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# The Conceptualization and Facilitation of Democracy in Taiwan by the School Principals

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## Abstract:

*In Taiwan, the role of school principals has shifted from that of an authoritative commander to that of a democratic facilitator at both the instructional and management level. This study was conducted to examine the experiences of school principals at the elementary and junior high school level in the change process and to determine the strategies that principals apply to facilitate school democracy. The qualitative methods employed in this study included semi structured interviews and a review of secondary research data. Twenty principals were recruited from elementary and junior high schools in Central Taiwan. The principals perceived school democracy in terms of cohesion, participation, respect, law abidance, equity, and diversity. To facilitate school democracy, the principals applied strategies of communication, dissemination and caution, coherence building, relationship building (guanxi), trial and error, and empowerment.*

**Keywords:** principal leadership, school democracy, school improvement, Taiwan

## Introduction

Current expectations and requirements for public schools have become increasingly complex and diverse. School principals in Taiwan typically encounter various challenges resulting from Taiwan's social plurality. First, changes in family and demographic structures, such as the increasing proportion of children born of immigrant mothers, as well as single-parent and dual-income families and the declining birth rate, have a considerable impact on the survival of schools (Wang, 2010; Yang, 2010). Second, it has become increasingly crucial for schools to communicate with the community in response to social changes (Marsh, 2007; Mutchler, 2011). Third, the democratic nature of education, in honor of freedom and equality for all students and maintaining student individuality, requires schools to break through traditional dogma (Perry,

2009). The changes in social values and systems have been reflected in the school members. For example, in response to Taiwan's declining birth rate, some schools have employed a considerable number of substitute teachers on a part-time basis to avoid a surplus of teachers in the future (Li, 2006). The merging resulting from the reduced school size has generated cultural changes at schools. Thus, gaps among school members have emerged, affecting how they communicate and cooperate. These ecological changes in schools, whether at the level of education policy or social change, test the professionalism of principals.

Research on school democracy in Taiwan is relatively limited. To date, research has indicated that a possible reason for teachers‟ collective apathy toward school democracy is favorable working conditions and high job security (Chiang, 2008). Democratic participation among teachers is constrained by time, ability, knowledge, and the attitudes of their supervisors. Principal leadership is also a key determinant of democratic participation (Lin, 2009; Tsai, 2003). However, a previous study revealed that teacher attitude toward school democracy is positive, even higher than that of administrative staff. Five dimensions of teacher attitudes toward school democracy that are relevant to participation in school affairs are perceptions of school democracy, legal issues, value orientation, self-identity, and awareness of the right to express opinions (Tsai, 2009). Although teachers generally have positive attitude toward school democracy, the aforementioned studies have shown that teacher involvement in school democracy is low, possibly implying that teachers mistrust school wide participation. The attitudes of school administrators toward school democracy are lower than those of teachers. Thus, clarifying the extent to which administrators support school democracy and what factors affect the development process of school democracy warrants further investigation.

## School Democracy and Empirical Studies

Organizational democracy has attracted considerable attention among business managers because of globalization, which has resulted in the diversification of organizational members and customer needs. To maintain equity among various ethnic groups within organizations and to understand customer preferences, organizational democracy has become the focus of organizational research in recent years (Foley & Polanyi, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Leach, 2009).In addition, other recent studies have shown that democracy can be used by the industry to contend with organizational apathy and capitalism (Johnson, 2006). The increasing diversity from globalization has resulted in the need for organizational democracy, causing considerable pressure for senior managers and subjecting hierarchical organizational structures to strict scrutiny(Clarke & Butcher, 2006). As a result of the requirements for democratization of the workplace as well as practical experience in the business industry indicating that a democratic management style could improve organizational performance and productivity, United States public schools have actively promoted reforms for decentralization (Johnson, 1998). Democracy, participation, and cooperation have become an emerging reform trend in management and educational administrations. Although elementary and junior high schools in Taiwan are not

subject to the effects of globalization in the same manner that are private sectors, social democracy movements and increasingly diverse expectations regarding the purpose of school education have pressured school administrations to lead or manage schools democratically.
At the governmental level, democracy can be defined as the processes through which the government responds to the preferences of citizens. Individual actors in a democratic system mutually interact according to personal preferences, thereby influencing policymaking processes. In schools, teachers, administrators, and even students may acting the same manner as do governments during the decision-making processes—either by changing or reinforcing personal preferences by selecting people with whom they prefer to interact, thereby affecting the school's decision-making practices. Woods and Grown (2009) discussed the main components of democracy and advocated the responsibility of school administrators and decision-making systems to convey the preferences offal staff or students. Schools should be responsible for protecting students, particularly those who are disadvantaged, as well as teachers and administrative staff from oppressive authoritarianism. All teachers, students, and administrative staff can cultivate self-identity and participate in building consensus on shared interests that transcend the interests of individuals. The legitimacy of school leadership should originate from the consensus of all school members. In addition, Woods and Gronn compared democratic leadership and distributed leadership styles, claiming that democratic leadership explains the relationship between individuals and communities. Because of synergistic principles, considering the intrinsic association between individuals and social structures is crucial. Socio-cultural aspects exert a considerable influence on individual sand might cause cultural inequalities within an organization (Lounsbury&Ventrisca, 2003).

In response to the social, economic, and political impacts, Perry (2009) proposed a democratization model of education policy involving the five basic components of equity, diversity, participation, choice, and cohesion, particularly emphasizing equality and interactions. A unique characteristic of this model is that Perry adopted cohesion to recognize that a democratic society, as Woods and Gronn (2009) indicated, operates according to consensus with co sanctioned rules in the decision-making process. However, trust, solidarity, and citizenship must be linked with consensus to enhance citizen commitment. Regarding the process for generating consensus, Perry considered trust, solidarity, and interconnection among citizens as critical factors because they are directly affected by whether schools can respond appropriately to the needs of minority groups. Both Woods and Gronn and Perry have provided a suitable theoretical framework by ensuring stable participation and consensus in minority or marginal groups within a community or an organization. However, in practice, there could be various problematic aspects, such as preference uncertainty, the consensus-building process, and type of authority. Preferences are affected by many factors, such as social change, personal traits, norms, and social interactions (March, 1997). A democratic structure might diminish the performance of organizations because democracy is the unorganized and ineffective collection of diverse voices.

The hierarchy of authoritarianism is considered to be clear, simple, and certain because it enables authorities to focus, simplify, and minimize the flow of information (Blaug, 2010).

Empirical research on school democracy shows that the higher teacher-led democracy is in school communities, the higher is the school's communal sense of trust. Willingness to participate in professional development also increases in such conditions, and more innovative ideas are generated for children with special needs (Kensler, Caskie, & White, 2006).Principals possess more transformational leadership qualities than do other people (Reason & Reason, 2006).In recent years, this trait has attracted a considerable amount of attention among researchers in educational leadership, which is believed to positively affect education reform. In an interview-based study involving school principals, Shields (2010) showed that transformational leadership begins with questioning unjust practices and is associated with a deepening sense of democracy, social justice, and equity. Furthermore, Bader, Horman and Lapointe (2011) observed that through the transformational leadership of the principal, vice principal, and teacher leaders, low-income students and those in multicultural learning environments can learn from democracy. The association among the democratic community, trust, and organizational learning in secondary schools was also verified by Kensler, Caskie, Barber, and White (2009), who identified that trust is a mediator between the democratic community and organizational learning. In addition, numerous empirical studies have shown that dialogue is crucial for school democracy (Buie& Wright, 2010; Jaramillo, 2011; Kakabadse&Kakabadse, 2003; Marsh, 2007; Mutchler, 2011). Student participation in democracy should not be ignored, and student leaders should be involved in school education to help explain school decision-making processes to other students (Wallin, 2003).Because of the lack of empirical studies on school democracy and its impact on schools in Taiwan, this study explored the experiences of practitioners by investigating the principals‟ conceptualizations of school democracy. According to their perspectives, the mindset of principals regarding school democracy and the strategies principals use to facilitate it was explained.

## Research Methods and Procedures

This study adopted a qualitative research design to collect data, and a purposive sampling technique was employed to select the maximal diversity of participants of interest(Patton, 2001).First, a list of elementary and junior high schools in Taiwan was obtained through the online database of the Bureau of Education in Taichung City, which is located in Central Taiwan. Second, the schools were classified by size, and six elementary schools and six junior high schools were selected affixed intervals. Third, a snowball approach was adopted to select key informants who could discuss the phenomenon regarding development of school democracy in-depth; specifically, two persons who were familiar with the schools in Taichung through their roles as senior teachers were asked to recommend principals whom they considered to be democratic (Bertaux, 1981). School size was used to select four elementary schools and four junior high schools from the list of recommendations. In total, 20 principals were interviewed (Table 1). All interviews were conducted at the selected schools and tape-recorded with the

interviewees‟ permission to create verbatim transcripts. Semi structured and probing questions comprised the major part of the interviews protocols (Lincoln &Guba, 1985). Interview protocols were used to ensure that the same procedures were followed during each interview. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using the constant comparative method to categorize and conceptualize the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The two primary research questions in this study were (a) How do principals perceive school democracy? and (b) What are the strategies (formal or informal) that the principals use to facilitate developing school democracy?

*Table 1: Background of twenty principals interviewed*

| Termsserved[a] | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 8 | 7 | 1 | 3 | |
| Education | Bachelor | | Master | Doctor | |
| | 1 | | 16 | 3 | |
| School size[b] | ~700 | | 701~1400 | 1400~2100 | 2101~ |
| | 5 | | 8 | 4 | 3 |

**a**One term of the principal is 4 years long.
**b**The number of students enrolled.

## Findings and Discussion

The data analysis clarified the principals‟ definitions of school democracy, as well as the strategies they adopted to facilitate school democracy and various dilemmas they faced in the context of school democracy. The completed manuscript for the third part of the results was submitted to a journal for a peer review. This paper focuses on the principal's definition of school democracy and the strategic promotion of school democracy.

## Principals' Perceptions of School Democracy

The following discussion applies frameworks proposed by Perry (2009) to identify themes emerging from an analysis of the interview data, and also includes definitions excluded from Perry's framework to comprehensively determine how principals in Taiwan perceive school democracy. The six dimensions of cohesion, participation, respect, law abidance, equity, and diversity were arranged according to the statistics regarding how many principals identified each of these items as a critical element of school democracy.

### *Cohesion: Consensus and trust*

Cohesion constituted the highest priority for school democracy among the principals interviewed in the study. The purpose of including all school members in the dialogue was to generate consensus, thereby enabling schools to accomplish tasks required by the government or parents. For most of the principals in this study, consensus meant the mutual agreement of most school members. Building consensus depends on the depth of conversations among administrators and teachers. As one principal said:

I think the deeper the issues people can discuss, the better and firmer the school consensus would be. Because many issues might induce conflict or interrogation, people might suspect others. So I think it is determined by how much trust we have for each other. The foundation of trust is based on your daily interactions with others.

Cohesion relies on trust among organizational members (Fung, 2014; Mach, Dolan, &Tzafrir, 2010). Principals judge teachers‟ trust toward them by observing teachers „willingness to disclose dilemmas. As one principal stated:

If teachers are unwilling to tell me what is on their minds, it means that actually they do not trust me. I think it is necessary to examine the whole democracy issue. Perhaps they do not believe what I tell them or that the decisions we made were not implemented well. So teachers do not want to perform what I ask them to do.

Trust should exist between principals and teachers and also between teachers and selected representatives in each committee. Principals believe that democracy requires teachers to accommodate decisions made through voting. However, principals did not mention solidarity and interconnection among school members, which Perry (2009) considered critical for cohesion.

## *Participation*

Procedural justice in a democratic organization ensures that members fully participate and involve themselves in decision-making processes (Korsgaard, Schweiger, &Sapienza, 1995).Most principals in this study claimed that school democracy involves the stakeholders‟ share of responsibilities in decision-making through the regulations of policies. Teachers should also learn to contest their principals, a method of professional development. As one principal stated: I expect teachers to make decisions. We can sit down to converse about what we really want. I think I will send someone from Local Teacher Association to motivate them. As a teacher, you should dare to challenge your principal. Perhaps you might act immaturely but you will improve gradually.

High-involvement management invariably encounters dilemmas regarding what decisions should be made by whom. The literature shows that teachers are unwilling to participate in all school decision-making processes (Conway &Calzi, 1995; Enderlin-Lampe, 1997).One principal provided criteria for participation:

Only stakeholders who are related to agendas have the power to participate. In this way, everyone is equal in the decision-making process. That is the spirit of democracy. So I want to particularly emphasize that only people who have stakes in the agendas have the right to vote. When people have the right to participate, they should be granted the opportunity to express their opinions.

Some principals have extended decision-making participation to parents and students. For example, students can decide what they want to have for lunch on children's day and whether they want to wear uniforms or their clothes to schools, provided that the educational principles are not violated.

## *Respect*

For traditional Chinese culture, which prioritizes conformity, diversity brings about conflict and resistance. For the principals interviewed in the study, respect serves as a solution for resolving difficult situations. As one principal said:

Teachers respect student opinions. The administration team respects teachers' teaching professionalism. Teachers respect administrators‟ legitimate power. That is the true meaning of school democracy, which is not simply about principal leadership and teacher empowerment. So I think what is more important is respect and also compliance. That is, the higher priority for school democracy is respect and compliance.

Consideration for social harmony and student welfare is also deemed to be rationality. Teachers should not exploit the power granted by law in school decision-making for personal gain (Woods &Gronn, 2009).

## *Law abidance*

In Taiwan, public schools are public institutions in which adherence to law represents the general rule.
Therefore, school administrators must follow governmental regulations as public servants.

I think when "democracy" stands together with "school," school democracy should be about institutionalization. Procedures and institutionalization are part of democracy. We are not the persons who established the institutions. Professors or the Ministry of Education are. When teachers want to change the institutions, you need to submit the request to the government and should not ask the school to amend the policy. Adherence to the law is democracy.

Despite the fact that decentralization affords schools with additional power to modify school practices, the principals interviewed in the study claimed that negotiations, decision-making, and

communication are regulated. However, in some cases, the discretion of principals might be applied when controversies arise because of a lack of regulations.

## *Equity*

Although equity is a key component of educational democracy (Perry, 2009), only five of the principals interviewed in the study mentioned it during the interviews. There are some conditions for equity. For example, one principal asserted that equity exists only when participants are involved in decisions that specifically concern them. However, another principal claimed that regardless of the condition, everyone is equal according to the principal's experience as a staff-member in the local teacher association.

In the teacher association, everyone is equal. The director of the association is simply one of the member representatives. If the director does not perform well, we will ask him or her to step down and elect someone else. That is how it works. We often talk about democracy. Democracy is equity. This concept is important.

Some principals also observed that although the gap between the principal and teachers does exist, they prefer to be equal to others. Provided that principals and teachers have distinct responsibilities, they essentially work toward the same purpose of improving the school and student performance. When they reach consensus on the main purpose, there is no hierarchy among them.

## *Diversity*

Taiwan's demographic transition has had a considerable impact on education. In addition to the declining birth rate, schools in rural areas have encountered an increasing percentage of new immigrant mothers, which typically refers to women from countries in Southeast Asia who marry Taiwanese men (Wang, 2010; Yang, 2010). Their children are considered culturally disadvantaged because of their low social status and proficiency in Mandarin. School principals consider the inclusiveness of these minority parents as a critical democratic practice.

For example, I would introduce the language of new immigrant mothers into the extracurricular activities. I think that recognizing the mother's culture and language may benefit students. So I would invite parents to explain to teachers why they came to Taiwan. Real democracy is taking care of diverse personal needs by using a professional attitude.

In recent years, Taiwanese society has transformed dramatically with many new opportunities emerging in various social aspects, such as economics, human rights, and technology advancement, all of which reframe perceptions and values. Some principals claimed that teachers belonging to younger generations are typically more assertive than their senior counterparts who primarily conform to administrators. Therefore, determining how to coordinate various opinions

becomes a great challenge for principals. A struggle for the basic principles of school democracy might emerge when the interests of the majority conflict with those of minority or disadvantaged groups.

## Strategies for Facilitating School Democracy

The data analysis revealed various strategies that the principals have used to facilitate school democracy. Presented here are the strategies that mainly correspond to the principals‟ definitions of school democracy. The major themes include communication, dissemination and caution, coherence building, relationship building (guanxi), trial and error, and empowerment.

### *Communication: Information disclosure and open dialogue*

Democratic processes involve the participation of various stakeholders. As school leaders, principals are the primary people possessing technical information relevant to decision-making processes and are expected to facilitate information sharing among stakeholders. To ensure the appropriate understanding of communications, communicating with teachers to clarify gaps is considered necessary for principals.

### *Information disclosure*

An approach to ensure openness regarding information among school members is to issue meeting agendas beforehand, either on paper or through intranet systems. All administrators must disclose their agendas with each other. One principal stated:

I think information disclosure is important. School democracy does not mean that you have to follow what the information tells you. Through a complete disclosure of information, consensus can be built after discussion rather than just demanding that they do what I ask them to do.

Information can be disseminated to parents at the beginning and end of the semester by providing information pamphlets. In Taiwan, the law reinforces parental rights to access information regarding student performance and to participate in school decision-making processes (Tseng & Lin, 2013). The principals interviewed in the study recognized that it is not guaranteed that information can be kept inside the school. Making their schools open to the public, not being afraid of people coming in, facilitates the development process of school democracy.

### *Open dialogue*

To collect opinions from various stakeholders, all committees are composed of representatives from each subunit of schools and community. For specific agendas, committees are organized to invite stakeholder input and to enable them to understand the advantages and disadvantages. The principals might also survey parents to determine their attitudes toward teaching, textbook

selection, classroom management, and school administration as a democratic manner in which to obtain consensus and parental involvement. For principals, surveying school members is both an approach to collecting feedback and a symbolic gesture showing teachers that they have inopportunity to express themselves, regardless of whether events transpire as anticipated. As one principal stated:

As a principal, I must understand what the lower ranks think. Teachers are at the front line. If you do not listen to them and try to understand them, they will respond passively to organizational goals. Then schools will regress and become problematic organizations.

## *Dissemination and Caution*

After the implementation of school management reform, the increased participation of teachers and other stakeholders in decision-making processes has transformed power relationships between teachers and principals. Conflicts that occur at meetings frequently result in considerable tension and deteriorate the principals‟ status as an authority figure. Therefore, most principals in this study preferred to disseminate communications before the meetings about any possible prospective changes and then observe teacher reactions. As some principals claimed, few teachers typically opposed whatever changes administrators proposed. Negotiating with them in advance to the meetings is necessary to facilitate effective decision-making processes and to reduce misunderstandings and negative reactions. As one principal stated:

We would figure out which grade levels are likely to oppose new changes in advance, and then we would break their alliance one by one. So permitting is important. You cannot wait until the formal meeting. Teachers can always win you over by voting because they collectively have more votes than you.

Principals believe that leaders should realize that their guidance is a key factor for school democracy, and it is their responsibility to clarify the advantages and disadvantages for teachers to participate democratically in the school’s decision-making processes. Communication of ideas by conscientious people is crucial.

## *Coherence building*

Individual preferences occasionally conflict with organizational goals (Gammage, Carron, &Estabrooks, 2001). Therefore, discussions on coherence building have drawn considerable attention among researchers. Principals, as democratic leaders, frequently encounter dilemmas that require wisdom to devise a compromise for personal and organizational goals. Determining a middle way is one approach. As one principal stated:

In fact ... we can try to find a middle way. When you have Proposal A and Proposal B, we can develop Proposal C by combining parts of A and B through discussion. Of course, approval from teachers is required. So this is one way to build coherence.

A second approach is to make some adjustments to demonstrate respect to minority groups within the scope of the legal regulations. A third approach is to allow teachers to propose a plan that is included in the meeting agenda. One principal stated:

I will let teachers make decisions. We must have a consensus. This is the only way for teachers to comply with policy. No consensus, no compliance. For example, to count teachers‟ credits, some people think that in addition to serving as a homeroom teacher, they also share administrative tasks, or help students with science exhibits, chorus, and so forth. They should receive credits. For the past 4 years of my term, as long as you propose your idea to site councils for discussions, we will accept the results.

Formal versus informal channels of coherence building. The principals interviewed in this study have distinct attitudes toward formal and informal channels of coherence building. Some principals prefer to send an alliance to lobby teachers who might oppose their proposal through an informal network. However, some principals insist on using formal channels for school decision making. As one principal stated:

In general, I personally think it should be formal. Why? Informal ways may lead democracy to develop a subculture, which is a bad trend. Why? Those who know how to bargain for their interests are more likely to get what they want, or teachers might come into the principal‟s office and lobby their requests. So I only make decisions at the meetings.

Occasionally, school members might identify the principals‟ allies and send them to negotiate with the principals. Decision making is primarily operated through a majority vote to assure the rights of individuals.

## *Relationship building (Guanxi)*

In Chinese culture, guanxi is ranked higher than rules and is used to establish interpersonal trust (Hwang, 2012; Lau & Young, 2013). Trust plays a critical role for effective leadership, but can be built based on relationships and competence (Hallam, Boren, Hite, Hite, &Mugimu, 2013). Most of the principals interviewed in this study mentioned the significance of building up guanxi with teachers. When teachers encounter problems, the principals should listen to their opinions with sincerity. As long as there is trust between teachers and principals, many conflicts can be resolved. However, trust requires time to be built through informal methods such as chatting, drinking, and eating with colleagues that enable teachers to relax and disclose personal opinions regarding critical topics. As one principal stated:

Because I know teachers may have afternoon tea, I deliberately take a sidetrack to buy kimchee on my way back from meetings outside of the school and share it with the teachers. I think you need to manage your relationships with teachers. Harmony does not come naturally.

School leaders realize that their authority must be shared with teachers. Command and order would only incite conflicts. Transformational leadership facilitates cooperation among school members (Shields, 2010). As one principal said:

I used to think I was a school leader. Why should I ask your favor? We now live in such a liberal society. Things change fast. You need more people to help you out with school affairs as well as other resources.

A principal further illustrate the nature of their relationship with teachers, saying, “Nowadays, many principals claim they want to understand teachers, an important task for me, but I do not agree that it is a task. It is an interaction.”

## *Trial and error*

Some of the principals interviewed in this study were concerned about teachers‟ preparation for school democracy. In Taiwan, the school administrative teams led by principals and several directors have long been granted the authority to administer and manage schools. Teachers who have no authoritative capacity retain a teaching-oriented professional identity as per the distinct divisions of teaching and administration in the school structure. Occasionally, conflicts arise because of incongruent perspectives. Principals have learned that it is necessary to educate teachers regarding the school decision-making process. One approach involves encouraging teachers to speak out at meetings and exercise their power. Principals also facilitate discussions to involve teachers in the conversation. A second approach is to involve teachers in the administrative work. One principal gave an example of class scheduling as a trial-and-error process for allowing teachers to arrange classes for other teachers.

We have learned that everyone is responsible only for their own position. Teachers were unable to sleep well because of stress regarding class scheduling. Then they finally realize that administrators have limits to satisfying everyone’s needs. I prefer to use this kind of issue for teachers to practice school democracy, so that they might perform better when bigger issues arise.

However, principals must establish clear criteria for teachers‟ decision-making. Teachers occasionally exercise their informal power to bargain with the principals. To avoid inconsistency, one principal set a rule: Unless the law is amended, it should be implemented for a while. Teachers cannot come to me and say,

I want to change it. I absolutely accept and respect the results of the final vote. It is a democratic process, but you should let it work for a period.

## *Empowerment: Teacher leadership*

Teacher empowerment is considered an effective approach to adjusting teacher behavior because of its bottom-up influence (Bogler&Somech, 2005). The principals interviewed in this study reported selecting teachers whose informal power and interpersonal relationships were adequately extensive to serve as an administrator. One principal stated:

For example, a teaching director should be someone whose words are influential. You cannot ask new teachers to take that job. It is very important if you have a network at school and are senior enough—other teachers will respect you.

Providing support for the schoolteachers‟ association is another approach to empowering teachers. In Taiwan, teacher associations are divided into three levels: national, local, and school. Some principals are afraid of the power of schoolteacher associations and typically discourage teachers from aggregating their power through teacher associations. However, some principals in this study preferred to support the association and considered it as a critical channel for communication. They might invite the director of the schoolteachers' association to the principal's office to determine whether there was any advice from teachers. One principal even asked the teachers to initiate a schoolteachers' association.

Sometimes, teachers have emotions toward some of the big issues outside of the school. I hope that they can establish schoolteachers' association to bring in democracy. Teachers can express some of their ideas rather than fighting against the administration team. I can accept it as long as the teachers act rationally.

The principals recognized that one advantage gained from sharing power with teachers is that teachers can help clarify matters with other teachers. As one principal indicated, when some teachers do not understand decisions made by the site council, other teachers who participate actively in the process can explain it to them. Principals attribute this behavior to the comprehensive involvement of school members.

## Conclusion and Implications

According to the research findings, the principals in this study perceived school democracy in terms of cohesion, participation, respect, law abidance, equity, and diversity. Compared to in the framework proposed by Perry (2009), exclusion of choice and inclusion of respect as well as law abidance signify cultural differences between Western and Eastern cultures, which prefer collectivism to individualism (Oyserman, Coon, &Kemmelmeier, 2002).Group harmony prevails over individual interests, and therefore, conflicts resulting from advocating for personal gain are less tolerable than those in Western cultures. Examining strategies that principals have adapted to facilitate school democracy reveals that certain principals in this study typically adopt strategies that facilitate the implementation processes of government policy instead of proactively and authentically investigating the needs of other stakeholders with the anticipation of building a democratic school for all stakeholders.

For practitioners, a major problem observed in this study is that there exists a value conflict between teachers and principals. The administrators predominantly control the school operation. Schools should strive to eliminate this top-down influence by rotating the leaders at various meetings, as recommended by Weick (1989). For democratic consensus-building in schools, Marsh (2007) proposed a collaborative concept combined with a deliberative democratic model. The basic principles include the following: (a) meaning is generated through negotiation, in which differences are recognized, (b) meaning is not entirely controlled by outside forces, but owned by some members, and (c) a shared sense of responsibility among members enables distinguishing important and unimportant aspects. Therefore, training is critical for participants

to completely comprehend the concepts of school democracy and to improve their communication and leadership skills. Schools must ensure that all school members receive adequate training so they can function more effectively.

For researchers, this study affords a preliminary understanding of the development of school democracy in Taiwan from the perspective of school principals. The subject warrants extensive investigation in the future because it may enable researchers to realize the effectiveness of school democracy movements. In the future, interviews of other school stakeholders can be conducted to gather data on their perceptions for the purpose of gaining a comprehensive understanding of school democracy practices. Developing school democracy is a complex process and may be culturally sensitive. To develop a comprehensive and culturally sensitive model, future studies should integrate other potential indigenized elements.

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