EXPLORING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SCHOOL DEMOCRACY AND CLASSROOM CLIMATE WITH STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING

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Preparing children to participate in democracy and public life is an important educational goal. School democracy is viewed as a good opportunity for children to learn and practice democratic attitudes and behaviours. School and classroom climate can serve as a basis for teachers to achieve this goal (*Geboers*, *Geijsel*, *Admiraal* and *ten Dam*, 2013). Both have also an important role in affecting students' achievement, democratic skills (*Mager* and *Nowak*, 2012) and democratic knowledge (*Alvernini* and *Manganelli*, 2011). There is vast international literature on school and classroom climate, but there is no consensus in the interpretation of these phenomena. One of the approaches refers to classroom climate as a part of school climate (*Marsh*, *Lüdtke*, *Nagengast*, *Trautwein*, *Morin*, *Abduljabbar* and *Köller*, 2012). Summarising the literature it can be established that classroom climate is the subjective perception of the student-teacher and student-student connections in the classroom.

In 2010, a study was conducted to explore 7th and 11th graders' attitudes towards school democracy (N=923). It has revealed a possible connection between school democracy and classroom climate. Five point Likert-type scales were used to measure students' perceptions of school democracy (*Csákó*, 2009) and classroom climate (*Torney-Purta*, *Lehmann*, *Oswald* and *Schulz*, 2001). Two more scales were also created to measure students' perceptions of classroom cooperation and the perceived differences within the school. Using these latent variables, a model was proposed based on the literature which suggested classroom climate, perceived classroom cooperation and perceived school differences are all in connection with school democracy. Structural equation modelling was applied to explore the supposed connection. Mplus was used to analyse the data.

The first results showed that the data did not fit to our proposed model. The measurement model of perceived school differences did not work suitably, hence this latent variable was excluded. Thus, school democracy, classroom climate and perceived school cooperation remained in our model. The fit of the modified and reanalysed model is considered acceptable (CFI=.94, TLI=.91, SRMR=.04, RMSEA=.06) and explains 66% percent of the latent variable school democracy. The path coefficient between perceived school cooperation and school democracy indicated a weak connection (.26), while it showed a mediate connection (.67) in the case of school democracy and classroom climate.

These results confirm our hypothesis and prove the connection between school democracy and classroom climate. The results strengthen the role of classroom climate in the process of democratic education. The other latent variable, perceived classroom cooperation has a weak connection with school democracy. The variables of perceived school differences were not working properly; these will need further refinement.

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