DEMOCRATIC PROCESES AT SCHOOL: CONCEPTIONS AND TENSIONS

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a study carried out with the interest of determining the conceptions and tensions of democratic processes in school, this study was focused on the students of basic secondary school of Sede 2 El Aposento of the Municipality of La Cruz. Taking into account the objectives of the research, the methodological approach was qualitative and the interpretation was carried out in the light of hermeneutics. Specifically, the focus group interview and the Q-sort method were used. In addition, it was supported by grounded theory, which is the support of the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti, used for this study. Finally, it is determined from this research that the students' conceptions and tensions about the democratic processes at school are hindering the correct experience of democracy and participation due to the absence of real spaces that promote it, the vertical relationship between teachers and students, the scarce democratic training and the insufficient interest that the students give to it.

Keywords- democracy - participation - citizenship - school.

Resumen

En este artículo se presentan los resultados de un estudio realizado con el interés de determinar las concepciones y tensiones de los procesos democráticos en la escuela. Este estudio se centró en los estudiantes de básica secundaria de la Sede 2 El Aposento del Municipio de La Cruz. Teniendo en cuenta los objetivos de la investigación, el abordaje metodológico tuvo un enfoque cualitativo y la interpretación se realizó a la luz de la hermenéutica. Específicamente, se utilizó la entrevista a grupo focal y el método Q-Sort. Además, se apoyó en la teoría fundamentada que es el soporte del Software de análisis cualitativo ATLAS.ti, empleado para este estudio. Finalmente, se determina a partir de esta investigación, que las concepciones y tensiones de los estudiantes sobre los procesos democráticos en la escuela, están obstaculizando la correcta vivencia de la democracia y la participación motivada por la ausencia de verdaderos espacios que la propicien, la relación vertical entre docentes y estudiantes, la escasa formación democrática y el insuficiente interés que los educandos le otorgan.

Palabras Clave: democracia – participación - ciudadanía – escuela.

Introduction

Democracy in school is understood as a set of skills and abilities designed to get a social coexistence based on values such as solidarity, participation and respect among others. Therefore, one of the main functions of school is to develop understanding of democracy. Which implies to listen to the voices of students, in the same way, it is necessary that the school becomes an organization where not everything is pre- established, so it is essential to estabish spaces where confidence be developed and there is comfort to express it freely (Prieto, 2003).

In addition to this, democracy in the school is related to different variables, for example, the concept of democracy in itself; in this sense, democracy is a life style that can be practiced at every age and in all the environments where people are involved (Osoro and Castro, 2017) According to Rousseau (as quoted in Touraine, 1990)" It is about identifying Democracy with common will" (p.163).

Other variable of interest to understand democracy in school is the students` participation, understood it as "a set of processes that favor male and female students to construct and become protagonists of their own education" (Garcia, D., 2014, p.90). According to (Garcia, F., 2009, p.07) democracy is the compromise and, therefore, is related to social action, in those fields where the students as a group have the chance to participate".

Citizen Formation is other variable tackled to the understanding of democracy in school. Citizenship is a right, it is a day by day conquer that permits the establishment of a democratic society (Jaramillo, 2008).

According to what was mentioned above, the school has a fundamental role in the making of citizens, though it is not the only who has that responsabilty; in the school knowledge, skills, attitudes and conducts can be learned .These must be characteristic of a citizen.

Therefore, the main objective of the research is to determine the conceptions and tensions of basic high school students regarding democratic processes in the school La Sede 2 El Aposento, for this puporse, it was necessary to establish the following specific objectives: Analyse the tensions that make difficult the participation of students in the scholar democratic processes ; characterize the students`conceptions of the participation in the scholar democratic processes and finally establish sense units of the conceptions of the students about the participation in the scholar democratic processes beginning from the found recurrences. In order to do that, it was essential to make an individual analyis of each component and then establish the possible existing relations among

themselves in order to understand the ideas, thoughts and points of view of the participants of the research process.

About the methodology: the tackling of the variables mentioned before was executed through the qualitative paradigm and the analysis of the results was developed in the light of hermeneutics. Besides, it was supported in the founded theory that is the basis of the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti used in this study.

Initially, it was made the taking of data by means of the interview to the focal group and it was used the method Q-sort that had the participation of 21 students of basic high school of the site 2 El Aposento, village El Aposento, municipality of La Cruz. In the second phase, to do the theorical analysis, it was established relations among codes beginning from the variables: Participation, Democracy and Citizenship. The third phase was the analysis of the information from the method Q-sort and the interview with the focal group using the quotes of the relationships of the codes. The last phase involved contrasting the results of the two data collection instruments.

Finally, one of the essential contributions of the final study is not only the understanding of different variables that influence the democracy in school, but also to contribute in the interpretation of the influence of democracy, participation and citizenship making. In the same way it is outstanding to mention that in the main findings it was established a contradiction between theory and practice, in other words, there is a diference between what students think and know about democracy and what is experienced in the classrooms and in the educational setting at large.

Methodology

To do the study it was established a qualitative epistemologic view. The objective of the qualitative investigation is giving a methodology of investigation that permits to understand the complex world of the living experience from the point of view of the people who had lived it (Taylor& Bodgan, 1984).

In the same way, the analysis of problems and human phenomena must tend for its interpretation, rather than its quantification. The subjective elements of human beings, both as individuals and as a part of social groups determine the scope of the work.

Regarding the research approach, this will be based on the hermeneutics. Sheiermacher (1768-1834) is considered the father of modern hermeneutics. He states that hermeneutics is the art of understanding, beginning from a dialogue (Càrcamo, 2005).

The hermeneutic method looks for saving texts, that is, the narrations of the subjects of study that make clear their world of sense. The narrations became texts that in turn are changed into a story about their lived experience. Hermeneutics permits to understand human life from speeches. Therefore, a story becomes a narration that makes evident the experience of whom expresses it and the story is susceptible to be transformed into a linguistic unit called a text (Rios, 2005).

The research had as a unit of work the students of the site 2 El Aposento, located in the village El Aposento, a rural area of the municipality of La Cruz; and the analysis unit corresponds to the high school students of sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth scholar year, to totalize 21 students.

The techniques used for gathering information were the interview to a focal group based mainly on conversation. In the same way, the applying of a survey using the technique Q-sort, which has as a principal value the opinion or point of view from based concepts and sub-concepts, looking for the analysis of what is for the students the meaning of participation and democracy in school.

The software ATLAS.ti software was used to do the analysis of the information. This program was designed at the end of the eighties by the German Thomas Murh. It permits the researcher to interpret the textual data. Its function is not to do an automatic analysis, but to make easy the operations that are normally made on these texts to do the qualitative analysis, segmentation of the text, making of comments and taking of notes, labeling of the text among other aspects. At a higher level this software allows to make semantic networks and the establishment of links to recover texts about logical, semantic and proximity operators and with the purpose to help the researcher to find new networks of relationships and in this way theorize about the data (Penalva, Alaminos, Frànces & Santacreu, 2015).

Results

This section presents the analysis of results of the present research by using the instruments that allows to have a more efficient approach to the objectives. Firstly, it is necessary to stand out the importance of the participation of the group of study; therefore, it was determined to use interviews to the focal group and the surveys based on the technique Q-sort, to be then analysed by the software ATLAS.ti.

Regarding the results of the interviews, it was established that students agree to carry out the democratic processes in the educational institution, basically, they express that they select the spokeperson

or student representative, to strenghten the cultural, playful and recreational aspects, on the other hand , there are students with a deeper democratic vision, as they say that these processes help to the improvement in the school, because they serve as support to deal with difficulties, inconveniences and issues originated in the institution.

In relation with the above mentioned, it is convenient to observe that there are divided opinions regarding the election of the students`representatives, because on one side there is a group of students who is centered in the characteristics related to the cultural topics, though this aspect is esential in the formative process, democracy conveys a more trascendental view; in the same way there are students who rescue the democratic value and lead it to the argument where leadership and support around the educational community prevails.

In the same way, it is relevant to outline the opinion of a reduced group in the institution which expresses that the election of a spokeperson is important because it can help to generate new ideas to deal with the needs observed during their democratic period.

On the other hand, the great majority of students who participated in the study revealed their dismotivation to participate in the democratic processes, they say that being part of the scholar government is a time consuming work and implies dedication; moreover it is necessary to have the personality of a leadership , because leaders have to make known themseves as people with authority who transmit confidence to the educational community and above all, to be right people and able to fulfill their proposals on behalf of the improvement of the institution. Nevertheless, , some population of the first scholar years expressed their positivism to participate as candidates, since they consider it as an excellent idea because if they are part of that government, the communication with other participants is going to be easier, moreover, they can contribute as supportive leaders to the youngest students. In the same way, it is esential that the democratic representatives count on the support of their teachers, who must train them to develop skills focused on the fulfillment of the proposals, this must be done with the aim of preparing this population for the future, since the values learned in school will be put into practice in their daily lives.

According to the profile that a student representative must have, the students mostly mentioned the same characteristics, they agreed that he or she must be responsible, reliable, punctual and above all to have a good academic performance; though these qualities are important in a representative, only one student mentioned leadership as the most important characteristic to be considered for someone who wants to make part of the scholar government, because to be

a leader implies to manage someone`s ideals in benefit of his or her community. Other aspect is that expression is essential in this process, but most students declare that they are not listened; therefore, their opinions are not considered. Though the scholar government must foster participation because it is an educational community, it is important that all the participants be included in it and be listened in their concerns and whose new ideas that can be originated from the issue be observed. In the same way, it is necessary to inform about all the processes that are carried out in the institution, because both teachers and students and parents are active people in the educational field; therefore, their opinions must be taken into account and communication be established as a crucial entity to get meaningful changes.

Regarding democracy and citizenship the students show that the democratic processes contribute notably in their formation as citizens, because when they use the mechanisms of participation as a democratic system since their school years, they get involved in the political aspect, that they will exercise in a future, because when they become adults they will be free to elect their respective candidates that contribute with their ideals, for this reason it is necessary to establish that in the school it must be emphasized that the democratic process of which they would be participants must be priorized through transparence and above all by the free election of the representative.

Through the ATLAS.ti. sofware, it was made the analyisis of the semantic network and the relationship between codes, so, three important aspects were determined in the research which were explained before, these aspects stand out for its determinant role in the study, these aspects are: participation, citizenship and democracy. Through the method of analysis Q-sort, it was determined the hierarchy level established by the students to the concepts most adapted to the treated topic, this analysis doesn`t show rights or wrongs, because it has in consideration the participation and the thinking of the group that is being studied. The aspects studied were: democracy, participation, leadership and citizenship, these concepts were crucial to know the point of view of students, though they are closely related, some variables were detected. Its organization took into account the number 1-4 where 1 was the most important and 4 the least important aspect.

Figure 1. Order of importance of words associated with Democracy.

DEMOCRACIA

1. Libertad 2. Voto 3. Abuso 4. Imposición
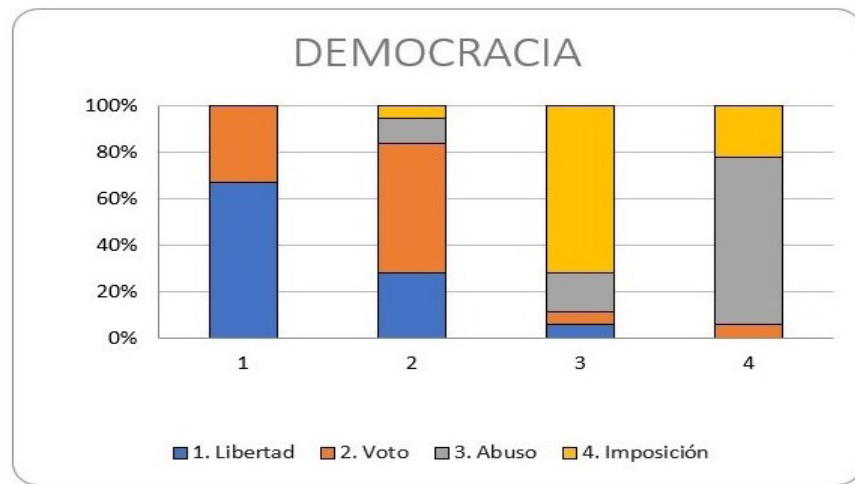
Source: this study

About the ítem democracy, the students organized it in a hierarchic way, having the first as the most important, in the next way: freedom, vote, abuse, imposition. According to this, it is concluded that students establish democracy as something favorable, because when they assign the level of importance to freedom and vote, good results are obtained.

Figure 2. Order of importance of words associated with Participation.

PARTICIPACIÓN

1. Colaboración 2. Responsabilidad 3. Silencio 4. Indiferencia

Source: this study

Regarding the item of participation, the group of students organized the information in tas follows: cooperation, responsability, silence, indiference; these results refer to the fact that this aspect is closely related to the positive concepts, cooperation and responsability that together contribute to establish a free and transparent democracy.

Figure 3. Order of importance, words associated with Leadership.

LIDERAZGO

1. Compromiso 2. Bien común 3. Perjuicio 4. Daño
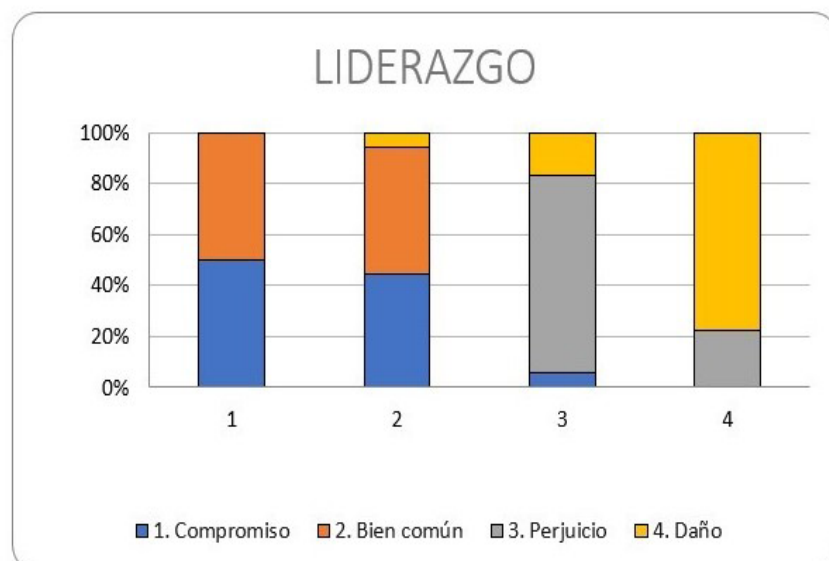
Source: this study

Regarding the item of leadership, the students organized the concepts as follows: compromise, wellfare, damage, harm. It is evident to understand that these results are oriented towards the collective benefit, an essential aspect in the democratic process.

Figure 4. Order of importance of words associated with Citizenship

CIUDADANIA

1. Derechos 2. Deberes 3. Irresponsabilidad 4. Injusticia
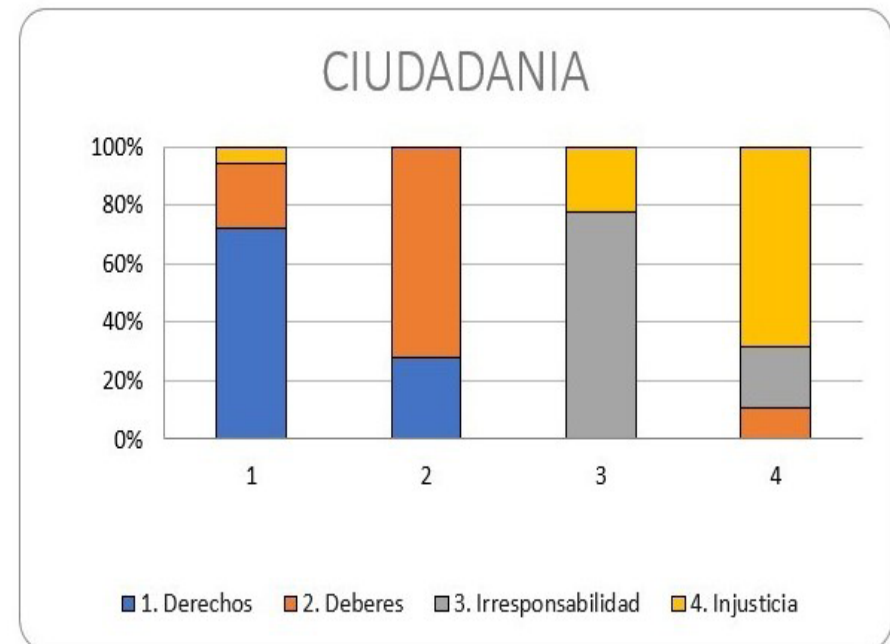
Source: this study

Regarding the item of citizenship, students determined the order as follows: rights, duties, irresponsibility, and unjustice; this result is clearly meaningful, because the concepts of rights and duties are established as important aspects to be considered in the making of citizens.

Conclusions

The survey fulfilled each one of the proposed objectives and accordingly the main contributions are presented. As the result of this research which offered a reflective insight into the conceptions and tensions of the democratic processes in school. It is convenient to enhance that the reality of the participants, their environment and their contexts determine the perspective that their stories stamped.

The democratic processes related to the election of the spokeman as part of the regulations of the law 115 and the decree 1860, related to the making of the Scholar Government, are accepted by the students who are participants of the campaigns of the candidates to spokeman, of the election of the representatives of the class and of the democratic journey that is carried out at the beginnig of the scholar year. Moreover, they consider the role of the students` representatives as an important aspect in the school environment.

However, it is noted indifference to make part of the Jobs of democratic election such as class representatives and spokemen, it is evident the aphaty of students to participate as candidates to be elected to those Jobs. They consider that they need time, responsability and qualities that many consider lacking in their personalities.

On the other hand, the conceptions that students have about the functions that the representatives of class and spokeman have to be fulfill are far from the legitimate ones, because what they denominate are focused mainly in the development of playful, sport, recreative and cultural activities. Therefore, it is important to enhance those stories that are most in relation with the true functions of student's representatives, as to be a channel of communication with their teachers and to propose new ideas, centered in the current issues and therefore they need to be reinforced.

For the adequate approach and development of the proposals of the spokeman is essential the advice of the directive staff and teachers who can enrich them and set them down according to the educational needs of the context and the possibility to develop them. Equally, it is important the support of the other students who from their interests and expectations allow to contribut to the constuction and development of them. According to the comments of the students, they stated that some teachers follow the fulfillment of plans of work, on the contrary to the student's community that in general don`t do it and others simply aren`t interested in the oversight of the process.

The educational institution establishes a profile to the charge of room representative, students consider that the main characteristics that the students` representatives must have are: responsability, punctuality, respect, keep a good academic record and be a reliable person. Accordingly, it is evident that they didn`t mention other qualities proper of leaders. The making of profiles to participate in the democratic processes is against democracy and leave in doubt freedom and autonomy as an essential part of it.

Making of decisions and the further achievement of actions are part of democracy and participation. The students don`t feel involved in decision-making processes, the staff and teachers are the ones who make these decisions and only inform them to the students and parents afterward.

In relation to citizenship the participants give the greatest responsability of the citizen formation to the family and teachers, they consider the example they set at home and in the school as a basic axle to be formed as citizens, in the same way, they identify other actors as the state, the government and the police as other actors who in lesser extent also have responsability.

On the other hand, the students relate democracy with voting. They state that the democratic spaces offered by the school to elect classroom representatives and spokemen are the participatory root that enable to exercise in the best way their citizen exercise of voting in a more suitable way for those who will occupy those charges as municipality, department and country representatives, I other words, the democratic school elections prepare them for the future.

The students`community is not always in agreement with the measures and decisions made at the school, so,

their attitude and behavior are framed mostly in keeping in reserve their disagreement to comment it only with their classmates and only a minimum of students show their unsatisfaction to the teachers.

Finally, it can be stated that it was found contradiction in their conception of democracy, participation, citizenship and leadership (method Q-sort) and what is actually experienced (tensions) in the school (interview to the focal group). There is a disagreement between theory and practice.

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