THE FUNCTIONING OF PARENTS IN PARTICIPATION COUNCILS

Frederik Smit, Radboud University, the Netherlands
Bert Felling, Radboud University, the Netherlands

Background & Research questions: By law, every school in the Netherlands has a participation council, where representatives of parents, teachers and students are consulted by the school management and the school board about matters concerning the management and the policy of the school. The (New) Educational Participation Act (2007) provides parents more rights to monitor and influence the policy of the school regarding the communication with parents, school hours, the quality of education, extracurricular activities and school fees.

The goal of the present evaluation study is to get a better understanding of the role of parents and teachers in the participation councils in stimulating (minority) parent participation at schools and in communities. More specifically, this study focuses on answering the following questions. What innovative policies of the participation councils support schools success by creating partnerships with (minority) parents and communities? To what output have the efforts thus far led? What are the outcomes of the efforts thus far? What recommendations can be given on the basis of this evaluation study?

Research methodology: The research involved a number of phases which built upon each other: (1) a preparatory review of the literature; (2) websurveys conducted among the chairpersons of the participation councils (parents and teachers), management and chairpersons of the school boards; (3) in-depth case studies of the functioning of participation councils in primary and secondary schools; (3) consultation with representatives of organizations of parents, teachers and school boards; (4) analyses; (5) reporting.

For the qualitative part of the study in-depth interviews were held with chairpersons of school boards, management, parents, teachers and students of six schools with relative openness towards its neighborhood and of six schools with relative closeness towards its neighborhood. The aim of this part of the study was to validate the information from the quantitative study and to get information on topics that were not covered by that part of the study.

Sample & Design: For the websurveys 6421 primary schools and 943 secondary schools were selected. A questionnaire was presented to the chairpersons of participation councils, management and school boards.

Main results: In the paper presentation the results of the study will be discussed in terms of administrative and organisation theories (the changes in the daily practices, policy making, decision making), participation theories (minority ethnic groups,
gender and class in parent-school relations, partnerships, shared responsibilities, the professional autonomy of teachers), networking/social capital theories (students educational achievement) and theories of market forces and quality theories (parents as consumers and as partners, responsibilities of socialization agents, community empowerment/local democracy).

Major implications: Discussion of the results in terms of practical implications for public and private schools in the Netherlands and other European countries.

References:
