Participatory-collaborative administration of a school unit: The role of the Teachers' Council

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Abstract: *The present project refers to the results of a quantitative research performed throughout the region of Larisa about the application of participatory administration in Greek schools. More specifically, it concerns the participation of the Teachers' Council in decision making on subjects revolving around the function and administration of a school in Greece (our country), all according to the European educational and political expansion of democratic and participatory processes. The results showed that, on its majority, participatory administration is applied, and that is quite satisfactory. Decisions on subjects regarding school function are mostly collaborative and followed by all members of the Teachers' Council, who declared that only sometimes are they called to validate a principal's already taken settlement. However, most educators are adamant on the need to improve the role of the Teachers' Council, proposing mostly the right election of scholar administrators, the need for clear separation of jurisdiction between teachers and principals, the offer of motive and the possibility of bigger flexibility in school units.*

Keywords: *Leadership, administration, participatory administration, decision-taking, effectiveness.*

JEL Classification: *I20, I29*

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1 INTRODUCTION

The quality of a country's human resources' education is an important factor on its development process.
In Greece, every school is obliged to follow and apply decisions according to each current developed educational politic.
The Ministry of Education and Religion, recognizing that the need to redefine all educational politics is more essential than ever, in the New Network of Support Structures for the Educational Process, is setting the foundation for a more democratic and collaborative school, upgrading the role of the Teachers' Council in its function even more. A system that supports the educators'
participation in school administration, aims to the redistribution of authorities, which are institutionally connected to the Principal, to a more collaborative structure that is called to partake in the process of taking decisions on the school's function.

Within a democratic model of administration and school function, the teachers' participation in taking decisions is mandatory. It constitutes one of the most promising strategies for educational reformation, which includes a more professional teaching approach, empowered schools and participatory administration (Smylie 1992).
The problems that come up and the issues that preoccupy a school unit are usually complex and require coordination and interaction between the educational personnel for their most effective treatment (Saitis 2005a).
An educator, as a member of a school's Teachers' Council, is not restricted to their educational duties, but is called to participate in scheduling actions that will form the school's culture, profile and function (Chatzipanayotou, 2003: 84-85). Pashiardis (1994) mentions that schools need to show autonomy, meaning that they should have their own culture and follow participatory models in the process of taking decisions. In a broader European level, there have been quite a few reformations that emphasize the administrational decentralization, school autonomy, effectiveness and quality

of performed education, and of course, evaluation of school units (MacBeath et.al, 2004).

Many modern researches support that the Principal, and the way he leads, is a decisive factor to the improvement of a school. More specifically, Stoll and Fink (1996) quote the National British Educational Commission, "A good leadership is one of the principal traits of a successful school". Southworth (1998) claims, that according to Sammons et al. (1995), almost every study that refers to a successful school shows that leadership constitutes as the main factor behind said success. Harris &Muijs (2005) mention that in many western European countries and especially in Great Britain, there was great importance in the matter of schools leadership and their administrative models. A quite famous leadership classification in scholar administrational models is that of Leithwood & Duke (1999), who determine six leadership styles:

⇨ Instructional leadership
⇨ Transformational leadership
⇨ Contingent leadership
⇨ Moral leadership
⇨ Managerial leadership
⇨ Participative leadership

"Participative" leadership is based on the viewpoint that a leader's principal concern is "promoting participatory decision taking" (Katsaros, 2008:110). In fact, according to Sergiovanni (1984, found in Katsaros, 2008), participative leadership has positive effects on the personnel's cohesion and contributes to the work load and pressure decrease put on the one on the helm. Besides, in a school unit, responsibility distribution between those immediately involved, renders them more active in the scholar community with obvious results on the school's effectiveness. Participatory administration assures the teachers' creative involvement, thus contributing to the mutual understanding of the school's purpose (Bush, 1995).

In international bibliography, the philosophy of the "hero-leader" Principal is considered out of date (Lashway, 2003) and the newest trend is towards a more distributed leadership (MacBeath, 1998). Distributed leadership is a term mostly used in researchers' circles, political entities, and educational reformists (Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2005). It is linked with school efficiency (Harrs & Muijs, 2003, MacBeath, 1998), sustainability of any educational change (Fullan, 2001, Marks & Printy, 2003), amelioration in students' performance (Copeland, 2003, Harris & Muijs, 2005, Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon & Yashkina, 2007, Leithwood & Mascall, 2008, Heck & Hallinger, 2009) and development of professional educational communities (Eaton & Christou, 1997; Harris, 2008, Valachis et al., 2009; Harris & Jones, 2010).

In one of his articles, Bush (2012) claims that turning towards a more distributed leadership is obligatory. The modern trend towards self-management of each school unit has increased the principals-leaders' responsibilities by a respectable percentage, and made effective administration a lot harder. It is obvious that distributing leadership means educators will have to collaborate amongst themselves and thus, efficient decision-making is reinforced. In the sector of education, collaborative work amongst both teachers and principals/leaders constitutes the main element of a distributed leadership, and has a positive effect on teachers and students (Bushand Glover, 2012). In the same article, there is a reference to a Kerry Barnett and John McCormick study, made on school principals in Sidney, in which they emphasize the "critical" part of the Principal in the encouragement of a more collaborative administrational model in schools unit instead of the old, more self-centered one.

When it comes to the student, Brost(2000) mentions that in schools where power is shared between principal members and educators, the quality of the educational process and material is clearly better. That could possibly be explained by the fact that in schools with participative leadership, teachers have a bigger sense of responsibility for every school on-going, which results to their working satisfaction and thus, contributes positively to their applied teaching methods (Perryetal, 1994).

2 PARTICIPATORY ADMINISTRATION IN GREEK SCHOOLS

In Greece, the Teachers' Council is constitutional since 1985, according to Law no1566, thus contributing significantly to the democratization of the scholar administration system.

The Teachers' Council is placed on the center of the school function, because it is responsible for substantial decisions "referring to the school's internal function, its programming, design and project review, prioritization, professional culture and ethics, training priorities and the school's pedagogy, the connection with the local community and more" (Mavrogiorgos, 2004:23). Consequently, its decisions, along with their quality and effectiveness, will depend on the school's smooth functionality, progress and development.

It hasn't been approached on a research level, despite the fact that the teachers' participation in school administration was considered the most important factor in liberating schools from the centralized administrational model, with its principal target being a self-ruled school and final purpose the amelioration of school effectiveness (Chatzipanayotou, 2003).

Participatory administration's effectiveness in the Greek bureaucratic model of administration is not as satisfactory as expected. Educators don't seem to take initiative in organizing school events and in taking advantage of every possibility of cooperation between the school and the local community, at least not in a satisfactory degree (Kousoulos et al, 2004). However, it seems that many of them do wish for a bigger and more essential part in the process of decision-making (Chatzipanayotou, 2003). According to Pasiardis (2004), the teachers' participation has a positive effect to the satisfaction they get from their profession and the enthusiasm they might feel towards the school they work in. In addition, he mentions that teachers usually prefer principals that provide them the possibility to participate in decision-making on school issues. In fact, in another one of his studies he talks about how teachers with these liberties can turn into leaders themselves (Pasiardis, 1994).

The current project's object is the teachers' participation, as members of the Teachers' Council, in Larisa's high schools. More specifically, the project aims to:

- The clarification on how teachers experience participatory administration in schools.
- Study the functionality and effectiveness of the Teachers' Council in Greekschools.
- Propose ways to ameliorate the school unit's function, according to the results of research studies.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research took place through a "survey" and a questionnaire was used in order to explore the stance and opinions of those questioned in regards to their participation in decision-taking on matters of school administration and function in each one's school of employment. The questionnaire, as a means of data collection, is most appropriate for studying quantitative analysis, because it ensures anonymity and, consequently, a relevant honesty in answers. It is usually recommended in the case that participants have personal relationships with the researcher, as well as when the researched sample is relevantly big, because it provides the necessary time frame for the participants to answer and also a chance for a more objective research result (Cohen et al, 2008:414)

The questions were distributed in 6 entities. The first is about demographic elements, such as sex, age, work relations, years of activity, marital status. The next three refer to the practice of participatory administration in each educator's school of employment, the functionality of the Teachers' Council and the teachers' involvement in School Personnel meetings. The last two evaluate factors that affect decision-taking on matters of creative actions from members of the Teachers' Council, as well as proposals on the school's improvement as a whole.

In this research, 136 educators from 21 Secondary Education schools in Larisa took part during the school year 2017-2018, with various work relations. More specifically, 31 teachers from schools in the city, 36 from suburban schools and 39 from rural area schools. According to data taken from the High School Administration Unit in the county of Larisa, the number of educators working in the area in the school year of 2017-2018 is 1554 permanent ones and 80 deputies .The research took place in the county of Larisa, November 2017. Google forms was used to create the questionnaire, in Greek language, and an email was sent to all school units, asking that principals forward it to their respective teachers.

The descriptive statistics and the response frequencies were taken out of google forms tables. SPSS 23 was chosen for further statistical analysis and data presentation, because of its easy use, its credibility and functionality in extracting results that were thereafter encoded in order to create the necessary tables.

The research's credibility is guaranteed, in some degree, by the fact that the sample was purposefully representative in terms of numbers and different layers (Javeau, 2000). Comparing the results to those of other studies, whenever possible, also allows and reinforces said credibility (Bird et al, 1999).

4 INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

According to the statistical analysis, there was respectable correlation between "participatory administration and a positive climate inside the Teachers' Council" [r=0,658, N=136, P<0,001], as well as between "the teachers' satisfaction towards their Council's function and the positive climate in general" [r=0,568, N=136, P<0,001].

Said positive atmosphere in the Teachers' Council function is an important factor in practicing participatory administration in a school unit, because it contributes in the teachers' collaboration and satisfaction, and also increases trust and willingness to participate in other school on-goings. In the process of decision-making, apart from the Principal's stance, it is vital to take notice of the desire and willingness of the collective school body, meaning the teachers themselves, to take part in the process. (Chatzipanayotou, 2003). Figure 1 lists the demographic data, as taken by the sample's answers.

Figure 1
Demographic Data

- Sex: 50 men (36,8%), 86 women (63,2%)
- Age: > 41years old (91,9%)
- Years of experience: >10 years (95,6%)
- Work status: Permanent 132 (97,1%), Deputies 4 (2,9%)
- Experience in the same school: < 10 years (60,30%)

The percentage of teachers that took part in our research were 63,2% women and 36,8% men. In regards to their marital status, an 84,6% stated they were married. Taking into account this number, as well as mobility in this sector, one can perceive the social and economic magnitude of the issue of permanent and temporary transfers.

Figure 2
Experience in the same school
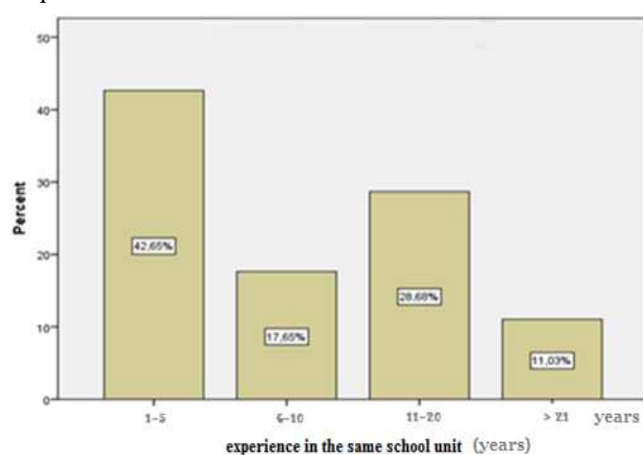
In Figure 2, we observe that a percentage of 42,6% states that they remain in the same school unit from 1 to 5 years. The existent of big mobility is an inhibitory factor in a school's effectiveness, since it prevents the configuration and maintenance of a positive vibe inside the school unit, does not ensure continuity and consistency of an educator's work, is a hindrance to the formation and realization of commonly

acceptable goals and affects negatively the scholar personnel and the students' performance (Mavrogiorgos, 1999, Edmonds 1979, Purkey & Smith, 1983).

5   PRACTICE OF PARTICIPATORY ADMINISTRATION

In regards to practicing participatory administration, a percentage of 66,2% states that the decisions on school function issues are taken by the Teachers' Council. Sometimes, however, the teachers (53,7%) are called to validate decisions already taken by the Principal. 97,8% agrees that collaborative decision taking equals responsibility on every member of the Teachers' Council, 77,2% states that they would participate in every Teachers' Council meeting, even if it was optional, and that the decisions taken collectively, are applied by every member, according to 55,9% of the sample.

Wherever there is participatory administration, there is participation from every member in the realization of the school unit's objective goal, which results in communication improvement between the unit members, and by extension, in the creation of a more beneficial vibe that contributes in the acceptance and practice of the administrational decisions, since group decisions make people feel committed (Koontzetal, 1980, Dackleretal 1978, Kanellopoulos, 1990).

When teachers participate in the process of forming and making decisions about their schools, they also contribute in building bigger trust and communication between them and their principals (Conway, 1984, Estler, 1998). It promotes a democratic way of thinking and allows educators to acquire experience in matters of school administration (Murphy & Beck, 1995), contributes to the improvement of the entire teaching process (Conleyetal, 1988) and also boosts the educators moral and, therefore, increases their productivity (Vroom, 1960, Conway, 1984).

6   MEETINGS AND WAY OF FUNCTION OF THE TEACHERS' COUNCIL

52,9% is satisfied by the way the Teachers' Council meetings are held and believes there is a positive climate (65,4%). A big percentage of the teaching sample (72,1%) stated that each coworker's opinion is respected. This is quite important, as it proves that in these meetings, a basic premise of participatory administration is applied, and that is respect towards each personality, so that through each member's participation there is no personality damage. (Kabouridis, 2002:57).

The existence of arguments between colleagues is also positive, since only just 1,5% stated that there are no arguments during Teachers' Council meetings. According to Kabouridis (2002: 60-61), "Lack of arguments indicates lack of concern towards achieving the best solution, and most of the time, indifference towards the settlement of school issues".

80,1% stated that the Teachers' Council is functioning in a way that contributes positively to a smooth school function, and they attribute that to a) the existence of cooperation and good communication between members, b) the teachers'

interest and c) the Principal's democratic administration style.

In many researches, there was alterability in the educators' willingness to actively participate in a collective process of decision-making (Griffin, 1995, Christou & Sigala, 2001; Meyersetal, 2001). If a teacher participates for the first time in such a working model, it is quite possible that they feel it works more as a "menace" against them. In these cases, it is up to the Principal to make sure that educators, and staff in its entirety, feel comfortable with that model, and to create an open school that inspires an atmosphere of trust. A good starting point would be to make their subordinates feel that by participating in the process, they get the opportunity to work with their Principal as equals, and thus, affect the school's politics (Pashiardis, 1994).

7   TAKING INITIATIVES FOR CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

86% agrees that the way a Teachers' Council functions inside the school contributes, either positively or negatively, in teachers taking initiatives and to the school's effectiveness. According to the results, the educators' interest and the positive climate are essential factors to their motivation towards actions. A big percentage considers the scholar personnel's mobility and bad leadership inhibiting factors. When the Principal shares the power of decision and helps establish a vision about teaching, education and innovation, then the school's benefits is maximized, in contrast to when the Principal prefers a more centralized administration (Heller & Firestone, 1995). Quite similar is the corollary coming from Meyers & Gelzheiser's research (2001), according to which, the school that was more improved and effective was the one where decisions were taken collectively, while the Principal was supportive of change and innovation. On the contrary, the school where the Principal had the absolute power in meetings, rendering all teachers inactive, was the least productive and effective.

8   PROPOSALS FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE TEACHERS' COUNCIL FUNCTION

The sample's main and most ardent proposal for the improvement of the Teachers' Council, with a percentage of 98,6% of unanimity, is the election of the school's most appropriate Principal. Administrators are usually considered ineffective by their subordinates either when they are not accepted by the members of the Teachers' Council (obviously because they do not believe them better than themselves for the position), or because of the way decisions are taken in the school (Hoyetal 1987: 338, Kalogirou, 2000: 52).

97,8% proposes a clear distribution of jurisdiction between the Principal and the Teachers' Council Establishing motives (both ethical and material) on people or groups of educators that take up creative initiatives is proposed by 89% of the sample. According to bibliography, establishing motives initiates teachers through the connection of effort performance reward (Saitis, 2002: p. 173).

The possibility of reforming the school's teaching schedule in order to hold the Teachers' Council meetings unobtrusively was also suggested (83,1%) as well as the possibility of establishing a local educational politic that adjusts to each school's uniqueness (82%).

The possibility of reforming the school's teaching schedule, according to its unplanned needs, is yet another proposal that suggest the necessity for autonomy in our country's school units, combined with a proposal for granting more power in Greek schools in order to apply a local educational politic adjusted to each school's needs.

9   CONCLUSIONS

Judging by this research's results, it is concluded that the participatory model of administration, in regards to the Teachers' Council's contribution in the Greek educational system, is applied in a relatively satisfying way in schools throughout the precinct of Larisa. Additionally, the way the Teachers' Council is functioning has an essential impact on the school's effectiveness.

However, according to the sample's proposals, a great percentage considers the improvement of this unit's function a great necessity.

Formally required clear distribution of jurisdiction between the Teachers' Council and the school Principal is also equally necessary in order to improve the Teachers' Council 'smooth function, and, by extension, the school'stoo.

Positive climate, as well as the Principal's appropriate leading, also appear as important factors to the existence of participatory administration and a school unit's effectiveness. Positivity throughout a school unit mostly depends on the Principal, who, in collaboration with every teaching member, strives to develop a favorable environment, where communication, collaboration and organizational factors are required to coexist. (Pasiardis & Pasiardi, 2000:26). In general, the Principal cultivates positivity, conducts collaborative programming, makes an effort to have the required material and technical foundation in order to achieve the school's most effective function and encourages the personnel's continuous professional development. A Principal's most important trait, according to Andrews & Soder (1987), is to be visible everywhere in the school.

A group's function, in order to be effective, depends on and is affected by the following factors: the group's size, each member's personal traits, its cohesion, quality of leadership and school culture and climate (Kousoulos et.al, 2004).

Teachers' constant mobility abolishes the basic administrative principal of "personnel union", that suggests the need to develop an atmosphere of cooperation and creativity between the school members. If the administration's purpose is to promote the teachers' participation in facing school problems, through the Teachers' Councils' improvement, then realizing the absolutely necessary relocations is a prerequisite (Kousoulos et.al., 2004). Consequently, it is mandatory to perform a rational distribution of human resources, emphasizing on the teachers' stability in the same school.

Establishing motives (material and ethical), systematic development of leading educational members and

decentralization of power are amongst the sample's proposals in this research, as conditions for the unit's, and the school's in general, effectiveness.

More specifically, teachers taking initiatives for everlasting creative activities must be connected to ethical and material reward, service recognition and evaluation, exploitation and support of the talented educators for more active participation in subsidiary school programs, as well as further education in and out of the school setting. Financial and material aid to a school unit is also vital in order to ensure that there are all the necessary conditions to create a modern environment of education for students, of work for teachers.

Of course, participatory administration demands a school that is open to the local community. It becomes the cultural centre of the entire area. Its relationship with the community is bidirectional. The school is open to the local community and the community is open to the school. Education should not be limited inside the four walls of a classroom and the school yard. The parents' role is essential and upgraded. The local community embraces and supports the school and participates actively in its work and life.

In order to achieve change, effective participatory administration and collaboration in Greek schools, the schools themselves must be a bit more flexible. There must be a high sense of personal and collective responsibility. Autonomy and teamwork must coexist in harmony. The pupil must have the chance for multiple choices and the teacher must have the possibility to create these choices.

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