



ITALIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Editor-in-Chief: Silvio Scanagatta | ISSN 2035-4983

Participatory Decision Making in Russian Schools

*Victoria Pogosian**

Author information

* Department of Teaching Foreign Languages to Young Learners, Institute of Childhood, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, Saint Petersburg, Russia. E-mail: pogosian@mail.ru

Article first published online

February 2020

HOW TO CITE

Pogosian, V. (2020). Participatory Decision Making in Russian Schools. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 12(1), 122-139. doi: 10.14658/pupj-ijse-2020-1-8

Participatory Decision Making in Russian Schools

Victoria Pogosian

Abstract: The development of education as an open democratic state-public system on the basis of distribution of responsibilities among the agents of educational policy and raising the role of all the participants of the academic process (the learner, the educator, the parent, and the educational institution) was first formulated in the Russian Education Law in 1992 manifesting the departure from the former Soviet type command administration leadership. The adoption of this law was to ensure the democratic principles of new education leadership, the autonomy of educational institutions and freedom and pluralism in education. This pilot study is aimed at disclosing students' and teachers' participation in decision making, and the findings give evidence that the extent of this participation is very limited at classroom level and practically non-existent at school level. Although the pilot study involved few interviews with teachers and students and the findings are to be regarded as preliminary, the situation is similar to the current trends in higher education leadership, which follows the business model of governance replacing collegiality with the concentration of decision making at administration level. The low extent of students' and teachers' participation in decision making is rooted in cultural traditions and the modern context of schools' and teachers' accountability caused by managerialism. Further research will shed light on the main factors influencing stake holders' participation in decision making at different institutional levels.

Keywords: participatory decision making, cultural practices, 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts leadership

Introduction

Participatory decision-making in education concerns various issues depending on the level of leadership. At the national level it deals mainly with the policy issues, while at the classroom level it deals mainly with pedagogical issues. Nevertheless, regardless of the level, educational leadership is influenced by the political, economic, social, historic and cultural factors. That is why it seems reasonable to regard the general background of education development and the context in which decision-making in education takes place in Russia.

Historic background of Russian education: a shift from commanding administrative to democratic leadership

The collapse of the USSR and Communist party commanding administrative leadership started a new era in the development of Russian education (Pogosian, 2012b).

The new principles underlying the strategy of the development of Russian education stated in the first post-Soviet policy document Law “On Education” adopted in 1992, such as the right of the individual for free development, accessibility of education and adaptivity of the system of education to learner’s needs, freedom and pluralism in education, democratic state-public leadership, and autonomy of educational institutions give evidence of the complete departure from the Soviet policy. The centrally designed Soviet curricula were replaced with freedom granted to educational institutions to design their own curricula which ensured pluralism and variety of educational institutions’ types and opportunities for learners to choose the institutions and educational programmes that satisfy their personal needs and inclinations; authoritarian Communist leadership was replaced with democratic leadership implying public participation and delegation of decision making from the state to local and institutional level.

However, the adoption of a ‘revolutionary’ law could not lead to immediate transformations in education, because the process was hindered by economic, political, administrative and human factors. Initially, after the adoption of the Law, it was extremely difficult to put the new principles of education governance into practice, as school principals at that time were not ready for enacting them. As contended by Hagen, Russian school principals of the 1990s were repositioned from Communist up-bringers to democratic facilitators and from authoritarian technocrats to commercial entrepreneurs which “contrasted sharply with the Soviet type command administration based on so-called one-man leadership” (Hagen, 2010, p. 87). Although the law delegated most responsibilities for running educational institutions

to local level and school principals became personally responsible for the school, “the former institutional structures and professional practices were still powerful” (Johnson, 1996, p. 119). Tkachenko, Minister of Education in 1992-1996, pointed out that many educators and administrative officials involved in education during that period were not able to accept “the new principles of the educational legislation”, because they had “many inflexible professional stereotypes” and sometimes attempts were made “to solve new problems with old resources and methods”. He emphasized that the new law was often being implemented by people who had not “yet made a definite break with the past” (Tkachenko, 1993, p. 199).¹

This research aims to shed light on the extent of the actual changes in Russian educational leadership more than 20 years after the adoption of the Law on education in terms of the extent of participatory leadership at school and classroom level. For that purpose it seems reasonable to start with identifying the range of the issues, which are currently in the domain of institutional decision making. Arguably, this range of issues deals with education policies as text and discourse.

Interpreted in the framework of Barthes’ (1974) concept of “readerly” and “writerly” texts for distinguishing the extent to which the practitioners are actively involved in policy, the Soviet policy documents may be described in terms of “readerly” texts. According to Barthes, a “readerly” text is “like a cupboard where meanings are shelved, stacked and safeguarded” (Barthes, 1974, p. 200). This kind of text makes no requirement of the reader to write or to produce his or her meaning. Interpreted in this framework, the Soviet era of educational policy may be regarded as the era of “readerly” texts, with the discourse centred not on interpreting, but on correct understanding and correct implementation of the state (Communist Party) educational policy. The authoritarian resolutions of the Soviet educational policy had to be followed thoroughly, without any critique, or disagreement. The discourses of the policies’ implementers were supposed to express approval and agreement. There was no opportunity to engage with critical analysis or, to voice a doubt or a different opinion. The Soviet school curricula reflected the state monopoly in education and were absolutely ‘readerly’ texts – they did not have any space for introducing any changes in terms of the subjects to be taught, their sequence and content, and the textbooks and books for teachers were strictly prescribing what and how to teach. The centralized syllabi for every subject/course had lists so-called “didactic units” identifying the content to be taught and learnt. The teachers were to use the textbooks selected at the national level, which also implies the same content of education and the same teaching methodology used at all schools all over the USSR (Pogo-

¹ Cited from Hagen, 2010, p. 93.

sian, 2012b). With this kind of educational leadership policy, there was not much room for decision making at school level.

In contrast, according to the Law “On Education” enacted in 2013, curricula are “independently designed and approved by educational institutions” (‘On Education’, 2012, p. 44); the Law ensures ‘variability of curricula, the possibility to design curricula of different extents of complexity and focus based on the educational needs and capabilities of learners’ (‘On Education’, 2012, p. 39). The new educational standards introduced by this Law no longer set the “didactic units”, but identify the learning outcomes in terms of competencies to be developed. That implies that it is the educational institutions that are to make decisions as to how to develop the competencies, what educational content, what didactic materials and methods should be used for that purpose (‘On Education’, 2012, p. 39-40). The law also requires that school curricula are to have a new structure which consists of a mandatory component to be introduced by all schools, and a component ‘designed by the participants of educational relations’ (‘On Education’, 2012, p. 40). That means that the schools now are able to decide what additional subjects they introduce into their curricula. It is also noteworthy that new ‘curricula ... may be based on different content taking into account learners’ educational needs and interests, providing profound studies of some subjects, content fields of the curriculum” (‘On Education’, 2012, p. 201), and this implies that learners become central stakeholders whose interests, preferences, needs and capabilities are supposed to play the key role in the process of decision making at the institutional level.

All that gives evidence that these new educational standards maybe interpreted as ‘writerly texts’. Besides meeting the individual needs of the students through corresponding curricula, schools can also organize various extracurricular events and activities for their students – circles, clubs, sports events, visits to theaters, museums, cinemas, hiking tours, etc. Decisions concerning the number and the content of extracurricular activities and events are also to be made at the institutional level.

As a result, making decisions concerning a range subjects to be taught, textbooks and methodology, extracurricular activities for their students, meeting their needs, interests, and capabilities is in the domain of schools. How are these decisions made? To what extent do the new policies in education impact upon participation in education policies as text and discourse? To what extent do teachers and students participate in decision making at institutional and classroom levels? These research questions have been focused to several particular questions addressed in this pilot study.

First, what cultural practices and leadership systems influence the participation of different stake-holders in decision making in the institution? Second, how do teachers and students engage with different participato-

ry processes? Third, in which institutional characteristics do institutional stake-holders place value?

Research methods

The research methods of this pilot study involved interviews, questionnaires and the analyses of policy documents and research literature. The interviews and questionnaires contained similar questions concerning teachers' and students' participation in decision making at school and classroom level.

This article presents preliminary data gained through interviews with one teacher having over 10 years of experience and a 14 year old student of the same school. The interviews were conducted in Russian, transcribed and translated into English. The narratives, examples and explanations of the interviewed teacher and student are supported with the data gained from questionnaires responded by 10 teachers with 2-5 years of experience and 10 students from other schools of Saint Petersburg (Russia) and their comments from open questions, and analyzed based on the policy documents. All the teachers participating in the research are teachers of one subject – English. As a whole, the respondents represent 21 schools of Saint Petersburg.

This kind of sample is going to provide only preliminary data. The analysis of the obtained data will provide a basis for hypothesizing on the current trends in participatory decision making in Russian schools and for proceeding to a wider scale research. The data drawn from the interviews and questionnaires will be described and analysed based on the following decision making levels: decision making at school level, decision making at classroom level.

Decision making at school level

Cultural practices and leadership systems that influence participation

According to Article 26 of the Law On Education' (pp. 78-79), educational institutions' governance is to be based on a combination of one-man management performed by Principal and collegiality. The collegial body of school self-governance in Russian schools is described as Pedagogical Council. Every teaching staff member is to attend its meetings to discuss the organizational and educational issues – the goals, objectives, pedagogy, students who have problems, school events, etc.

The Pedagogical Council is held at least 2 times during an academic year: before an academic year starts (in late August) to discuss the plan of the school's activities, and at the end of an academic year (June) to analyze how

the goals objectives were reached, the results of final exams, the main goals and the priorities for the next academic year. Some schools also hold several thematic Pedagogical Councils (4-5 times per academic year) to discuss such issues as how to work with gifted children, how to raise the school's competitiveness, etc. (Rojkov & Baiborodova, 2000).

Summarizing the most essential dominating features of Pedagogical Councils in Russian schools, Salamatina in her doctoral research points out several drawbacks - authoritarian style, superficial discussions, lack of relationship between discussed theories and practices, lack of teachers' independent activities, and low efficiency. These features are suggestive of the fact that the extent of opportunities for participatory decision making at these councils is very limited, Salamatina describes them as councils for instructions rather than for discussions (Salamatina, 2011).

There is another body for decision making at schools described as Methodology Boards. They convene to discuss with teachers of one subject the issues concerning various aspects of teaching certain school subjects. Each Board has a leader, one of the experienced teachers appointed by the principal. During the meetings, as the interviewee said, "the leader puts forward the objectives that were formulated by the principal or vice-principals, for example: the students should have two copy books for home assignments. My role as a teacher is to implement what we have been told. At these meetings, I can express my opinion concerning the given instructions, but that is useless, because in case I do, I will be told that that is the decision I am to put into practice. But in case I suggest that I organize some extracurricular event for my students, no one would be against it."

Teachers and students engage with different participatory processes

According to the interviewee, there is not much of teachers' involvement in decision making at school level, and if there is, these decisions deal with the issues which do not seem to the leadership very relevant.

Other teachers' responses showed that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities available for them in decision making in school (40% said sometimes, 40% said often, and 20% said nearly always), and that they have opportunities to contribute to decision making about problems and possibilities in school (40% said rarely, 40% said sometimes and 20% said nearly always).

60% of the teachers indicated that they sometimes participate in decision making about things that happen in the school, 20% said rarely 20% said often. With regard to optimal contribution 40% of the teachers think that they rarely contribute enough, 20% think that they do it sometimes and 40% said often.

Institutional characteristics the stakeholders place value

At the same time, it is interesting to note one of the comments of the young teachers: "the decision making is for the leadership." This comment

characterizes the awareness of one's role in the decision making and the actual involvement as fairly passive. The evidence reveals the involvement is just being present at the meeting of the Pedagogical Council or a Methodology Board, and taking notes to perform the instructions given (in other words, being aware of what is to be done). In this respect, everyone has an opportunity to be involved in decision making, but to what extent this opportunity is used is still a question, especially considering the fact that these bodies existed during the Soviet period too. This supposition is based on the comments of one of the teachers:

Most valued in my involvement at school are the achievements of my students, and documentation. Because of lack of experience and time shortage I think it is important to perform your duties without causing problems to the leadership.

Some other comments given by the teachers also give evidence that their participation is characterized by being rather passive:

There are situations when I would like to participate in decision making at school, but my experience and age often are an obstacle for drawing attention to my opinion. I think that the opinion of young teachers is important for school because we bring something new, but unfortunately the leadership does not always understand it.

It is difficult even to imagine a situation when my opinion could be important or decisive in decision making at school level. These issues are decided by the administration, heads and experienced teachers, on the other hand, I would be even scared to make decisions due to the responsibility.

The reservations of the young teachers are understandable, during the initial period at an institution, it is better to learn more so that to feel more confident in the profession. Will teachers' learning eventually lead to a greater extent of involvement in decision making? Does learning have an impact on the involvement in decision making at institutional level?

School administration usually provides courses for teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD), for example, when the new forms of testing the achievements of school graduates were introduced, high school teachers were to take courses on unified state examination (USE). Since the new federal educational standards have been adopted, teachers are to take courses concerning the new standards' requirements implementation. But, as the interviewee said, 'if I want to take a course to meet my own desires or ambitions, I will have to pay for it myself'.

Other teachers also pointed out that they rarely (20%), often (60%) or nearly always (20%) have opportunities for meaningful CPD. As for the focus of their CPD on the areas they want, it happens rarely (20%), sometimes

(20%), often (20%) or nearly always (40%). The diversity of responses implies the differences of situations in schools.

At the same time, teachers rarely (60%) or only sometimes (40%) have enough time for learning. As clarified by the interviewee,

there are time constraints for my own learning – I have to give a lot of classes and I need a lot of time to prepare for them, there is no opportunity to substitute me at school so that I could have time for learning, that is why I can spare time for my own learning only during the vacation period or in the evenings.

Young teachers expressed different opinions on the question concerning the impact of their learning on how they get involved with decision making in school², but the interviewee's comments show that in fact professional status is of little value for being involved in decision making:

I hold a PhD degree in Education, but as a school teacher I do not feel that it helps me to participate in decision making, even when I try to explain that some of the decisions are not correct pedagogically, no one would listen. I think I'd like to be more involved, but after several attempts to argue against some decisions, I decided not to try again.

Deliberating on the personal involvement in decision making, the interviewee pointed out that she would like to be more involved in this process, and added:

I am in a direct contact with my students, and I know better what to do and how things should be done, in the meantime, I am given instructions by people who do not know these students at all. At the same time, it may be too dangerous if all teachers were free to do in the classroom whatever they like.

It is interesting to point that the views of young teachers are almost the same, they unanimously expressed their desire to get involved in decision making at school level, but their comments reveal that their attitude is a bit different, some thinking that their young age and lack of experience do not allow them to voice their opinions; some expressing their disappointment with the state of art of decision making and their readiness to change the situation:

I think I would like to be more involved in the teachers' community at school, but sometimes the process of communication and sharing ideas with the colleagues is disappointing. It might be good to have a kind of union of teachers for settling ambiguous issues.

² Rarely 20%, sometimes 20%, often 40%, nearly always 20%.

The most valuable characteristics in the involvement in decision making at school for young teachers seems to be awareness of the decisions that have been taken and to implement them:

About some decisions we learn post factum or when it is ordered or requested by the leaders. In this situation the most valuable thing is at least to be aware of what is going on and to participate in what was decided.

The school collegiate bodies of governance are not new, they existed during the former Soviet period of 'readerly texts' leadership, and the findings reveal that they have not changed much: providing a formal floor for discussions and decision making, they are mostly the means of communicating the leadership decisions to those who are to put them into practice. The interviewee emphasized that

There are no ways that the administration enables teachers to get involved in the decision making. If I want to participate, it should be my initiative: I should visit the principal and say what I want, or I should speak at the meeting of Pedagogical Council, but I do not think that what I say will be taken into account. That is why I would think twice before speaking, if the issue is of value to me, I might express my initiative.

In other teachers' opinions, the leadership team involve them in decision making in school rarely (40%), sometimes (40%), often (20%); the leadership team rarely (40%) or sometimes (60%) encourages them to be involved in decision making in school. They think that they have opportunities to discuss problems and possibilities in school with the leadership team rarely (20%), sometimes (20%), often (40%) or nearly always (20%). But asked if they have enough of these opportunities, 40% responded that they have them rarely, 40% said often and only 20% said nearly always.

The data obtained from the teachers' responses indicate that the teachers' opinions differ in this respect. The evidence reveals that the situation is different in various schools, and further research is needed to shed light on the actual leadership and teachers' interactions in the area of decision making.

What about students' involvement in decision making at institutional level? The interviewed student pointed out that he is not in any way involved in decision making at school level, and there are no students' committees or councils or other bodies facilitating this involvement at school. He also said that this kind of involvement is of no value for him.

The replies of other respondents: 40% pointed out that they rarely know about the roles and responsibilities available for them to be involved in decision making in school (30% said often, and 30% said nearly always). Howev-

er, 30% rarely and 70% only sometimes participate in decision making about things that happen in school.

All the students indicated that they rarely have opportunities to contribute in decision making about problems and possibilities in school. At the same time, unlike teachers, students do not express any desire to be involved and they see no importance in it. It turned out to be practically no difference found between the statements of the interviewed student who said “I do not want to be involved in decision making in my school, and it is of no importance for me, besides, I do not know what other people want”, and the comments of other students who wrote:

At our school students practically do not take part in decision making at school level, mainly they do it at classroom level. Because I have never done it, I do not know how it might be done.

It is noteworthy, that the students do not see value in being involved in decision making at school level, for example, the interviewee said that the only value for him in his involvement in school is socializing with his friends. And one of the comments of respondents of other schools was “I am glad when school does not prevent me from learning.”

Participatory decision making at classroom level

According to the teacher interviewee, at classroom level there are several ways that she can make her own decisions: “while the decision on choosing the textbook is made by the administration, if I want to use an additional textbook, I am free to do it. Teachers are also free to use certain techniques of teaching. I can also skip some exercises from the textbook if I think they are not good for my class.”

She also usually tries to get the pupils involved into decision making, mainly she does it through giving creative assignments, when students can decide, for example, what kind of drama to role play, what kind of tour of Saint Petersburg to prepare, whom to interview. These kinds of assignments are usually given at the end of the quarter. Other teachers responded that they facilitate with different extent of frequency (rarely 20%, often 60%, nearly always 20%) opportunities for students to get involved in decision making about their learning in the classroom.

At the same time, the students’ replies give evidence that they rarely or never³ participate in decision making about what and how they learn in the classroom. The student interviewed said that he is sometimes involved in

³ It is noteworthy, that although the questionnaire did not contain the word “never”, some students inserted it in the answer sheet, evidently desiring to emphasize the fact that they have never experienced certain activities.

decision making at classroom level, for example, when they plan tours or excursions, that is, the issues related to extracurricular activities rather than to learning.

Deliberating on the opportunities and ways of understanding students' learning styles, strengths and weaknesses the interviewed teacher said:

As a foreign language teacher I have more opportunities to understand the students' learning styles than other subject teachers, I think in this respect I am in a better position because we work often in small groups and there are opportunities for individual communication. I can hardly understand how teachers of other subjects (e.g. mathematics or physics) do it, and that is why I think they speak more often not about individual pupils but about the whole class – 'this class is weak' or 'this class is strong'.

Following this remark, it is noteworthy that all the teachers who responded to the questionnaire are foreign language teachers, and for their lessons, the cohorts of students are divided into smaller groups (8-12 students). This is really an advantage because it provides opportunities to get to know the students better as learners and to build one to one relations with them. The interviewed teacher said that she usually learns about the individual abilities and preferences of her students through evaluating their tests and home assignments and in this way identifies their weaknesses and strengths in learning and helps them to focus their efforts towards improvement. For that purpose she gives them individual assignments (e.g. for reading, etc.), but she also admitted that she does not do that often.

According to other teachers, 60% said they nearly always have opportunities for developing an understanding of their students' strengths and weaknesses regarding their learning (20% said sometimes, and 20% said often). But as for the opportunities to learn about their students' individual learning needs, the replies are too different (rarely 20%, often 40%, nearly always 20%), the same is true for the opportunities for developing their students' management of priorities for focusing their efforts towards improvement (rarely 20%, sometimes 20%, often 40%, nearly always 20%).

The diversity of replies demonstrates that based on testing, teachers are able to draw conclusions concerning the strengths and weaknesses of their students, but not all of them are able to identify the underlying needs, to understand where the strengths and weaknesses are rooted, and based on that to focus on improvements.

At the same time, for students the role of the teachers in their learning is very relevant. The interviewed student stated that he does not think that there are any opportunities for him to develop an understanding of his learning style. As for an understanding of his weaknesses and strengths in learning and managing priorities for focusing his efforts towards improve-

ment, he gets this from tests results, then he also asks the teacher what was his mistake, what he needs to revise; he is also aware of his weaknesses when he is ill and skips some classes, and he understands that he has missed some teacher's explanations in the classroom. He finds helpful for his learning both independent studies and teachers' explanations, the latter being very important:

I may understand things myself too, but the teachers explain things in detail.

This identifies the key role of the teacher in students' learning, but also raises a question of teacher-students relationships and their impact on learning.

That is why it is interesting to find out if teachers have opportunities to facilitate one-to-one relationships with students, how they do it, and if they think that it is important for them.

According to the interviewed teacher, the relationships with her students are important in terms of the students doing the assignments, not ignoring what they are asked to do, being willing to start a dialogue, to communicate, ask her questions, for example "I do not understand what it is, please explain". But there are few opportunities to facilitate one-to-one relationships with her students and for talking together, although she finds it very important. Mainly it happens after classes – for example, if somebody did not understand some rule, or got a bad mark, she asks him/her to stay after the class to find out what is not clear, but that happens very seldom, mainly due to time constraints: a break between classes is short, the classroom during the break is occupied by other students.

Other teachers agree with the fact that time constraints (sometimes 40%, often 60%) prevent them from building one to one relationships with their students. Mainly they have opportunities to talk together with their whole class or small groups (sometimes 40%, nearly always 60%). At the same time, 40% of teachers think that they are able to build one to one relationships with their students (others: sometimes 20%, often 40%).

In this respect, it is interesting to learn the students' views on their one to one relationships with teachers. As the interviewed student said:

There are opportunities for teachers to get to know me on a one to one-level, for example, a teacher may say to a student to stay after the classes and to rewrite a test (but they never want to know me better, they have no interest), or a student can after a class approach his/her teacher and ask what is his/her problem, but I never do it. If I have relationships with a teacher depends on the teacher – if the teacher is kind, communicable, if the teacher can say spontaneously – 'What do you think?' Or if you can trust the teacher. I had this kind of relationship with geography and algebra teachers. There are also two days a

week when we can stay after classes to rewrite tests on math, sometimes I say to the teacher that I would like to rewrite my test.

It is noteworthy that the student points out that it is the teacher who in some way initiates the relationship, and that it also depends on certain teacher's qualities (kind, communicative). At the same time, the student's remark ('they never want to know me better, they have no interest') gives evidence that, though there are opportunities to initiate the relationships, there is no interest from the teachers' perspective, although 80% of teachers responded that they do it nearly always or often.

Maybe that is the reason why half of the students who participated in the pilot study believe they rarely learn better when teachers get to know them (50% - often) or when teachers like them (rarely 50%, sometimes 50%). These responses might indicate that at least half of students do not expect that if teachers know them better they would learn better.

Do teachers talk with their students about their life outside school – their interests, communities and activities outside school, dreams and aspirations, plans for future life, education, jobs, and how their learning is connected with that?

The interviewed student said that there are opportunities at school level and at classroom level for him to talk about how his learning is connecting with his hopes for his future, but nobody uses these opportunities. Deliberating on why this happens, he added:

Maybe everybody is afraid, maybe it is also impolite – the teachers prepare for classes.

Answering the question about how the learning at school connects with what he would like to do when he leaves school, the interviewee told a joke he read on the Internet.

Statistical data on who needs algebra after school – 100% of algebra teachers.

For him this joke refers to the fact that what they learn in some subjects involves – all kinds of complicated rules they would never need, for example, that refers to mathematics:

Maybe engineers need the knowledge about sine and cosine, but I doubt everyone wants to be an engineer. There should be separate classes or programmes for those who want and need it.

Other students' questionnaire responses confirm that they rarely talk with their teachers about how their learning will help them realize their dreams, 40% of respondents often talk with their teachers about how their learning will help them get qualifications they need for further education, the rest do it rarely, 60% of respondents only sometimes talk with their teachers about

how their learning will help them get qualifications they need for the job they want, the rest do it rarely.

The interviewed teacher said that she rarely talks with her students about the above issues, but she often gives them such assignments that imply answering the questions concerning what the students are going to do after they leave school, for instance when we study such topics as My Future Career.

40% of other teachers indicated that they rarely have opportunities to discuss with their students how their learning connects with their further education, what kind of job they would like, how their learning connects with their dreams for their future (often 40%, sometimes 20%). The majority of teachers (80%) indicate that they rarely talk with their students about what they need to do to realize their hopes/dreams, 20% doing that often. They rarely (40%) or only sometimes (60%) talk with their students about the qualifications they will need to get the job they want. 20 % of the respondents rarely talk with their students about what motivates them to learn, 40% do it sometimes, and 40% do it often.

The interviewed teacher does not see any opportunities to connect students' learning with exploring the ways they might get involved with their community. Most of other teachers sometimes (80%) talk with their students about how their learning might help them get involved with their community, the rest do it rarely; at the same time, most of other teachers rarely (60%) talk with their students about how their learning might help them get involved with their community when they have a job, 40% talk about it sometimes.

All the students who completed the questionnaires indicated that they rarely talk with their teachers about how their learning opportunities help them with the groups they are part of outside school, about how their religion, or faith, or philosophy helps them with their learning, about how they would like to get involved with their community in the future when they have a job. One of the respondents wrote 'never' responding to all these questions.

At the same time, the views of teachers and students on their relationships impact on learning, practically unanimous. All the teachers think that learning is better in the classroom if the students trust them, and all students believe that they learn better when they trust teachers. All the teachers think that learning is better when they trust the students (often 20%, nearly always 80%), and all students agreed that they learn better when teachers trust them.

All the teachers agree that the learning is better in the classroom if the teachers respect the students, which correlates with the students' opinion that when teachers respect them, they learn better and when they respect their teachers.

All the students think that when people get treated fairly, they learn better, the teachers also agree that the learning is better in the classroom if everyone is treated fairly. All the teachers think that learning is better in the classroom if conflicts are resolved peacefully (often 20%, nearly always 80%). More than half of the students responded that when conflicts at school are resolved peacefully, they learn better (rarely 40%, nearly always 60%).

Arguably, mutual trust, respect, confidence in teacher-students' relationships valued by both teachers and students are developed in the process of their interactions, when they know enough about each other, when they talk with each about their lives, and not only about school subject related issues. For that purpose there is a need for establishing one to one relationships with students, learning more about them, and fostering trust and confidence. At the same time, as the pilot research revealed, teachers have not enough time for that.

Discussion

The pilot research has shown that, although the current Russian educational policy as text and discourse provides conditions for participatory decision making, at institutional and classroom levels participatory decision making has not become a common practice.

Arguably, there might be different reasons for this. Some of them might be rooted in the past - in the former Soviet practices and related stereotypes, or cultural traditions of power relations. Some of them might be caused by the current trends of education development in the context of market economy leading to growing managerialism.

The research in the area of higher education policies has revealed the trend for managerialism worldwide, including Russian education (Pogosian 2012b; Mercer & Pogosian, 2013). Managerialism has led to a significant decline of collegiality in decision making at institutional level (Pogosian 2012a, p. 29), to a growth of the significance of accountability and efficiency (Pogosian, 2012a, p. 30). As Morrish pointed out: "Managers respond only to performance indicators with calculable outputs" (Morrish, 2010, p. 232).

Some of the most important calculable outputs in terms of performance indicators in the context of schools concern students' academic achievements. The scores the students gain at Unified National Examinations (the scores they submit when applying to HEIs) are relevant both for schools as signifying schools' efficiency, and for teachers as signifying their efficiency. These scores are the basis for school rankings calculated and analysed by Education Committee for determining the top schools⁴.

⁴ In Saint Petersburg, for example, the Education Committee names 50 top schools of the

At present there are two mandatory examinations which all school graduates take – those in Russian and Mathematics, other examinations are taken depending on the HEIs enrolment requirements⁵. To ensure high scores of their graduates, schools' administration tries hard to provide profound training in mandatory disciplines and to prevent the students from taking elective tests in the areas in which they may fail. Two stories told by the interviewed student demonstrate the school priorities and their impact on collegiality in decision making.

Story 1. The student's family planned going to a holiday during spring vacation period, but the school announced that during the vacations all students are to write sample tests. The family's dilemma was that on the one hand writing sample tests is useful, on the other hand, the family had planned the trip and the student really needed a rest from studies. His mother tried to argue with the school administration and local school authorities that students are supposed to have a rest and not study during vacations. But she got the same replies at all levels – this is done for your son's good, don't you want him to have high achievements?

Story 2. One of the interviewed student's classmates took a Unified National Examination in physics, he just wanted to see the extent of his proficiency and his chances to apply to a technical HEI. He failed the examination, and when the school was notified of his results, his mother who happened to be a teacher at the same school was fired for not having prevented her son from taking the test for which he was not ready.

These two cases demonstrate that there is little room for participatory decision making at institutional level, that teachers, students and their parents are to obey the administration's decisions, they are to contribute to institutional priorities by all means, whatever their own views or inclinations are. And these priorities are focused on high performance indicators, one of the most of them is students' high academic achievements.

The situation is similar at classroom level. As the pilot study revealed, teachers do value the relationships with students based on mutual respect and trust, but most of them cannot find time for establishing these relationships, for getting to know their students' dreams, desires, plans for future, and life outside school. This might be rooted in the current teachers' evaluation policy and performance-based pay which, as Firestone put it, 'focuses disproportionately on measurement' (Firestone, 2014). This measurement includes the achievements of students at UNE, the numbers of students who participated and won in contests, Olympiads, and other events dealing with

city, and also the top schools of every city district. This information is open to public and has a big impact on the decisions of parent when selecting schools for their children (Tsygan-kova, 2012).

⁵ There are currently discussions on increasing the number of mandatory examinations.

students' achievements and thus meriting their teachers. This results in the domination of teacher-centered and subject-centered pedagogy, overload of students with home assignments (Pogosian, 2012b, p. 297-298), students' either permanent or periodical stress from learning (Petrova & Gorovaya, 2005, p. 74), and students' health deterioration⁶. The evidence reveals that a lack of participatory decision making at classroom level is only one of many side effects of current school-governance policies.

The findings of this research correspond to the findings of the study of power distance in Russian schools which revealed large power distance between school administration and teachers, and between teachers and students (Pogosian, 2016). Arguably, large power distance prevents collegiality in decision making both at institutional and at classroom levels. As a result, lack of participation decision making may be also attributed to culturally inherited practices of leadership rooted in cultural values and traditions.

Conclusion

Although the findings of this pilot research are not conclusive, and they show only some of the tendencies in the area of participatory decision making at the institutional and classroom level in Russian schools, it is obvious that further research will not only shed more light on the current situation, but also allow to design the paths for research informed transformations.

The issue of participatory decision making in Russian schools has not been studied so far, but a preliminary conclusion can be drawn that while at the state level a policy of 'writerly texts' has been adopted, at the institutional level 'readerly texts' policy has been prevailing. This pilot research also revealed that participatory decision making in school education is a consequence of various interrelated issues of educational institutions' operations in the context of market economy.

References

- Barthes, R. (1974). *S/Z: An Essay*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Firestone, W.A. (2014). Teacher Evaluation Policy and Conflicting Theories of Motivation. *Educational Researcher*, January 27. Published online before print, doi: 10.3102/0013189X14521864. Retrieved from <http://edr.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/01/27/0013189X14521864.abstract>
- Hagen, U. (2010). *Heads Negotiating School-Based Management in the 1990s*. Russian, Norwegian, and Scottish Stories of Change. Oslo: Oslo University College.

⁶ According to Director of the Department of State Policy in the Sphere of Upbringing, Additional Education and Social Protection of Children Alina Levinskaya, more than 50% out of 13.5mln of Russian schoolchildren have problems with health, and by the time of receiving school certificate, only 10% of school graduates are healthy (Tokareva, 2009).

- Johnson, M.S. (1996). Western Models and Russian Realities in Postcommunist Education. *Journal fuer Internationale Bildungsforschung*, 2, 2, 119-132.
- Mercer, J. & Pogosian, V. (2013). Higher Education leadership in Russia: a case study of mid-level academic management at an elite State university. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43, (2), 184-202.
- Morrish, L.A. (2000). A Feminist's Response to the Technologization of Discourse in British Universities. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 7, 229-238.
- On Education in the Russian Federation. (2012). Federal Law of the Russian Federation N 273-Φ3 (12 of December, 2012).
- Petrova, N. & Gorovaya, V. (2005). Modern School and the Problem of Students' Health. *The Success of Modern Science*, 11, 73-75.
- Pogosian, V. (2012a). Marketization of Higher Education and University Discourse. Krasnodar: Premier.
- Pogosian, V. (2012b). Russian Educational Policy: Two Different Eras. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10, 1, 274-304.
- Pogosian, V. (2016). Russian Pre-Service and Young In-Service Teachers' Views on Cultural Dimensions of Russian Education: Power Distance. FLEKS - *Scandinavian Journal Of Intercultural Theory And Practice*, 3, 2. Retrieved from: <https://journals.hioa.no/index.php/fleks/article/view/1832/1646>
- Rojkov, M. & Baiborodova, L. (2000). Organization of the Up-bringing Process in School. Moscow: VLADOS.
- Salamatina, N. (2011). Non-traditional Forms of a Pedagogical Council of a Modern Comprehensive Secondary School. A review of PhD dissertation. Vladikavkaz.
- Tokareva, D. (2009). The School of the Future: The Pupil will Choose the Necessary Subjects from the Menu. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 18. Retrieved from: <http://kpmo.momos.ru/noinns/552-shkola-budushhego.html>
- Tsygankova, M. (2012). The Ranking of Petersburg Schools Based on UNE. Retrieved from: <http://www.fontanka.ru/2012/08/31/059/>