

The Democratic Distributed Leadership in the Greek School: A Survey on the Leading Role of Teachers in School Units of the West Greece Region

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Abstract: Educational leadership has been engaged in international literature and research in recent years, especially in its role in promoting democracy and its values at school units. The contribution of school units is considered important for the strengthening of democracy and its values, especially in countries such as Greece, which is currently facing major social and economic problems that have a negative impact on the quality of democracy. A basic conclusion emerging from the international literature is that the promotion of democracy and its values at school units requires, among other things, the redefinition of the role of the educational leadership so that the members of school units can contribute to the creation of a participatory democratic culture through changing attitudes and practices in school units. For this purpose, it is considered necessary to implement a model of democratic distributed leadership aimed at transforming school culture and further democratizing it through the promotion of collective democratic moral aims and values, such as participation, cooperation, consultation and respect for the freedoms and rights of all members of the school community. This goal can be achieved through the educational interaction between teachers, students and the principal, so that everyone can, through their individual action, contribute to the creation of a democratic school culture. In this paper we examine the role of teachers in the promotion of democracy in the Greek School in the light of their participation in democratic distributed leadership. For that reason, we conducted a survey that explores teachers' attitudes towards promoting democratic principles and values in the school environment. For the implementation of this research proposal, we used the survey method using questionnaires in a sample of 400 teachers in 80 secondary education school units of Aitolokarnania Regional Unity. The results of the survey showed that teachers lack the necessary knowledge of democracy and its values and that they do not, through their attitudes, have the mood to contribute to the development of a democratic distributed leadership in the particular school units where our research was implemented.

Keywords: Democratic distributed leadership, democratic values, distributed leadership, school administration, school governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades efforts have been made in western democratic countries to develop through education, democratic values such as collectivity, cooperation, dialogue, participation, etc. Cultivating these values in school units requires the development of democratic models of school governance. By developing such models, school governance can foster the development of democratic practices that go beyond the traditional model of school administration. Because democratic values become meaningful and constitute an essential part of the formal curriculum when they are applied within the school unit through democratic attitudes and practices (Woods, 2005). With the development of democratic models of school governance, school administration can promote democratic educational goals through the adoption of democratic

attitudes and practices not only by principals but also by teachers and students who are committed to develop a democratic school culture in the school community. A minimal prerequisite for activating school administration for democratic purposes is the implementation of a distributed leadership model in the school unit.

The distributed leadership model enables the presence of many leaders in the school unit and increases the satisfaction of teachers and students while helping to create human capital and favors, through the interaction between the principal, the teachers and the students, the development of social capital (Mayorwetz, 2008). The development of human and social capital strengthens the democratic features of the distributed leadership model, without being fully identified with democratic leadership (Harris, 2014).

Therefore, distributed leadership is by definition not democratic and does not necessarily promote democratic values. For this reason, in the present study we have adopted the concept of distributed leadership in a democratic version, which we define as "democratic distributed leadership". Democratic distributed leadership embraces the idea of sharing competences but incorporates at the same time the moral objective of promoting democracy and its values. In this perspective, democratic distributed leadership can include the attitudes and practices of all members of the school unit, that is to say, both the principal and the students and teachers, and to assess whether they are oriented towards the promotion of democracy and its values. In this paper we will focus our research on teachers' attitudes to see if they are oriented towards adopting democratic values and transforming school administration into a democratic distributed leadership.

2. SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

The concept of "school governance" is a general category that includes "democratic school governance", which has as its mission the formation of a democratic social ethos, mainly through the learning and diffusion of democratic values in school units. According to Halász (2003), school governance has as its constituent elements negotiation, persuasion and dialogue, which makes it suitable for the promotion of democratic values in modern democratic societies. As school units are transformed daily into open learning organizations, influenced by social and economic change, they increasingly need consensus through negotiation, dialogue and participation in the decision-making process of all school members. The traditional school administration, which is identified in the person of principal, today fails to respond to multiple challenges in the school area, such as the increasingly complex legislative framework, the involvement of local authorities in school affairs, rights of parents, students and teachers, the development of school units and the adaptation of the curriculum to social changes (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007).

In these circumstances, there was a need for more democratic school governance models, which would not only contribute to the co-management of school problems, but would also shape the conditions for changing and transforming school culture and school practices towards their democratization. The condition for these changes is the implementation of a distributed leadership model that combines the adoption of democratic values with democratic educational practices. It is the democratic distributed leadership, which is a version of the distributed leadership model and is the only form for a successful and sustainable democratic leadership in the school unit (Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007).

It is worth mentioning here, that the distributed leadership model is referred to international literature as shared or collaborative, or democratic leadership (Anderson, Moore & Sun, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2009; Mayorwetz, 2008; Storey, 2004; Timperley, 2008). Therefore, the version of the democratic distributed leadership that we propose and use in the present work perceives the educational leadership as a social phenomenon not attributed to individual leadership, but emphasizes the interaction of the members of the school unit that work together to achieve democratic purposes. Also, within the framework of democratic distributed leadership, organizational directions, impetus and empowerment of the school unit are the result of the "circulation of initiative", while leadership is exercised by multiple leaders, thus influencing and shapes the conditions, rules of operation and relationships of the members of the school unit. It promotes human abilities, emphasizing in valuation of specialization and development - utilizing human resources in ways that contribute to the achievement of ethical democratic goals. Consequently, it works for the development and activation of human abilities in everyday school activities in order to cultivate the value of democracy to its members (Woods, 2005).

The model of democratic distributed leadership presupposes that leaders must act with responsibility, correctness and justice, creating positive social relationships such as mutual trust, transparency and proper guidance towards common goals with benefits for everyone. Giving emphasis on the effort for development and well – being of all members of the

school unit and its transformation into a democratic learning community. Finally, the leader exercising democratic distributed leadership equally shares his responsibilities with other members of the school community in order to create a democratic climate and achieve collective organizational success (Yukl, 2010; Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). It also has a high level of commitment to ethical - democratic values and self - awareness of its beliefs, emotions and abilities. He does not seek positions of responsibility to satisfy his vanity or to demonstrate his authority, but to express and impart democratic values and practices to the school unit (Gardner et al., 2005).

On the basis of the above theoretical framework, the democratic distributed leadership can promote the educational interaction among the principal, the teachers and the students within the school unit. Through this interplay each one can promote, with his individual action, collective, democratic, moral goals and values, such as participation, cooperation, consultation and respect for the freedoms and rights of all members of the school community.

It is important to underline that the degree of promotion and maintenance of the model of democratic distributed leadership in the school unit depends on a) the presence of multiple leaders (leader – plus aspect) in the field of school administration, and b) the way that leadership roles and tasks are distributed (the practice – aspect) in the school unit (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). In particular, multiple leaders in the school unit take leadership roles, either individually or collectively, to promote values and pedagogical practices in the school unit that enhance their democratic culture. Within the framework of democratic distributed leadership, teachers can take leading roles in the ethical cultivation and development of students, in promoting democratic values and in democratizing the school unit.

3. DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND DEMOCRATIC DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

One of the main aims of the school is the ethical cultivation and development of students with the primary aim of shaping tomorrow's democratic citizens (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2014). For the ethical development of students, it is important to have knowledge of values, ethical consciousness, interpersonal understanding, and responsible judgment, through which students can express their ideas and opinions, and shoulder the moral responsibility of their actions (Aspin, 2007). In this perspective, Thornberg argues that values education is the key factor in integrating democratic values into the school's life, such as active participation, co-operation, tolerance for diversity and social justice (Brownlee et al, 2016). The role of teachers is crucial for educating students on democratic values.

In particular, the ethical impulse of students by teachers is part of an educational leadership that attaches great importance to the diffusion of democratic values within the school unit. In this way, teachers are transformed into active members of a democratic distributed leadership acting to promote the ethical and democratic nature of the school unit. In such a context, teachers have the ability to operate in a way that engages them in the decision-making process in order to improve relationships among teachers, students and parents and to reform the culture of school unit in to the direction of its democratization (Brown, 2007).

Hence, the promotion of democratic values and the consolidation of a democratic culture in the school unit presuppose the existence of a democratic distributed leadership that is free of inelastic administrative structures and aware of the functioning of bottom - up systems of school governance. In this sense, the school unit should be composed of teachers able to teach democratic values, to become active members to exercise democratic distributed leadership oriented towards the development of a society of democratic citizens (Danoff, 2010). So, through our research we will attempt to investigate whether teachers adopt attitudes that in favor of the development of a democratic distributed leadership as a condition for the promotion of democracy and its values in the Greek School.

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

For the implementation of this research proposal, we used the method of the survey using questionnaires, as the main methodological tool. The information gathered with the questionnaires was passed to a database of statistical software SPSS 18. In addition, in the questionnaires we applied a 5-grade Likert scale so that we can more reliably capture the answers given by the subjects of the survey (DeVellis, 2007). Subsequently, we quote the demographic data of the teacher sample and present the statistical analysis of the data derived from the processing of their responses to the statistical software SPSS 18. In particular, we analyze the attitudes¹ of teachers in relation to their practices and methods that they

¹ For the notion of attitudes have been given various definitions. Social psychologist Gordon Allport argued that the concept of attitudes "carries one of the most important descriptive and explanatory burdens of social psychology", defining himself as "a mental or neural state of readiness for response,

apply in promoting the democratic values in the school unit and the possible development of democratic leadership in the promotion of democratic values, based on the responses given to the questionnaires.

A. Sample of the research

Regarding the selection of the sample we used the method of stratified sampling (Javeau, 2000). The survey was carried out in 400 teachers of 80 school units of secondary education in the Region of Western Greece. More specifically, the distribution of the sample amounts to 58.70% for women and 41.30% for men, while the school units come mostly from urban areas (64.3%) and the rest of them come from semi – urban (19.8%) and rural areas (15.9%).

B. Logic of the research

The results of our research are presented in four parts, which correspond to four stages of escalating the democracy of teachers. These four stages were inspired by the work of Elisabeth Bäckman & Bernard Trafford (2007), which concerned the exploration of school administration's attitudes towards the promotion of democratic values in the school unit. The choice of democratic values that we are looking at, has been based on the Council of Europe Model for promoting democratic citizenship, which focuses on the promotion of three fundamental democratic values, namely “Rights and responsibilities”, “Active participation and “Promoting diversity” (Gollob et al, 2010).

In the first and second of the above stages, the answers to the questions range from one (1), which equates to the democratic attitudes of teachers, to five (5), which equates to their authoritarian attitudes. This means that the higher the average of answers, the more authoritative attitudes are observed by the teachers. And vice versa, the smaller it is, the closer it is to the democratic attitudes of teachers.

In the third and fourth stages the answers to the questions range from one (1) which equates to the authoritarian attitudes of the teachers, up to five (5) which equals to their democratic attitudes. That is, the greater the average of answers, the more democratic attitudes are observed by the teachers, and vice versa the smaller it is, the closer it is to the authoritarian attitudes of the teachers. Subsequently, we will present the results of the analysis of the data, which relate to the four stages of escalating the democracy of teachers' attitudes.

C. Results of the research

In the first stage, where the higher the average of responses, the more authoritarian attitudes are observed by teachers, regarding the democratic value "Rights and responsibilities", the more authoritarian attitudes of teachers ($avg^2 = 3.83$) are related to the assignment to teachers by the principal of any responsibility or activity based on school regulations or the internal rules of operation of the school unit. Regarding the democratic value “Active participation”, the most authoritarian attitudes of teachers ($avg = 3.12$) are related to their position that the subject of teaching methods belongs exclusively to their competence. Finally, with regard to "Promoting diversity", the most authoritarian attitudes ($avg = 3.39$) of teachers relate to their position that school books should promote the values and customs that they have been established and dominated by society.

Similar to the first stage, in the second stage, regarding the democratic value "Rights and responsibilities", the most authoritarian attitudes of teachers ($avg = 3.97$) are related to their position that the freedom of expression of students can reconciled with their obedience to regulations and the smooth functioning of the school unit while their less authoritarian attitudes ($avg = 1.78$) are related to their position that they should have the freedom to choose the activities related to their educational work. In both "Active participation" and "Promoting diversity", authoritarian attitudes of teachers to all questions are well below the average.

In the third stage, where the higher the average of responses, the more democratic the attitudes of teachers are, in terms of "Rights and responsibilities", more democratic attitudes ($avg = 4.01$) are related with the position of the teachers that the school principal should take into account the needs of the students and promote the democratic values according to the

which is organized on the basis of experience and exerts a direct or dynamic influence on the behavior of the subject in all the objects or situations with which he is involved" (Allport, 1935: 810). Another theoretical approach proposed by many researchers (Eagley and Chaiken, 1993; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) is the tri - componential model of attitudes, according to which the attitude is a unified and indivisible condition of the subject that is analyzed in three dimensions : emotional, behavioral, and cognitive. In more detail, the emotional dimension refers to the subject's feelings in relation to the object of attitude, while behavioral dimension is linked to the tendency of the subject to act. Finally, the cognitive dimension consists of the ideas and beliefs that the subject has for the object of attitude (Oskamp & Schultz, 2005: 9-10).

² Where “avg” means average.

curriculum while less democratic attitudes are linked to the fact that decisions on educational issues are taken after by consulting the principal and after informing the students (avg = 3.65). In addition, in "Active participation", the more democratic attitudes of teachers (avg = 4.01) are related to encouraging students to engage in the learning process through individual activities. Instead, teachers' attitudes regarding their contribution to the content of the lessons are less democratic (avg = 3.44). Finally, regarding the democratic value "Promoting diversity", the more democratic attitudes (avg = 4.39) of teachers concern the protection of the religious freedom of students, while less democratic are their attitudes regarding whether or not the school administration must allow teachers to apply a "free" curriculum that aims at equal treatment of students' cultural and social identities (avg = 3.13).

In the fourth stage, where the higher the average of the responses, the more democratic are the attitudes of the teachers, regarding the "Rights and responsibilities", the more democratic attitudes of the teachers (avg = 4.41) relate to the promotion of a climate of trust, respect, and consensus among colleagues and students. On the contrary, the less democratic attitudes relate to whether the democratic values contained in the curriculum must be implemented in the everyday life of the school unit (avg = 3.65). Regarding "Active participation", more democratic attitudes relate to the position of teachers, according to which each student and / or teacher should be involved in decision-making and assume responsibility for issues related to the school unit (avg = 3.71), while the less democratic attitudes of teachers (avg = 2.69) are related to their contribution, in cooperation with students, to the content of the courses. Finally, in the democratic value "Promoting diversity", a high degree of democracy is presented by teachers' attitudes related to the promotion of democratic values and the prevention of any possible distortion (avg = 4.04), as well as attitudes related to the encouragement of students with disabilities, students of poverty or poor students to take initiatives (avg = 4.21).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of our research show that school teachers do not sufficiently understand democratic values or often ignore their existence, resulting in a practical problem in promoting democratic values and democratic education in the school environment. On this basis, the role of teachers in developing a democratic distributed leadership model in the school unit is rather limited, while teachers themselves directly or indirectly accept or identify this role with school administration. That is, they seem to follow the educational process as defined by the school's internal regulations and the legislation in force, without intending or willing to activate for the strengthening of "Rights and responsibilities", "Active participation" and "Promoting diversity" in the school area, preparing students as tomorrow's democratic citizens.

In addition, as it appears from the results of our research, non-adoption of appropriate learning methods and educational practices by teachers, results in the non-inclusion of democratic values in the educational process either as a basic component of the curriculum or through spontaneous educational practices. As a result, the school unit is led to the establishment of a conservative framework that refers to the traditional version of the school administration rather than to the model of democratic distributed leadership. In this sense, teachers fail to promote the principles of democracy in the school unit. Therefore, it makes it impossible to democratize the school unit and leaving unfulfilled the basic purpose of democratic education, which is concentrated on the idea of an active and responsible student who has to intervene through his participation in all aspects of school life.

It is obvious that there is a weakness among the majority of teachers. On the one hand to understand adequately the importance of democratic values in the educational process and on the other hand to realize that the "formal" promotion of democratic values does not help students to acquire a democratic culture and adopt the values such as equality, freedom, mutual respect, active participation and resolution of emerging issues through dialogue and cooperation.

We believe that the results of the above research are generalizable for the whole of Greek Education because of its large sample, which occupies a large area of the Greek Territory. This conclusion highlights the problematic nature of democratic education in Greece and the need for interventions by the official educational policy makers in the country. Co-ordinated efforts of school administration with both public and private actors, such as parent and guardian clubs, local government and non-governmental organizations, are also required.

In addition, organized intervention through the formal education policy at the level of the Regional Directorates of Education, with the main purpose of training the principals and the teachers on issues related to knowledge and practices promoting the democratic values within the school unit, would be a major intervention in this direction. Especially, as is shown by our research, it is necessary to train teachers and principals on problem management issues that focus on tackling discrimination and social exclusion of children of vulnerable social groups and tolerance to the different.

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