed On the contrary; teachers believe that students are incompetent in tolerating other ideas. Reactions given by teachers who encounter a marginal behavior have been found to be supportive and accepting.

Instructional practices teachers conduct during teaching-learning process are of crucial significance in democratizing the learning environment, students, and eventually the society. One should always bear in mind that participation is an indispensable part of democratic education. Participation should not only be perceived as students' attending to the classes and expressing their opinions, but also as involvement of different people into important decision making processes regarding instructional practices.

Teachers should simultaneously consider multiple factors that shape democratic environment such as students' participation into decision making, attitudes towards marginal opinions, classroom seating chart, instructional strategies and methods used, individual differences, variety of instruments and tools, and techniques employed in assessment and evaluation.

It may be necessary to increase teachers' awareness of democracy and to inform them about new practices during these days when rapid changes are observed globally. Teachers may be provided with an in-service training about democratic classroom environment. Democratic approach should not be artificial, rather it should be sincere, and it should be discernible in attitudes and behaviors. It is the only way for teachers to be the primary and reliable supporters of democratic life.

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