# Civilized and Uncivilized Behaviors in the Classroom: An Example from the Teachers and Students from the Second Stage of Primary Education

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### Abstract

Purpose of this study was to investigate civilized and uncivilized behaviors in the classroom, the emotions and reactions towards them, as well as the strategies aiming to prevent these kinds of behaviors from the point of view of students and teachers attending second stage of primary education (6th, 7th and 8th grades). As a qualitative research model was employed in this study which was designed. Sample of the study consisted of 80 students and 28 teachers attending second stage of primary education at Eskisehir city. Data were collected via interviews. A semi-structured questionnaire was used as the data gathering tool. Based on the findings of the study, students perceived civilized behaviors of the teachers as educational whereas teachers evaluated civilized behaviors of the students being towards the course. Being respectful was interpreted as a common civil behavior. Both teachers and students felt positive sentiments towards civilized behaviors and became happy. Another finding of the study revealed that teachers performed uncivilized behaviors, containing violence, towards students. When faced with uncivilized behaviors, students either got negative emotions (as an introverted reaction) or got angry (as an extroverted reaction). Students' reactions were often being passive and keeping their silence whereas teachers often reacted by warning the students. For the prevention of uncivilized behaviors, teachers prefered to talk with the parents, forward the students to the counselor and make one-to-one conversation.

### Key Words

Civilized Behaviors, Primary School Students, Teachers, Uncivilized Behaviors.

There are several studies indicating the decrease of the civilized behaviors in 21st century (Benton, 2007; Cole, 2005; Peck, 2002; Scott, 2009). Especially the press states that civility had been eroded in the last 40 years (Henninger, 2007), incidents of incivility were gradually increasing (Swinney, 2004), and courteous behaviors unfortunately are not common anymore (Calhoun, 2000; Dalrymple, 1996; Feldman, 2001; Schneider, 1998).

Civility comes from the Greek word "civilitas" meaning community or city (Clark & Carnosso, 2008). In non-violent communities with tolerance, civilized behaviors carry the meaning of "form of decision-making", "attitude" or "moral values" resulting in non-institutional actions of social interactions between people (Calhoun, 2000; Leagaard, 2008). Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary (2013) defines civility as "polite,

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reasonable, and respectful behavior, polite actions and words" whereas The Old World Dictionary (2013) defines it as "formal courtesy and respect for the others". People who can behave like this have an admirable quality (Schuck, 2005).

Civility is seen as the foundation of a democratic society (Novak, 2012). Since the interaction established by the teacher with his/her students from the first day of the course is affecting the students positively or negatively (Berger, 2003), taking individual democratic roles is the responsibility of the schools, especially teachers (Print, Ornstrom, & Nielsen, 2002). According to Boice (1996), the behavior of the student is shaped depending on his/her teacher being a pro-social motivator ("Did you understand?", "You can do it") or being an anti-social motivator (threat, blame, etc.). So, a democratic school culture and a democratic class environment should be formed (Morrison, 2008; Okutan, 2010a). Thus, by managing in-class behaviors and with the formation of positive learning environments, teachers can perform effective instruction, as well as helping academic success of the students (Wentzel, 2002).

On the other hand, uncivilized behaviors can be observed at home, at school, at work and in public places and it is becoming increasingly common (Ferris, 2002). Incivility in the classroom, is the actions disturbing learning atmosphere created in collaboration with the conflicting actions that are not compatible with them (Feldman, 2001) or deliberate destruction of the teaching / learning process (Morrisette, 2001). The reason causing incivility is physical and emotional factors according to Kuhlenschmidt and Layne (1999), and large classrooms according to Morrissette (2001).

According to Kauffman and Burbach (1998), incivility can be learned as civility. According to Elder, Seaton and Swinney (2010), incivility has a cost. Hirschy and Braxton (2004) stated that the prevention of students' incivility would affect their academic and intellectual development positively. In constructivist education, learners do not take the knowledge as it is; they create or explore it (Perkins, 1999). Thus, constructivist teachers can offer the knowledge to their students in a form that will allow the utilization of the knowledge in solving the problems of real life (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Gregg (1999) says that there are a lot of problems in terms of the management of uncivilized behavior by the teachers at the secondary school level. On the other hand there are indications that students get tired from the behaviors that disturb them as well and they prefer to have more civility in the classroom (Carbone, 1999).

The researches revealed the decrease of the civility in the classroom especially at the college level (Alexander-Snow, 2004; Feldmann, 2001; Nilson, 2004). The problems related with uncivilized behaviors in the classroom are mostly discussed at the universities (Amada, 1992; Downs, 1992; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Rowland & Kanokraj, 2009; Schneider, 1998). Although they are frequently expressed by the teachers and managers of the primary and secondary schools, limited number of researches has been conducted at this level (Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Boice, 1996; Clark & Springer, 2007).

Considering these discussions, the purpose of this study is to investigate civilized and uncivilized behaviors in the classroom according to the teachers and students from the second stage of primary education (6th, 7th, and 8th grades). In this context, the following questions were addressed:

1. What are the civilized behaviors in the classroom according to the teachers and students? What are the emotions of the teachers and students towards these behaviors?

2. What are the uncivilized behaviors in the classroom according to the teachers and students? What are the emotions of the teachers and students towards these behaviors?

3. What are the strategies of the teachers to prevent uncivilized behaviors of the students?

## Method

### Research Design

Phenomenology, one of the qualitative research models, was used as the pattern of this study. Accordingly, the focus of the research was set as civilized and uncivilized behaviors in primary school level.

### Participants

Sample of the study consists of 80 students who were studying in primary schools of Eskisehir city, during 2011-2012 spring semester and 28 teachers who were instructing at these grades. The selection criteria of the students who have participated in this study was being a student of 6th, 7th of 8th grades, whereas instructing at these schools were set as the main selection criteria of the teaches. Availability

sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in this study. In order to determine the students and teachers from the available sample, criterion sampling has been used.

Participants of the study are 80 primary education second stage students distributed as 9 girls and 11 boys from 8th grades, 10 girls and 12 boys from 7th grades and 10 girls and 10 boys from 6th grades and 28 primary school teachers, 17 female and 11 male. The average seniority of the teachers was 12 years. 5 teachers had master degree, 1 had PhD degree and the rest had bachelor degree. The distribution of the teachers according to the discipline was as following: Science-4, English-3, Math-3, Language-5, Physical Education-1, Visual Arts-1, Technology and Design-3, Religion and Ethics-1, Drawing-1, Music-1, Information Technology-2, Social Sciences-1.

### Data Collection

A semi-structured questionnaire has been developed for the data collection from the teachers and students who have participated in the study. The literature about the formation of semi-structured questionnaire has been reviewed. The first part of the questionnaire consists of the questions gathering demographic information of the participants whereas the second part consists of the questions related with the subject. Face-to-face interviews have been conducted with the teachers and students during data collection process. The duration of the interviews conducted with the students was around 30 minutes whereas the duration of the interviews conducted with the teachers was around 40 minutes. Students were coded using nick names, indicating their grades. The same method has been used for female and male teachers.

### Data Analysis

Content analysis was used for the analysis of the data applying the following steps: coding, determination of the themes, the organization of the data according to the codes and themes. The data gathered by the interviews was transferred to the written record and a total of 85 pages of written text were obtained. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that researchers start with some general themes derived from reading the literature and add more themes and subthemes as they go.

In order to ensure internal validity of the research, the perception of the teachers and students about the education has been defined using direct quotations, and then they have been interpreted. To ensure external validity, the methodology of the research was described in details. For the sake of the reliability, each researcher has coded the data separately and independently. An overall comparison has been performed, no statistical analysis has been applied and a common ground has been established for some codes that were not meeting by discussing. The levels of compliance in coding were close to each other.

### Results

The findings of the research will be given by supporting with direct quotations from the views of the students and teachers.

### Civilized Behaviors in the Classroom and Emotions towards These Behaviors

Civilized behaviors in the classroom and emotions towards these behaviors are discussed under separate titles. These are presented below.

**Civilized Behaviors of the Teachers in the Classroom According to the Students and Students' Emotions towards These Behaviors:** Civilized behaviors of the teachers in the classroom according to the students are discussed under "personal" and "educational" themes. Students' emotions towards civilized behaviors of the teachers are discussed under three different themes, namely positive emotions, positive emotions towards the teacher and positive emotions towards the course. Emotion is defined as "structured feeling that appears often in the inner face of a certain stimulus, leading to behavioral reactions, (Kervancı, 2008, p. 28).

**Civilized Behaviors of the Students in the Classroom According to the Teachers and Teachers' Emotions towards These Behaviors:** Civilized behaviors of the students in the classroom according to the teachers are discussed under "personal" and "towards the teacher" themes. Teachers' emotions towards students' civilized behaviors are discussed under three different themes, namely "positive emotions", "positive emotions towards the profession" and "positive emotions towards the students".

## Uncivilized Behaviors in the Classroom and Emotions and Reactions towards These Behaviors

Uncivilized behaviors in the classroom and emotions and reactions towards these behaviors are discussed under separate titles.

**Uncivilized Behaviors of the Teachers in the Classroom According to the Students and Students' Emotions and Reactions towards These Behaviors:** Uncivilized behaviors of the teachers in the classroom according to the students are discussed under "uncivilized violent behavior" and "uncivilized non-violent behavior" themes. "Uncivilized violent behavior" are divided into "verbal and reactive violence" themes. Students' emotions towards uncivilized behaviors of the teachers are discussed under two different themes, namely "negative emotions" and "negative emotions towards the school". Negative emotions are divided into two, as "outward and inward negative feelings". Students' reactions against uncivilized behaviors of the teachers are analyzed under two different themes, namely "active and passive reactions".

**Uncivilized Behaviors of the Students in the Classroom According to the Teachers and Teachers' Emotions and Reactions towards these Behaviors:** Uncivilized behaviors of the students in the classroom according to the teachers are discussed under "uncivilized violent behavior" and "uncivilized non-violent behavior" themes. "Uncivilized violent behavior" are divided into "verbal and reactive violence" themes.

Teachers' emotions towards uncivilized behaviors of the students are given under two different titles, namely "negative emotions" and "negative emotions towards the course". Negative emotions are divided into two, as "outward and inward negative feelings". Teachers' reactions against uncivilized behaviors of the students are analyzed under two different themes, namely "active and passive reactions".

## Strategies of the Teachers to Prevent Uncivilized Behaviors of the Students

Strategies of the teachers to prevent uncivilized behaviors of the students are summarized under five themes, namely counseling, family, student, course and teacher. One of the preventive strategies is the orientation of the student to the guidance and counseling specialist. At the same time, talking with the parents of the student is another preventive strategy.

## Discussions

The study reveals that students perceive civilized behaviors of the teachers as educational whereas teachers evaluate civilized behaviors of the students being towards the course. Being respectful is interpreted as a common civil behavior by both groups. Teachers and students feel positive sentiments for civilized behaviors and get happy. For civilized behaviors, some of the students get positive emotions towards the teacher whereas some of the teachers carry positive emotions towards the profession. In general, the behaviors interpreted as civilized behavior by the students are the ones towards them (students) whereas the behaviors interpreted as civilized by the teachers are the ones towards the course. Both groups develop positive emotions for these behaviors.

Plank, McDill, Mcpartland, and Jordan (2011) looked for civility of the students among their general behaviors, whereas in this study the behaviors of the students towards the course were taken as civility. According to "National Civility Survey in USA (2011)" of KRC research group, half of the students face with such an experience and 1/10 of the parents change the school of their children due to this reason (Stanyon, 2011). In this study, it has been found that the teachers were not using science based strategies, as expressed by Bull and Solity (1996), Çelik (2003) and Dad (2004). According to Okutan (2010b) the reasons behind this fact are the mismanagement of the class by the teachers, and the knowledge taught at the course is detached from practices of real life. On the other hand, participative, flexible and democratic classroom climate (Aydın, 2003) may decrease incivilities. According to Yılmaz (2008), in order to achieve this, teachers should be specialized on the formation of appropriate learning environments (Banning, 2005) and on the strategies about the management of undesired behaviors destructing the flow of the course. Duke and Jones (1985) state that school climate strategies that encourage students to behave positively should take place. Another finding of the study is that teachers show reactionary violence towards the students. The findings of this study are in accordance with the findings of Gözütok (1994), Doğan (2001) and Eğitim-Sen (2003) researches. The literature states that the teachers often get angry, become stressful and even afraid of their own classes, independent of the type of students' incivility (Barbetta, Norona, & Bicard, 2005; Ennis, 1996; Hernandez & Fister, 2001; Meyers, 2003). This finding of the research is in accordance with the literature.

According to the teachers, the nature of students' incivility is non-violent, but sometimes they may show violent incivilities as well. This study shows that incivility continues at the second stage of the primary education as well. Many studies show that students exhibit uncivilized behavior in the classroom (Çetin, 2002; Hernandez & Fister, 2001; Kocabey, 2008; Plank et al., 2001). According to Richardson (1999), students who are reluctantly attending the course may bring their unresolved problems to the classroom and may exhibit incivilities. Meyers, Bender, Hill, and Thomas (2006) indicate that the closeness of the instructor to the students will determine the emotional climate of the class.

Demonstration of the skills like acting casual, friendly approach, affective aspects of democratic development, courtesy, respect, seeing the students as individuals and considering their personalities will allow taking steps towards a democratic classroom environment (Güven, 2004). Otherwise, incivilities that the students have faced may cause them to fear from the school, to lose their self-confidence, to increase aggressive and destructive attitude, to the detriment of objects, to response rudely and to lie (Şahin & Beyazova, 2001). Güleç and Alkış (2004), found that teachers often prefer the method of oral warning for modifying the behaviors of the students. This finding overlaps with the finding of the study. Fassinger (1995) and Ataman (2000) connect the way of decreasing incivilities of the students with the application of techniques consisting cooperative and collaborative learning.

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**Ek.**

*Görüşme Soruları*

Öğrencilere yönelik sorular;

1. Öğretmeninizin size yönelik medeni davranışları nelerdir? Bu davranışlar karşısında neler hissediyorsunuz? Açıklar mısınız?

2. Öğretmeninizin size yönelik medeni olmayan davranışları nelerdir? Bu davranışlar karşısında neler hissediyorsunuz ve tepkiniz ne oluyor? Açıklar mısınız?

Öğretmenlere yönelik sorular;

3. Öğrencinizin size yönelik medeni davranışları nelerdir? Bu davranışlar karşısında neler hissediyorsunuz? Açıklar mısınız?

4. Öğrencinizin size yönelik medeni olmayan davranışları nelerdir? Bu davranışlar karşısında neler hissediyorsunuz ve tepkiniz ne oluyor? Açıklar mısınız?

5. Öğrencilerinizin medeni olmayan davranışlarını önlemeye yönelik neler yapıyorsunuz?