

Self-Evaluation as a Change in the Greek Education System (General and Special Education): A Critical Overview of This Project



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ABSTRACT: At a time when maximizing the effectiveness of educational organizations is a requirement, school self-evaluation is increasingly gaining ground as a practice of evaluating educational work, providing information that can contribute to the development of schools. Seamless implementation of self-evaluation in a school unit requires acceptance of its core assumptions by those involved in the process, otherwise it is undermined. At the same time, introducing a change in an educational organization is a complex process that, if not accompanied by the appropriate manipulations, is very likely to fail to integrate into its processes. One case of an unsuccessful attempt to introduce change is the application of the school unit's self-evaluation in the Greek education system, whose manipulations have led it to failure. The study estimates that the factors that have impeded its introduction and implementation have to do with teachers' non-involvement in the creation of the change, non-participatory decision-making and not dispelling teachers' insecurities, while the bureaucratic structure of the central authority appears to be problematic as well. These practices are an example to be avoided and education policy makers must take this into account so that the effort to introduce and integrate a change in the Greek education system can be effective.

KEYWORDS: evaluation of educational work, school self-evaluation, change management

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation refers to the effort to measure the effectiveness of a thing or process and as a practice is increasingly adopted by organizations with human resources involved (Robson, 2007). Evaluation in modern society helps to meet the ever-increasing demands for essential information, which contribute to maximizing the efficiency and performance in organizations, while this process could only be considered useful in the field of education as well (Dimitropoulos, 1998). The evaluation of the effectiveness of the educational project is indeed inextricably linked to the educational process (Pasiardis, 2007a), aiming both at the improvement of the educational functions and at increasing the effectiveness of the educational project (Michail, Pasiardis, Savvidis, Stylianidis & Tsiakkiros, 2003), something that is requested in an era where knowledge is of utmost importance for development (Savvidis, 2011). One way to evaluate the educational work is the self-evaluation of the school unit, with the aim of increasing its effectiveness (Boud & Donovan, 1982).

As Vanhoof and Van Petegem (2011) state, schools are becoming increasingly autonomous and are expected to be increasingly self-directed. In the context of this autonomy, according to them (2011), the evaluation of the quality of the educational work produced by the schools themselves is also mentioned. Self-evaluation refers to the processes that are mostly initiated by the school itself and by which its functioning is systematically evaluated by its own people, in order to make decisions or adopt initiatives in the context of overall school development (Vanhoof & Van Petegem, 2011). The recognition of the importance of self-assessment has led to the adoption of this practice by most educational systems in Europe (Vanhoof, Van Petegem & De Maeyer, 2009).

The importance of self-evaluation according to Kyriakides and Campbell (2004) lies firstly in the fact that both parents and tax-paying citizens in general are informed about the efficiency or otherwise of the use of their money, but also about whether the school he cares about his students. In addition, the feedback provided to teachers through self-evaluation can result in their improvement and professional development (Hopkins, 1989), while the process can also contribute to the strengthening of students in terms of learning outcomes (Kyriakides & Pashiardis, 2005). Also, the fact that self-evaluation is carried out by its recipients results in the strengthening of autonomy and democracy in the school organization (OECD, 1998).

On the other hand, when a new element is introduced into an organism, it is most likely that resistance will be caused (Kythraiotis & Pasiardis, 2012a). It is a psychological and at the same time social phenomenon, according to James (1998), which is caused to

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individuals due to the reversal of their habits and brings them face to face with the unknown. According to Everard and Morris (1999), the success of an introduced change in an educational organization is a complex issue and that is why change attempts often fail, while, as Wong and Cheung (2009) point out, the effective management of the change process change is essential for its success. The framework of the evaluation of the educational work in the educational institutions of primary and secondary education in Greece was shaped by various legislative texts (Laws 3848/2010, 4142/2013, Presidential Decree 152/2013), but the introduction of the self-evaluation of the school unit was actually attempted with Ministerial Decision No. 30972/Γ1/15-3-2013. It was a change in the area of Greek education, and in fact, as it was a new practice that deviated from the traditional current practices, it could, according to Armstrong (1973), be characterized as an innovation. An innovation that, however, can be characterized as anything but successful, since its introduction caused resistance from the teachers who were called to implement it and in the end the process was delegitimized by them.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the reasons that may have contributed, so that the project of implementing the self-evaluation of the school unit in the Greek educational area was led to incomplete results. After referring to the main theoretical aspects related to self-evaluation, the actions taken by the Greek central authority, which introduced it, will be analyzed in order to identify inefficient practices that should be avoided by the decision-makers in the central authority of the educational system in the case of introducing a change.

METHODOLOGY

The research was based on a bibliographic review and study of the bibliographic sources, as well as a thematic content analysis of the available material. It is a qualitative study which focuses on the investigation of all aspects that frame the field in question. It aims to capture and highlight the factors that influence the entire project. It also attempts to contribute to the supply of theoretical material which, if properly utilized, can lead to successful results both in the planning and implementation of corresponding actions.

1. Basic theoretical aspects of self-assessment

According to Dimitriou and Kyriakidis (2007), for the development of self-evaluation in the school unit it is necessary to ensure that there is acceptance of its theoretical assumptions by those involved in the process, assumptions which support self-evaluation and derive from theories of social and organizational psychology. On the other hand, the non-adoption of these assumptions by schools makes the implementation of self-evaluation problematic (Kyriakides & Campbell, 2004). MacBeath (1999) therefore mentions its four main assumptions. According to the first, people naturally seek to learn and improve (MacBeath, 1999). This according to Kyriakides and Campbell (2004) means that there is a tendency for individuals to learn from their experiences but also to evaluate them. They (2004) mention as an example that teachers can judge which of the methods, they apply are effective and which are not, in order to develop the appropriate programs, so that their teaching is effective.

The next assumption according to MacBeath (1999) is that in order for change to occur in the organization, there must be action within the organization itself. That is, the essential changes that result in an increase in effectiveness in a school are the result of the actions and initiatives of the school participants themselves (Kyriakides & Campbell, 2004). As Kyriakides and Campbell (2004) underline, the importance of this assumption does not lie so much in the ability of the organization to effectively introduce a change, as in starting the change from within the organization itself and in addition, this fact implies an ethical responsibility of the organization to introduce, maintain and evaluate the whole process. Another assumption according to MacBeath (1999) is that feedback is considered important for development, both at the level of the organization and the individual. In other words, the data resulting from the self-evaluation process are considered feedback data and should imply improvement on the one hand at the individual level, on the other hand at the level of the entire school organization (MacBeath, 1999).

Another assumption mentioned by MacBeath (1999) is that when individuals create something themselves, then they feel bound and committed to what they have created. This is an assumption derived from the systemic theory of Getzels and Guba, where the organizational efficiency model of Hoy and Miskel was based (Kyriakides & Campbell, 2004). According to this model, the place an organization has in the lives of employees has an impact on their motivation and commitment, elements that are catalysts for measuring the effectiveness of the organization (Kyriakides & Campbell, 2004). And according to Rosenholtz (1989b), the innovation must start from the school organization itself, because, in this way, the participants feel it as their creation and then their motivation to work and strive for it increases. Kyriakides and Campbell (2004) consider that this should be the case with members of a school organization in the case of self-assessment implementation. Another assumption about self-assessment, noted by Kyriakides and Campbell (2004), concerns the collection of empirical data. In particular, since, in the context of self-evaluation, scientific rationality necessitates the process of collecting empirical data (Cohen, Manion & Morisson, 2007), it is expected that participants in a school organization follow the dictates of objectivity and for the sake of data are in position to change even their practices (Visscher & Coe, 2003) and furthermore, they consider this process as an integral part of their task (Kyriakides & Campbell, 2004). Thus, the members of a school organization, especially teachers, need to be actively involved in the process of collecting empirical data about school effectiveness (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000).

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As Vanhoof and Van Petegem (2011) point out, the introduction and implementation of self-evaluation is not an easy task for a school, while a decisive role for the quality of the whole process is played by how it is carried out. Implementing a change in school is also a complex process (Bartley, Melville & Weinburgh, 2012). As Kythraiotis (2012) mentions, the complexity of the change is due to the fact that school organizations, being open social systems, include various factors (human resources, structures, etc.) which can promote or, on the contrary, hinder the implementation of change. Most researchers consider change as a process rather than an outcome, and effective management of this process is essential for its success (Wong & Cheung, 2009). Everard and Morris (1999), in fact, note that the success of an introduced change in an educational organization is a complex issue and that is why often attempts to change fail. Kythraiotis, also (2012), states that certain factors can lead the change process to complete failure.

2. Investigation of the inhibiting factors for the integration of self-evaluation in the Greek school

Since in Greece the self-evaluation of the school unit, according to circular number 30973/Γ1/05-03-2013 of the Ministry of Education and Religion, would be implemented for the first time, it was a change in the Greek education system. As it turned out, the project of introducing self-assessment in Greek school units was not successful, as the new leadership of the Ministry of Education - after the elections of January 25, 2015, where political power passed from the ND-PASOK joint government to the SYRIZA-ANEL joint government - with press release on January 31, 2015, announced her suspension (Ministry of Culture, Education and Religion, 2015).

Trying to identify the reasons that led to the failure of said change, one discovers some mishandling. First of all, as MacBeath (1999) states, for self-evaluation to proceed and to have positive results, participants must have a positive attitude towards it. According to Rosenholtz (1989b), in order to create a sense of "ownership" of a change and motivate those involved to work for it, a collective decision process about its introduction, with the participation of those involved themselves, is necessary.

According to Kythraiotis (2012), the leadership must involve the participants in drawing up the vision related to the change through the dialogue, the exchange of opinions, the exploitation of experiences, the feedback, the modification (possibly) of the objectives, which, according to Vanhoof and Van Petegem (2011), it is necessary to take into account the needs and wishes of the participants. As Hill, Shapiro and Wise (1989) state, a leader first encourages participation in the development of a vision and then proceeds to develop a plan to achieve it, so that action is linked to the vision and a sense of it develops. of "ownership" towards achievements. On the contrary, the central authority (Ministry of Education and Religion), as rapporteur and guide for the implementation of the change, acted rather autocratically, since it essentially imposed the decision to introduce the change, without prior consensus on the objectives and dialogue with the direct involved (A.D.I.P.P.D.E., 2015), who are none other than the educational community. According to Everard and Morris (1999), the non-participation of stakeholders in decision-making about change is a serious problem that negatively affects it. They (1999) point out that refining the vision and strategy by leadership and then announcing the decision and demanding compliance from those involved reduces the chances of change success, since this is about a process of dialogue, feedback and interaction, and when this process is bypassed, not engagement and commitment, but distancing and reaction. As Fullan (1993) notes, what is important cannot be determined by deciding and ordering. Fuegen and Brehm (2004) and Knowles and Linn (2004) argue that individuals do not resist change so much as that it is imposed on them. Moreover, it was "commissioned", according to the no. 44375/Γ1/24-03-2014 circular of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, effectively bypassed any distribution of leadership and participatory decision-making in critical circumstances such as this one, a practice that Vanhoof and Van Petegem (2011) point out as essential for support of self-assessment. Participating in decision-making also results in the strengthening of teachers' self-efficacy, which contributes to the formation of a positive attitude towards change, as argued by Zimmerman (2006). Also, as reported by Beckard and Harris (1987), an attitude on the part of the leadership, regarding the management of change, that endangers its success has to do with not understanding the process of the intervention, as a result of which it is given emphasizing action and neglecting planning which is equally important. In this case, the central leadership hurriedly implemented the change with circular number 44375/Γ1/24-03-2014 of the Ministry of Education and Religion, ignoring the fact that the teachers manifested the "foreign idea" syndrome, as stated by Everard and Morris (1999), as they faced the change with insecurity and concern and considered the intentions of the Ministry to be punitive (A.D.I.P.P.D.E., 2015). The mistrust of the teachers came from the belief that the specific evaluation system would degrade rather than upgrade the school units, as well as that it would endanger the working future of the teachers, which seemed uncertain in an unfavorable period due to the financial crisis (A. D.I.P.P.D.E., 2015). Apparently, there was no assurance that the self-assessment data would serve as evidence of improvement and not for a punitive purpose, an action necessary according to Zimmerman (2006) in order to encourage teachers to provide data. Vanhoof and Van Petegem (2011), in fact, point out that, for self-evaluation to have better results, the participants must not consider this process as a threat, which was not achieved in this case, on the contrary, insecurity and fear were not entertained of teachers, which, according to Fullan (2001), creates a barrier to change. Another factor which, according to Morrison (1998), negatively affects change and which seems to have been the case here, acting as a catalyst in the failure of self-assessment, is the complexity of change. The duties of teachers, as derived from the Ministerial Decision number 30972/Γ1/15-3-2013, provided for unprecedented and demanding practices for teachers, for which there was no appropriate and sufficient support, guidance, information, as the

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Educational Federations reacted strongly, canceling most of the evaluation-related trainings (A.D.I.P.P.D.E., 2015). Therefore, the teachers being on the one hand charged with additional tasks, and on the other hand insufficiently informed about the assessment, its purpose and benefits, they obviously did not consider the introduction of this form of assessment as an opportunity for improvement, on the contrary, they rather appreciated that they have more from such a process to lose (control of situations, freedom of movement, time, effort) than to win. This fact, according to Brauns and Taut (2003), strengthens the resistance towards the evaluation and also the degree of difficulty regarding the effectiveness of the process.

Another possible reason for failure has to do with the functioning of the central authority (Ministry of Education and Religion) which instituted the change. So, the central authority, with its multi-level bureaucratic structure, tends to emphasize 'compliance', as Elmore (1980) puts it, rather than the ability to implement any change. This consequently leads the school, which has developed bureaucratic structures, to spend itself in complying with the demands of higher authorities, rather than developing its capacity to implement change effectively. Accordingly, higher authorities (Directorate of Education, Regional Directorate of Education, Ministry by hierarchy) spend more time checking compliance with regulations than checking the ability to implement change, which becomes evident in no. 44375/Γ1/24-03-2014 circular of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, where it was stated that "The Regional Directorates of Education in cooperation with the corresponding Directorates of Education, are invited until 11-4-2014 to send to the Director of the Minister's Office a table with the schools in which the formation of the working groups has not been completed". According to Kythraiotis and Passiardi (2012b), this phenomenon constitutes an obstacle to the success of the change. In other words, the same central principle that institutes the change, actually hinders its implementation with its structures. It should also be noted that in times of change micro-political power is intensified within organizations, making the effort to institute change complex (Blase, 1991). In this particular case, the micro-political power did not relent and, it seems, worked in the form of a coalition between the teachers, as the teachers skeptical of self-evaluation, having a common attitude through the trade union bodies, cooperated in order to extend their influence to the rest of the teachers as well. dynamizing the climate of reaction within the educational community. The climate of division created in the school units is indicatively reflected in announcements by teachers' associations:

"... To some extent, the debate in the schools was also colored by the expression of the anxiety of many colleagues for a counter-proposal of the education movement – here opinions are divided both at the level of trade union forces and at the level of colleagues. Until the publication of the third circular, 13 elementary schools (out of the Association's 30 in total) and 6 kindergartens had proceeded with minutes of non-formation of the working groups, while after the circular all the school units proceeded with corresponding minutes thus declaring universal resistance and disagreement of colleagues towards self-evaluation. After the circular and the mandatory assignments, in several schools the disagreement of colleagues was recorded based on the relevant text of the ILO, we had the first official resignation of a headmistress, while already, teachers' associations are setting specific group meeting times with the aim of universal participation in the attitudes in order to blocked their operation with the universal abstention of colleagues. The battles of signatures, the practices of refusing to form groups, the blocking of seminars with a massive presence of members of the Association, signal the disposition of the great majority of the Association to oppose the evaluation. They form a majority front of struggle that, despite the fluctuations, fears, worries, delusions, can fight the next battles in terms of victory..." (Mariolis, 2014). "...The final assessment was positive: of the 20 schools in the city, only 4 formed teams voluntarily, of the 11 multi-seater schools in the rest of the county, only 2. All single-seater schools, almost all minority schools and the great majority of kindergartens did practical not forming groups. However, during the time that the battle against self-evaluation was fought in the teachers' associations, there were conflicts - sometimes intense - and it made us all realize how much the climate in schools will change and how the relations between colleagues will be if the evaluation is implemented..." (Tabakis, 2014). As can be seen, the above conditions could create anything but favorable ground for the universal acceptance of self-assessment assumptions, which is a necessary condition for the effective implementation of self-assessment according to Kyriakides and Campbell (2004). According to Fullan (1991) after all, if during the introduction and implementation of the change the obstacles are not overcome, such as what has been mentioned in the case of the school units in Greece, then instead of the internalization of the change, i.e., its integration into the school, rejection occurs and its failure, as happened in this case.

CONCLUSIONS

As Barber (1996) states, an organization's ability to improve and modernize determines its success. He (1996) characterizes self-evaluation as a key process for this purpose. However, for the data of the Greek educational system, the self-evaluation of the school unit is a change and, as Starr (2011) points out, schools face difficulty in facing any kind of change. According to Fullan, Cuttress and Kilcher (2005), knowledge about the change does not necessarily ensure the success of its implementation, however the absence of relevant knowledge guarantees its failure. As noted by Everard and Morris (1999), change proponents tend to grasp a clear vision and believe that its transmission is sufficient for its implementation, ignoring that resistance from those involved is a consequence of this fact, while also ignoring the perceptions and positions of the participants. These attitudes, as they (1999) argue and, as was demonstrated in the case of the self-evaluation of the school unit in Greece, lead the change effort to a wreck.

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Therefore, those who lead such changes in the educational system should, as Miles (1986) points out, realize that they must follow different strategies, from the phase of introduction to the phase of implementation and internalization of the change, in order to make its management successful and efficient.

As Wong and Cheung (2009) also emphasize, it is important to understand that only when one realizes the reasons why a change should occur does one decide to change. The consolidation of change occurs when there is a change in the values, attitudes and perceptions of individuals (Everard, Morris & Wilson, 2004), since change is not just an event (Hall & Hord, 2001). It is a process through which individuals and the organization gradually evolve as they acquire the ability to cope with new circumstances (Hall & Hord, 2001) and this is something that should be taken into account by policy makers if this process is to don't lead to failure.

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