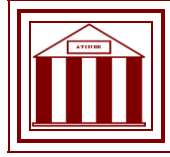


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**Toward a View of Classroom Social
Psychology: Examination of Real Life
Classroom Situations**

**Gamze Inan Kaya
Assistant Professor
Istanbul University
Turkey**

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
Email: info@atiner.gr URL: www.atiner.gr
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Toward a View of Classroom Social Psychology: Examination of Real Life Classroom Situations*

Gamze Inan Kaya
Assistant Professor
Istanbul University
Turkey

Abstract

In the academic formation programs of candidate teachers, classroom management is a main domain. Therefore, candidate teachers are expected to develop an effective perspective on classroom management issues in real classrooms. This study aimed to reveal the opinions and suggestions of undergraduate senior year prospective teachers on the real life classroom situations from a social psychological perspective. For the present study, the participants were asked to write down their opinions on and the suggestions for solutions to five real life situations, which had taken place in real classrooms formerly. Following the written data collection, a group discussion on each real life situation was run among the participants. The participants were asked to report their suggestions on and exchange ideas over each real life situation. This discussion phase of the data collection was video recorded. At the data analysis phase of the study, written documents and video recordings were transcribed. The transcribed data was analyzed qualitatively. As for the data analysis phase, the themes were revealed and discussed from a social psychological perspective to the classroom life. The findings of the study demonstrated that in solving problems, candidate teachers taken different roles, respected the norms of the classroom processes, attributed the behaviors of students and themselves to different causes and had attitudes toward classroom management.

Keywords: Classroom management, social psychology of classroom, real life classroom situation.

Corresponding Author:

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Introduction

In addition to the knowledge on the professional subject area and the instructional efficiency, the knowledge on classroom management strategies is the asset for candidate teachers. The teachers need to develop an effective perspective in order to deal with classroom management issues. In the literature it is reported that the inefficacy to solve problems in classroom is one of the main causes of job dissatisfaction or burnout for teachers (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006).

Classroom management is basically defined as creating a learning environment where students' participation is maintained (Brophy, 2006; Erdoğan, 2008, Good and Brophy, 2008). In this definition the role of teacher is emphasized related both on designing the learning environment and regulating participation of the students. These roles of teachers' involve effective time, resource and effort management and elimination of obstacles before a positive learning environment (Erdoğan, 2008). In a broader definition (Jones, 1996), the effectiveness of teachers over the learning environment or the students is determined related to have knowledge on the classroom management, developmental and learning psychology issues, to have efficacy to generate positive relations in classroom, to use optimal instructional methods by taking into consideration the individual differences, to utilize methods to upgrade the level of learning task related behaviors and to have efficiency in counseling for students who have disruptive behaviors (cited in Emmer and Stough, 2001). Since, the constructivism in education (Piaget, 2007; Vygotsky, 1998) questions the omnipotence of teachers in classrooms, the aim of effective classroom management should be, additionally, defined as providing all the students with the equal learning opportunities and supporting them to become self-regulated learners (Emmer and Stough, 2001; Schunk, 2001).

Keeping in mind the aspects listed above, classroom management is a research area in education, which is mostly practical, and needs the theoretical underpinnings mostly from psychology. Although, in the related literature, classroom management is in congruence with educational psychology research (Brophy, 2006; Dembo, 1991), a perspective to classroom life from the theoretical background of social psychology is promising (Babad, 2009; Kutnick and Rogers, 1990; McMillan, 1980).

Classroom is a physical environment where a community's social interactions take place. In addition to the physical aspect of the term, it also defines the community itself. In the classroom, especially in primary and elementary years, the instructional practice is attended by a group of same aged minors and the instructional practice is directed under the authority of a professional adult. At this point we face the nature-based difficulty of education in terms of classroom management. That is, classroom education is not based on voluntarism, instead being a citizen; all students have to attend formal education beginning from a very early age. Besides, being obligatory, this classroom education is prolonged for years (Babad, 2009). Therefore, even

the students, who started their education life with a great enthusiasm, may become less volunteer in the case of less effectively managed classrooms.

From the perspective of social psychology, the students are members of a group and this membership lasts long and usually involuntary. This description may seem pessimistic, yet, in terms of effective classroom management, it is also promising. That is when the teacher knew the social psychological processes and dynamics of the classroom as a group; it is easier to settle positive learning environments.

This study is based on the social psychological perspective to classroom management. In the study five classroom real life situations are utilized in order to understand the positions of teacher candidates in terms of social psychological issues such as social roles, social norms, attributions and attitudes.

Method

Participants

The participants of the study were 51 candidate teachers. The sample attended to the “Classroom Management” and “School Practicum” courses in the same semester in their formal education program. All the participants were undergraduate senior year students from the Primary Education Department Science Education Program at the faculty of education. Eleven of them were male and 40 of them were female.

Measures

In this study the qualitative data was collected by 5 real life classroom situations. These real life classroom situations were chosen by the researcher from the classroom observations and in-service teacher interviews depending on both relevance and prevalence in a primary school typical classroom.

The first real life classroom situation had taken place in a classroom, where the students know each other formerly, yet they newly met the teacher. One of the students, who participated in the activities eagerly in the beginning of the class, seemed neither listening to the teacher nor participating in the second half of the lesson. The second situation was on the dilemmatic position of a teacher who threatened her class to complain on their misbehavior to the school principle. In the third real life situation, the teacher was receiving a letter from one of her students. In the letter the student was complaining about the teacher’s unfair and neglectful behaviors toward oneself. The forth situation was about a student’s usual position before the class when he/she was given the word. The classroom regularly laughed at him/her any time he/she began to speak in public. The last real life classroom situation was about a student, who was very successful in academic issues yet usually avoided to contact others socially.

Procedure

For the present study, the participants were asked to write down their opinions on and the suggestions for solutions to five real life situations, which had taken place in real classrooms formerly. Following that stage of data collection, a group discussion on each real life situation was run among the participants. The participants were asked to report their suggestions on and exchange ideas over each real life situation in the discussion. The discussion was video recorded. In the data analysis phase of the study the written documents and video recordings were transcribed. The transcribed data was analyzed qualitatively.

Findings

In this study, the data was analyzed from a social psychological perspective to the classroom management. Therefore, pre-determined data categories were utilized related to the classical research titles in social psychology. In the data analysis phase, after the transcription, the qualitative data was coded for each real life situation. Following that, the thematic coding was done as the deductive analysis for all situations according to the pre-determined categories such as social roles, norms, attributions and attitudes. The details of real life classroom situations were reported above, however at this point; they are rephrased from a comprehensive perspective. In effectively managed classrooms, both teachers and students feel secure and respected. The real life situations covered in this study, are the situations, in which one of these two parties feel uncomfortable, insecure, disrespected, confused, unattended, powerless and so on and so forth. That is, in these real life classroom situations, the positive climate, related to the social psychological issues was degraded.

Therefore in the data analysis, all the situations were categorized into the social roles, norms, attributions and attitudes. Under the main category of social roles in the classroom, the roles of teacher in each real life situation demonstrated variability. The roles for teachers included being observer, investigator, caregiver, help-seeker and ignorant. As for the next category, which is the categories of social norms, the themes are derived as follows: behaving consistent, not to humiliate, respecting for individuality, apologizing for mistakes. In addition to that, attributions category involved teacher-based and student-based attribution themes. The last pre-determined category related to social psychological perspective to classroom was on the attitudes. Accordingly, in the data analysis, the attitudes of teacher candidates revealed were as follows: Waiting before taking an action and the intervention. The categories derived in each real life situation can be monitored in the Table 1.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to reveal social psychological conceptions of candidate teachers on the five real life classroom situations in terms of classroom management strategies. As it was mentioned above, social psychology's classical research areas are perspective-widening to understand the classroom real life, because classroom is a special community including one adult and same-aged students (French, 1990).

Therefore, from a social psychological point of view, the findings of the study revealed that; in solving problem situations, candidate teachers, gone into different roles, respected the norms of the classroom processes, attributed the behaviors of students and themselves to different causes and had differing attitudes toward classroom management.

As for the roles reported by the respondents, they were mainly related to the social and managerial skills of the teachers rather than their instructional role. This finding can be interpreted in the light of the idea that classroom management and instructional methods and techniques are different subject areas, although in the classroom life they take place simultaneously (Erdoğan, 2008). Even though, the teachers reported some instructional practices, the instructional interventions, aimed not only to accelerate learning performance of students but also to manipulate the students to feel comfortable and respected. For example, in some narrations the prospective teachers said "I encourage them to take part in group tasks". This explanation seems as an instructional intervention. Although it is so, the main aim behind this manipulation was care giving to the disadvantaged students in the specific real life classroom situation.

The social norms were the second pre-determined social psychological category that was utilized in the data analysis. Accordingly, the social norms category included the titles of behaving consistent, not to humiliate, respecting for individuality and apologizing for mistakes. In a positive classroom environment, both teachers and students usually obey these norms. However, some candidate teachers had a need to legitimate their position in obeying the norms, for instance the norm of "apologizing for mistakes". They explained their obedience to this norm in terms of the higher hierarchical position of teacher in the classroom. That is they said although they were older and more powerful compared to their students, they had to be wiser and humble at the same time.

The attributions of teacher candidates on the real life classroom situations were categorized as either being related to the teachers or to the students. In some contexts, teachers questioned the legitimacy of their own behaviors in classroom. This argumentation led teachers to behave in different roles and according to different norms listed above. For instance, when teachers defined their roles as "investigator" they emphasized researching their own role in the problem situation. At the same time, for example, the teachers, from the role of "observer" reported monitoring the behaviors of students in order to reveal their attributions.

Lastly, attitudes of teachers varied depending on their cognitions and affective experience in classroom. Therefore, depending on their attitudes toward classroom management, they reported to behave, either after a period of observation and data collection or intervene immediately for the sake of the instruction or the students. These can be classified under preventive or reactive classroom management styles (Good and Brophy, 2008). In other words, the teachers who had a strong attitude toward preventive classroom management would tend to observe for a while before taking an action, in order to generate a preventive model for similar problem situations. On the other hand, a teacher who mainly emphasizes the discipline for the sake of instruction may prefer directly intervening at the moment of the occurrence of misbehavior.

In conclusion, the study analyzed the classroom management approaches of candidate teachers in the face of real life classroom situations from a social psychological perspective. In this study, the classical research titles of social psychology literature were applied as a pre-determined categorization for the data. The results supported that this perspective was eligible for understanding the classroom management related issues in education.

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Table 1. *The Categorical Analysis of the Data*

Category	Definition	Examples
1. Social roles	Roles are the position-related conceptions on the norms, patterns, expectation etc. in a social context.	<p>Observer: “In this case formerly I observe the student for a while.” “Before intervening, I monitor the student for a while. I mean I observe her/him.”</p> <p>Investigator: “I search for the reasons.” “I search for the reason that why my student is excluded from the group.” “I use sociometry to learn more.” “I collect data on my hypothesis. Will it be verified or falsified?”</p> <p>Caregiver: “If he/she is in that position I ask whether he/she feels ok.” “I call him/her in name.” “I touch on shoulder and ask for what is wrong.”</p> <p>Help-seeker: “I consult him/her to the school psychological counselor.” “The school counselor may prepare a classroom intervention program on empathy.” “I ask for help from the school counselor.”</p> <p>Ignorant: “I ignore the behavior. Because I don’t want the others’ attention to lesson is disrupted.” “I ignore their laughter. Otherwise I may reinforce them positively.”</p>
2. Social norms	Social norms are, the non-written but commonly shared standards of behavioral patterns of the group members in a social situation.	<p>Behaving consistent: “In order to save the consistence and decidedness of teacher in the eyes of students the teacher should take an action.” “When the students see that the teacher behaves inconsistent, then the lessened trust to teacher will be lessened more.”</p> <p>Not to humiliate: “I try to do this by not hurting his/her feelings.” “What I have to take in consideration is not to hurt any parties feelings.” “I say to class that it makes me feel unhappy when they laugh at their friend.”</p>

		<p>Respecting for individuality: “I have a private conversation with the student.” “I am sure there is a subject on which this student might be successful.” Apologizing for mistakes: “Even teachers can make mistakes. I accept my mistake.” “If I really think that I made a mistake, I apologize. Teachers should apologize when needed.”</p>
<p>3. Attributions</p>	<p>Attributions are the causal explanations of behavior. They are made related to the circumstances under which they take place.</p>	<p>Teacher-based: “Did I do something that can prevent him/her from involvement?” “She/he may be silent because of my misbehavior.” “I think of where did I do a mistake?” Student-based: “I ask questions on the subject to manipulate him/her to participate.” “The most important thing for students is being treated fairly.” “The student may be thinking that she/he is already successful. She/he doesn’t need others.”</p>
<p>4. Attitudes</p>	<p>Attitudes are the mental representations toward notions. All attitudes have behavioral, cognitive and emotional components, which work in accordance.</p>	<p>Waiting before taking an action: “I have an interview with him/her. How has he been bothered? Then I try to solve the situation.” “I ignore the laughter.” “I observe the student both inside and outside the classroom.” Intervention: “I encourage the student to share own ideas.” “I want a written reflection from the class on what do they think about my behaviors toward them.” “I ask the same question to the student who laughs at the other.”</p>