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PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS ABOUT DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM PRACTICE: INFLUENCES ON INTENTIONS FOR PEDAGOGICAL INTEGRATION

Dr. Nehaben Dahyabhai Thakkar*¹

¹Lecturer (Ex I/C Principal), Christian College of Education, Anand, Gujarat.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated pre-service teachers' intentions to integrate democratic practice into their teaching and the influence of attitudes and beliefs on intentions. Participants were comprised of 250 student-teachers from 15 Colleges of Education affiliated to Gujarat University, S. N. D. T. University, and Sardar Patel University of Gujarat. Intention was determined solely by attitude, and attitude by two beliefs about outcomes of democratic practice. Pretest to posttest changes on knowledge of how to integrate democratic practice corresponded to levels of course implementation.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Outcomes of Teachers as Democratic Practitioners

Belief in the importance of a democratic society remains strong in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Goodman, 1992; Ravitch, 1983). Support of this importance is based on positive attitudes towards three dimensions of democratic principles: (a) the opportunity for full social participation (Goodlad, 1996), (b) equal opportunity in a diverse society (Spring, 1999), and (c) a moral norm of justice and fairness (Gutmann, 1987). There is some evidence of the positive effect of schooling in preparing democratic citizens. Students in democratic classrooms develop a "fund of democratic knowledge"; that is, they learn and work in classrooms where the situated use of democratic practices is evident (Parker, 1996b, p.195). This "fund" might be derived from two aspects of the practice of teaching: teacher content knowledge and pedagogical strategies. Teachers who know how to use democratic strategies are deliberative in developing a democratic class environment (Soder, 1996; Pryor, 2004b). Teachers whose social studies methods courses include integrating civic knowledge into curricular content areas (history, political science, economics, geography and anthropology) are more skilled in teaching civics (citizenship in a democracy) (Parker, 2001).

A recent report regarding the preparation of future secondary teachers for citizenship educator roles suggests that the responsibility for developing a disposition to teach with tolerance and [understanding of] difference lies first with the university itself (Kobow, 1999). For pre-service teachers in a social studies methods course, reflecting on teaching practice while participating in schools might foster intentions to integrate democratic practices (Darling-Hammond, 1996; O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reizug, 2000; Parker, 2001; Pryor, 2000).

SAMPLE

The sample comprised of 250 student-teachers with 125 male and 125 female student-teachers from 15 Colleges of Education affiliated to Gujarat University, S. N. D. T. University, and Sardar Patel University of Gujarat.

INSTRUMENT

In the pilot study, multi-item forms of the questionnaire scales obtained high alpha reliability coefficients ranging from .90 to .97. These multi-item scales correlated highly with the instrument's single-item measures (ranging from .92 to .97), suggesting the reliability of the scores on the final instrument. The instrument consisted of 15, 7-point, bipolar evaluative and probability scales. These scales measured the variables of the theory of reasoned action, as well as four aspects of knowledge of implementing democratic practice. To measure behavioral intentions, the scale included items such as "I intend to implement democratic practice into my teaching in the year 2013" (item 1). Attitudinal items used the stem question "My attitude toward (feeling about) implementing democratic practice ..." (item 2), and normative items used the stem of "The teachers at my school think it is important.... (Item 12). Operational knowledge was measured with items such as "I know how to integrate democratic practice into my teaching" (item 4), and knowledge of constituent elements of democratic practice were measured with scale items such as "I know how to integrate liberty and freedom into my teaching" (item 5).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The instrument was administered by each instructor during class, at the beginning and at the end of the semester. Pre-service teachers were given 20 minutes to complete the instrument. Data were analyzed by multiple regression of criterion variables (i.e., intention) on the theoretical predictors (e.g., attitude, norm, outcome beliefs), by correlation, and *t* tests.

DISCUSSION

This section reports the five most important findings: (a) the influence of attitude and subjective norm on intention to implement democratic practice, (b) the influence of three beliefs about potential outcomes of implementing democratic practice on attitude toward that behavior, (c) the influence of three normative beliefs on subjective norm, (d) the influence of three beliefs about knowledge of how to implement three dimensions of democratic practice on knowledge of how to implement democratic practice as a whole, and (e) changes in knowledge of how to implement democratic practice following course completion.

Influence of Attitude and Norm on Intention

In the multiple regression of intention on attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm, only attitude carried a statistically significant beta weight. This multiple correlation rose noticeably after treatment. The regression of pretest scores produced a multiple correlation of .714, accounting for just under 50% of the adjusted variance ($F = 35.352$; $df = 2, 68$; $p = .000$). The

regression of posttest scores produced a multiple correlation of .844, accounting for just over 70% of the adjusted variance ($F = 90.200$, $df = 2, 73$, $p = .000$). There were no statistically significant pretest-to-posttest changes in attitude or norm for any of the three classes, and intention scores rose significantly only in class 2. But in each of the three classes, the intention and attitude scores moved noticeably closer together after the treatment. These scores rose in classes 2 and 3, but fell slightly in class 1.

Influence of Outcome Beliefs on Attitude

The regression of pretest scores produced a multiple correlation of .737, accounting for just over 52% of the adjusted variance ($F = 26.119$; $df = 3, 66$; $p = .000$). The regression of posttest scores produced a somewhat larger multiple correlation of .780, accounting for just under 60% of the adjusted variance ($F = 37.231$; $df = 3, 72$; $p = .000$).

In the regression of pretest scores, only enhanced student learning carried a statistically significant beta weight ($\beta = .706$, $p = .000$). In the regression of posttest scores, however, two outcome beliefs carried statistically significant beta weights. Enhanced student learning carried a smaller beta weight than in the pretest regression of .452 ($p = .003$), and enhanced student cooperative behavior carried a larger beta weight of .559 ($p = .002$).

Pre-service teachers begin their field experience with two main concerns: (a) content domain area (what shall I teach?) and (b) pedagogical process (what strategies should I use?) (Enz, Cook, & Weber, 1992). Teaching exemplars such as designing and implementing lessons are important to interns (Gould, 2000; Willard-Holt & Bottomley, 2000). During the field experience, pre-service teacher focus of concern shifts from organizing teaching to enhancing students' cooperation (Sanders & Meloth, 1997).

Influence of Normative Beliefs on Subjective Norm

The regression of pretest scores produced a multiple correlation of .354, accounting only for just over 8% of the adjusted variance ($F = 3.110$; $df = 3, 65$; $p = .032$). The regression of posttest scores produced a multiple correlation of .558, accounting for just over 28% of the adjusted variance ($F = 10.833$; $df = 3, 72$; $p = .000$).

In the pretest regression, none of the three beliefs carried a statistically significant beta weight. In the posttest regression, however, the belief that other teachers wanted the interns to implement democratic practice carried a statistically significant beta weight ($\beta = .652$, $p = .000$).

Influence of Three Beliefs on Knowledge of How to Implement Democratic Practice

The knowledge of how to perform the various constitutive parts of a multi-component behavior, such as implementing democratic practice, could be seen as predictors of the capability of participants to perform the target behavior. To test this notion, scores on knowledge of how to implement democratic practice were regressed on three aspects of democratic practice,

knowledge of how to implement in teaching (a) liberty and freedom, (b) justice and fairness, and (c) equality/equal opportunity.

The regression of pretest scores produced a multiple correlation of .653, accounting for 40% of the adjusted variance ($F = 16.587$; $df = 3, 67$; $p = .000$). The regression of posttest scores produced a multiple correlation of .845, accounting for 70% of the adjusted variance ($F = 60.846$; $df = 3, 72$; $p = .000$).

In the pretest regression, knowledge of how to implement liberty and freedom was the only predictor that came close to statistical significance, and carried a beta weight of .579 ($p = .000$). In the posttest regression, knowledge of how to implement liberty and freedom was again the only statistically significant predictor, carrying a somewhat lower beta weight of .532 ($p = .000$), but knowledge of how to implement equality and equal opportunity came much closer to statistical significance than previously, carrying a beta weight of .226 ($p = .065$).

High Implementation Level-class 1

Two types of implementation were used: (a) focused observation forms and (b) reflection on knowledge of how to implement constituent components of democratic practice. Students' written narratives on their forms indicated skill in analysis of instruction. For example, an analysis of liberty and freedom as a democratic practice in the classroom is found in the writing of one student:

Learners need a variety of worksheet types so that liberty and freedom will be reflected. In my [mentor's] class, there is very little variation of worksheet type; all students do the same work at the same time, even if they have different abilities. I'd like to see students select what they need for practice.

Medium Implementation Level-class 2

Use of forms was instructor directed and graded. This instructor used instructional modeling (narrative story) as a form of integration of democratic practice. Students met with a fourth-grade teacher who taught about democracy by developing classroom social studies units. The instructor of the course remarked about the effect of linking student field experience to narrative story about democratic practice: Once an intern related a playground story about name calling and race. This led to a few minutes of rich discussion and also triggered memories of others to relate their stories. These incidents were an opportunity to highlight the point that democratic practice is part of school everyday not just during social studies. Will it quite naturally follow that they will themselves engage in DP [democratic practice]? I think, yes they will.

Low Implementation Level-class 3

Forms were used as independent assessment of observations in the schools, but not as a discussion point for analysis of democratic practice. The focus of instruction in this class was district-wide testing and assessment. Students were given the district tests in history for grades 8

and 10 as a means to create an awareness of testing content for their future teaching. This treatment level aligns well with infusing more content into a social studies methods course, however purposeful integration of content with behavioral goals was not evident in course implementation. The instructor of this course remarked about broad effects of field observations on pre-service teachers; instructor emphasis of a knowledge-based outcome was evidenced in the instructor's comments:

Teachers don't know the extent of social studies in the entire school system. They do not see where it fits, especially concepts connecting history, economics, geography, and government. They do not see where they [the domain areas] are connected. It is important to concentrate on teaching these domain areas.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the pre-service teachers had strong intentions to implement democratic practice into their teaching, and that these intentions were controlled by attitude toward this behavior. Higher levels of democratic practice integrated in the social studies methods course were associated with higher levels of student knowledge of how to implement democratic practice.

As students progress through their teacher education program, importance should be placed on restructuring the social studies methods course to increase two aspects of democratic practice: (a) civic knowledge and (b) pedagogical approach. Specific strategies within the methods course should include the following: (a) allocation of course time for professors and students to discuss definitions and implications of democratic principles in a school setting, (b) resources for students to develop skills in reflection and analysis of the field experience, and (c) course grades highly weighting evaluation of students' skills in analyzing and implementing democratic classroom practice. To strengthen the use of these strategies, scaffolding the field experience with opportunity for methods course reflection is of particular importance.

Social studies faculty should engage mentor teachers in the interpretation of democratic principles and strategies for integration of democratic practice into their teaching. While the influence of mentor teachers on pre-service teachers is well documented (Enz et al., 1992; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990), interpretations of this influence require additional research. For example, in this study, the increased influence of subjective norm on intention on posttest scores suggests the need for study of mentor teachers' knowledge and beliefs concerning democratic practice. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to investigate students' intentions during the second semester of the field experience-student teaching, and into in-service teaching. School administrators' attitudes and beliefs should be investigated. University and department mission statements should support the importance of teachers as leaders of students prepared to participate in a democratic society. Finally, civic education and pedagogical integration of democratic practices into methods course should gain particular attention in pre-service program

design, an outcome of less probable success if democratic practices are not aligned with the field experience.

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