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Government Policy on Teacher Evaluation in Greece: Revolutionary Change or Repetition of the Past?

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Abstract

After nearly two decades of freedom from evaluation, teachers in Greece became the focus of a new evaluation system. In 1998, reformers sought to raise the level of student performance by the regulation of teacher performance through a top-down evaluation system administered by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The probable effects of this evaluation system on teachers' professional roles and development are analyzed.

Political and Historical Framework

Greece represents a sound example of Cuban's (1995) argument that educational reforms return again and again. This occurs, he argued, because "reforms have failed to remove the problems they intended to solve". For over one hundred years, Greece has been characterized by abortive, short-lived educational reforms, which have never been implemented for more than a few years, and then were abandoned by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (MERA) for having failed to bridge rhetoric, design and reality (Persianis, 1998).

Following the restoration of democracy in 1974, and the entry of Greece into the European Union in 1981, Andreas Papandreou's Socialist Government came to power. His agenda included the designing of new reform proposals that would accelerate the democratization as well as modernization of the Greek educational system. As a member of the E.U., Greece places emphasis on reaching West European standards and innovation. Greek schools, a highly centralized system under the jurisdiction of the MERA, has been following French and German teaching methods "... regurgitation of foreign pedagogical thought" (Curtis, 1994; Persianis, 1998). The country is divided into fifteen administrative regions for education, each of which is subdivided into 240 districts (Peripheria), and is headed by evaluators-inspectors who monitor the application of the curriculum. The educational programs are directed by provincial and local authorities (Director and Employer of school Offices, one in each province) under the managerial general policy guidelines of the MERA. The latter is composed of all kinds of offices and institutions (Pedagogical Institute) that function according to central authority regulations, which motivate, lead, and sponsor any policies and draft laws, increasing the bureaucratization of schooling at all levels.

It is obviously difficult for those within educational bureaucracies to offer critical policy analyses. In Europe, educational control is governmental (France) or quasi-governmental (Great Britain), and it has been observed that educational policy is located within the administrations of liberal or conservative parties. In Greece, even minor changes depend on decisions made by the MERA, which reinforces the top-down manipulation of policy decisions.

It would not be misleading to say that there is no consensus on policy among the major political parties, especially as it relates to the New Democracy and Panhellenic Socialist Movement. Each party strives to promote its own ideological principles and interests rather than to develop on-going goals through mass political organizations or interest groups. The centralized nature of the administrative structure of the Greek Educational System has been challenged through various attempts at "political manipulation" by the governing party elite and the different interests groups (Gouvias, 1998). Moreover, each Minister claims to leave his stamp on any educational reform and ensure his lasting reputation in the history of Greek education. An instance of this appeared in June 1996, when the new Minister of Education, G.Arsenis (also a socialist) launched the reform for "Ethniko Apolyterio" (National Leaving Certificate). He promised to develop school curriculum, to provide in-service training for teachers, to reestablish a whole hierarchy of evaluators whose mandate would be to monitor and solve problems for the sake of teachers' improvement. The new reform was enacted by the passage of legislation, and instituted a politically motivated program of Teacher Evaluation. Unfortunately, the reform was announced "suddenly" without previous warning in the summer season (vacation for schools), a typical strategy the Greek state uses to secure legitimacy and reduce resistance.

Issues such as appointments, duties, inspection, evaluation and so forth, have always been worked out in drafts of legislation. The Minister with the cooperation of legislators and executives from the MERA wrote a reform bill, took it to the Parliament, and asked his colleagues to make it law, in a manner that Wilson (1996) ironically calls "ministerial responsibility." Greek Ministers actions reflect the attitude of centralized bureaucracies, which attempt to "secure" their positions by law before negotiating among practitioners and taxpayers. Instead, policy agendas must be socially negotiated in a "National debate of education" among all factions- -the government, policy-makers, and practitioners, which in a broad sense facilitate communication in solving problems cooperatively (OECD, 1995).

In the new era of educational reforms, no area has received more emphasis than the quality of instruction and those employed to deliver it. Duke (1995) indicated that "the key to educational improvement lies ... in upgrading the quality of teachers"; central to improving the quality of teachers is the teacher evaluation-inspection-supervision process. The issue then becomes how to refine and change the content of the traditional top-down flow of policy.

In 1981, the Socialist Government passed Law 1340/82, which abolished the influence of inspectors. Since then, teachers and school organizations have been free of inspection. That Law of inspection remained in existence until recently, though with no substantial role in enhancing teaching quality. All these years, teachers were being appointed but were never formally evaluated. In this policy vacuum, teachers had the unique opportunity to take advantage of their newly found liberties and promote the professionalism of teaching; unfortunately, they did not avail themselves of this opportunity.

On the other hand, the model of a more flexible evaluation was a great challenge for Greece, which could not suddenly allow the whole educational system be in a vacuum without internal restrictions and rules. Reformers sought to raise the level of students' performance by the regulation of teacher performance. According to the Government Gazette 27/02/98 and the application of Law n.2525/98, the new evaluation policy underlies the top-down evaluation of all participants from researchers, policy makers, evaluators, principals down to teachers. The results of these evaluations are to go directly to the Central Offices of MERA. Before analyzing some noteworthy issues as regards that evaluation, it is essential to discuss briefly the role of the government in policy making.

The role of the government

In Greece, the government is the principal source of funding. It sponsors any kind of policy research through the Pedagogical Institute. Its agencies are appointed and not elected, and are accountable to the public through the MERA. That situation creates the situation of a "crisis of confidence" (OECD, 1995), because any kind of policy making has the reputation of being fragmented and politicized, and as a result there is no trust among the stakeholders, either in higher levels of the hierarchy or at the base of school organizations. The social scientists perceive evaluation and authority as interconnected (Stone, 1988) in a centralized authoritative educational system, where there are levels of superiors (evaluators) and subordinates (evaluatees).

The former exercise authority based on the power of law and political skill rather than on interpersonal relations, whereas the latter show compliance with the control system. It is difficult for a single center to control the complex modern educational system. It is for this reason that the centralized system has been criticized for lack of imagination and its "top-heavy" structure in making decisions (OECD, 1995). The needs of the government and of the practitioners cannot both be met.

When one political party leaves office, it is replaced by another, which has different views and priorities. Furthermore, "clientelism" pervades Greek education--the belief that the criteria for appointment of teachers, evaluators and other employers or employees are usually political following the well-known "rousfeti" (personal favors by politicians to clients). Stone (1988) correctly argued that policy making tends to be essentially political and involves a struggle over ideas, implying that the development of policy has not followed a linear, rational model, but a model of differentiation. In this model, experts and policy makers generate and bring knowledge into theories, which,

later on, teachers use and practice. Political parties with strong and consistent ideology - as in Greece - have stopped holding consultative meetings with teachers unions; they are convinced that they know what to do without consulting teachers.

Why the restoration of evaluation is so important

The current policies represent the first time that the MERA has paid so much attention to evaluating-supervising instruction, teaching and especially teacher appropriateness for school productivity. It is noteworthy that with the present policy everybody is being evaluated--from principals to employers of educational offices, directors, and inspectors-consultants. It is a top-down, multi- dimensional hierarchical form of evaluation. However, teachers are the focal group who are being evaluated and self-evaluated from multiple directions from higher levels (See Figure 1).

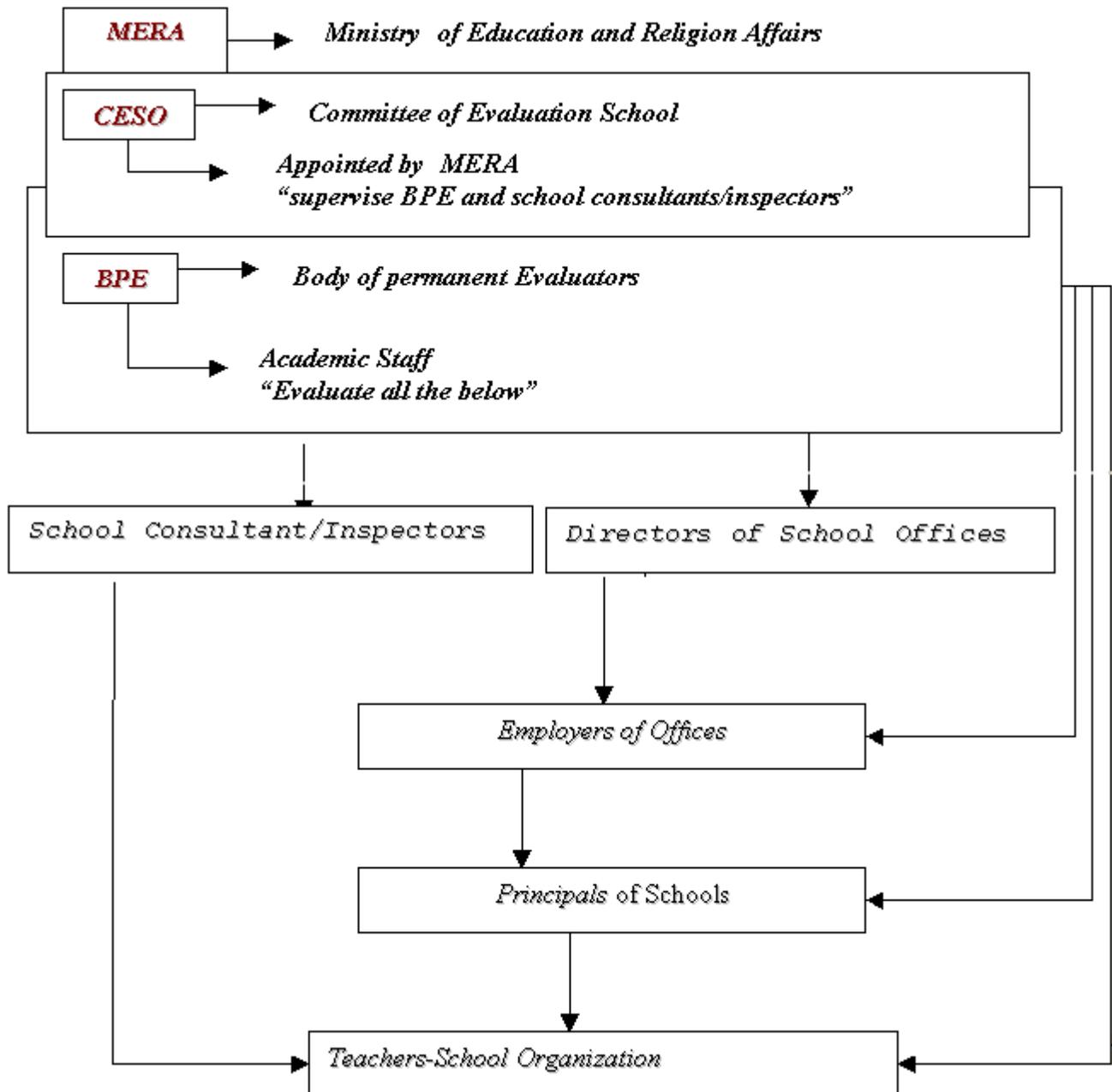


Figure 1. The Evaluation Pyramid

The only exception occurs at the top of the pyramid of evaluation, BPE (Body of Permanent Evaluators), whose members will not be evaluated but are elected by the MERA through public competition. The enabling legislation underlying this policy does not mention the qualifications of the personnel who will occupy this level of the evaluation system. At the highest level there is the Committee of Evaluation of School Organizations (CESO) which "supervises, controls and coordinates the functions of BPE and school consultants" (Law, 2525/98, article 5, FEK 188A' & Contemporary Education, 1997).

Evaluation is a significant tool in controlling what is going on in schools and it seeks to promote the self-development of teachers and the quality of their instruction. The type of evaluation that the new law in Greece proposes is twofold. It includes both a formative evaluation element, which is based on the "art of teaching" (Barber & Klein, 1984, pp.96-97) and emphasizes teacher performance and process of instruction, and a summative evaluation element, which is grounded on both processes and products of instruction. In fact, evaluation should empower teachers to use teaching methods that will benefit students' learning. It is not suggested that teacher evaluation be implemented in isolation, but rather in combination with other school improvement initiatives. However, the question that arises is whether the criteria of evaluation reflect international, national, regional and local needs of education. The general issues of the new policy remain the same across the country, but seemingly they are flexible to adjust to the local needs.

In Greece, the main contributors to evaluation theory and methodology have been academics and educational researchers – like those in BPE and CESO—working under the directive guidelines of the "political center." The same happens in a variety of countries such as the United States of America, where evaluations are conducted by specialized external evaluators (Wilcox, 1989). They produce standard questionnaires that any level of employees dealing with quantitative outcomes must complete, instead of conferring or advising teachers. In this respect, the new reform appears to be a "non reform," inasmuch as it repeats and re-establishes anachronistic procedures, mainly those that move the government to the position of the employer, and the teachers to the position of employees in an atmosphere lacking mutual trust and collaboration.

On a positive note, the new system is the first time that teachers have the chance to evaluate themselves, though I am not convinced to what extent it will be a positive experience nor how powerful will be the final reports sent to the higher levels of official evaluation system. Undoubtedly, self-evaluation represents an innovation, since it affects the local community and the teachers of each school, who will have, first, their own rules in the policy of self-evaluation, to solve their own problems, and secondly, a reasonable degree of autonomy (Law D2/1938/26- 02-98).

Who are the evaluators and what is their role?

One of the most noteworthy features of the new hierarchical policy of evaluation is the creation of two types of evaluator, the Internal (principals, directors, employers, inspectors, and consultants) and the External (BPE, CESO). In Britain and the USA, internal evaluation employs people who are not members of the evaluated institutions, rather they are specialists with the mandate to check on the use of public funds and insure that information be forwarded to the central government. They are experienced professionals who make formal and informal visits to school organizations to interpret (statistically) those organizations. Are these findings trustworthy, however?

It is worth mentioning that, paradoxically, in 1927, more than seventy years ago,

Considering evaluation as a sort of "investigation," teachers can subjectively determine their standards, wants, desires and present their findings, and offer feedback for themselves and others. Because they are concerned about students and tasks of teaching as well, they reflect upon leadership and accountability for instructional and personal growth. Evaluators bring their own objective lists with questions that represent a standardized measurement of teacher performance based on complex sets of explicit and implicit standards and on teaching theory rather than on realities of classroom life. The evaluator must be a person who uses "judgment as a tool, works to make sense of a particular school" (Wilson, 1995). In opposition, even though supervisors should be the instrument of decentralization, they should draw the connective chain from local to central authority, and give the final statement regarding the quality of a school.

The new Greek evaluation system delegates authority to principals who, instead of advising and organizing instruction, can now control and set realistic expectations in achieving teaching objectives. Assuredly, that change is based on the lack of internal evaluators who could be engaged full-time in observing school life. In the meantime, it seems that the government intends to supplement the abolition of tenure by removing incompetent teachers from classrooms. In regards to the new policy, principals assume the authority to reject or alter teachers' goals, while evaluating teacher development within a general infrastructure.

My argument is twofold. On the one hand, principals consider their buildings as private territories regardless of teachers' opinion about their effectiveness to act as educational leaders. The question remains: Do principals have the appropriate skills to evaluate and supervise the teaching staff, even though they primarily identify themselves with a political party? Furthermore, how could the validity of evaluation be secured where there are personal disparities and differences? (Contemporary Education, 1997, pp.150). Finally, how can the whole school organization function in harmony and be productive within such an environment? Multiple evaluation presupposes more data and more opportunities to corroborate findings.

Evaluation and Evaluators from Teachers' Perspective

Teachers are of the opinion that "evaluation does not represent an external consideration of school reality but an internal one by people who are involved" (OLME, 1997; Duke, 1995). They want to set their own priorities on what knowledge would be most useful to their enterprises, and to strengthen a new professionalism, since teachers themselves would contribute with their own criteria in evaluation process (with emphasis on Self-Evaluation). Yet teachers require participating and planning for their individual students at the level of the Center of Decision (MERA). Such ambitions might change teachers' behavior and sense of accountability, and most important change their image and opinion of evaluation coming from higher to lower levels.

Teachers need to have confidence in the impartiality and competence of evaluators because the latter "are reluctant to use objective measures since they tend to face teachers as inadequate" (Barber & Klein, 1984). Usually teachers feel overloaded with both teaching responsibilities and episodes of evaluation-supervision that bring about frustration, conflict and pressure which in turn increase teacher stress and burnout. If evaluators adopt a new, more collegial, class-centered style rather than their office/authority-based manner in assisting teachers to define their instructional intent, autonomy will not be undermined and stress will be reduced (Goens & Knciezyk, 1981).

Moreover, teachers complain about the lack of cooperation with senior administrative offices, which assume a different approach to education. They provide practical considerations about how evaluation may be carried out, and stress the importance for evaluators of living the reality of schooling every day. On the other hand, the academic and research communities start out with policies that represent politically attractive solutions. Duke (1995) claimed that "the initial impetus for changes has tended to come from political and theoretical-based rather than professional school-based demands and needs" (p.155). Politicians are so out of touch with the reality of schools that sometimes they do not even know if their policies are bad or if their goals are too abstract (Wilson, 1995). People whose work is crucial for the improvement of teaching and learning increasingly become disengaged from the hard work of improving schools because others outside their workplace decide what the policies are going to be.

By all accounts, teachers, individually and through their associations (unions) resist policies they do not understand. When a new idea is introduced, resistance is the common reaction. Teachers are familiar and comfortable with prior procedures, because they know what to do. The unknown, unfamiliar can be frightening, since it will be analytically investigated and reviewed. The more complex and uncertain the policy-legitimate implications are, the more likely teachers will need information and insights into what evaluation is doing and what it achieves. Conflicts can be identified and discussed, while superiors and subordinates will have a wider range of options from which to choose and will become wiser from the effort of choosing (OLME, 1997).

Conclusion

Will Greece continue to appoint official evaluators based on political interests rather than on the past performance or qualifications of candidates? Will the inspector-supervisor-consultant-principal become an independent professional (school person) or will he remain a governmental technocrat? Whatever the outcome, it is imperative that the public know what schools are doing, and judge whether they are doing it well. It is important for schools to be monitored, to reveal bad practitioners, bad practice, and bad teachers. Furthermore, all the interest groups must show an increased sense of accountability, and work in a collaborative environment with explicit standards.

Government agencies are usually free from blame, while the achievement of a policy is placed primarily on the backs of practitioners-teachers. The evaluation process must be divided not in form, as occurs now, but in essence. Local policies should promote and facilitate the diffusion of innovations and initiatives from all people who are involved with education. We can no longer rely on bureaucratic mechanisms, on regulations in law that hinder change or on complex standards that force narrow definitions of effectiveness. Schools will change when we change our thinking about them (Wilson, 1995).

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