

Preparing to Teach Democracy: Student Teachers' Perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake' as a Set of Teaching Materials in Social Science Education

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Keywords: Democracy, social science didactics, social studies, teacher education, teaching materials

- Teaching democracy is a central feature of teacher education in social science education.
- This study examined student teachers' perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake' teaching materials.
- Student teachers highlighted the role of social science concepts and classroom discussion.
- They also emphasised how democracy was conceptualised in the teaching materials.
- Examining teaching materials might contribute to student teachers' professional development.

Purpose: Few studies have examined student teachers' perceptions of teaching materials on democracy. For the purpose of addressing how teacher education in social science might contribute to student teachers' qualifications for teaching democracy, this study investigated student teachers' perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake' as a set of teaching materials for teaching democracy in social science education.

Design/methodology/approach: This study relied on a survey and observations among 47 student teachers in a social science didactics course.

Findings: Analyses of student teachers' perceptions revealed concerns about teaching social science concepts, engagement of secondary school students in classroom discussions and the theoretical framing of the teaching materials.

Research limitations: The study focused on 47 student teachers' perceptions of a particular set of teaching materials and may not be generalisable.

Practical implications: This study indicates that social science teacher education might benefit from involving student teachers in the examination of teaching materials.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Education for democracy is often included in government mandates for schools (Eurydice, 2017; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019). Increasingly, democracy has come to constitute an important theme in individual subject areas in secondary education, such as citizenship education, social science/studies and civics (Eurydice, 2017; Sheppard & Levy, 2019) and in teacher education in these subject areas (Lee & Manzon, 2017). I use the term 'social science' when referring to my own study and adopt the term used by the authors when reviewing literature. As Adler (2004) noted, it is a common understanding among social studies educators that 'social studies is, or should be, focused on the broad goal of enabling learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary for civic participation in a democratic and globally connected society' (p. 3). This understanding in turn relates to the role of teacher education in preparing student teachers to teach about democracy, which is the focus of this study. However, while the values, institutions and practices often associated with a democratic society are important in young people's education, *democracy* and *democratic* are used as labels for diverse political processes, even when the very foundations of democracy are under pressure across the world (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). Democracy is a contested concept that is understood and used in diverse ways, both theoretically (e.g., Biesta, 2011b; Birch, 2007) and in practice (Raiker & Rautiainen, 2020), and pertinent examples include the various ways democracy as a form of rule is practiced. To gain insight into how teacher education in social science might contribute to student teachers' qualifications for teaching democracy, I first present previous research, focusing on teaching practices in secondary education, teacher education, and the use of teaching materials, before contextualising the present study and presenting its guiding research question.

1.1 Teaching practices in secondary education

Previous research on the teaching of democracy and politics in secondary education has indicated that some teachers focus on narrow conceptualisations of these topics (Barton & Avery, 2016). Building on Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) framework of orientations towards citizenship education, Patterson et al. (2012) found that most of the teachers participating in their survey subscribed to what Westheimer and Kahne (2004) labelled a 'personally responsible' conception of citizenship associated with a thin understanding of democracy. A smaller group subscribed to a participatory approach, focused on active participation in society and democracy, and the smallest group of teachers adopted a social justice approach, characterised by a desire to change the status quo (Patterson et al., 2012). Journell and Buchanan (2013) argued that traditional civics instruction tends to focus on complex democratic processes without providing opportunities for students to apply their knowledge to real-life political or social issues.

1.2 Previous research on teacher education

With this backdrop of teacher perspectives and practices, it becomes essential to study how education for democracy can be approached in teacher education in social science. Studying the parallel field of history education, Barton and Levstik (2004) lamented that teachers are primarily expected to cover the curriculum and maintain control of the classroom and argued that teacher education should focus on purposes and teaching practices that promote a participatory and pluralist democracy. Similarly, the process and associated teaching practices of educating young people for democracy is a vital element of teacher education in social science, which is often referred to in the Nordic countries as social science *didactics*.

A recent review found social studies courses in teacher education to be beneficial for the development of certain democratic skills among student teachers, such as problem solving and

media literacy, in addition to planning skills (Lee & Manzon, 2017). Further, studies from the United States have found social studies courses to influence student teachers' reported knowledge of central issues (Buchanan & Crawford, 2015) as well as their own pedagogical approaches and instructional activities (Bauml, 2016; Castro, 2014). While these studies may indicate that what is taught in teacher education courses matters for student teachers' knowledge and practice, Adler (2008) argued that 'if it is the teacher who controls classroom curriculum and instructional activity, the question for teacher educators then becomes one of helping teachers develop the capacity for making professional, thoughtful decisions while being engaged in teaching itself' (p. 332).

Consequently, in addition to modelling quality teaching and offering rich opportunities for practice and specific teaching strategies (Ball & Forzani, 2009), teacher education should aim to develop student teachers' professional reasoning about practices and their realisation in the classroom (Philip, 2019). For example, teacher education in social science needs to engage student teachers in critical reflection on their own conceptualisations and those presented in the materials and practices they introduce to their students (Mathé, 2016). A study of student teachers in Norway found that they expressed liberal views of democracy with a focus on voting, elections and individual rights (Eriksen, 2018). While participants were positive towards teaching about democracy and highlighted factual knowledge and activities related to school democracy, subject-specific aspects of democracy as a topic in social studies were not prominent (Eriksen, 2018). In turn, how the concept of democracy is presented to students in school may influence their perceptions of democracy. Teachers' use of teaching materials is therefore important and below I argue why we should study their use in teacher education.

1.3 Teaching materials

Almost two decades ago, Avery (2004) emphasised that social studies teacher educators should help student teachers analyse textbooks and other materials – for example, by asking what conceptions of citizenship textbooks provide, what types of political participation are emphasised and how far they move beyond the 'structures and functions of government' (p. 53). Today, a range of teaching materials are available to social studies teachers, including teaching plans, programmes, a plethora of texts and various classroom exercises. Therefore, it is important to examine available teaching materials, student teachers' perceptions of these materials and how they might use them with their students in the classroom. Although many aspects of teacher education in social science deserve attention, student teachers' critical examination of available teaching materials seems particularly understudied. To my knowledge, few studies have addressed the use of teaching materials in teacher education (for an exception, see Thompson, 2015), and fewer have studied perceptions of teaching materials in social science didactics. For the purpose of addressing how teacher education in social science might contribute to student teachers' qualifications for teaching democracy, the present study investigates student teachers' perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake' as a set of teaching materials for teaching democracy.

1.4 Contextualisation of the study

Following a revision of school curricula in Norway, which is the context of the present study, the theme of democracy and citizenship is being implemented across school subjects (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). Under this revision, teachers will be required to include aspects of teaching for democracy within and across subjects, although teaching for, about and through democracy remains a primary responsibility of social science teachers. If schools are to take on the task of educating students for democracy, research must consider how well-prepared teachers and student teachers are for this task (Adler, 2004). In response to

this call and to address the research gap identified in the studies reviewed above, the following research question guides this study:

How do student teachers perceive the ‘Democracy Cake’ as a set of teaching materials for teaching democracy in social science education?

This article reports on a study using a mixed methods design to contribute to social science teacher education. In this study, I examine how student teachers perceive the ‘Democracy Cake’, a set of teaching materials designed as a board exercise, by providing opportunities for their critical examination of the materials in didactics seminars. In turn, such examinations may enable them to make professional, thoughtful decisions about their own teaching. Moreover, the article elaborates on some of the challenges of teaching democracy in social science, particularly regarding the combination of developing knowledge about democracy as well as inspiring democratic engagement through the use of teaching materials developed for the explicit aim of democracy education. In the following, I discuss the study’s theoretical framing, methodological approach, findings and educational implications.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMING

Research on teaching and learning in the school subject of social science draws on multiple theoretical perspectives and traditions. Here, I employ theoretical perspectives related to teaching democracy as a theme in social science education to argue that teacher education in social science should incorporate both disciplinary knowledge and the role of students’ own perspectives when preparing student teachers to teach democracy.

2.1 Teaching democracy in social science

Teaching democracy involves knowledge, skills, values and dispositions (Johnson & Morris, 2010). Knowledge of democracy includes understanding societies and power structures as well as knowledge of the political system (Kerr, 2000) and of one’s rights in a democracy (Osler & Starkey, 2017). Relevant skills involve being able to analyse political structures (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), partake in interaction and dialogue and engage in collective action and participation (Osler & Starkey, 1999). Central values include social justice, one’s own and others’ dignity, and engagement in informed and responsible reflection (Johnson & Morris, 2010). Finally, dispositions can encompass knowledge, skills and values. Relevant dispositions include a questioning attitude, critical interest in public affairs and the commitment and motivation to make changes in society (Johnson & Morris, 2010; Veugelers, 2007).

Social scientific concepts are pillars of social science and citizenship education (Davies, 2015; Sandahl, 2013), and teachers face the challenge of including all students in meaningful learning activities involving complex concepts. It is common to distinguish between substantive and procedural concepts (Davies, 2015). Concepts such as democracy, poverty, parliament and identity are substantive – or first order – concepts because they help students learn *about* something. Procedural – or second order – concepts describe what students should be able to do as they learn, for example, reflect, analyse, discuss and draw inferences from evidence (Sandahl, 2015). Milligan and Wood (2010) argued that social science concepts and understandings are ‘changeable, contextual, and contestable’ (p. 488). This notion implies presenting a less ordered and certain world to students and allowing for students’ own emergent understandings during the learning process. Moreover, the balance between students’ own perspectives and the social science disciplines is an important aspect of social science education (Sandahl, 2015), and too much weight on the infrastructure of democracy over students’ own ideas and experiences might

alienate some students. However, educating for democracy necessarily includes equipping students with knowledge about democratic structures and processes and with the skills and dispositions to engage with them (Adler, 2004).

2.2 Including student voices

Several authors have argued the importance of allowing students' voices to feature prominently in social science and citizenship education by engaging their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions (Hess, 2009; Leighton, 2012; Mathé, 2018; Olson, 2009). In studies on practice-based teacher education, researchers have suggested that the facilitation of classroom discussion is a core practice that should be targeted in teacher education, including, for example, 'posing problems to begin a discussion, monitoring student participation during discussion, and responding to student ideas' (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009, p. 281). Within the field of social science education, different forms of discussion are often considered a way of learning about, applying and evaluating important content through a practice with a strong potential for developing a variety of dispositions. Drawing on the work by Parker (2003), Hess and McAvoy (2015) described the purpose of discussion as creating shared understanding by 'listening, questioning and working through ideas' (p. 5) and diverse views. While *deliberation* is aimed at solving shared problems and agreeing on a plan of action, often aiming for some kind of consensus, *discussion* is more open-ended (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Engaging students in pair, group or whole-class discussion can bring citizenship to life in the classroom by facilitating processes by which students can develop their ideas and critical enquiry skills with the help of the teacher (Cremin & Warwick, 2015) and 'weigh evidence, consider competing views, form an opinion, articulate that opinion, and respond to those who disagree' (Hess & McAvoy, 2015, p. 5). Engaging in this kind of class discussion means engaging in a democratic activity. Thus, students are not simply preparing for active citizenship; they are, in fact, being active members of society. However, classroom research has demonstrated that it can be challenging for teachers to facilitate quality discussions (Hess, 2010; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Based on research conducted in North American classrooms, Hess (2010) developed a set of characteristics of effective discussions, including a clear focus, student and teacher preparation, students doing most of the talking and having enough time to explore ideas thoroughly; additionally, Hess noted that the teacher and students should ask open, authentic questions and build on each other's ideas and arguments. These characteristics imply that achieving quality discussions in many instances requires planning, particularly on the part of teachers, and that identifying and examining various purposes of discussion and choosing discussion formats that align with these is a relevant activity for teacher education in social science (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Hess, 2010). This includes planning for discussion as a part of a unit *and* developing the sensitivity needed to notice potential moments for spontaneous discussions, keeping in mind the learning goals and wider educational aims to which the discussions should contribute.

In sum, this study starts from the premise that conceptual understanding and disciplinary concepts are fundamental aspects of social science education, but such concepts should be combined with learners' own perspectives. Class discussions are suited to exploring disciplinary and student perspectives while simultaneously having the potential to be democratic activities involving diverse perspectives, argumentation, consensus or dealing with disagreement. The teacher is particularly important in planning and leading quality discussions about democracy, developing knowledge about democracy and incorporating democratic principles. Hence, this needs to be addressed in social science teacher education.

3 METHODS

This study used a mixed methods design by integrating qualitative data from observations with a mixed methods questionnaire (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). The study further relied on methodological triangulation (Cohen, Manion, & Morison, 2011), as these methods were integrated to investigate the same phenomenon, namely student teachers' perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake'. The first data source comprised observation notes from two seminars in social science didactics for student teachers. The second data source consisted of the student teachers' responses to a questionnaire. To provide some context, I describe the procedure that was chosen for this study before detailing the study's context and participants, data collection, analyses and ethical considerations.

3.1 Procedure for using the 'Democracy Cake'

The 'Democracy Cake' is a set of teaching materials developed by the Rafto Foundation (2018) and aimed at strengthening secondary students' understanding of democracy. The Rafto Foundation (2018) website states that the 'Democracy Cake' should preferably be used after participation in an educational programme at the Rafto Centre. Although similar to a board *game*, the 'Democracy Cake' is rather a board *exercise*. The main difference between a game and an exercise is that an exercise is not framed as a competition between players with the goal of winning (Allery, 2004). In the two seminars with social science student teachers, I used this particular exercise as an example of teaching materials on democracy that they could use in their own classrooms. In teacher education, it is possible for student teachers to experience such exercises from both the teacher's and the students' perspectives to identify opportunities and challenges of utilising such pre-defined exercises (Edwards, 2010).

The 'Democracy Cake' consists of two boards, the *state cake* and the *democracy cake*. They are circular boards divided into six 'slices' with a circle in the middle and three sets of 'ingredients': six state cake ingredients, 21 good democracy ingredients and 13 bad democracy ingredients. Short definitions of all the ingredients are provided on the back of each card. The ingredients are listed in random order in Table 1.

Table 1: Democracy Cake Ingredients (Reproduced with permission from the Rafto Foundation)

State cake ingredients	Good democracy ingredients	Bad democracy ingredients
Communal identity	Free and fair elections	Terrorism
Delimited territory	Formal consultations	Anti-democratic political organisations
Executive power	Referendum	Abuse of power
State monopoly of violence	Legislative branch	Suppression of organisations
State apparatus	Due process	Censorship
Common currency	Judicial branch	Discrimination
	Ombudsmen	Extremism
	Public transparency	Political repression
	Anti-discrimination laws	Corruption
	Freedom of speech	Contempt of politicians
	Freedom of association	Governmental surveillance
	Freedom of the press	Lack of trust in the democratic system
	Freedom of assembly	Election fraud
	The right to privacy	
	Freedom of religion or belief	
	Welfare services	
	The right to education	
	Media diversity	
	Affirmative action	
	Universal suffrage	
	Public access to decision-making	

The 'Democracy Cake' comes with a set of instructions for organising and carrying out the exercise with school students in groups of three to four. The instructions emphasise that although the board exercise is similar to a board game, the purpose is not to compete and win but to engage in discussion and reflection. Briefly put, the instructions are as follows: First, the students build a state by placing the six state ingredients in their prioritised order on the state cake board and name their state. The groups justify their choices and discuss similarities and differences in plenary. Second, the students create a democracy by choosing six good democracy ingredients and placing them on the democracy cake in their prioritised order. Again, they must justify their choices. Third, the teacher provides each group with a bad democracy ingredient. The groups discuss which good ingredient from the used and unused pieces might counteract the bad ingredient. The teacher facilitates a plenary discussion of the groups' choices. The second and third steps can be repeated to develop the democracies further. Finally, in plenary, the students compare and contrast the democracies developed in the exercise with the democracy in which they live (their country) and discuss whether a democracy can ever be fully developed.

3.2 Study context and participants

For this study, I used purposeful selection at the participant and site levels (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The main rationale for this sampling strategy was the limited research on teacher education in social science, particularly relating to student teachers' examination of teaching materials. I sought participants who were studying to become social science teachers in secondary school. I therefore selected a full-time teacher education programme at a large Norwegian public university. The year-long teacher education programme comprised practice and professional teaching courses and required students to have previously completed an undergraduate degree. This teacher education programme qualified teachers for teaching in lower and upper secondary school. The majority of students enrolled in social science didactics in the teacher education programme had completed their master's degree in a relevant discipline, and they were heterogeneous in terms of age and teaching experience.

I contacted a social science teacher educator and asked permission to conduct the study in his social science didactics seminars. As he was willing and able to participate, I recruited two of his groups of student teachers, one in the spring and one in the autumn of 2018. The first group consisted of 21 and the second of 26 student teachers, including both men and women. The student teachers had different disciplinary backgrounds within the social sciences, for example social anthropology, sociology or political science.

3.3 Data collection

Table 2 provides an overview of the number of participants and the data sources they contributed to.

Table 2: Overview of Participants and Data Sources

Group	Observation data	Questionnaire data
1	21	8
2	26	23
Total	47	31

3.3.1 Observation of seminars in social science didactics

The focus of the observed seminars was to provide the opportunity for the student teachers to practice the 'Democracy Cake' and then discuss their perceptions of its potential for use with students in social science education. The overall purpose of this activity was to give the student

teachers practice with and support in critically examining teaching materials such as the ‘Democracy Cake’. That is, this study was not intended as an evaluation of the ‘Democracy Cake’ as such. Although the seminars were led by the groups’ regular social science didactics teacher educator, I introduced and provided instructions for the exercise. I took the role of observer-as-participant (Cohen et al., 2011) and facilitated group discussions. The student teachers completed and discussed the ‘Democracy Cake’ in groups of four to six. During the group work, I walked among the groups noting key words from their discussions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The student teachers were given approximately 45 minutes to work with the ‘Democracy Cake’, followed by a plenary discussion about their perceptions of the exercise and their thoughts about the opportunities and challenges of using the same exercise with their own secondary school students. Directly following each seminar, I wrote out my jotted notes in complete sentences, adding examples that were mentioned and relating different statements to each other (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.3.2 Questionnaire for student teachers

The responses to the questionnaire comprised the primary data source for this study. The questionnaire contained two closed-ended (quantitative) and five open-ended (qualitative) questions, and therefore it qualifies as a mixed methods approach (Bazeley & Kemp, 2012). The two closed-ended questions concerned how participants perceived the theoretical foundation of the exercise. I based the response alternatives on three different perspectives on democracy used in previous research on young people’s understanding of democracy (Arensmeier, 2010; Mathé, 2016), namely theories of (1) liberal democracy (Dahl, 1998), focusing on democratic procedures and institutions and individual rights; (2) participatory democracy (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970), emphasising broader citizen participation in several arenas of society, including the workplace; and (3) deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1995), focusing on public deliberations aiming to reach some form of common good. The three perspectives highlight the importance of democratic politics, but differ in their views on the role of citizens and the extent to which people should partake in decision-making. To allow for more nuanced data, participants could choose more than one of the response alternatives. The five open-ended questions concerned participants’ perceptions of the opportunities and challenges of using the ‘Democracy Cake’ with their own secondary school students and allowed participants to respond in their own words. The survey questions are presented in Table 3. All participants were invited to complete the questionnaire.

Table 3: Survey Questions

Closed-Ended Questions (Quantitative)	Open-Ended Questions (Qualitative)
<p>1. To what do you think the term ‘democracy’ in the ‘Democracy Cake’ refers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A form of government - A description of a society’s values - Aspects of human relations - Other <p>2. The way you remember it, which conception of democracy is most like what came across in the ‘Democracy Cake’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Liberal democracy focused on democratic institutions, individual rights and elections - Participatory democracy focused on people’s participation beyond elections and democracy also outside of politics - Deliberative democracy focused on dialogue, solving problems in communities and reaching consensus - None of these 	<p>3. What do you think was positive about the ‘Democracy Cake’?</p> <p>4. What do you think was less positive about the ‘Democracy Cake’?</p> <p>5. How well do you think the exercise is suited for students in lower or upper secondary school?</p> <p>6. What can be challenging about using the ‘Democracy Cake’ with students?</p> <p>7. Were there any aspects of democracy or a democratic society that did not come across in the ‘Democracy Cake’?</p>

Following the seminar with the first group of student teachers, I emailed the participants to invite them to respond to the questionnaire. I attached information about the study to the email and asked participants to follow a link to the digital questionnaire. Using this strategy, I received survey responses from eight of the 21 student teachers (38%) in the first group. To increase the number of participants in the second round of data collection, I invited the second group of student teachers to respond to the questionnaire at the end of the observed seminar. As the second group completed the questionnaire during the seminar, 23 of 26 student teachers (88%) responded to the survey.

3.4 Data and analyses

The data from the digital questionnaire comprised 118 written responses (qualitative) in addition to the responses to the two multiple-choice questions (quantitative). To analyse the qualitative material, I conducted a thematic analysis across the responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis consisted of three phases. In the first phase, I read through the entire material several times, highlighting words and phrases that were repeated (e.g., *difficult concepts*). In the second phase, I started grouping the words and phrases into thematic categories (e.g., *concepts*). In the third phase, I refined the thematic categories by grouping entire phrases and sentences in the responses according to the main categories and by identifying agreement and contradiction within and across categories (e.g., the tension between opportunities to learn about concepts versus the challenge of understanding abstract concepts in the board exercise). Although the thematic analysis was primarily data driven, the presence of theoretical concepts, such as *democracy*, in the questionnaire necessarily influenced the data and analysis. As the two closed-ended and one of the open-ended questions asked about student teachers' perceptions of the theoretical framing of the 'Democracy Cake', their responses necessarily reflected this theme. The thematic categories and their respective key words are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Thematic Categories (Qualitative Survey Responses)

Concepts	Student Discussion	Conceptualising Democracy
Concepts (23)	Discussion (16)	Non-present elements (20)
Difficult concepts (8)	Reflection (7)	Unidimensional conceptualisation (5)
Knowledge (8)	Dialogue (4)	Lacking opportunity to critique (2)
Conceptual understanding (7)	Express (2)	
Definition (3)	Agreement (2)	
	Argumentation (2)	
	Being heard (2)	
	Disagreement (1)	

Next, the responses to the multiple-choice questions were combined and presented in terms of numbers and percentages using a digital questionnaire platform. The purpose of including these questions was to identify which theoretical perspectives the students related to the 'Democracy Cake'. Because the descriptive statistics provided this information, I did not pursue further quantitative analyses of this material.

The mixed methods design facilitated integration through providing for more elaborate and nuanced data than would have been achieved relying on only one of the methods used. While the quantitative survey data provided an overview of the student teachers' expressed interpretations of the theoretical framing of the 'Democracy Cake', the qualitative survey data complemented this overview by providing the student teachers' examples and explanations in their own words (Greene, 2007). At the level of analysis, I integrated qualitative and quantitative data by combining percentages with illustrating quotes from the student teachers (see section 4.3). The data resulting from my observation of the two seminars comprised my notes from the student teachers' comments and contributions to the plenary discussion about the board exercise. In line

with triangulation strategies, these observation notes served as a reference to the individual survey responses (Cohen et al., 2011).

3.5 Validity and reliability

I took several steps to reduce threats to validity and reliability. The main strategy involved triangulation of data collection methods (observation and a mixed methods survey) with two different groups of participants to search for convergence of results (Cohen et al., 2011; Johnson & Christensen, 2017). In the observed seminars, I aimed to reduce the potential threat of opinion leaders and my own presence as a researcher by emphasising that I was interested in the participants' perceptions and by asking open questions to invite diverse responses. Further, by complementing my observations with the digital survey, I minimised the effect of this weakness (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). To strengthen the participant perspective and emic validity, I included two different student teacher groups, actively rephrased participants' comments during the seminars and provided low-inference descriptors in this paper (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). As the data showed convergence in central themes as well as divergent perspectives within themes, I find them trustworthy for making valid interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the present data include diverse perspectives, I believe it is reasonable to assume that the non-responses among participants in the first student teacher group do not represent a threat to the validity but can be explained by the time lapse between the seminar and survey invitation. Although the findings of this study are not generalisable, they may be relevant to teacher education in other contexts, and readers may engage in naturalistic generalisations of the findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

Finally, a researcher's positionality contributes to shaping data collection and analysis. I have a background as a social science teacher in upper secondary school and currently work as a teacher educator and researcher within social science education. My work with students' perceptions of democracy, politics and citizenship preparation in social science has strengthened my concern for young people's citizenship practices and my belief that the education system should address and incorporate these. As such, my background influenced the questions I asked the student teachers to reflect on and, potentially, the answers they provided.

3.6 Limitations

The limitations of this study relate to its external validity (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Due to the sampling procedure, it is not possible to generalise the findings to other groups of student teachers. Further, as the inferences concerning student teachers' perceptions of the teaching of democracy were based on their experiences with a specific educational exercise, the characteristics of this exercise necessarily influenced the findings. However, the exercise that was chosen for this study was created for diverse student groups. The existence of an English language version in addition to the Norwegian version means that it is not limited to Norway. In this article, I have provided detailed descriptions of the exercise to allow for comparisons with other teaching materials on democracy.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The Rafto Foundation contacted me in early 2018 to ask whether I would like to present a brief analysis of the 'Democracy Cake' at a Nordic conference for social science didactics in 2018 and sent me two sets of the 'Democracy Cake' to examine and use with student teachers. My initial examination of the board exercise inspired the present study. Importantly, the Rafto Foundation was not involved in the planning, execution or analysis of this study, and I received no funding from the Rafto Foundation to conduct it.

Concerning the study's participants, the digital questionnaire did not include personally identifiable information or sensitive questions, and participation was anonymous. The student teachers who participated in the social science didactics seminars and tried out the board exercise were informed at the beginning of the seminar that I would take notes during the seminar and provided their consent. I obtained consent from Norwegian Data Services to conduct the study. For both groups, I made explicit the fact that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

4 FINDINGS

This study investigated student teachers' perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake' to contribute with insights into how social science teacher education might contribute to student teachers' qualifications for teaching democracy. The student teachers provided insights into their perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake' as a set of teaching materials, including both opportunities and challenges of using it with secondary school students. Three main themes stood out across the observation and survey data: (1) the role of concepts in the 'Democracy Cake', (2) facilitating student discussion about the 'Democracy Cake', and (3) conceptualisations of democracy in the 'Democracy Cake'. The following sections describe the student teachers' perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake', based on the observation and survey data, with representative quotes translated from Norwegian.

4.1 The role of concepts in the 'Democracy Cake'

Although social science concepts were not mentioned in the questionnaire, a large portion of the student teachers' responses concerned the role of concepts in the board exercise. Several student teachers positively highlighted the opportunity to work with and practice using concepts. They commented that the exercise 'elaborated on the concept of democracy' and was a 'practical exercise on a somewhat vague and wide concept'. However, some participants also reported that issues related to concepts would be the most challenging aspect of using the exercise to teach democracy to secondary school students, specifically stating that the exercise included many difficult concepts related to democracy and the political system.

Many of the responses related such concepts to knowledge, particularly requiring students' prior knowledge and understanding of democracy. The following quote was typical of the responses in this category: 'Quite a few concepts require a good understanding and knowledge, so the exercise could be too difficult for some groups'. Other student teachers explicitly addressed the challenge posed by difficult concepts related to political structures and democratic institutions for lower secondary or 'weaker' students, such as *due process* and *formal consultations*. One student teacher noted that 'the explanations on the back of the slices are also hard to understand without solid background knowledge'. These responses indicate that these aspects of teaching democracy would require teachers and student teachers to support their students during group discussions and put effort into contextualising the concepts with their students. In addition, one respondent suggested that teachers should consider how to organise the exercise in terms of group size, allotted time and when to introduce the exercise while teaching the topic of democracy in social science. Respondents explained that teachers should decide whether to use the exercise as an introduction to the topic of democracy 'to awaken discussion and reflection' or at the end of the unit to use and consolidate knowledge. Student teachers also highlighted the importance of contextualising the exercise and its many concepts within the broader theme of democracy, as exemplified by the following response: 'Difficult concepts demanding a lot of prior knowledge. Depending on what the teachers do later, it may

seem fragmented for some students if it is not contextualised by the teacher'. This challenge points to some implications for teacher education, which I address below.

In the seminars, the discussion about social science concepts included how the exercise provided opportunities for differentiated instruction. Particularly, student teachers pointed out that the exercise included concepts with varying levels of complexity, which to some extent would allow students to explain concepts and construct arguments based on their own level of comprehension. For example, *freedom of speech* should be a familiar concept to most secondary school students and can be explained by using both everyday language and more specialised language with reference to legal documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948).

4.2 Facilitating student discussion about the 'Democracy Cake'

The majority of the positive perceptions of the board exercise mentioned or focused on student discussion. Many student teachers expressed that the exercise could facilitate discussion and reflection, for example, on prioritising different characteristics of a democracy and considering different views. One student teacher noted that the exercise 'engages students and forces them to make priorities in their democratic society. Moreover, they have to decide their priorities through dialogue'. Further, student teachers related this kind of activity to active citizenship as they perceived that it enabled students to practice democratic activities in the classroom. Incorporating such views, one participant wrote that the exercise was 'a fun way to discuss important aspects of democracies, practice expressing your views, and discuss until reaching a mutual understanding and agreement – an important part of being a part of a democracy'. However, although the exercise was developed on the notion that participants will come to an agreement, some student teachers addressed the important role of diverse views and disagreement in classroom discussions about democracy. Indeed, a common perception among the student teachers in the didactics seminars was that they could not agree on the most important components of a democracy during the group discussions. To complete the exercise, the groups with internal disagreement either let the majority decide or manipulated the exercise to include more democracy ingredients than it allowed for.

Some responses addressed challenging aspects of facilitating quality discussions among secondary school students, so that 'everyone participates and gets to utilise the concepts. If you withdraw or do not know the concepts, it may have little or no function other than listening to others.' These responses highlighted the importance of the teacher in leading and supporting discussions about democracy that include all students in the classroom.

4.3 Conceptualisations of democracy in the 'Democracy Cake'

The participants' perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake' includes their understanding of its theoretical framing. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather these data. The quantitative findings illustrated that the student teachers to a large extent related the 'Democracy Cake' to democracy as a form of rule and theories of liberal democracy (Figures 1 and 2). Concerning what democracy refers to (Figure 1), nearly 60% of responses related the concept of democracy as presented in the exercise to a form of rule, just over one-third (35%) of responses related it to values in society (e.g. freedom of speech), and just under 7% to relationships between people (e.g., within the family or in the workplace). Concerning the theoretical framing of the exercise (Figure 2), almost 60% of responses related the exercise to liberal theories of democracy, just over one-quarter (26%) to participatory democracy, and under 15% related it to deliberative democracy.

Figure 1. Student teachers' perceptions of what 'democracy' refers to in the 'Democracy Cake'

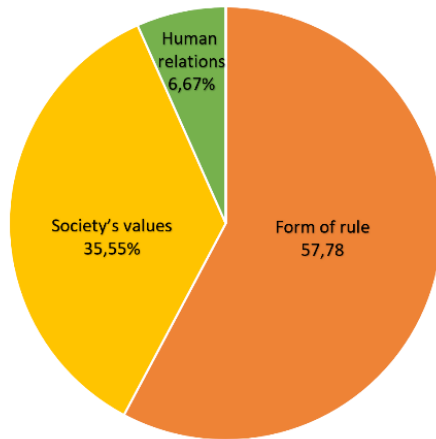
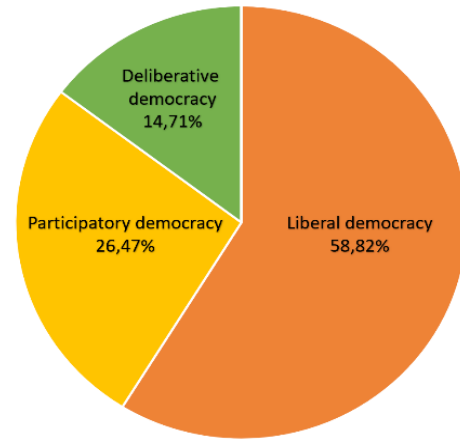


Figure 2. Student teachers' perceptions of the theoretical framing of 'Democracy Cake'



In addition to corroborating the quantitative findings, the qualitative findings contribute to a more comprehensive picture of the student teachers' perceptions. First, one set of responses focused on what participants referred to as a 'liberal' or 'unidimensional' understanding of democracy in the 'Democracy Cake'. For example, one student teacher wrote that 'the exercise primarily builds on a liberal understanding of democracy, and the importance of, for example, democratic awareness and citizenship was not very visible'. Second, a few responses explicitly mentioned that the exercise did not facilitate problematisation of the model of democracy that was presented or of democracy itself. The fact that the exercise builds on a conceptualisation of democracy that presupposed the existence of a state was one example mentioned both in the plenary discussions during the seminars and in the survey: 'The exercise presupposes that democracy has to be within a state, which is wrong'. Further, student teachers in the seminars reflected that the exercise built on a conceptualisation of democracy that may differ from how many secondary school students understand it and how they discuss it in daily language. Third, the responses further gave examples of aspects of democracy that student teachers perceived as missing from the board exercise, such as 'distribution of resources enabling democratic participation', 'power/resource perspectives' and 'democratic mindset'. Illustrative of the student teachers' discussion in the seminars, one participant wrote that 'of course the cake influences students' interpretations of what a democracy is/can be'. This quote touches on a central aspect of social science and citizenship education research, namely the significance of how concepts such as democracy are operationalised and taught in classrooms (e.g., Arensmeier, 2010; Biesta, 2011a; Mathé, 2018; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Consequently, these findings are relevant for the role of teacher education in preparing student teachers to teach about democracy.

In sum, the student teachers in this study expressed their perceptions of the theoretical framework of the 'Democracy Cake', identified opportunities and challenges of using this kind of exercise with secondary school students and suggested strategies to overcome what they saw as limitations of the exercise. Such strategies included the planning, organisation and contextualisation of the 'Democracy Cake' within the broader theme of democracy, as well as opening for supplementary aspects of democracy.

5 DISCUSSION

The findings illustrate the student teachers' perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake' as a set of teaching materials developed for use with secondary school students. Although they addressed different kinds of issues, the overall pattern was one of convergence in the findings across data sources (Greene, 2007). Below, I discuss the findings in relation to previous research related to the two main themes of preparing to teach democracy (5.1) and contributing to student teachers' professional development (5.2).

5.1 Preparing to teach democracy

One of the main themes in the findings of this study concerns the role of concepts related to democracy in social science education (Davies, 2015; Milligan & Wood, 2010; Sandahl, 2013). The student teachers in the present study highlighted the challenges of substantive concepts related to democracy aimed at students learning *about* democracy. Conversely, they primarily emphasised opportunities in terms of procedural concepts requiring students to discuss, make priorities and come to agreement on specific dilemmas. That is, the student teachers largely perceived the 'Democracy Cake' as positive for its modelling of democratic skills (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Johnson & Morris, 2010). Working with substantial concepts through this kind of structured participatory approach may be a fruitful instructional strategy for imparting content while engaging learners cognitively as well as socially and emotionally. However, and similar to what Journell and Buchanan (2013) argued to be the case in traditional civics instruction, the student teachers in this study did not address how young people might apply the knowledge and skills targeted by the board exercise to analyse real-life political issues.

The findings show that a majority of the student teachers related the 'Democracy Cake' to theories of liberal democracy, and several of them noted that it did not invite critique of its framing of democracy, which could be problematic. Eriksen's (2018) study revealed that student teachers largely perceived democracy in line with theories of liberal democracy, and Mathé's (2016) study of secondary school students generated similar results. These findings might indicate that teaching materials about democracy that are framed by theories of liberal democracy do not challenge student teachers' prior conceptualisations, which may in turn explain why many of the student teachers in this study did not express critical perspectives or suggest other aspects of democracy. As such, the use of this particular set of teaching materials in teacher education might have consequences for the student teachers' own conceptualisation of democracy and, consequently, for the way they teach it in the future. However, the discussions in the seminars not only included the aspects of democracy emphasised in the 'Democracy Cake', but also supplementary and critical perspectives contributing to the view of democracy as contextual and contestable (Milligan & Wood, 2010).

I would argue that this recognition points to the need to involve student teachers in *critically* examining various teaching materials. Indeed, the recognition that teaching materials are necessarily based on a selection of perspectives might contribute to an awareness of their own role as gatekeepers of students' access to diverse views, examples and narratives (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Johnson & Morris, 2010; Sheppard & Levy, 2019).

The student teachers participated in the board exercise through group and plenary discussions, and the opportunities and challenges of facilitating quality discussions featured strongly in the findings. While the student teachers noted that the 'Democracy Cake' could facilitate in-depth discussion of disciplinary concepts and structures, this particular exercise does not require students to provide their own ideas of what constitutes a democracy. It does, however, ask them to discuss how democracy can be further developed, reflecting the changeable and contextual nature of social science concepts and understandings (Milligan & Wood, 2010). Importantly, though, the student teachers also emphasised that discussions about complex concepts would

require a great deal of support and scaffolding from the teacher to include all students in the classroom. In line with some of Hess's (2010) characteristics of successful discussion, the board exercise gave a clear focus for the discussion and facilitated student teachers' dialogue. However, it is up to the teacher (and students) to plan and prepare and create a classroom environment in which they can build on, challenge and develop each other's ideas and arguments. Consequently, teacher education should prepare prospective teachers to compensate for limitations in different kinds of teaching materials and enable them to lead quality discussions in which students evaluate multiple perspectives, draw inferences and practice democratic skills (Grossman et al., 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Sandahl, 2015).

The findings in this study indicate that by eliciting student teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching democracy to secondary school students, the discussions went beyond developing their disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge and skills. Indeed, the student teachers made use of their knowledge to discuss their role as future teachers in designing instruction about democracy that both incorporates and challenges disciplinary and student perspectives. This implies that using teaching materials, such as exercises and texts developed by various organisations, in social science classrooms requires teachers' professional judgement in the planning, execution and consolidation stages to be sensitive to the balance between multiple perspectives that many argue is necessary in social science and citizenship education (e.g., Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Sheppard & Levy, 2019). Involving student teachers in the examination of various kinds of teaching materials could support them in this effort by requiring them to investigate others' and their own conceptions and relate these to educational purposes and their own instruction.

5.2 Contributing to student teachers' professional development

An important aspect of teacher education is contributing to student teachers' critical reflection about their own teaching methods for the benefit and growth of their students (Adler, 2008; Avalos, 2011). In social science, this can include reflecting on and examining teaching materials developed to improve students' understanding of democracy and the political system. Further, it is essential that social science teachers are able to recognise that there are different conceptualisations of democracy which have implications for instruction (Avery, 2004). Developing such competence requires relating disciplinary knowledge to students' lifeworld and might serve as a counterweight to thin conceptualisations offered, for example, in textbooks or by some teachers (Barton & Avery, 2016; Patterson et al., 2012). Consequently, student teachers need to be involved in critically examining their own beliefs and the underlying conceptualisations of teaching materials within social science teacher education programmes (Avery, 2004; Goodnough, 2010; Mathé, 2016). A contribution of this study is the illustration of how student teachers can further their own professional development by participating in exercises that help them transform disciplinary knowledge into reflected practice (Avalos, 2011).

6 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE TEACHER EDUCATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the present study reports on the perceptions of some student teachers in the Norwegian context, it offers insights for teacher education in social science education more widely. First, this study contributes perspectives on preparing student teachers to teach democracy as a subject-specific topic in social science, for example, regarding the challenges of disciplinary concepts and facilitating group discussions. In light of the findings, it might be relevant for teacher educators to focus on strategies for designing social science lessons that are sensitive to the balance between democratic values, the institutions and infrastructure of democracy and secondary school students' own relations to democracy.

The fact that student teachers were concerned with the concepts related to democracy is illustrative of the role of these concepts in social science education: concepts are vital for our ability to reflect on and communicate about social science and the world around us. Moreover, conceptual understandings develop through the learning process and can be considered transition points rather than endpoints or facts to be memorised (Milligan & Wood, 2010). In line with Barton and Levstik (2004), discussing various purposes of working with disciplinary concepts could also enable student teachers to plan teaching focused on specific learning goals as well as wider educational aims, including applying concepts and skills to current political dilemmas and challenges (Journell & Buchanan, 2013). Second, a plethora of teaching materials developed by various organisations and companies are available to social science teachers. Being aware of and identifying the underlying assumptions of such resources, as well as developing the competence to balance, scaffold and contextualise them in the classroom, is therefore essential for new teachers. This study has demonstrated one way of involving student teachers in the examination of materials designed for teaching about democracy. It illustrates how this activity facilitated student teachers' reflection on the theoretical framing of the exercise in order to encourage critical awareness of other kinds of teaching materials in their futures as social science teachers. As concepts such as democracy, politics and citizenship are contested (Biesta, 2011b; Milligan & Wood, 2010), teacher education in social science has a particular responsibility to contribute to student teachers' professional development in terms of evaluating and designing teaching materials that consider diverse perspectives.

As previously argued by Adler (2008) and Avery (2004), systematic research on teacher education in social studies is needed. Based on the findings and limitations of the present study, future research could focus on longitudinal observations of teacher education seminars in social science to explore how teacher educators facilitate student teachers' reflection on instruction of subject-specific topics and the links that are provided between theory and practice. Further, research could follow student teachers as they move between teacher education on campus and in schools to identify how they use the theoretically grounded tools provided by teacher educators with their own students and the challenges they experience as they develop strategies for transforming disciplinary knowledge from the social sciences into subject matter knowledge, balancing disciplinary and student perspectives.

7 CONCLUSION

This article presented a study of social science student teachers' perceptions of the 'Democracy Cake' developed by a non-profit organisation to strengthen secondary school students' understanding of democracy. The student teachers identified several benefits and challenges of using these predefined teaching materials. While a majority reported that the exercise used a liberal democratic framing of democracy, some also suggested additional components of democracy or challenged its call for consensus. Based on the findings from this study, I suggest that teacher education in social science might benefit from involving student teachers in critical examination of teaching materials to contribute to their professional development as social science teachers to strengthen students' access to diverse perspectives on democracy.

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