
ANNOTATION

Meagher, FSC, Raymond. “Extent of Lasallian Lay Teachers’ Perceived and Preferred Involvement in School Governance Decisions.” PhD dissertation, Saint John’s University in New York, 1996. 265 pp.

This dissertation – about shared governance and shared decision-making – provides a welcome contribution to a deeper understanding of the history and transitional factors behind the growth of “shared mission” both in industry, public schools, and Lasallian schools. Literature in the 1980s and 1990s about shared decision making in general was “incomplete, inconsistent, and inconclusive,” with most of such studies confined to public schools (42). “The present study was conducted to address the dearth of research data involving shared decision making in Lasallian schools” (29). The instrument used for the study was the Shared Education Decisions Survey (SEDS), which was developed to help schools more accurately assess teacher perceptions as they apply to involvement in decision-making. Based on the results obtained, it is hoped that the kind of “participatory organizational culture” that educational researchers advocate may be appropriately engendered in Lasallian schools.

The review of Twentieth Century literature about public and Catholic education – focused on bureaucracy and administrative theories, the growth of Catholic and Lasallian schools in the United States, and the development of “association” and “shared decision making” up to 1996, when the dissertation was written – is thorough and valuable. Both the general educational literature review and those that cover the influence of the Second Vatican Council and its repercussions within the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools as they developed how they would live out “shared mission” provide an excellent overview for both scholars and anyone interested in the primary factors influencing education in the Twentieth Century.

The dissertation focuses on the lay teachers in the eleven high schools of the New York District of the Brothers of the Christian Schools – covering the States of New York, New Jersey, and Michigan – in early 1994-1995 and the extent to which they desire to be, and actually are, involved in various school governance functions. There were thirteen study questions and nine study hypotheses. The study used 92 individual decisional situations within ten different categories of the Shared Education Decisions Survey (SEDS): Planning, Policy, Curriculum/ Instruction, Pupil Personnel, Staff Personnel, School/ Community Relations, Parental Involvement, Staff Development, Budget, Plant Management, and Overall Involvement. A Likert scale measured their responses in regard to the extent to which they would like to be, and actually are, involved in these areas of governance. The surveys were administered at each school during a general faculty meeting, ensuring consistent results across the entire faculty spectrum, and resulted in 259 sets of responses. The responses were also compared in terms of possible teacher background variables.

In the results, the teachers’ overall *actual* decisional involvement was between “rarely” and “sometimes.” Their highest perceived degree of shared decision making was in the area of Curriculum/ Instruction: between “sometimes” and “often,” primarily in the evaluation and choice

of textbooks and curricular materials. Similarly, they felt more involved with helping to solve students' academic problems (Pupil Personnel). In the areas of Policy and Planning, they perceived themselves as being "rarely" or "sometimes" involved. The rest of the ten areas fell between "rarely" and "never." Participation in the area of Plant Management and the area of Budget were the lowest among all the categories.

In the results, the teachers' overall *desired* decisional involvement was between "sometimes" and "often." Their highest desired degree of shared decision making was in the two areas that also showed their greatest actual involvement: Curriculum/ Instruction and Pupil Personnel. The other strong area in which they showed a desire to be involved was that of Policy, such as in the setting of guidelines for homework. In decreasing scale, the other areas of less and less interest in being involved in shared decision making were Planning, Staff Personnel, Staff Development, School/ Community Relations, Parental Involvement, Budget, and Plant Management. The data supports the conclusion that "there were significant differences among the teachers' desired mean involvement scores in the various domains of school governance." It also showed that their desire to be involved in shared decision making in certain areas was greater than their actual involvement, with the most significant gaps in the areas of Policy, such as in establishing guidelines for evaluating administrators, and Staff Personnel, such as in selecting department heads. The least gaps between the desired and actual involvement were in the areas Plant Management and Curriculum/ Instruction, which is interesting in that the two areas also represent the two opposite degrees of perceived actual involvement. It indicates that most teachers are fine with not being involved with Plant Management but really do want to be involved, even a bit more than they already are, in Curriculum/ Instruction. Generally, however, 80% of the teachers indicated "decisional deprivation" in 74 of the 92 decisional situations provided in the survey. This was especially true in areas related to planning and policy-making.

The results also showed that there were relationships between some of the ten decisional domains and differences in the number of years teaching, number of years in the current school, highest level of education, content area of teaching, number of students in the school, age, and gender. While there was no general correlation between perceived decisional involvement and teacher morale, the number of years in the current school did make some difference in the categories of Planning, Policy, Curriculum/ Instruction, Pupil Personnel, School/ Community Relations, and Plant Management. Plus, "the perceived extent of involvement in policy decisions is most highly correlated with faculty morale" (215). Teachers reported a significantly higher desire to share decision-making in the areas of Curriculum/ Instruction, Pupil Personnel, and Policy than in any of the other areas.

This study was done among lay teachers who were just beginning to experience the consequences of the Institute of the De La Salle Brother's 1993 General Chapter's advocacy of "the sharing of power with lay teachers in making and carrying out decisions in Lasallian schools"; and, therefore, "extrapolation to the future on the basis of the results of the present study must be made with caution" (40). For future study, among the author's recommendations is that similar studies should be done in other Districts of the Institute, in other Lasallian ministries, and comparing urban and suburban school results. Likewise, it would be helpful to replicate this study in schools of other Religious Congregations or to focus on Lasallian administrators and their perceptions of lay teachers' involvement in shared decision-making.

One of the more interesting observations was that a number of the respondents asked for more information about shared mission. “Apparently there is not a clear understanding or conceptualization of what Shared Mission is all about on the part of the lay teachers” (224). Quoting the Provincial/ Visitor of the New York District, the urgency of the issue is made clear: “If we don’t share our mission and decision-making with our lay partners, divisions between our lay faculties and ourselves will grow larger” (225).

This study, the author concludes, could be “helpful in planning and designing shared decision making models. The effective implementation of this organizational strategy of shared decision making in Lasallian schools would seem to go a long way toward achieving the goal of Shared Mission” (43). At the same time, it is essential that the Brothers “come together to assess, identify and clarify the actions being taken to develop the process of sharing the Lasallian mission in their particular educational institution” (225).

The data from this dissertation indicates that lay teachers in Lasallian schools want to be engaged in shared decision making, more than administrators may realize, and that any further development of a realized “shared mission” will require an intentional openness to such shared governance on the part of both the Brothers and their lay teachers, especially since there “may not be a clear understanding of what Shared Mission is all about on the part of the Brothers. Do they want to share the Mission?” (225).