DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 055 SP 038 257

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TITLE Empowering Elementary Teachers in Restructuring Schools: Dimensions To Guide the Mission.
PUB DATE 1998-11-06
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, November 6, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Decision Making; Educational Change; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Public Schools; *School Restructuring; Self Efficacy; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Empowerment; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS Ohio

ABSTRACT

Teacher empowerment is a cornerstone of educational reform efforts. This study measured dimensions of teacher empowerment with a census of the 3,677 teachers in 169 Ohio public elementary schools initiating self-designed state-funded restructuring. Mailed surveys examined six dimensions of teacher empowerment (decision-making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy, and impact). A total of 1,888 teachers (51 percent) in 108 elementary schools (64 percent) completed and returned the surveys. Teachers rated their overall empowerment 3.93 on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Dimensional ratings were status (4.17), professional growth (4.29), self-efficacy (4.21), decision making (3.50), impact (3.69), and autonomy (3.38). There were no statistically significant differences in rating of empowerment by race/ethnicity or academic degree held. The finding of no difference in teachers' ratings of empowerment "across years of teaching experience" indicates that programs to increase skills and knowledge should be implemented at both preservice and inservice levels. Differences in ratings by gender suggest that educating elementary school teachers may require gender-specific guidelines. (Contains 29 references.) (SM)

Running head: EMPOWERING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

Empowering Elementary Teachers in Restructuring Schools:

Dimensions to Guide the Mission

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New Orleans, LA

November 6, 1998

Abstract

Teacher empowerment is a cornerstone of educational reform efforts. The purpose of this study was to measure dimensions of teacher empowerment with a census of the 3,677 teachers in 169 Ohio public elementary schools initiating self-designed state-funded restructuring. Mailed survey returns were received from 1,888 teachers (51%) in 108 elementary schools (64%). Teachers rated their overall empowerment 3.93 on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=SD to 5=SA). Dimensional ratings were: Status (4.17), Professional Growth (4.29), Self-Efficacy (4.21), Decision-Making (3.50), Impact (3.69) and Autonomy (3.38). Statistically significant ($p<.001$, effect size .01 or greater) differences in ratings of empowerment by elementary teacher demographic characteristics are discussed. The finding of no difference in teachers' ratings of empowerment across "years of teaching experience" indicates that programs to increase skills and knowledge should be implemented at both preservice and inservice levels. Differences in ratings by gender suggests that educating elementary teachers may require gender-specific guidelines.

Empowering Elementary Teachers in Restructuring Schools: Dimensions to Guide the Mission

The 1997 National Education Association's survey of teachers reported that three-fourths of American public school teachers were currently working in schools involved in school reform. This current school reform is focused at the school level and assumes that school personnel within the building have the knowledge, skills, and will to design and implement improvements that will increase student learning. The participation of classroom teachers in planning and implementing improvement is critical to the success of these restructuring efforts (Fullan, 1993; Fullan & Horgan, 1996; Griffin, 1991; Hawley, 1990; Holmes Group, 1986, 1990; Levin, 1986; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Sarason, 1992). Fullan emphasized, "Teachers as change agents are the sine qua non of getting anywhere" (1993, p. 18, italics in the original). If we as teacher educators can identify the skills and knowledge that teachers will need for greater empowerment (often described as taking on "new roles"), we can help teachers develop these through new, dynamic programs.

Context of the Study

The Ohio state legislature invited individual public schools to submit proposals describing self-designed restructuring plans. The local school building

was to be the unit for school change. In rounds I and II (1993 and 1994) of state funding, 169 elementary schools were awarded $25,000 per year (renewable for five years). These successful proposal, mirroring recent educational literature and restructuring models, all included plans to empower teachers by increasing their participation in "new roles" (Ohio Department of Education; July, 1993). However, these "new roles" were not defined.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to define, measure, and describe the empowerment of elementary classroom teachers in 169 restructuring public elementary schools. Questions that drove the study were:

1. What is the level of teachers' empowerment in the elementary schools as they initiate their funded efforts?
2. Are there differences in the empowerment by teacher demographic variables (gender, age, race/ethnicity, academic degree held, and years of teaching experience)?

The results of the study were returned to individual schools to be used by the local planning teams.

Literature Review

Thirteen dimensions of teacher empowerment were identified in the literature: (1) accountability, (2) authority/leadership, (3) curriculum planning/design, (4) collegiality/collaboration, (5) decision-making, (6) impact/causal importance, (7) professional growth, (8) professional knowledge, (9) responsibility, (10) self-efficacy, (11) self-esteem, (12) status, and (13) mentoring (e.g., Boles, 1990; Bredenson, 1989; Comer, 1988; Gore, 1989; Levin, 1991; Lichenstein, McLaughlin & Knudsen, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Lightfoot, 1986; Rappaport, 1987; Short, 1992; Slavin & Madden, August, 1993). The School Participant Empowerment Scale (Short & Rinehart, 1992a) was the only instrument identified in the literature that measured as many as six of these dimensions. The development of the School Participant Empowerment Scale was grounded in both the literature and Short's empirical work and research in school empowerment. Short (1992, pp. 9-14) identified and defined six dimensions of teacher empowerment: decision making (teacher participating in important school related decisions); professional growth (opportunities for teachers to develop and expand their perspectives and skills); status (respect and admiration from colleagues); self-efficacy (teachers' feelings of ability to be effective); autonomy

(freedom to control professional life and decisions); and, impact (the ability to directly influence life in the school).

Method

This was a descriptive research study using a mailed survey questionnaire.

Data Source.

The target sample for the study was 3,677 classroom teachers working in 169 elementary schools funded to implement their own restructuring designs. Because the restructuring efforts included the total school (funding required that 80% of the teachers and the building principal agree to the plan), a census survey was used to emphasize inclusion.

Instrumentation.

The School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES) (Short & Rinehart, 1992b) measured teacher empowerment on six dimensions: (1) decision making, (2) professional growth, (3) status, (4) self-efficacy, (5) autonomy, and (6) impact. The SPES used a five-point Likert-type rating scale for each of the 38 items (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Cronbach's coefficient alpha reliabilities for the subscales reported by Short and Rinehart,(1992a) were: decision making .89; professional-growth, .83; status, .86; self-efficacy, .84; autonomy, .81; overall scale, .94.

Data Collection.

A packet containing a cover letter, a questionnaire for each classroom teacher, and a self-addressed, postage-paid return envelope was mailed to a coordinator in each elementary school. The number of teachers in the 169 schools ranged from seven to 57. An envelope was attached to each questionnaire with instructions to the teachers to complete the questionnaire, seal it in the envelope, and return it to the contact person. A summary of the study and the data for the individual school (aggregated for confidentiality) was promised to each school.

Return rates.

The overall return rate for classroom teachers (n=1888) was 51%, with the 108 schools (64%). The within-school return rates varied from 100% to 29%. Two-way ANOVAs by gender and return-rate by item were used to compare the teachers' responses to the 38-item School Participant Empowerment Scale with the responses of the teachers in the 100% return-rate group. No statistically significant ($p<.001$) interactions were found on any of the two-way ANOVAs. No statistically significant ($p<.001$) differences were found by return rate. Differences by gender were found on nine of the 38 items. Because of the large sample size and no differences among group means by return-rate, the data were aggregated for further analysis. The unit of analysis for the study was the classroom teacher.

Characteristics of the teachers and schools in the returning sample were compared with those in schools not returning data and with the overall profile of elementary teachers and schools in Ohio on selected variables (Snyder, Hoffman, & Geddes, 1996).

Data Analysis

The data analysis began with an exploration of the stability of the subscales identified by Short and Rinehart (1992). These subscales could not be confirmed in the data set and new subscales were identified (Klecker & Loadman, 1996). Cronbach's coefficient alpha reliabilities of the new subscale with the 1888 observations in this study were: Status (6 items) .85, Professional Growth (4 items) .72, Self-Efficacy (12 items) .90, Decision Making (8 items) .81, Impact (5 items) .84, Autonomy (3 items) .84, and Total Scale (38 items) .94. There were moderate to high correlations among each of the six dimensions, yet each added something unique to the overall teacher empowerment score. Descriptive statistics were calculated for teacher demographics and responses to the School Participant Empowerment Scale. ANOVAs (SAS GLM procedure was used because of the unequal numbers in each category) were used to test for differences in responses to the subscales and total scale score of the SPES. Alpha level was set at $p<..001$ for the omnibus F with an additional criterion of an effect size (η^2) of at least .01

(Keppel, 1982) because of the large n of the sample. A Scheffe post-hoc was used to follow up significant omnibus Fs with alpha set at .001.

Results

Demographic characteristics of the teachers

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the teachers in the

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Place Table 1 about here

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sample. Eighty-five percent of the responding elementary teachers were female; 15% were male. The modal age of the sample of teachers was the 40-49 years of age category (42%) (The range of age was from twenty-two to sixty-seven years). Sixteen percent of the teachers were in the 22 to 29 years of age category; 15% were in the 50 to 59 years-of-age category; and two percent were in the 60 years-of-age and older category. Most of the respondents (91%) were Caucasian; seven percent were African American; fewer than 1% were Asian; and 1% identified their race/ethnicity as "other." Fifty-four percent held bachelors degrees and 46% held masters degrees. The distribution of the categories for "years of teaching experience" was nearly bimodal; 20% of the teachers had been teaching from 16 to 20 years and 19% had been teaching five years or fewer. Seventeen percent had

been teaching from six to 10 years; 15% from 11 to 15 years; 18% from 21 to 25 years and 12% were in the "26 years or more" category.

This large sample of classroom teachers was compared with the state and national populations of elementary teachers (Snyder, Hoffman & Geddes, 1996) on five demographic variables: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) race, (4) academic degrees, and (5) years of teaching experience. These comparisons used ANOVA or chi square tests of Goodness of Fit, as appropriate. The demographic characteristics of teachers in the sample fit the national profile with two exceptions: (1) the percentage of Caucasian teachers in the sample (92%) was slightly higher than the national proportion (87%), and (2) the sample median for years-of-teaching experience was 17 years; the national median was 15 years. The demographic profile of the sample paralleled the profile of teachers in the sate of Ohio (Ibid).

Overall Ratings of Empowerment

Table 2 presents means and standard deviations of elementary teachers' ratings of empowerment on the six subscale dimensions and the overall score.

Place Table 2 about here

The scale range was from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree with a neutral midpoint at 3.00. The elementary teachers in the sample (n=1888) rated their overall empowerment as 3.93 with a standard deviation of .50. This rating indicated that the teachers were almost to the "agree" point on their sense of empowerment. The low standard deviation indicated that the teachers' ratings were fairly consistent across schools.

The three items that were rated between the 4.00 "agree" and 5.00 "strongly agree" points of the scale with their means and standard deviations were: Professional Growth (4 items) 4.29, .61; Self-efficacy (12 items) 4.21, .50; and Status (6 items) 4.17, .60. The three that received ratings between the neutral midpoint of 3.00 and the 4.00 "agree" scale point with their means and standard deviations were: Impact (5 items) 3.69; Decision Making (8 items) 3.50; and Autonomy (3 items) 3.38, 1.02.

Differences in Ratings by Teacher Demographics

There were no statistically significant ($p<.001$, effect size of at least .01) by the race/ethnicity or academic degree held. Following up preliminary indications, a three-way ANOVA with gender, years of teaching experience, and age was used look for differences in elementary teachers' responses on the six subscale and total empowerment scores. There were no significant interactions

among the variables on any of the three-way ANOVAs. Table 3 presents the statistically significant results. There were no differences by "years of teaching

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Place Table 3 about here

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experience" or "age" on any of the subscale or total scale means. Differences by "gender" with the means presented in parenthesis were found on the Status (f=4.20, m=4.01); Professional Growth (f=4.32, m=4.09); Self-efficacy (f=4.23, m=4.11); Autonomy in Scheduling (f=3.41, m=3.18) and Total Scale Score (f=3.95, m=3.80). In each instance, female elementary teachers rated their empowerment higher than did male teachers (statistical procedures were adjusted for the unequal n's of the groups as well as for inflated alpha). No statistically significant ($p<.001$, effect size .01 or greater) difference was found on either the Decision Making or the Impact subscale.

Discussion

All of the means of elementary teachers' ratings of empowerment were above the neutral 3.00 midpoint and indicated "agreement", thus, the following is a discussion of degree rather than kind of response. The two subscales on which there were no demographic differences in response were Decision Making

(teacher participating in important school-related decisions) and Impact (the ability to directly influence life in the school). The relative low rating of agreement on the Decision Making subscale (3.50) was surprising and particularly troubling because this was the most frequently cited "new role" or "empowerment dimension" found in the literature. The large sample of elementary teachers did not fully agree (4.00 on the rating scale) that they were involved in important school decisions. Teachers also rated their sense of Impact (the ability to directly influence life in the school) uniformly at a level of less than full agreement (3.69).

Gender Differences in Responses

The differences by gender were also differences in degree rather than kind, however, they were found to be statistically significantly different using very conservative criteria. Female elementary teachers rated their empowerment on the dimensions of Professional Growth (opportunities for teachers to develop and expand their perspectives and skills) higher than did male elementary teachers. Perhaps the opportunities presented through inservice programs in the schools are of more interest to female teachers. Male and female elementary teachers may no define "professional growth" in the same way. Female elementary teachers rated their sense of Self-efficacy (teachers' feelings of ability to be effective) higher than did male elementary teachers. Female elementary teachers may receive more

positive feedback from students and evaluating adminstrators. Is teacher s0.elf-efficacy tied to student achievement and will it increase as school improvement leads to indicators of greater student achievement? This is an area for further research.

Female elementary teachers also rated their sense of Autonomy (freedom to control professional life and decisions) higher than did male teachers.1 The mean rating by male teachers (3.18) was just above the neutral midpoint.

Female teachers rated their sense of Status (respect and admiration from colleagues) higher than did male elementary teachers although both ratings were above the 4.00 level. Perhaps the disproportionate female/male ratio in elementary schools provides female teachers with a higher perception of status. Also, elementary teaching has long been thought of as a "women's field" (Gamble & Wilkins, 1997). Decorse and Vogtle (1997) presented in-depth interviews with eleven male elementary teachers and reported that the perception of elementary education as a female field led to a reduced perception of status by even the teachers' families.

Implications for Teacher Education

The finding of no difference by "years of teaching experience" in elementary teachers' ratings of empowerment indicates that programs to increase

skills and knowledge should be implemented at both preservice and inservice levels. Decision Making, the dimension of empowerment most frequently mentioned in the literature, is described in terms of "shared decision making." Elementary teachers need training and practice in group processes and consensus building to more effectively work with other planning team members. Classroom teachers need more information about their opportunities in restructuring schools. Are administrators ready to share decision making with teachers? Perhaps classroom teachers need more knowledge about curriculum development, assessment, program evaluation, and school finance to truly participate as "empowered" members of school-improvement teams.

Recent studies (e.g., Brookhart & Loadman, 1996; Montecinos & Nielsen, 1997) reported that male elementary preservice teachers were very difference from their female counterparts. This study found that gender differences continue as new elementary teachers enter the schools and through this cross-sectional look by "years of teaching experience." Educating elementary teachers may require gender-specific guidelines.

The six dimensions of teacher empowerment identified by Short (1992) and measured by the School Participant Empowerment Scale (Short & Rinehart, 1992b) provide some guidelines for directing teacher participation. However,

one important dimension of teacher empowerment that was not measured by the School Participant Empowerment Scale was professional knowledge. This is an important dimension; the relationship between knowledge and power is well-recognized. Professional knowledge for elementary teachers includes wide and deep general knowledge as well as a thorough understanding of how students learn and ways of facilitating and assessing that learning. Further, for classroom teachers in restructuring elementary schools, professional knowledge should include an in-depth understanding of the philosophies and processes underlying the improvement efforts in individual schools and the accountability assessments used to measure the students' improvement.

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Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample of Classroom Teachers

Variable	N*	%
Gender		
Female	1603	85.4
Male	274	14.6
Age		
22-29	268	15.8
30-39	428	25.3
40-49	705	41.6
50-59	259	15.3
60 and over	34	2.0
Race		
African-American	138	7.4
Asian	11	0.6
Caucasian	1682	90.5
Other	27	1.5
Academic Degrees		
Bachelors Degree	997	54.5
Masters Degree	834	45.5

(continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample of Classroom Teachers

Variable	N*	%
Years of Teaching Experience		
5 years or fewer	355	19.0
6-10 years	311	16.7
11-15 years	280	15.0
16-20 years	367	19.7
21-25 years	330	17.7
26 years or more	223	12.0

Note. Frequencies may not sum to the total N of the sample because of non-response to item.

Table 2.

Ratings of Empowerment by Total Group of Elementary Teachers

Dimension of Empowerment	N	Mean	SD
Status (6 items) alpha = .85	1888	4.17	0.60
Professional Growth (4 items) alpha = .72	1888	4.29	0.61
Self-efficacy (12 items) alpha = .90	1888	4.21	0.50
Decision Making (8 items) alpha = .81	1888	3.50	0.69
Impact (5 items) alpha = .84	1888	3.69	0.75
Autonomy (3 items) alpha = .84	1888	3.38	1.02
Total score	1888	3.93	0.50

Note. Scale range 1= strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree; frequencies do not sum to N because of non-response to item.

Table 3.

Analysis of Variance for Ratings of Teacher Empowerment

Dependent variable: Status

Source	df	F
Age	4	1.98
Gender	1	7.11*
Years of teaching	5	0.68
Age x Gender x Yt	31	1.31
Error	1632	(0.33)

Dependent variable: Professional Growth

Source	df	F
Age	4	0.78
Gender	1	6.12*
Years of teaching	5	0.85
Age x Gender x Yt	31	1.27
Error	1632	(0.35)

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

Analysis of Variance for Ratings of Teacher Empowerment

Dependent variable: Self-efficacy

Source	df	F
Age	4	1.54
Gender	1	7.69*
Years of teaching	5	2.60
Age x Gender x Yt	31	1.70
Error	1632	(0.24)

Dependent variable: Decision Making

Source	df	F
Age	4	1.70
Gender	1	2.52
Years of teaching	5	1.93
Age x Gender x Yt	31	1.43
Error	1632	(0.46)

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

Analysis of Variance for Ratings of Teacher Empowerment

Dependent variable: Autonomy

Source	df	F
Age	4	1.22
Gender	1	7.33*
Years of teaching	5	0.79
Age x Gender x Yt	31	1.21
Error	1632	(0.31)

Dependent variable: Total Scale

Source	df	F
Age	4	1.98
Gender	1	7.11*
Years of teaching	5	0.68
Age x Gender x Yt	31	1.31
Error	1632	(0.33)

Note. Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.

*p<.001; effect size is equal to or greater than .01.

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