

## **Teacher Empowerment in the Decision making Process**

**Dr. George E. Hicks  
1095 Woodbine Drive  
Orangeburg, SC 29115  
803-614-8281/803-536-8806**

**Dr. Cassandra Sligh DeWalt, C.R.C.  
184 Foxbriar Court  
Newberry, SC 29108**

**803-321-3131/803-536-7075**

## **Abstract**

According to Erlandson and Bifano (1987), teacher empowerment is a vital dimension of the school's organization. Lieberman (1989) defined teacher empowerment as "empowering teachers to participate in group decisions and to have real decision-making roles in the school community" (p. 24). Furthermore, Summers (2006) addressed the need for professionals to be well rounded in the process of articulating needs. Furthermore, teachers may need to learn decision making strategies and to help accomplish the mission of the organization. This study identified current and past research that examines the need for teachers in the decision making process. Through involving teachers in the decision making process, empowerment was noted as being integral in the decision making process. Findings suggested that future research be done in this area.

## **Teacher Empowerment in the Decision Making Process**

According to Erlandson and Bifano (1987), “the neglect of teacher empowerment as a vital dimension of the school organization. It has encouraged quality teachers to leave the classroom and individuals of high academic quality to avoid careers in teaching” (p. 31). Lieberman (1989) defined teacher empowerment as “empowering teachers to participate in group decisions and to have real decision-making roles in the school community” (p. 24).

Chapman and Hutcheson (1982) found that teachers have left the teaching profession because they felt that their experiences were not well utilized. They noted that teachers felt that their abilities were better utilized and developed in their new career because they learned new things and contributed to important decisions. They also noted that there was responsiveness to their desire for salary increases, job responsibilities and autonomy. Additional research by the National Center for Educational statistics (1984) confirmed the research by Chapman and Hutcheson in that they concluded that the demand for new teachers between 1988 and 1992 would exceed the supply.

Peters and Austin (1985) declared that for teachers to be truly empowered, they need a supporting environment in which they are cared for, not isolated, and are given opportunities to participate regularly in decision making that affects them as teachers. They contend that when teachers participate in decision making, the staff’s efficacy, commitment, willingness, and dedication become very strong.

According to Futrell (1989) “history will view the 1980s not as the decade of education reform, but as the decade of education debate” (p. 9). Futrell asserted that the years of the 80s were spent arguing, posturing and traveling well-worn roads. She noted that educators, politicians, policy makers, teachers’ unions, child advocacy groups, parents and business and community leaders argued, bickered, and pulled in a host of contradictory directions. She further noted that legislators, bureaucrats and commissioners all pointed fingers and accused, and as a result of the arguing, the real issues of schooling in America were not addressed. Futrell concluded that although the years of the 80s were viewed as a decade of educational debate, there was a mass of regulations imposed by the states. Specifically, she continued, state legislators enacted more than 700 statutes between 1983 and 1985; however, these statutes

usurped the authority that appropriately belonged to teachers, principals, parents, and local communities.

Futrell maintained that was the first wave of reform which emanated from the state house rather than the schoolhouse. Its purpose was to control and regulate teachers and local schools. A second wave of reform supported educational change; however, it dealt with the change being wielded by educators, not legislators. Thus, local schools, teachers, and the teaching profession in several states began to lead the educational improvement effort. Furthermore, the second wave of reform called for efforts that brought teachers, principals, superintendents, school boards, parents, and business and community leaders in collaborative efforts to renew and improve their school.

Maeroff (1988) found that when teachers have to worry about who is boss, empowerment is perceived as professionalism. Maeroff observed that teachers are a part of the organization; therefore, they should be able to contribute to the decision-making process in order to feel involved.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a significant difference existed between principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making as a form of empowerment in South Carolina.

#### Significance of the Study

Teachers comprise a large percentage of the educational institution. They are the ones who carry out the mission and who endeavor to accomplish the goals of the institution. The study done by the Carnegie Foundation (Boyer, 1988) indicated the teachers were not very involved in decision making. School administrators can enhance the organizational climate of the school by allowing teachers to become involved in decision making and permit them to share their expertise. It is anticipated that this research will support the need for teacher involvement in decision making to enhance the fulfillment of the school's mission and to improve its organizational climate.

## Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this research are:

Ho: 1 There is no significant difference between principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making.

Ho: 2 There is no significant main and interaction effects of status, race, and gender on principals and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making.

## Demographic Data

The original sample selected for this study consisted of 100 principals (50 elementary and 50 secondary) and 500 teachers (250 elementary and 250 secondary) from a random selection of 100 schools (50 elementary and 50 secondary) from all regions of South Carolina. Questionnaires were received from 80 principals for a (80%) return rate, and 393 teachers (207 elementary and 186 secondary) for a (76.6%) return rate. The return rate for the combined sample was (78.8%).

The analysis of the sample according to sex revealed that almost 8 (79.4%) out of every 10 teachers were females and almost 9 out of every 10 (88.7%) principals were males. slightly more than two-thirds (68%) of the combined sample were females.

The analysis of ethnicity revealed that more than two thirds (70.3%) of the teachers and three quarters of the principals (74.7%) were white. Less than one third (29.7%) of the teachers and slightly more than one quarter (25.3%) of the principals were black. For location, slightly less than 7 out of every 10 (69.9%) teachers and more than 7 out of every 10 (74.7%) principals were from rural schools.

For the level of school, the data revealed that slightly more than half (52.7%) of the teachers were from elementary schools, and more than half (57.1%) of the principals were from secondary schools. The combined total revealed that slightly more than half of the sample (51.1%) was from elementary schools.

For years of experience, 2 out of every 10 (20.5%) teachers had 0-5 years of experience, Slightly less than 2 out of every 10 (19.2%) teachers had 6-10 years of experience, Slightly less than 3 out of every 10 (28.1%) teachers had 11-15 years of experience and slightly more than 3 out of every 10 teachers (32.3) had 20 or more years of experience. Less

than 1 out of 10 (2.7%) principals had 6-10 years of experience. Slightly more than 1 out of every 10 (13.3%) principals had 11-15 years of experience, and slightly more than 8 out of every 10 (84%) principals had 20 or more years of experience (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

Frequencies and Percentages of Distribution of Teachers and Principals According to Demographics

	Teachers		Principals		Combined Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sex						
Male	83	20.6	71	88.2	153	32
Female	316	79.4	9	11.3	325	68
Row Total	398	100.0	80	100.0	478	100.0
Race						
Black	116	29.7	20	25.3	136	29
White	274	70.3	59	74.7	333	71
Row Total	390	100.0	79	100.0	469	100.0
Location						
Rural	276	69.9	56	74.7	332	70.6
Urban	119	30.1	19	25.3	138	29.4
Row Total	395	100.0	75	100.0	470	100.0
Level						
Elementary(K-6)	207	52.7	33	42.9	240	51.1
Secondary (9—12)	186	47.3	44	57.1	230	48.9
Row Total	393	100.0	77	100.0	470	100.0

Years of Experience						
0—5 years	78	20.5	0	0	78	17.1
6-10 years	73	19.2	2	2.7	75	16.4
11-15 years	107	28.1	10	13.3	117	25.7

(table continues)

Elementary Teachers’ and Principals’ Responses to Student Development Tasks. Slightly more than three fifths of the teachers (62%) and a vast majority of the principals (93.9%) agreed that teachers were sometimes to almost always involved in shaping the curriculum at their schools. All of the principals (100%) and slightly more than two thirds of the teachers (67%) agreed that teachers were sometimes to almost always involved in choosing which textbooks are used.

All of the principals (100%) and slightly more than four fifths (86.1%) of the teachers agreed that teachers were sometimes to almost always involved in choosing other instructional material. Nearly three fourths (72.7%) of the principals felt that teachers were sometimes to almost always involved in setting student promotion and retention policy while slightly more than three fifths (61.2%) of the teachers felt that they were seldom or almost never involved.

All of the principals (100%) and slightly less than three fifths (57.8%) of the teachers agreed that teachers were sometimes to almost always involved in setting standards for student behavior. Almost all (96.9%) of the principals felt that teachers were sometimes to almost always involved in designing staff development and in-service programs while slightly less than three fifths (57%) of the teachers felt that they were seldom to almost never involved. A vast majority (90.9%) of the principals felt that teachers were seldom to almost never involved. A vast majority (90.9%) of the principals felt that teachers were sometimes to almost always involved in setting school and district goals while slightly more than one-half (55%) of the teachers felt that they were seldom or almost never involved (see Tables 2).

**Table 2**

## Descriptive Analysis of Elementary Teachers and Principals' Responses to Student Development Tasks

Tasks	Groups	N	Mean	SD	Almost Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always
1. Involved in shaping the curriculum at my school	Teachers	205	2.86	1.22	17.5% (36)	20.5% (42)	29.3% (60)	23.9% (49)	28.8% (18)
	Principals	33	3.91	1.04	6.1% (2)	21.2% (7)	21.2% (7)	42.4% (14)	30.3% (10)
2. Involved in choosing which text-books are used	Teachers	206	3.07	1.47	24.8% (51)	23.3% (48)	23.3% (48)	22.3% (46)	21.4% (44)
	Principals	33	4.91	0.29	0	0	0	9.1% (3)	90.9% (30)
3. Involved in choosing other instructional materials	Teachers	207	3.76	1.19	7.1% (15)	21.3% (44)	21.3% (44)	32.4% (67)	32.4% (67)
	Principals	33	4.79	0.48	0	3.0% (1)	3.0% (1)	15.2% (5)	81.8% (27)
4. Involved in setting student promotion and retention policy	Teachers	206	2.17	1.24	43.2% (89)	26.8% (45)	21.8% (45)	12.6% (26)	4.4% (3)
	Principals	33	3.36	1.19	6.1% (2)	21.2% (7)	21.2% (7)	33.3% (11)	18.2% (6)
5. Involved in selecting standards for students behavior	Teachers	207	2.70	1.35	28.1% (58)	28.2% (58)	28.2% (58)	18.4% (38)	11.2% (23)
	Principals	33	4.21	0.74	0	18.2% (6)	18.2% (6)	42.4% (14)	39.4% (13)
6. Involved in Determining staff development and in-service programs	Teachers	207	2.70	1.21	39.1% (81)	17.9% (37)	29.0% (60)	8.7% (18)	0
	Principals	33	4.21	0.74	0	3.1% (1)	24.2% (8)	54.5% (18)	6.1% (12)
7. Involved in setting the school and district goals	Teachers	207	2.23	1.26	39.1% (81)	15.9% (33)	24.6% (51)	15.9% (33)	3.0% (1)
	Principals	33	3.88	1.11	6.1% (2)	3.0% (1)	39.4% (13)	24.2% (8)	1.5% (3)



## **Comparative Finding**

Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 predicted no significant difference between principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making. The t-test procedure was employed to analyze the data for the four categories of items pertaining to this hypothesis.

Statistically significant differences were found between principals' and teachers' perceptions of teachers' involvement in Student Development Tasks ( $t=20.32, <.001$ ). These findings revealed strong significant disparities between principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making according to student development tasks.

Additional t-test analyses were conducted to determine if elementary principals and teachers' perceptions for teacher involvement in decision making differed from the perceptions of secondary principals and teachers. For elementary principals and teachers, statistically significant differences were found for Recruitment and Budgeting Tasks ( $t=8.62, p<.001$ ), Student Development Tasks ( $t=-13.78, .001$ ), administrative tasks ( $t=-9.26, <.001$ ), and Scheduling Tasks ( $t=-9.34, <.001$ ).

These findings revealed strong significant disparities between elementary principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making. Similar differences in perceptions were found between secondary principals and teachers. Statistically significant differences were found for Student Development Tasks ( $t=-14.51, p<.001$ ). These findings also revealed strong significant disparities between secondary principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making. Based on the overall findings, Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 predicted no significant main and interaction effects of status, sex, and race on elementary teachers' and principals' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making. The Analysis of Variance Procedures were used to analyze the data for this hypothesis.

For the Student Development Tasks items, a significant main effect was found for status ( $F=43.772, .0001$ ). Higher order interactions were not statistically significant at the .05 level. The findings indicated that status is a factor that significantly impacted on principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making (see Table 3).

### **Table 3**

Analysis of Main and Interaction Effects of Status, Sex, and Race on Elementary Principals' and Teachers' Perceptions of Student and Development Tasks

Variables	Sum of Squares	Df	f	p
Status	29.224	1	43.772	<.001*
Sex	0.000	1	0.000	0.993
Race	0.307	1	0.459	.499
Status Sex	0.375	1	0.561	.455
Status Race	0.179	1	0.268	.605
Sex Race	0.003	1	0.005	.946
Status Sex Race	1.693	1	2.536	.113

## CHAPTER V SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a significant difference existed between principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making as a form of empowerment in South Carolina. A survey instrument designed by the researcher adapted from Boyer (1988) was used to generate data to compare the perceptions of the 80 principals and 393 teachers concerning one area of decision-making tasks, Student Development Tasks. The sample was further divided according to elementary and secondary levels.

Comparative data were generated using the t test and Analysis of Variance procedures to test the following two null hypotheses:

Ho:1 There is no significant difference between principals' and teachers' perceptions of teachers' involvement in decision making.

Ho:2 There is no significant main and interaction effects of status, race, and gender on principals' and teachers' perceptions of teachers' involvement in decision making.

Ho:1 No significant difference between principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making was rejected. Results of the t-test analyses revealed strong significant

disparities between principals and teachers perceptions of teacher involvement in Student Development Tasks.

When broken down according to levels, the results of the analysis for elementary teachers and principals indicated strong significant disparities between their perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making. The analyses yielded similar results for the secondary teachers and principals.

Ho:2 No significant main and interaction effects of status, race and gender on principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making was partially rejected. Results of the ANOVA Analyses for elementary principals and teachers revealed status as a statistically significant main effect for Student Development Tasks.

Results of the ANOVA Analyses for secondary principals and teachers also revealed status as a statistically significant main effect for the decision making category of Students Development Tasks. No higher order interactions were found.

### Conclusions

The overall findings of this study revealed significant differences between the principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making. These findings indicated that teachers perceived themselves as having little to no involvement in decision making at their schools. These findings are in contrast to Maeroff's (1988) three guiding principles in regards to teacher empowerment which help to move teachers closer to professionalism. They are status, knowledge, and access to decision making, and McElrath's (1988), premise which noted that Sound teacher empowerment can be the vehicle which restores confidence in the schools and reduces teacher isolation, increases autonomy and accountability, and encourages collegiality among teachers as professionals" (p.1). These findings support the findings of Ravitch (1985) who noted that educational reform movements took teachers for granted and presented less opportunities for them to be involved in decision making.

Principals and teachers agreed that teachers were sometimes to almost always involved in the decision-making process in shaping the curriculum, in choosing the textbooks that were used, in choosing other instructional materials, in setting formal school standards for student behavior, and in determining a safe school environment. According to the Student Development Tasks, teachers were not involved.

These results support the findings of Erlandson and Bifano (1987) who observed that teacher empowerment was neglected as a vital dimension of the school organization, and Chapman and Hutcheson (1982) who noted that teachers felt that their experiences were not well utilized in the

schools. They found that teachers have a need to contribute to important decisions, which in turn was substantiated by Peters and Austin (1985) who found that teachers need to be given opportunities to participate regularly in decision making that affects them as teachers. They found that when teachers participate in decision making, their efficacy, commitment, willingness, and dedication became very strong.

The results of this study revealed that significant disparities existed between principals' and teachers perceptions of teacher involvement in decision making. Principals perceived teachers as being more involved in the decision-making process than teachers perceived themselves in the Student Development Tasks (see Table 3).

These findings further indicated that the disparities in perceptions could be influenced by status, gender, and race.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Administrative Training Programs for principals have the necessary skills for involving teachers in the decision- making process.
2. Districts provide intensive in-service programs for principals who lack the skills for involving teachers in the decision-making process.
3. Principals provide in-service for teachers who are hesitant about being involved in decision making.
4. Group decision making be an integral part of every school.
5. Districts assess their present system of teacher involvement in decision making and make changes where necessary.
6. Teachers be provided in-service training on how to become involve in the decision making process.
7. A replication of this study using a large sample be conducted to include the middle school population.

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