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Teacher participation in decision making and its impact on school and teachers

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine teacher involvement in different domains of decision making in Greek primary schools and explore associations with school and teacher variables.
Design/methodology/approach – A survey employing self-administered questionnaires, with a Likert-type scale assessing teachers' actual and desired participation in three domains of decision making, was used. Scales measuring perceived school climate, self-efficacy and job satisfaction were also included. Data were collected from 143 teachers working in primary schools located in different areas in Greece.
Findings – The multidimensional approach to measuring teacher participation in decision making revealed quite high actual participation in decisions concerning students' and teachers' issues, but low levels of participation in managerial decisions. The discrepancy between the actual and desired levels of participation showed significant deprivation across all decision-making domains. Greater participation in decisions concerning teacher issues and lower levels of deprivation of participating in managerial issues were associated with teachers' perceptions of better leadership and higher collegiality in schools. The strongest predictor of both teachers' sense of efficacy and job satisfaction was their participation in decisions concerning teacher issues.
Practical implications – Educational leaders should promote forms of participation in decision making that increase teachers' actual involvement in decisions concerning their duties and opportunities for development and also provide for more sharing on issues concerning the school management, particularly for women.
Originality/value – The study underlines the value of dimensionality in investigating decision making in schools.

Keywords Primary schools, Greece, Teachers, Decision making, Participatory leadership, School climate

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The participatory leadership movement has gained much popularity over the last three decades. Participatory leadership engages all members of an organization or organizational division in jointly identifying its vision, goals, strategies and involves them in key areas of decision making (Spillane, 2005). This empowerment of individuals is considered fundamental for enhancing their morale and motivation, increasing levels of job satisfaction and promoting a sense of responsibility and commitment to organizational effectiveness and improvement. New ways of organizational management that cultivate synergistic creativity and establish high-performance workplace practices focus on collaborative decision making (Goleman, 2002; Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003; MacBeath, 2005; Harris, 2004).

In line with such general trends in organizational management, schools are also under pressure to change and evolve into learning organizations, that is, into collaborative communities fostering a knowledge seeking and capacity building environment (Spillane *et al.*, 2001; Hord, 1997). The idea that school leadership can and

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should be shared among members of the entire educational community is broadly promoted as a factor contributing to the development of such learning communities and also broadening the range of leadership processes that naturally exist in schools (Barth, 2001; Harris, 2003; Lambert, 2002). Moreover, the societal pressures for accountability and educational reforms leading to effective schools, suggest models of school decision making that involve increasing amounts of teacher participation (Pashiardis, 1994). In fact, recent results of longitudinal data provide support of the view that shared leadership builds the academic capacity in schools and thus has a positive impact in student learning (Hallinger and Heck, 2010).

Shared decision making is a process designed to push educational decisions at the level where those closest to students may apply their expertise to promote student learning and, therefore, making implementation of those decisions not only possible, but also successful (Bauer, 1992; Pashiardis, 1994; Perry *et al.*, 1994; Somech, 2010). Teacher participation in school leadership helps them build leadership capacities, fights the bureaucratic system of schooling and has been associated with efforts of school democratization (Goleman, 2002; Gronn, 2000; Cheng, 2008).

Participatory decision making in schools has been included in research regarding organizational theory, school effectiveness and teacher empowerment (Sergiovanni, 1992). Many researchers argued that teacher participation in school decision making had many advantages for teachers and schools, like increased dedication, job satisfaction, increased motivation and greater responsibility (Cheng, 2008). On the other hand, shared decision making can be threatening to staff members, in the beginning, involves the risk of early confrontation, slows down the process of reaching a decision, may increase the workload and stress for all school members, and thus it can create a sense of work alienation and cause frustration to participants (Pashiardis, 1994; Harris, 2004; Quinn and Troy-Quinn, 2000; Smylie, 1992).

The present paper reports on a study investigating actual and desired levels of teacher participation in multiple decision-making domains and its impact on teachers' sense of efficacy, job satisfaction and perceptions of school climate. Based on empirical results, the paper aims to reach conclusions and make recommendations regarding ways of promoting constructive modes of teacher participation in school decision making.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Teacher participation in school decision making: the multiple dimensions of the construct

Participation in school decision making is a complex task which refers to the extent of involvement in different decision-making areas, approached with different levels of desire and sources of power (Ho, 2010). Decision making refers to various aspects of school life, from curriculum and instructional co-ordination to students' attendance and discipline and from staff development and personnel issues to the allocation of resources and general administration (Pashiardis, 1994; Smylie, 1992). Participation differs according to the domain of decisions, as principals tend to involve teachers more in the technical domain of students' and instructional issues rather than in the school administration and management domain (Somech, 2002).

Early researchers used to dichotomize decisional participation into teaching and managerial issues (Ingersoll, 1996) while, later on, more detailed classifications were developed (Imber and Duke, 1984; Bacharach *et al.*, 1990). Apart from measuring actual participation in different areas of decision making, authors suggest that

research should also examine teachers' willingness to be involved in different decision-making domains (Pashiardis, 1994). Alutto and Belasco (1972) conceptualized participation in decisions in terms of the discrepancy between actual and desired participation, which creates a typology characterized by conditions of deprivation, equilibrium and saturation in decision making. Although recent studies provide some evidence of positive effects of teachers' participation in decision making, it is not always clear whether teachers are willing to participate in all types of decisions, in which types are more likely to face decisional deprivation and which are associated with certain outcomes (Smylie, 1992; Cheng, 2008; Bacharach *et al.*, 1990; Chan *et al.*, 1997).

Given the above, it is important to carry out research that is not limited to applying a generic construct of teachers' involvement in school decision making, but one which takes into account its multidimensional nature, both in terms of the different decisional domains and the discrepancies between teachers' actual and desired participation in each of these domains. Such research would shed more light into school practices of decision making and their associations with teacher and school outcomes.

2.2 Participatory decision making and teacher and school outcomes

As already noted, there is evidence of an association between teachers' participation in decision making and perceptions of school climate, job satisfaction and self-efficacy. At the collective level, teachers who perceive their school climate being positive are more willing to participate in decision making, and in fact, they do participate more (Smylie, 1992). Schools with participatory decision making often have principals who are knowledgeable of several group techniques so that they can make the right choice of group technique to meet the needed objective of shared leadership (Pashiardis, 1993).

At the individual level, two important variables contributing to school effectiveness are teachers' sense of efficacy and job satisfaction, both of which have been associated with the degree of participation in school decisions. Teacher self-efficacy refers to his/her perceived ability to meet the demands and challenges implied by the job and ultimately affect students' learning. Teachers with high self-efficacy set more ambitious standards for themselves and for students, put more effort and persist longer, and are more likely to succeed. Participatory decision making empowers teachers by delegating authority and responsibility to them, thus strengthening their perceptions of personal ability and fostering their belief that they can create the results they really desire. Moreover, teacher self-efficacy is a motivational trait that is linked to team performance. Caprara *et al.* (2006) argue that teachers with high self-efficacy levels are more likely to create the appropriate conditions and give priority to an interpersonal network construct that provides them with job satisfaction. Participation in school decision making has the potential of creating an environment where teachers feel valued and able to contribute to school goals thus increasing not only their sense of efficacy but also their professional fulfillment (Harris, 2004). In fact, ambitious teachers are less satisfied with their job, if the working environment does not provide them with a challenging enough workplace (Davis and Wilson, 2000). Many authors argue about the positive effect of teacher participation in school decision making on teachers' satisfaction with their job (Alutto and Belasco, 1972; Bacharach *et al.*, 1990; Conway, 1984) and some studies have confirmed such associations. However, such effects are found to be rather weak and outweighed by school climate effects, especially those related to collegiality, team cohesion and leadership aspects of school climate (Somech, 2010; Taylor and Bogotch, 1994).

2.3 Research questions

Empirical research that examines the impact of shared forms of leadership on school performance is scarce (Hallinger and Heck, 2010; Marks and Printy, 2003; Pounder *et al.*, 1995). As noted by Pashiardis (1994), although there is much discussion supporting shared decision making in schools, not enough data are available to indicate that it is "panacea for the improvement of education." He also stresses that teachers' actual and desired levels of involvement in the decision-making process must be assessed, as the goal-setting procedure is more easily accepted if teachers feel that they have the opportunity to participate if they want to.

The aim of the present study was to examine teacher involvement in school decision making, as a multidimensional construct pertaining to decisions classified into three different categories: student issues, managerial issues and teacher issues. The role of gender and professional experience was also explored, as well as the effect of participatory decision making on outcome variables linked to school effectiveness (i.e. teachers' sense of self-efficacy, job satisfaction and perceptions of school climate). More specifically, the following research questions were formulated:

(1) What are teachers' actual and desired levels of involvement in different domains of school decision making?

(2) Does actual participation or its discrepancy from the desired level of participation differ between men and women or among teachers with different lengths of teaching experience?

(3) Is teachers' actual participation in different areas of decision making associated with perceptions of school climate, sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction?

(4) Is the discrepancy between actual and desired levels of participation related to teachers' perceptions of school climate, sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction?

(5) Which decision-making domain is more important in predicting the above outcomes?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 143 primary school teachers working in four major geographical districts of continental Greece. The majority of teachers (64 percent) were teaching in urban schools and 82 percent held permanent positions in schools. Regarding school size, 37 percent of the teachers were working in big schools (>200 students), 41 percent in medium-sized schools and 22 percent in small schools (<50 students).

Females comprised 76 percent of the sample. Almost half of the teachers (46 percent) were in the 36-45 years age group, 32 percent were up to 35 years old and 22 percent were more than 45 years of age. In terms of professional experience, 45 percent had up to ten years of experience, 30 percent had 11-20 years and 25 percent had more than 20 years. Moreover, 30 percent of the teachers in the sample had additional studies (postgraduate or professional development courses).

3.2 Measurements

A three-part questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. In the first part, participants were asked to provide demographic and professional data, in the second

part they recorded their actual and desired participation in school decision making and the third part included scales for measuring perceptions of school climate, self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

3.2.1 Teacher participation in decision making. A four-point Likert-type scale was employed after revising the original scale developed by Chatzipanagiotou (2003), which used a trichotomy of participation, taking into account the Greek context. The first domain, "student issues," included five items regarding teaching and learning approaches, extra-curricular activities, student attainment, attendance and discipline. The second domain, "managerial issues," included four items regarding financial management, school maintenance, facilities, equipment and teaching materials, the assignment of students to classes, and relations with the local community. The third domain, "teacher issues," included six items regarding the allocation of teaching duties and other school responsibilities, professional development activities, collaboration with subject teachers, teacher behavior and teacher-parent interactions.

Total and subscale scores were calculated as means of item responses. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's α) for the three subscales were satisfactory: 0.76, 0.79 and 0.68 for actual participation and 0.80, 0.77 and 0.76 for desired participation, respectively. Discrepancy between actual and desired participation was calculated so that positive scores denoted decisional deprivation, negative scores denoted decisional saturation and zero scores denote decisional equilibrium.

3.2.2 School climate scale. The perceived school climate was assessed using the six-point Likert-type scale developed by Taylor and Tashakkori (1994). The scale consisted of three subscales referring to the principal's leadership style, faculty collegiality and student discipline. The leadership subscale included ten items such as "goals and priorities for the school are clear" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$). The collegiality subscale dealt with the available professional support teachers feel they can get by their colleagues (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$). Examples of the seven items composing this subscale were: "can count on staff members to help out" or "great deal of cooperative effort among staff." The student discipline subscale included seven items regarding school problems caused by student misbehavior (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$). Examples of items were: "attitudes that reduce academic success" or "physical conflicts." Responses to reversely phrased items were recoded so that a score of 1 indicated an absolutely negative school climate and a score of 6 an extremely positive educational environment.

3.2.3 Teacher self-efficacy scale. A four-point Likert scale was used to assess teachers' self-confidence about their capacity for efficient instruction (Schwarzer *et al.*, 1999). Respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement to 12 items referring to issues of task accomplishment such as "I am convinced that I am able to successfully teach all relevant subject content to even the most difficult students" or "I am confident in my ability to be responsive to my students' needs even if I am having a bad day". The reliability coefficient for the scale was very good (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$).

3.2.4 Job satisfaction scale. A five-point Likert scale, including 16 items, was used to assess teachers' satisfaction with their job (Brayfield and Rothe, 1951). Respondents were asked to express the degree of their agreement or disagreement to items such as "It seems that my friends are more interested in their jobs" or "I am often bored with my job." Scores of four items, which were negatively phrased, were reversed prior to averaging, so that high values of the total score denoted satisfaction (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$).

4. Results

4.1 Actual and desired participation

On average, actual participation of teachers in school decision making was moderate, while their desire/willingness to participate was high (Table I). In fact, 89.5 percent of the discrepancy scores denoted some amount of deprivation, 7.7 percent a state of equilibrium, and only 2.8 percent denoted saturation. The discrepancy between actual and desired participation showed significant deprivation in all three areas of decision making (Figure 1).

Teachers expressed a strong desire for participation in decision making, with higher scores on students' issues, and lower scores on managerial issues. However, their actual participation was perceived to be much lower, generally at a moderate level, but low on managerial issues and quite high on student issues. The smallest discrepancy between desired and actual participation was found on student issues and the highest on managerial issues.

Although teachers' actual participation in decision making about student issues and issues directly concerning their own status was rather high, their participation in administrative decisions was low. Teachers' willingness to participate both in student issues and in teacher issues was clearly high, but their desire to participate in managerial issues was lower. The highest level of both actual and desired participation was recorded in student issues. The greatest discrepancy was recorded in managerial issues, where actual participation was low and desired participation was moderate (Table I).

4.2 Differences with respect to gender and experience

Women recorded significantly lower levels of total participation in school decision making compared to their male colleagues (Table II), but gender difference was not

	Actual participation Mean (SD)	Desired participation Mean (SD)	Participation discrepancy Mean (SD)
Students' issues	3.01 (0.53)	3.42 (0.46)	−0.41 (0.53)
Managerial issues	1.93 (0.69)	2.71 (0.69)	−0.78 (0.72)
Teachers' issues	2.69 (0.52)	3.29 (0.48)	−0.60 (0.59)
Total	2.54 (0.49)	3.14 (0.46)	−0.60 (0.54)

Notes: [a]Respondents were asked to indicate their actual and desired participation for each item on a scale ranging from 1 ("never involved") to 4 ("very often involved")

Table I.
Actual and desired participation[a] according to domain of school decisions

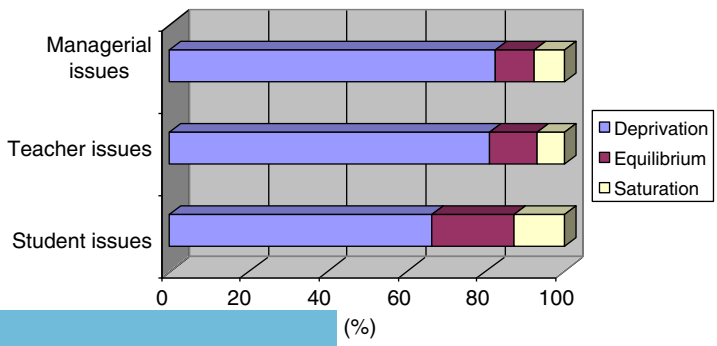

Figure 1.
Distribution of discrepancies between actual and desired participation in school decision making according to domain

significant when decisional deprivation was examined. Similarly, multidimensional comparison revealed significant differences for actual participation (Wilk's $\lambda = 0.931$, $F(3, 138) = 3.39$, $p = 0.020$) but gave non-significant results for decisional deprivation (Wilk's $\lambda = 0.955$, $F(3, 138) = 2.17$, $p = 0.095$).

Women ($M = 2.64$) were somewhat less willing than men ($M = 2.95$) to participate in managerial issues ($t(140) = 2.31$, $p = 0.022$, $d = 0.454$) but they actually participated much less frequently in this type of decisions ($d = 0.711$). The discrepancy between actual and desired participation was similar in men ($M = 0.66$) and women ($M = 0.83$) ($d = 0.228$). Regarding decisions on professional issues, women ($M = 3.29$) were equally willing to participate with men ($M = 3.34$) ($t(140) = 0.541$, $p = 0.589$, $d = 0.106$) while they actually participated less frequently in this type of decisions ($d = 0.439$) but the discrepancy between actual and desired participation was not significantly different in the two groups ($d = 0.298$). On the contrary, regarding student issues, women and men recorded similar levels of desired participation (women: $M = 3.44$, men: $M = 3.38$; $t(140) = -0.636$, $p = 0.526$, $d = 0.125$) and similarly frequent actual participation ($d = 0.376$).

Table III shows means and standard deviations for actual participation in school decision making and decisional deprivation with respect to the level of teachers' experience. Total participation was found to be associated with teachers' experience, but total decisional deprivation was not. Multivariate analysis of variance of actual participation also showed significant differences between different levels of teachers' experience (Wilk's $\lambda = 0.819$, $F(9, 331) = 3.15$, $p = 0.001$). Univariate tests revealed that

Table II.
Actual participation in school decision making and decisional deprivation, in men and women

	Women ($n = 108$) Mean	SE	Men ($n = 34$) Mean	SE	Significance of difference[a] p
Actual participation					
Total participation	2.47	0.046	2.77	0.079	0.002**
Students' issues	2.96	0.053	3.16	0.079	0.057
Management issues	1.82	0.064	2.29	0.118	<0.001**
Teachers' issues	2.64	0.051	2.87	0.084	0.027*

Notes: [a]t-test for independent samples, *,**Significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively

Table III.
Actual participation in school decision making and decisional deprivation according to years of experience

	Up to 5 years ($n = 24$) Mean (SD)	6-15 years ($n = 61$) Mean (SD)	16-25 years ($n = 41$) Mean (SD)	More than 25 years ($n = 16$) Mean (SD)	Significance of difference[a] p
Actual participation					
Total participation	2.28 (0.49)	2.51 (0.48)	2.58 (0.46)	2.96 (0.37)	<0.001**
Students' issues	2.86 (0.64)	3.00 (0.52)	3.02 (0.50)	3.25 (0.46)	0.168
Management issues	1.51 (0.43)	1.87 (0.65)	1.98 (0.73)	2.61 (0.57)	<0.001**
Teachers' issues	2.46 (0.56)	2.66 (0.54)	2.74 (0.46)	3.01 (0.41)	0.009**

Notes: [a]One-way analysis of variance, *,**Significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively

participation in managerial decisions and those related to teachers' issues was indeed associated with school experience but participation in decisions regarding student issues was similar for all groups. In fact, a significant linear trend was found for both participation in managerial issues ($p < 0.001$) and teachers' issues ($p = 0.001$), showing that teachers' participation in decisions on these domains was higher the longer they served their profession. When decisional deprivation was examined multivariately no significant differences were found between groups of teachers with different levels of experience (Wilk's $\lambda = 0.902$, $F(9, 331) = 3.39$, $p = 0.118$).

4.3 Participation and school climate

The higher the teachers' participation in all three domains of school decision making the more positive their perceptions of school climate. In fact, correlations were weak to moderate regarding leadership and collegiality aspects of school climate, while they were weak regarding discipline matters. Similarly, the lower the decisional deprivation of teachers the more positively they perceived their school's climate as regards leadership and collegiality (Table IV).

The strongest predictor of teachers' perceptions of school leadership was their actual participation in decisions concerning teacher issues. Actual participation in other decisional domains was not found to additionally contribute to the prediction. Moreover, when dimensions of decisional deprivation were examined for inclusion in the second step of hierarchical regression, deprivation of participation in managerial issues was found to significantly increase the predictive value of the model ($R^2 = 27$ percent).

Similar results were found for teachers' perceptions about collegiality ($R^2 = 25.5$ percent). Regarding the discipline component of school climate the only statistically significant predictor was teacher participation in decisions regarding student issues, but the effect was very weak (2 percent).

4.4 Participation and individual work variables

Self-efficacy reported by teachers was high and job satisfaction above the middle level, despite the lower than desired participation in school decision making. Associations of

	School climate[a]			
	Leadership	Collegiality	Discipline	Total
Actual participation				
Total participation	0.439**	0.436**	0.194*	0.475**
Students' issues	0.321**	0.364**	0.172*	0.378**
Management issues	0.343**	0.292**	0.159*	0.352**
Teachers' issues	0.456**	0.470**	0.161*	0.486**
Decisional deprivation				
Total deprivation	−0.445**	−0.424**	−0.111	−0.445**
Students' issues	−0.325**	−0.314**	−0.176*	−0.359**
Management issues	−0.404**	−0.401**	−0.030	−0.401**
Teachers' issues	−0.450**	−0.392**	−0.110	−0.408**
Mean	3.91	3.78	3.46	3.72
SD	1.24	1.11	0.92	0.85

Notes: [a]Scale from 1 "strongly disagree" to 6 "strongly agree", *,**Significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively

Table IV.
Correlations of teachers' participation in decision making and school climate

both work variables with total participation in decision making were rather weak and this was true for participation in both teachers' and students' issues. Regarding participation in managerial issues, a weak correlation was found with self-efficacy, while the correlation with job satisfaction was not statistically significant (Table V).

Decisional deprivation, practically, was not associated neither with teacher efficacy nor with job satisfaction, although a very weak correlation was found with the latter for decisions on teachers' issues.

The strongest predictor of teachers' self-efficacy was their actual participation in decisions concerning teacher issues. Actual participation in the other decisional domains was not found to additionally contribute to the prediction. Results concerning job satisfaction were similar.

Next, hierarchical regression was employed, with perceived school climate entered at the first step, while participation dimensions were examined for inclusion, in a stepwise manner, at the second step. Results showed that the effect of teacher participation in school decision making on job satisfaction was mediated by teachers' perceptions of the school climate, as none of the participation dimensions was a significant predictor of job satisfaction, after adjusting for school climate. However, participation in decisions concerning teachers' issues was still the only significant predictor of self-efficacy, even after adjusting for perceived school climate.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Examination of teacher participation in school decision making adopting a multidomain evaluative approach revealed that teachers did not participate to the same extent in the different decisional domains, nor were they willing to participate equally in all types of decisions. Previous research had also reported that teachers were more active and expressed more desire for participation in instructional rather than managerial decisions (Bacharach *et al.*, 1990; Cheng, 2008; Smylie, 1992). More specifically teachers in this study, participated more in decisions regarding student issues, followed by decisions on teacher issues, while their involvement in managerial issues was even more limited. The same pattern was found as regards teachers' willingness to participate in the different decision making areas.

	Self-efficacy[a]	Job satisfaction[b]
Actual participation		
Total participation	0.288**	0.228**
Students' issues	0.270**	0.246**
Management issues	0.184**	0.083
Teachers' issues	0.294**	0.284**
Decisional deprivation		
Total deprivation	−0.069	−0.179*
Students' issues	−0.004	−0.131
Management issues	−0.100	−0.151
Teachers' issues	−0.063	−0.189*
Mean	3.16	3.60
SD	0.45	0.57

Notes: [a]Scale from 1 "not at all true" to 4 "exactly true"; [b]scale from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree", *,**Significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively

Table V.
Correlations between teachers' participation in decision making and individual work variables

Furthermore, teachers were not satisfied with their actual levels participation in school decision making. Findings indicated that in all three areas of decision making the majority of teachers experienced deprivation of some degree. This situation is problematic for schools since internal pressures for greater participation, even if not overtly manifested, are a source of micropolitics in schools with a negative impact on school climate (Ho, 2010).

Even though the current legal framework in Greece encourages the full participation of all teachers in school decision making, regardless of individual background characteristics, it appears that, in practice, this is not realized. This may be related to the centralized structure of the Greek education system, which, despite the democratic rhetoric, leaves little room for decisional autonomy to individual schools. Collective action for promoting common purposes is very limited in Greek schools' culture. It may also indicate teachers' reluctance to seek greater involvement in decisions as this could make them confront certain colleagues, running the risk of being disfavored (Ho, 2010; Duke *et al.*, 1980).

School administration was the domain where teachers reported the lowest levels of participation, as well as the greatest levels of deprivation, thus confirming earlier studies in different educational settings (Taylor and Bogotch, 1994; Chan *et al.*, 1997; Cheng, 2008). The exceptionally low levels of actual participation in managerial decisions was not surprising, given the centralized and bureaucratic structure of the Greek education system and the fact that school administration is the most strictly regulated decisional domain in primary education. The moderate level of desired participation in this domain indicates teachers' reluctance for greater involvement, which can probably be attributed to the high cost of such decisional participation compared to the benefit in terms of real influence. It may also reflect the fact that teachers' professional identities are primarily linked to the process of teaching and learning and do not embrace, to the same extent, school management responsibilities. Despite this fact, the discrepancy between actual and desired participation in this decisional domain was high, which may reflect teachers' need for more control in the allocation of resources, a decision-making area enjoys greater leeway than other administrative domains.

Student issues constituted the decisional domain where teachers reported the highest levels of participation and experienced the smallest degree of deprivation, which is also in accordance with previous research (Perry *et al.*, 1994). As noted above, pedagogical roles and responsibilities make up the core of teachers' professional identities. Teachers feel responsible for, and committed to promoting, student learning and welfare. At the same time, decisions related to pedagogy, such as teaching and evaluation methods or classroom management strategies, are not as strictly regulated by the state as other decisional domains and are carried out more at the level of the individual teacher/class. This segregation of pedagogical activity which is characteristic of loosely coupled systems, safeguards teachers from micropolitical pressures deriving from conflicting interests that may constitute an issue in other decisional domains necessitating a more collective approach, such as those related to school administration and management.

Teacher issues were the domain where teachers reported moderate levels of actual participation in decision making, while their levels of desired participation were relatively high. Both actual and desired involvement in this decisional domain was higher than respective levels of involvement in managerial decisions and lower than those concerning student-related issues. Decisions concerning teacher issues (such as

participation in professional development activities, collaboration with subject teachers or parents, the allocation of various school responsibilities, etc.) are less centralized in Greece and more closely linked to the pedagogical work of teachers than issues of school administration and management.

Generally, results were in accordance with previous findings about teachers' involvement mainly with decisions concerning instructional issues but experiencing deprivation in all areas (Cheng, 2008; Smylie, 1992; Conley, 1991).

Women recorded lower levels of participation in school decision making than their male colleagues but this was not the case in all three decisional domains. A strong gender effect was found on actual participation in managerial decisions, a weak effect on participation in teacher-related decisions, while there was no effect on decisions concerning student issues. The low levels of women's involvement with managerial decisions particularly, may be related to their conscious or unconscious assumptions concerning the existence of differentiated roles for male and female teachers in a school that have been developed through socialization in a male-dominated, western society. Despite their lower levels of actual participation, women felt equally deprived as men in all three domains.

Work experience had also an impact on actual participation in decision making concerning managerial issues and teacher issues, but had no effect on participation in decisions regarding student issues. The more experienced the teacher, the more s/he participated in decisions regarding managerial and teacher issues. Not unexpectedly, the biggest difference between highly experienced teachers and those new to the profession was found in decisions regarding managerial issues. This may be due to the better knowledge, expertise and authority of experienced teachers when decisions of this kind have to be made (Huberman, 1988). Nevertheless, deprivation was at similar levels for all teachers, irrespective of years of experience, and across decisional domains. This finding is in line with previous research showing that, in the early days of their career, teachers are more concerned with maintaining class control and "surviving" in the classroom than with more general matters relating to personnel, school administration or school-community collaborations (Capel, 2001).

In the present study, high teacher participation in all three domains of school decision making was found to be associated with more positive perceptions of the leadership and collegiality components of school climate. This finding confirms that teachers' involvement in decisions, at an adequate for each domain level, is associated with a leadership perceived as supportive, fair and democratic and also with a collaborative environment (Smylie, 1992). Participative forms of decision making provide a platform for teachers to work collaboratively with their colleagues and the principal. Such processes cannot flourish under a controlling, bureaucratic or authoritarian leadership (Ho, 2010). The principal is responsible for providing her/his staff with opportunities for participating in decision making, working with them as partners and devolving authority and power, thus building leadership capacity for all (Pashiardis, 1994). It is also possible that participatory decision making, by fostering creativity and innovation, creating a higher commitment to the collective vision of the school and establishing a sense of ownership (Muijs and Harris, 2003; Morrison, 2002; Neuman and Simmons, 2000; Pashiardis, 1993), promotes a collaborative culture. Indeed, schools with a positive school climate were characterized by participatory decision making and recent case studies of "high growth" schools revealed that all of them were employing varied forms of collaborative leadership (Hallinger and Heck, 2010).

Teachers' job satisfaction was not found to be associated with teachers' levels of decisional deprivation and the impact of their actual involvement in decision making was weak and indirect mediated by school climate. This finding is in accordance with previous findings that an important predictor of job satisfaction and teacher retention in the profession is the quality of relationships they develop with significant others. The absence of a substantial, direct association between participation in decision-making and teachers' job satisfaction may be related to the fact that even high levels of participation in Greek schools do not necessarily imply real influence on the final decisions reached.

Finally, our research revealed a positive association between participation in decisions concerning teacher issues and levels of self-efficacy, even after controlling for school climate. Previous research had also found a positive association between distributed leadership and teachers' self-efficacy (Harris, 2004). Nevertheless, it is difficult to reach conclusions regarding the causation in this association, as we could equally argue that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy feel more apt to participate in decision-making or that encouraging participation in decision-making increases teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

The results of the present study contributed to a deepening of our understanding on the means and paths through which participatory decision making can affect schools. In future studies, it would be interesting to examine teachers' perceived influence on the different decision making areas, explore what they actually mean when reporting their "desired" levels of participation (i.e. whether they, in fact, report their desired levels of "influence" on final decisions), and to investigate what forms of participation they consider as most appropriate.

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