Improving school leadership through inclusive participation: the challenge of the diversity of school culture

2014 ESHA Conference
Dubrovnik, 26-29 Oct 2014

Vedrana Spajic-Vrkas
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zareb
Participation - what does it mean?

- To be present
- To be involved in an activity
- To consult
- To contribute to decision-making
- To monitor and evaluate the impact of the decision

Participation is a process, not a condition.
What is inclusive participation?

- The possibility of all those who are affected by a social institution to **have a share in managing** it so as to ensure that the institution meets their own **needs and interests** (Dewey, J. *On Democracy*, available from: http://wolfweb.unr.edu/homepage/lafer/dewey%20dewey.htm).

- **Inclusive participation = deliberative decision-making = distributed (shared) power**
Why is inclusive participation in education important?

- In a contemporary democracy, the quest for good educational governance and quality education means primarily *more openness and transparency, and a wider involvement* in the process of decision-making.

- Initially, the interests of diverse educational actors may be more or less in conflict but they are all have equal responsibility for reaching the consensual decisions which potentially contribute to the growth and wellbeing of all the students.

- Inclusive participation provides for new values, standards and practices to be established and, as such, may become a *potent tool for improving the quality of education*.

- “It is through engagement with others, through dialogue and other social processes that people come to develop a shared meaning of learning. In all these mutually supporting processes we notice that it is the relationships between the people, the ways in which they communicate, share the construction of knowledge and develop new understandings that create the *sustainable learning*” (Lodge, C. (2005). “From hearing voices to engaging in dialogue: Problematising student participation in school improvement.” *Journal of Educational Change*: 6, 125–146).
What are the benefits of inclusive participation for various educational actors?

- The improvement of democratic decision-making skills
- The strengthening of the sense of ownership in school quality management
- The raise in trust in school as an institution in which all voices count and all students are given equal chances to succeed
- The development of responsibility and accountability for the outcomes of teaching and learning
- The advancement of school as a collaborative community of teaching and learning
What are the key prerequisites for inclusive participation?

- **School autonomy** (decentralised system)
- **Legal provisions** (laws and school regulations enabling the participation of all)
- **(Self-)Representation** (esp. of the socially marginalised groups)
- **Dialogue and exchange** (of various ideas, interests and expectations)
- **Power-sharing** (participatory school governance)
- **Mutual respect** (among all the actors)
The importance of a dialog-type of participation in education

- Dialogue is an important means of building school as a collaborative community of learning and teaching:
  - It requires active listening and engaged conversation
  - It promotes openness to new ideas and ways of thinking
  - It contributes to a climate of trust


- Dialogue promotes analysis, diverse interpretation, (self-)reflection, critical investigation and, as such, contributes to the reorganisation of school knowledge
Who should primarily participate in school decision-making?

- Those who teach in school (teachers)
- Those who learn in school (students)
- Those who are responsible for the overall functioning of school (headteachers)
- Those who have the right to monitor school work as they are vitaly interested in it (parents and guardians)
- Those whose social mandate is to monitor school work (state administration/inspection)
- Those whose work contributes to the common well-being at the local level (representatives of the local community and the civil society)
- Those who have other interests in school
The basis for parents’ participation?

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 24, Par. 3
  - the universal recognition of the **right to education** which enshrines the **parental right** to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children

- The European Convention on Human Rights, Article 2 of the Additional Protocol
  - the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching for their children which will be in conformity with their own **religious and philosophical convictions** (insofar as these are compatible with the fundamental values of the Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly on 4 September, 2012)
Some forms of parents’ participation

From: Eurydice 2009; 2012

- **Decision-making power**
- **Consultative role**
- **Involvement in school/class activities**

- School educational plan/action plan
- Determining curriculum content
- Determining the content of optional subjects
- Choosing teaching methods
- Choosing textbooks
- Determining criteria for grouping pupils for compulsory learning activities
- Setting internal assessment criteria of pupils
- Selecting teachers
- Determining duties and responsibilities of teachers
- Awarding teachers additional salary payments for non-stipulated duties and responsibilities
Challenges to inclusive participation: 6 types of parental involvement in school

- **The supporter** – willing to contribute in practical matters, an excellent helping hand, pleasant partner
- **The absentee** – uninvolved and unapproachable; does not consider him/herself suited to help
- **The politician** - desire to help make decisions and exert influence
- **The career-maker** - satisfied as long as school takes on all tasks and sees teachers as an extension of parents
- **The tormentor** - feels offended and misunderstood as a result of the school’s attitude and own educational experiences
- **The super-parent** - prepared to support school and teachers alongside their job; is willing to invest in the school relation

Challenges to inclusive participation: Factor dimensions of parents’ understanding of the main aims of elementary school


**1st dimension**
**EUROPEAN SCHOOL**
- Multiple language proficiency
- Development of ICT literacy
- Acquisition of conflict-resolution skills
- Preparation for life in culturally diverse societies
- Preparation for life in united Europe
- Preparation for lifelong learning

**2nd dimension**
**THE AUTHORITATIVE AND PRAGMATIC SCHOOL**
- Respect for authority
- Respect for the elderly
- Preparation for everyday life
- Assisting parents in upbringing their children
- Development of personal autonomy and self-reliance

**3rd dimension**
**SCHOOL OF RIGHTS AND AUTHONOMY**
- Development of critical thinking
- Empowerment of students to protect their rights and the rights of others
- Promoting free expression of one’s opinion and the defence of one's attitudes

N=531
The main aims of elementary school: parents and headteachers compared *(means)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Headteachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for further education</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for life in a culturally diverse society</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting parents in education</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriotism</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for life in the United Europe</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Challenges to inclusive participation: Factor dimensions of parents’ understanding of what should be done to improve school quality


N=531

1st dimension
SHIFT TOWARDS
A SCHOOL BASED ON EUROPEAN VALUES

2nd dimension
SHIFT TOWARDS A MORE PRAGMATIC SCHOOL

3rd dimension
SHIFT TOWARDS A SCHOOL THAT PROMOTES STRONG CHARACTER

4th dimension
SHIFT TOWARDS A CARING AND LESS DEMANDING SCHOOL
Challenges to inclusive participation: Factor dimensions of the indicators of good school according to parents


N=531

1st dimension
SCHOOL AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

2nd dimension
SCHOOL OF GOOD IMAGE

3rd dimension
SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE

4th dimension
A BABY-SITTING SCHOOL
The basis for students’ participation

The Convention of the Rights of the Child:

- **Article 12**: “States parties shall insure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

- **Article 13**: “The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.”
The benefits of participating in school decision-making for students

- The development of critical approach to information, official knowledge and the “reality”
- The development of openness, flexibility, reflectivity and multiperspectiveness
- The development of feeling of self-efficacy and trust in education, school etc.
- The development of social and civic competence, including responsibility for the community wellbeing and engagement for social justice
- The development of an active support for democracy
- The development of a participatory school and classroom climate (culture)
The obstacles to inclusive participation: the modes of students’ participation (The Caroline Lodge Model)

Instrumental approach

- **Quality control** (the students are passive source of information; their opinions are used as evidence in judgments about the quality of institutional provisions)
- **Students as a source of information** (the students are still passive source of information; although they provide valuable information for improvement, they are not involved in dialogue to develop shared understanding of the issues raised)
- **Compliance and control** (the students are active informants, they are involved in school change but their voices are used to serve institutional ends and may be easily manipulated)

Human development approach

- **Dialogue** (the students are active participants in change; they express their opinions freely with a view to nurture a dialogue which is a means of building a shared narrative. “Dialogue is about engagement with others through talk to arrive at a point one would not get to alone.”

Obstacles to inclusive participation: Ladder of children’s participation (The Roger Hart model)

An example of students’ non-participation

- **Researcher**: Were you in a position to choose some topics in instruction?
- **1st student**: No.
- **2nd student**: No, but we participated; we expressed our opinion.
- **Researcher**: Were you interested in some particular topics? Did you come with some suggestions to your teacher?
- **3rd student**: No, we did not suggest anything. The teacher had prepared a list of topics to be discussed.

More obstacles: students’ civic and political participation


Vedrana Spajic-Vrkas
The key to inclusive participation:
SCHOOL CULTURE
What is school culture?

- Basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation; they operate unconsciously, and define, in a 'taken-for-granted' fashion an organisation’s view of itself and its environment (Schein 1985).

- School culture is an integration principle ('a glue'); it holds the cultures of teachers, students, administration and parents together in a common framework (Stoll 1998).

- School culture is a set of central and deeply rooted values which make the foundations of its life and work (Eisner 1994).

- School culture defines values, beliefs, customs, symbols, ceremonies, rituals and stories of success and failures in education (Deal & Peterson 1999).

- School culture gives support and identity to those within it, and creates a framework for learning (Stoll 1998).
What are the dimensions of school culture?

- **Attitudes and beliefs** (a set of more or less explicit presumptions of school actors about the purpose of school and education, school basic aims and objectives, school effectiveness and the possibility of school change)
- **Cultural norms** (written and unwritten rules on what is acceptable, habitual or expected behaviour)
- **Relationships between the main actors** (verbal and nonverbal communication in various situations and at different levels)


Vedrana Spajic-Vrkas, ACES
The typologies of school culture and the possibilities of inclusive participation

- S.J. Rosenholtz 1989:
  - Dinamic ('moving'): ‘freedom to ...’ (focus on internal plans and priorities)
  - Static ('stuck'): ‘freedom from ...’ (focus on external priorities and requirements)

- Hargreaves 1995
  - Hothouse (controlled, pressure dominates)
  - Welfarist (collaborative)
  - Traditional (formalistic, routine dominates)
  - Anomic (uncertainty and isolation)

- Stoll & Fink 1996
  - Moving (effective & improving)
  - Cruising (declining)
  - Struggling (ineffective)
  - Sinking (ineffective & declining)
  - Strolling

- Deal & Peterson 1999; 2002
  - Tonic (positive)
  - Toxic (negative)
### 5 types of school culture in Croatia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EGALITARIAN SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td>• Student-oriented&lt;br&gt;• Focus on students’ rights and responsibilities&lt;br&gt;• Independent student elections&lt;br&gt;• Teacher stress students’ positive achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td>• School activities reflect the cultures of the community&lt;br&gt;• Students are encouraged to do community service&lt;br&gt;• School is seen as the place were democracy is learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESPONSIVE SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td>• School assists students in facing personal problems&lt;br&gt;• School counselors and administration are accessible and open to student&lt;br&gt;• Students feel free to ask for assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRADITIONAL SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td>• School nurtures the identity and tradition of the local and national community&lt;br&gt;• Students have a deep sense of belonging to school and the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUTHORITARIAN SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td>• Focus on punishment not on finding solution&lt;br&gt;• Students are primarily blamed for school failure&lt;br&gt;• Parents are involved only when problems emerge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The typology and individual schools compared

- When each school is compared to 5 types (factors) of school culture, new and more complex combinations emerge that define each school more accurately:
  - Egalitarian-democratic school
  - Democratic school
  - Traditional school
  - Neotraditional school
  - Responsive, traditional & anti-democratic school
  - Authoritarian school
  - School defined by general negativism
The possibility of inclusive participation in the context of the individual school culture

**Pro-participatory schools**
- Egalitarian-democratic
- Democratic
- Traditional
- Neo-traditional

**Anti-participatory schools**
- General negativism
- Responsive, traditional & anti-democratic (RTA)
- Authoritarian
School in which general negativism prevails

- Such schools seem to have, in particular, negative impact on:
  - Independent decision-making
  - Motivation for community work
  - Respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities
  - Respect for other religions
  - Empathy for people in need
  - Patriotism
  - The feeling of belonging to Europe
Responsive, traditional & anti-democratic (RTA) school

- Such schools seem to have, in particular, **negative impact** on:
  - Interest for events in school and society
  - Self-responsibility
  - Self-critique
  - Respect for other worldviews and cultures
  - Intrinsic motivation to help the poor
  - Readiness to defend a just cause
(Neo-)Traditional school

Such schools seem to have, in particular, positive impact on:
- Interest for events in school and society
- Self-responsibility
- Independent decision-making
- Respect for other worldviews and cultures
- Respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities
- Respect for other religions
- Empathy
- Intrinsic motivation to help the poor
- Readiness to defend a just cause
- Patriotism
- The feeling of belonging to Europe
Egalitarian-democratic school

- Such schools seem to have, in particular, positive impact on:
  - Responsibility towards school tasks
  - Self-critique
  - Motivation for community work
Are some schools doomed to non-participation?

The answer depends on many factors, including the following:

- The tradition of decision-making in education (centralised vs. decentralised system)
- The type of the political and/or civic culture that prevails in the society (Almond & Verba: subject vs. participant culture)
- The modus operandi of the central and the local government (political will vs. political rhetoric)
- Cultural tradition and power relations at the local level (centralised vs. diffused power positions)
- Economic situation (affluent vs. staggering economy)
- School tradition and culture (open vs. “fortified” schools)
- The type of school leadership and management (authoritarian vs. democratic school governance)
- Professional identity and political self-consciousness of teachers (teachers as the transmitters of knowledge vs. teachers as critical and transformative intellectuals.)
The shift to inclusive participation is always possible but...

Factors affecting changes in education

System level

- Educational policy and implementation strategies
- Laws on education
- Quality assurance scheme (inspection & counselling)
- Education and training of teachers
- Monitoring, research & data collection

Institutional level

- School-community cooperation
- School/teacher-parent cooperation
- School culture
- School staff capacity building
- School management & leadership
- School staff capacity building
- School culture
- School/teacher-parent cooperation
- School-community cooperation
- Monitoring, research & data collection
- Quality assurance scheme (inspection & counselling)
- Educational policy and implementation strategies
- Laws on education

- School policy priorities
- Curriculum
- Teaching methods
- School-self-evaluation
- Learning resources
Well, than...
Nonetheless, ...