School governance and teachers' attitudes to parents' involvement in schools☆

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ABSTRACT

This study probes teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement in schools as a function of four types of school governance as suggested by Bauch and Goldring. Participants of the study included head-teachers, chairpersons of parents' committees, and teachers of 11 primary schools in a medium-sized town in Israel. A discriminant analysis found different profiles of teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement: resistant and negative attitudes characterized schools where parents were empowered. Ambivalent attitudes characterized schools with professional and bureaucratic modes of governance, and positive attitudes were found in schools with partnership governance. This implies that the latter mode of governance is a promising step toward a community-oriented approach.

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School decentralization framework offers opportunities for a new type of school governance (Caldwell, 2003; Gay & Place, 2000). It favours a communal or partnership governance mode that empowers teachers and parents over hierarchical patterns of bureaucratic control and management (Bush & Gamage, 2001). According to the decentralization approach, sharing school governance with teachers and parents is perceived as a strategy for improving the educational system (Helsby, 1999; Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Murphy, 1991). Despite the important influence of the school–parent relationship for students and for the school at large (Epstein, 2001), this strategy has not only increased teachers' workload (Lam, 2006) but also becomes a source of conflict over teachers' turf, namely their professional spheres of influence (Gay & Place, 2000; Ingersoll, 2003). If so, the question arises, how do teachers perceive parental involvement in schools, in light of the corresponding changes in power relations? As of yet, little is known about the link between school governance and parent–teacher relations (e.g., Gay & Place, 2000; Bauch & Goldring, 2000; Nir & Ben-Ami, 2005). The present study focuses on teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement during a period of school decentralization. For that purpose, we employed Bauch and Goldring's (1998) classification of school governance defined according to the relative power of parents and teachers at school. Based on this classification we examine whether teachers differ in their attitudes toward parents' involvement in

different modes of school governance. As teachers hold a pivotal role in the successful implementation of school reforms, focusing on this question can contribute to a better understanding of the conditions under which schools can benefit from an increase in parents' empowerment.

For this purpose, in the first section of this study, we review research literature regarding parent–teacher relations in schools. Section 2 summarizes the trend of parental involvement in the Israeli educational system. In Section 3, we describe the research data, variables, and research analysis. Section 4 presents the findings and in Section 5, we discuss the findings and consider implications for policy makers.

1. Empowerment and parent–teacher relations

According to Glatter (2002), the tendency of policy makers to empower school level stakeholders, in particular, headteachers, teachers and parents, contributes to the establishment of a new framework of school governance. Concerning teachers, decentralization has enhanced their professional roles and extended their responsibilities to include collaboration with administrators, colleagues, and parents (Bauch & Goldring, 2000; Ingersoll, 2003; Murphy, 1991).

As teachers are offered more power to be involved in school processes and policy, an opportunity is presented for challenging their professional position and for redesigning their work, including their interactions with parents (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Parents are an important component within the school system, to which headteachers and teachers must be responsive. In the initiation of school decentralization, policy makers expect

parents to be active partners who have influence over school decision-making and participate in school activities and governance (Goldring & Sullivan, 1996; Murphy, 1991). The empowerment of parents is further endorsed and encouraged by the market ideology and consumer orientations that penetrate into schools. In this regard, parents have influence over educational reforms although they are not formal partners in policy-making processes (Conley, 2003).

The empowerment of both parents and teachers is assumed to contribute to substantial parent–teacher interaction (Cheng, 2002). However, the research literature has not reached a consensus regarding parent–teacher relations during a period of school decentralization. Some researchers have indicated that the school reform has not affected traditional parent–teacher relations, in which teachers control the instructional component and parents provide support (Malen & Ogawa, 1988). From other studies, one can learn that the changing power relations have constituted an opportunity for establishing new modes of collaboration (Driscoll, 1998). Other researchers have claimed that parents' empowerment and teachers' professionalization have intensified existing conflicts between the two parties (Mawhinney, 1998). For example, school-based management (hereafter SBM) schools[1] have been found to intensify parents' militancy (Nir & Ben-Ami, 2005). A possible reason for this is that teachers' professional work has become observable and subject to greater public influence and exposed to external pressures and demands than at traditional bureaucratic schools (Addi-Raccah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Hannaway, 1993).

In this context, findings indicate that teachers feel that parents' empowerment decreases their wellbeing, introduces uncertainty into their work, and raises questions about their professional discretion (Blase, 1987, 1988; De-Caravalho, 2001; Ogawa, 1998; Todd & Higgins, 1998). Empowered parents, particularly when they are from a high socio-economic status background, may be perceived as powerful clients who may affect teachers' control over the content of their professional judgment (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1986). Thus, parents may be regarded as troublesome as they may restrict teachers' professional power. Although teachers have a major interest in cooperating with, and being supported by parents (Acker, 1999; Johnson, 1990), they express discomfort with parents' participation in schools and may resist their intervention (Addi-Raccah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008).

As Ogawa (1998) states, "the assumption that more parent involvement of all types is always better has gone largely unexamined and unchallenged" (p. 8). Some researchers have shown negative effects and less favoured types of parental involvement in schools (Pomerantz et al., 2007), particularly when parent–school relations are poorly designed and badly implemented (Epstein, 2001). Actually, parents' intervention in teachers' judgment was a source of conflict between the two parties (Mawhinney, 1998). While parents are interested in influencing the school so as to transmit their social and cultural capital to their children (Lareau, 2000; Weininger & Lareau, 2003), teachers attempt to preserve their social position as a professional group by having control over a particular type of knowledge and do not like parents interfering in their work (De-Caravalho, 2001). Since they are experts in education, teachers tend to think that they merit more power in school than parents (Todd & Higgins, 1998). Thus, intensive parent involvement in school is perceived as threatening teachers' professional position, lowering their social status, and undermining their professional considerations (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993; De-Caravalho, 2001; Todd & Higgins, 1998).

This may occur particularly during a period of decentralization, in which the spheres of influence of family and school overlap more greatly than in the past (Epstein, 2001; Murphy, 1991). The increase in parent empowerment may intensify parent–teacher rivalry and conflicts. In this regard, Lortie's idea of the "zone of acceptance" between parents and teachers has shifted, and its boundaries have become more vague and blurred, leading to different patterns of parent–teacher relations (Smrekar, 1996). The increase in parents' participation in school decision-making has the potential of turning schools into an arena of battle over turf (Blase, 1991; Bolman & Deal, 1997; Malen, 1995; Mawhinney, 1998). Teachers often feel that they must actively resist intervention of parents who demand substantial involvement in schooling and who adversely affect their domain by insisting on certain practices or questioning others.

Some researchers have argued that the conflicts between parents and teachers will never be resolved as they are an immanent component of parent–teacher relations. Other researchers, on the other hand, believe that teachers and parents can and must find ways for better cooperation (Bauch & Goldring, 1998). In this regard, teachers are expected to develop new methods and strategies to cope with parents and find new avenues of collaboration with them (Blase, 1987; Lieberman & Miller, 1999).

2. Teachers' attitudes toward parents: a contextual approach

Based on a contextual approach to studying teachers' work in general (Johnson, 1990; Lam, 2005; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2006), and parent–teacher relations in particular (Bauch & Goldring, 2000; Seginer, 2006), it is assumed that teachers' propensity to interact with parents and attitudes toward parent involvement can be attributed to the organizational characteristics of the school in which they work. Based on a review of studies conducted by Seginer (2006), it has been indicated that school factors (e.g., size, culture) affect the amount and quality of parent–teacher interactions. By adopting this perspective, in the present study we focus on school governance as a factor that can shape and affect teachers' relations with parents. Several studies have already shown that school governance reshapes teachers' and parents' roles and influences teachers' work and behaviour (Gaziel, 1998; Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2006; Verdugo et al., 1996; Wylie, 2007). School governance can create opportunities for new and different patterns of teachers' interactions with others, including parents (Bauch & Goldring, 2000; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). For example, Lewis and Forman (2002) showed that the extent of teachers' empowerment affected the nature of relations that teachers wanted and were able to develop with parents. It was found that when teachers felt empowered enough, they could establish better relations with parents and believed that they can work well with them.

Bauch and Goldring (1998) suggested a classification of four types of school governance based on parents' and teachers' empowerment: (1) Bureaucratic: low teacher and parent participation; in this traditional mode of governance, the parents' role in schools is passive while teachers maintain classroom autonomy. (2) Teacher's professionalism: high teacher empowerment and low parent participation; in this type of school governance, teachers' power is based on their expertise, and they are perceived as knowing what is best for students. This type of school governance may corroborate with the protective model in which parents delegate the responsibility for educating their children to schools (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). However, as teachers and parents hold different attitudes, positions and responsibilities with regard to the children (Lortie, 1975; Todd & Higgins, 1998), this mode may be a source of conflict. Teachers tend not to attempt to involve parents, as they fear that it might decrease their professional status

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[1] School-based management (SBM) schools are equivalent to Local Management of Schools (LMS) in UK.