

Teacher Participation in the Management of Schools

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Participation — the idea of having a share in management and in profits — could be considered as the new concept to be applied in the Maltese Economy as far as the ‘employed’ are concerned, in the 1980s. The principle, when it comes to Education, may be examined in terms of various sectors — students, parents, teachers, private schools, local state schools, national policy and government.

It is therefore pertinent to note what has been said so far as regards Teacher Participation. It has been claimed that it “is not incompatible with a sound educational policy”. Far back in 1969, CASE (England) declared that teachers should have a right to be involved at all levels of planning and consultation on matters of vital educational concern. For the teacher’s role in education is changing: he cannot act in an authoritarian atmosphere. He has to be accepted as the social operator who collects ideas, hypotheses and changes and makes them known to the masses. He is an animator and promoter of ideas, necessities and cultural and social fermentations.

A Democratic Society

A Commonwealth Secretariat Report, issued in 1974, provides recommendations for the setting up of consultative bodies representative of parents, teachers, students and the community to ensure a wider sense of participation and responsibility in educational organisation.

Hence more than one concept seems to be evolving. We have to accept the “atomic theory of education” — the school is a social institution which has to be related to the economic life of society. It has to adapt itself to the new educational goals and to changes in social and living conditions. Hence the demands, political, moral, social, and economical, that are being made on the teacher and the pupil, have to be re-examined and assessed in relation to the demands being made on the content and methods of instruction.

Change and innovation have to be accepted as essential for educational organisation as for any

living organisation, and the citizens who can ensure this change are the teachers. Hence they cannot be treated as switch-boards of programmed learning, or indoctrination. They have to make the educational policy of any nation work. They have to participate in an advisory, consultative and managerial capacity to transform the school into an “organic part of a democratic society in which it carries out its role as mediator between the past and the future”.

It seems to be in this sense that the Director General of UNESCO has remarked that “the success of any educational enterprise depends primarily on the aptitudes and qualities of the teacher and innovation itself has no chance of success without the thrust of teachers who know their trade and work in it conscientiously and devotedly”.

Collective Common Action

It is within the power of the teacher to ensure that an education policy be made to succeed. But teachers still have to learn how to act and to face their problems collectively. They have the right to change and innovate in their work, but this right becomes meaningful only when the participants have an effective role in the organisation.

It follows that educational institutions should manage their own affairs with the real participation of all those concerned. A UNESCO report, “Learning to Be” (1972), indicates the need of unifying the teaching staff for the purpose of collective common action. This would reflect the differences between teachers’ functions: providers of documentation such as librarians, preparers of documentation who use mass communication and who would help to formulate information so as to be suitable for teaching purposes, and disseminators and educators who guide, support or supervise the pupils.

In order to achieve their ideals in education, teachers have to realize that their power as an influence in society lies in organization, unity, and commitment. They have to realize that “Democracy is a fragile institution, dependent for its

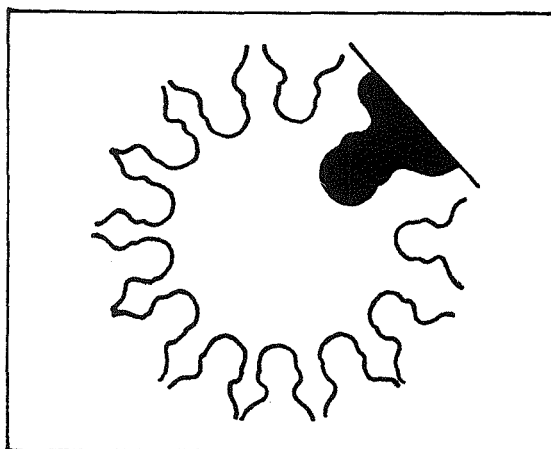
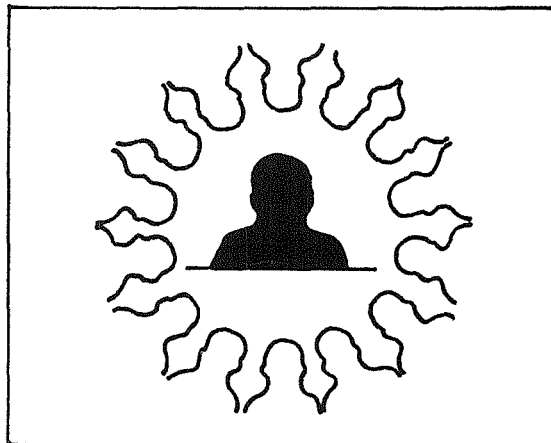
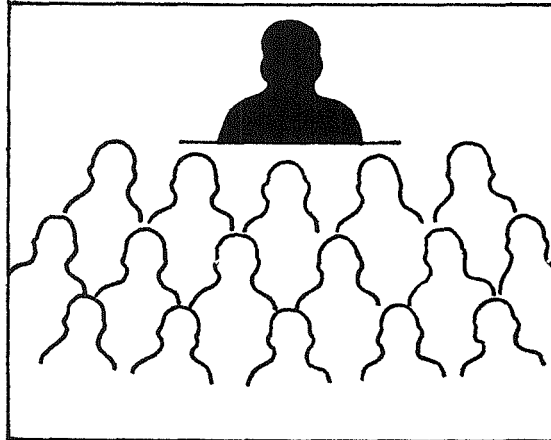
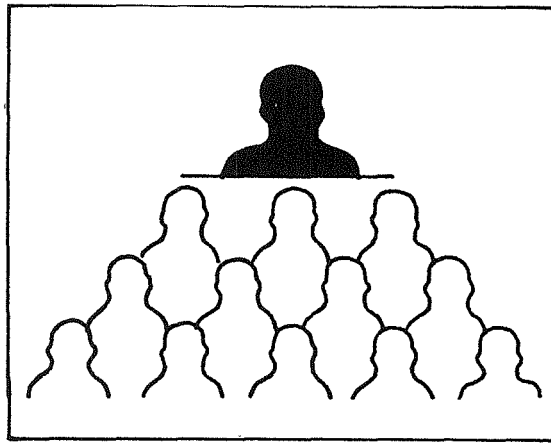
survival on the wisdom of those who participate in its processes". It is therefore up to the teachers themselves to put pressure on society to place education at the top of the nation's priorities. They need to ensure that teachers everywhere are no longer blocked out of educational decision making, to maintain public trust in state schools, and to acknowledge their common destiny with other public employees and work co-operatively to ensure that they are well treated.

Presumably this would ensure progress. Teachers need to be committed and to be involved in the educational socialization process of society. This has already been conceived in some way or other in some countries: in Cuba, for example, the role of the educator is perceived within the framework of "participation of the whole of society in the task of education"; in Peru, the General Law on Education stipulates that "those engaged in education, on account of the specialized functions they perform, shall collaborate in the study and elaboration of educational policy, in particular as it concerns the teaching profession. This participation shall be channelled through the educational institutions of the system and representative teacher's organizations".

The Need of Teacher Commitment

The teacher in a developing country should aim at creating a sense of social responsibility, avoid producing a sense of capitalist elitism among administrators, abolish the inhibition of colonial servitude and reverence to substitute it by fraternal dialogue and co-operation, offer useful and relevant experience, and avoid exploitation and wastage. Hence the need of teacher commitment. To be meaningful and substantial, participation is to include involvement in the formulation of policy, involvement in the planning of programmes and projects to implement that policy, involvement in practical implementation of policies and execution of programmes, and involvement in the evaluation of programmes and projects. Such general lines could apply to the commitment of any identified group in the socio-economic development of society; they apply to the teacher in particular since it is he who has to make an educational policy work for the benefit of society itself.

The teacher's demand for participation in the management of schools implies in its turn the fulfilment of the educational policy required by the State. It has already been made clear that it is the teacher who makes a policy work, but somebody had added that it is also the teacher who is generally blamed for shortcomings of unsound policies. If this is so, then teachers must be ready to take and to share risks and since risks could be very expensive, the teacher needs to be well trained and well informed before he is entrusted with his job.



Moreover school organization has to be established on a sound basis. This implies that teachers have the possibility of seeing their school in perspective, of having the possibility of working in a team and of being enabled to understand administrative problems.

The Head-Teacher's Role

The head-teacher's role is vital. He needs to establish friendly relations with his staff and to be entrusted with full responsibility for the running of the school. It therefore follows that the head of a school cannot act alone: he has to consult teachers on the organization of classes, distribution of lessons, the time-table, general activities and the curriculum. Michel Praderie, in "Participation in French Educational Planning", has emphasized this point: "The key to successful operation essentially lies with the school's head, who has an ambiguous role: that of heading an educational team and being responsible for administrative matters".

Moreover teachers need teaching-aids. Foremost among these should be the library, the so called 'heart of the school'. A well organized library could weld teachers into a team ensuring that the school stay on the right lines -- if children are eager for information and know how to use books to develop their curiosity, a measure of progress would certainly be achieved. Teachers could be encouraged to improve upon their teaching, to help and share in the organization of a school library and to give advice as to what type of books are to be obtained.

Examples of Experimentation

An example of how teacher participation could be applied, is the School Council as envisaged by a committee headed by Sir John Lockwood which proposed the setting up of Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations. This Council, proposed in 1964, aims at reviewing and developing curricula, teaching methods and examinations in schools, through research, assistance, advice and the publication of relevant material. It operates through a structure of interlinked committees served by a secretariat.

It is one example of how teachers could participate effectively in the formation and application of one aspect of an educational policy. They investigate aims, devise and develop new materials which appear to be needed, test experimentally and revise the materials provided, diffuse the ideas gained by holding conferences, publishing their discoveries and allowing an opportunity for evaluation. The teacher is thus given an opportunity to participate in the organization of his school and the educational

system of his country. He is not just another cog in the wheel of 'democratic' bureaucracy.

The desire to experiment and encourage teacher participation has also been expressed in Malta. The MUT Report on Education in Malta (1967) pointed out that "unless one and all pull together as a united team no progress can be achieved, and we shall fall short of our ideals", and proposed the creation of a machinery whereby authority is delegated down the line. Since then ventures in participation have been made, but the effectiveness and success of experiments in participation within the fold of educational institutions still has to be assessed.

The Development Plan for Malta 1973-80 pointed out that "the Government has embarked on a fundamental reform of the educational system: a reform which takes account both of the organization of schooling and of the academic and practical objectives of the educational process". This implies diversity and flexibility and therefore should encourage experimenting and pioneering. This can only achieve results if the teachers are asked to co-operate and to give their intelligent advice and help in the management of education at all levels and at school level in particular.

The idea of consultation, of inviting teachers to participate in the organization of schools, is taking root: by the end of 1977, School Management Committees were introduced in eleven state schools while a Workers' Committee was subsequently introduced in the Department of Education. According to a report entitled "Workers' Participation in Decision Making: Malta National Report" which was presented at Ljubljana in 1977, these committees can deal with discipline, school funds and requisites, school activities, curriculum development, physical conditions and hygiene and other matters connected with the running of the schools. But they have to function within the policy of the Education Department.

An OECD Conference on Participatory Planning in Education (1973) has noted that "Participation becomes a reality only when the participants have an effective voice both in the purposes of the organization and in making these purposes operational". In this sense the Conference emphasized that such an organization implies control of i) the structure and content of the educational task, ii) personnel training for the system, iii) the structure and flow of resources and rewards, and iv) planning.

Teachers can participate in the organization of schools on an advisory, consultative and managerial basis. Recent studies imply this by the very fact that they tend to concentrate on the various functions being demanded from the teacher in modern society: he has been called co-operative group leader, organizer of others, conveyer of information, therapist, self-instruction

specialist, counsellor and subject-matter specialist. It is within this context of the teacher's role, that we should see how this innovation of participation in the management of schools could be applied.

First, it must be realized that innovation has to be seen as meeting a need felt by the school, teacher and community. There must be adequate leadership to stimulate, guide and structure the innovative approach.

Second, it must be realized that teachers' organizations must be consulted.

Third, it must be realized that teachers, above all, should be made to have full confidence in the reforms that may be proposed.

Fourth, assuming that the delegation of formal decisions to local units is accepted, an interior authority structure should ensure the co-ordination and interdependence of the various levels involved. This reminds me of Bozidar Pasaric's remark that participation "passes principally through two tightly connected and interrelated phases: first, the process of decision-making, and second, the execution and control of these processes in accordance with the strategic decision."

A School Management Plan

Assuming that teachers are ready for participation, we have to see how this idea of commitment and involvement could be applied:

Each school could have a School Management Committee chaired by a head-teacher and having power to deal with such items as Administration, Curriculum and Examinations, Cultural Activity, Library, Social Work, and Discipline. These different sectors of management could be organised in terms of sector-committees formed from among the teaching grades particularly concerned with each. Teachers could be given the power to choose and to elect their representatives on these committees. Indeed I am thinking in terms of power exercised by delegation both from above and below. The various chairmen of these committees could together form the School Management Committee which would be able to ensure co-ordination, correlation and co-operation.

Before saying more about these sector-committees, I should state that I am envisaging a web-like pattern of organization, which would involve teacher participation within the school, within relations with various external bodies which could serve to complement the education of society, and relation to the central authority. Thus the various School Management Committees could serve to ensure the establishment of a Teachers' Conference in which all teaching grades, the employer, teacher's organizations, interested parties in education, and parents would all be represented. This could serve to help review and

evaluate renewal and reform in education, professional standards and experiment. It could provide a liberal forum where Education could be freely and constantly surveyed and discussed. Moreover the School Management Committees could also serve as a link with the Central Authority and the Ministry of Education which could retain its Council for Education for purposes which have already been established.

It appears that according to the plan being envisaged, power and authority would not solely be delegated along a vertical line from top to bottom but rather in the form of an extremely wide-angled pyramid where the delegation of power and consequently active participation, would follow a series of lateral and longitudinal lines. Thus it should be realized that all teachers should be concerned with the well-being and administration of the school and therefore many decisions should be taken on the spot.

An Administration sector could deal with such things as school building and maintenance, circulars, attendance and congregations, distribution of lessons and time-tables, parents' days, school calendar activities, class size and selection, assessment of students, provision of equipment, school funds, contact with other schools and with the Central Authority. This implies that class-teachers and form-teachers would not simply act as attendance record keepers and general students' counsellors. They will have to bear more responsibility -- after all participation should not only bring with it sharing in decision-making; it would not be a sound policy to accept participation of power without responsibility, or to ask for full co-operation without granting the right to participate in formulating and assessing policy.

Some teachers should be elected to deal with the Curriculum. With the establishment of the posts of heads of departments, teachers of particular subjects could be given the opportunity to discuss, and examine their syllabus in terms of the classes entrusted to their care. It is here that inter-class discussions (and even inter-schools) and educational tours, could be organized. Here the function of the Education Officer should come to the fore. He could collect information from various schools, organize meetings for teachers on particular subjects, assist in in-service training for teachers and encourage the development of 'subject organizations' which would help the teacher to keep in touch with his fellow workers all the time.

The Library and the organization of Cultural Activity must be considered as two essential factors of education. When the term Library is used, I am implying a fully equipped and used library. This means that the teacher in charge or librarian must have ample time and assistance to ensure that information and documentation could

constantly be provided for students and teachers. The teachers who can help in the organization of the library could well be entrusted with providing such aids as tape-recorded programmes, films and printing. Being considered as the 'power-house of words and ideas', the library could serve as the ideal place where students work on assignments that would arouse their interest and increase their experience. The school could ensure valuable co-operation with the Public Library authorities, but it must also be realized that "it is not enough merely to persuade pupils to acquire a public library ticket, nor simply to insert 'library' periods into the school time-table".

Similarly we cannot relegate Cultural Activity to the occasional school excursion or the prize-day play. Specialist teachers could be entrusted with the organization of sport activities, cultural competitions, exhibitions, debates, drama, choir, gardening and environmental care for the students within the school. All such activity could help to enhance the atmosphere within the school, to create a feeling of belonging to a society, and to develop further the character of the students. Teachers would have to come up with suggestions and help in the organization of such activities. Some time during school hours could be dedicated to this variety of extra-curricular activity to give to every teacher and pupil the possibility of participating in projects or programmes where they are best able and inclined to give their share.

Social Work is a sector in which a lot of progress needs to be made. We have started with educational guidance and counselling but we need more professional partners. These could include school psychologists, speech pathologists, school nurses and health education officers. Their number per school could be determined by the needs of each particular school and in terms of its student population. Those in charge of counselling could help students prepare for employment or future studies by organizing career programmes, visits to industries, meetings with Employment Officers, etc. Health Officers could help in ensuring cleanliness, in checking disease, in ensuring the

health education of pupils. The class teachers need to keep in contact with such people and help in the running and supervision of welfare activity in schools, school canteens, and to provide corrective measures that will result in optimum learning for each student who has to grow and face the problems that modern society often creates.

A polluted environment, permissive society, drug addiction and a host of other unwholesome companions tend to influence the behaviour of students. Today it is being made clear that teaching is not an easy job: teachers have to face indiscipline, indifference to learning, misconduct, truancy, perversion and delinquency, especially in secondary schools. Late in 19th century England it could be reported that "teachers were frequently jeered at and insulted on their way to and from their duties". They had "often to invoke police protection to escape molestation". In recent years in Malta we have had some startling incidents too. It must be realized that because in the past many lacked an opportunity to learn, many did not yearn for learning. Hence those students coming from a deprived environment cannot readily and sheepishly accept the teacher. However, we should be bitterly angry when harm is done to our schools by grossly exaggerated accounts of indiscipline or even when we note indifference to the teachers' plight, especially the teacher who earnestly desires to maintain discipline in difficult classes. Sometimes teachers argue that their authority in class is undermined by too much office red-tape and bureaucracy and even by outside bodies. However, we may say that it has been accepted that today's teachers do have to face difficult and problem children and that the authorities have agreed to do something about it.

In our schools Discipline Boards could be established to deal with difficult classes and teachers could be given more power to deal decisively with recalcitrants. It is only when teachers are respected as masters in their classes, that their decisions are accepted and respected by difficult pupils... and parents. Pupils who are being

continued on p. 24

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