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# IS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT BECOMING AN INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENON?

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Community control of the local school is a concept which started in the mid-seventeenth century in North America. Massachusetts, USA, legislated that every town should not only establish a school but also create a school district with an elected school board. However, the application of business principles (such as the economies of scale and the cult of efficiency that plagued American society in the early twentieth century) gave rise to a movement for fewer but larger school districts. This resulted in a movement from decentralization to centralization with much less community input. In contrast, the Australian education systems, which were fully centralized bureaucracies until the early 1970s, started not only to move from centralization to decentralization but also to School-Based Management (SBM) with community participation.

In the mid 1970s, the effective schools research emphasized not only the importance of strong school leadership but also parental involvement in improving school effectiveness. In the late 1980s, the concept of community participation in school management became a major theme in school reforms in several education systems such as: Australia, New Zealand, UK, and USA. In the 1990s, it is becoming an international phenomenon which is being embraced by most education systems. This paper examines the development and implementation of this concept and its implications to school management.

Le contrôle de l'école locale par la communauté est un concept qui a eu lieu vers la moitié du dix-septième siècle en Amérique du Nord. L'état du Massachusetts a décrété que non seulement toute ville doit avoir une école, mais elle doit aussi créer un district scolaire administré par un conseil scolaire élu. Cependant, l'application des principes de commerce (telle que l'économie réduite ou le culte de l'efficacité qui empoisonnent la société américaine du vingtième siècle) aboutissait à la création d'un nombre réduit de larges districts scolaires. Il s'en suit d'un changement allant de la décentralisation à la centralisation, ce qui réduit la participation des communautés. Au contraire, les systèmes d'éducation en Australie, qui furent complètement centralisés aux mains de la bureaucratie au début des années 1970, a commencé à s'éloigner de la centralisation pour devenir plus décentralisé, et aussi à se rapprocher de la gestion à base d'école (SBM pour School-Based Management en anglais) avec la participation des communautés.

Vers le milieu des années 1970, la recherche sur les écoles efficaces a souligné non seulement l'importance des cadres dirigeants des écoles mais aussi la participation des parents d'élèves pour améliorer l'efficacité des écoles. A la fin des années 1980, le concept de la participation communautaire dans la gestion de l'école devint un thème principal des réformes scolaires survenues dans des systèmes d'éducation en Australie, en la Nouvelle Zélande, le Royaume-Uni et les États Unis d'Amérique. Dans les années 1990, il devint un phénomène international adopté par la plupart des systèmes d'éducation. Cet article examine le développement et la mise en oeuvre de ce concept ainsi que ses conséquences sur la gestion des écoles.

### **Development of the Concept of School Based Management**

The centralised bureaucratic models of school administration in Australia were such that several North American educationists who examined the Australian systems criticised the control, conformity and preoccupation with efficiency and examinations (Butts, 1955; Jackson, 1961; Kendall, 1938; and Turner, 1960). By the mid 1960s, the citizens of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) were so unhappy with the system of education imparted to their children they organized themselves to find a solution. In 1966, they established a committee to come up with an alternative model. The report of this unofficial committee, which was released in 1967, recommended the establishment of school boards or councils consisting of the principal and representatives of the parents, teachers, community and in the case of secondary schools the students (Currie, 1967). The articulation of this new concept resulted in a media initiated public debate not only in ACT but also in most Australian states. In 1971, the release of a report commissioned by the South Australian Government recommending the establishment of school councils and the first Report of the Australian Schools Commission (1973) promoting the concept of community participation in school management provided an unexpected boost to the spread of the new concept. Resulting from these events, South Australia became the first Australian state to amend its Education Act to provide for the establishment of school councils in 1972. This was followed by Victoria and ACT in 1975 and 1976 respectively to provide for school councils and boards in the form of mandatory corporate bodies. In 1983, Northern Territory (NT) also amended its legislation to provide for school councils in the form of optional bodies but two attempts by the New South Wales (NSW) to establish school councils in 1973 and 1983 were blocked by the NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF).

### **Decentralization vs Centralization**

Yet, in North America, the impact of the application of business principles had been so effective that by 1977, USA was able to create on an

average eight times larger school districts. Morphet et.al., (1982) point out that there were 127,344 school districts in 1932, but in a process of consolidation of smaller and uneconomic units, this number was brought down to 16,000 by 1977. In Canada, the process towards centralisation has been even more drastic. Alberta has brought down the number of administrative units from its peak of 5000 to 140, and in 1993 has proposed to reduce this number to 60 (Alberta, 1994). Manitoba has reduced its number of administrative units from its peak figure of 2400 to 48 (Perfect, 1978) and added a new concept of a Francophone school division in 1994 (Manitoba, 1994b). On the other hand, the key stakeholders of schooling such as principals, teachers, and students were excluded from being elected to the district/divisional boards of education.

However, in the mid 1970s, the findings of the effective schools research and the New Right political philosophy expedited the process of change towards community participation in school management. In 1980, the United Kingdom provided for some limited rights for the parents and teachers to be members of school governing bodies in England and Wales. In 1984, the Green Paper on *Parental Influence at School: A New Framework for School Government in England and Wales*, emphasized the importance of expediting the process (UK, 1984).

In North America, the process of consolidation towards the creation of larger administrative units shifted the authority and power from local communities to the district/divisional superintendents and their staff. In the USA, the report on *A Nation at Risk*, by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE, 1984) opened the eyes of many Americans to the ill-effects of the prevailing system of education. The proponents of reform advocated changes to the way in which state schools were governed and made accountable to the public. The two broad strategies that emerged were school site-based management and parental choice. Under school site-based management, the transfer of authority relating to budget, staffing, and instruction from the district/divisional offices to representative bodies comprised of administrators, teachers, parents, and local community at the school level was envisaged. The logic of site-based management required each school to determine the type of school reform that it wanted (Raywid, 1990). In 1985, the first *School Reform Act* was enacted in Illinois providing for the mandatory Local School Improvement Councils (LSICs). Accordingly, in Chicago public schools, LSICs were appointed by the principals and were empowered to advise the principal in planning school improvements and reviewing school spending priorities (Naftchi-Ardebili et al., 1992).

### **Transfer of Genuine Authority to Schools**

In the state of Victoria in Australia, the defeat of the governing party at the General Elections in 1982 after a period of 27 years in office had a big impact

on school management. The new Minister for Education established six working parties, comprised of representatives of administrators, teachers, parents, and community to recommend reforms on different aspects of school management. In this process particular emphasis was placed on 1) genuine devolution of authority and responsibility to the school communities; 2) collaborative decision-making; 3) a responsive bureaucracy; 4) effectiveness of educational outcomes; and 5) the active redress of disadvantage and discrimination.

In 1983, on the basis of the new political agenda, the *Victorian Education Act* was amended to empower the school councils to determine the general education policy of the school within the general guidelines issued by the Minister. Accordingly, from February 1984, the councils were made to be responsible for the buildings and grounds including improvements, employment of ancillary staff, maintenance of accounts, general budget planning, selection of principals and deputy principals, and effecting auditing. Further, the council members were accorded protection against having to meet the costs arising from any action for damages, by providing for the Attorney General to appear on behalf of a council in such an eventuality (Fordham, 1984).

In 1986, UK amended its *Education Act*, to empower school communities in England and Wales. The schools were required to establish governing boards comprising the Head-Teacher and governors elected by the parents and teachers and nominees of the Local Education Authority (LEA). In August 1987, the Government directed the implementation of all provisions relating to school governance by September 1989 (UKDES, 1987). In 1988, the *Education Reform Act* was enacted for promoting higher standards of education strengthening the involvement of parents and local community in keeping with their expectations of what can be achieved in schools. It was envisaged that by April 1993, school governors would have the control of the school budgets for teaching and other staff; the cost of maintenance of the premises including heating and lighting; and purchase of books, equipment, stationary and other goods and services. Further, schools were authorised to vote themselves out of LEA control and receive funding directly from the Secretary for Education and Science (UKDES, 1989).

In 1986, a New Zealand parliamentary committee revealed that the quality of teaching in New Zealand public schools was undermined by three major problems: 1) teachers had control of their own terms and conditions of service; 2) grossly elaborated structures; and 3) obsolete administrative practices and attitudes (Scott, 1986). These revelations led to the commissioning of a Task Force headed by a business leader to recommend the required changes. When the teacher organisations opposed SBM, the Government insisted that it had a mandate from the people and if teachers wanted to have their input they could be involved in the process or else the Government would proceed with or without their support. Alarmed by the prospect of being left out they decided to participate. Based on the

recommendations made by the Task Force, the 1988 White Paper announced the most comprehensive reforms in SBM. It required every public school to establish a board of trustees comprised of the principal and the representatives of parents, teachers, community, and (in the case of secondary level) students (Longe, 1988). The *Education Act* of 1989 came into effect on 1 October 1989, with the most comprehensive devolution package so far implemented. It included recruitment of staff; payment of salaries; determination of salary points; negotiation of industrial agreements; and maintenance and improvements to buildings.

In 1988, due to the efforts of a coalition of parents and citizens in Illinois, the most radical set of educational reforms occurred in the USA. The *School Reform Act* of 1988, mandated that Chicago public schools be managed by Local School Councils (LSCs). These councils were to consist of six parents, two community residents, two teachers, and the principal. The devolution package included: the evaluation of the principal's performance and renewal of his/her contract; approval of school budget in consultation with Professional Persons Advisory Committee (PPAC); approval of the school improvement plan (SIP) prepared by the principal in consultation with the relevant stakeholders; and monitoring the implementation of SIP and the budget by the principal. When one considers the fact that prior to 1989/90 school year, Chicago principals functioned under the direction and supervision of district/divisional superintendents, these reforms changed the system in such a way to make the individual school the main focus and the target for improvement returning it to local control (Fitch, 1990). However, the reform process in USA was such that by 1989, 75 per cent of the states mandated SBM for their public schools (Lewis, 1989).

In 1988, the NSW Government which was elected on the "New Right Agenda" overruled the opposition of the NSWTF (who were resisting community participation since 1973) in terms of its Election Manifesto. On the basis of the recommendations of a management consultant commissioned by the Government, the administrative structure of the Department of School Education was over-hauled. Starting from 1990, the staff at the Head Office was drastically reduced and regional offices were strengthened. An action plan was implemented for each public school to have a school council by 1994. The authority and responsibility in certain areas such as staff development; payment of electricity, gas, and water bills; selection of principals and decisions relating to other executive positions were devolved to the schools (Scott, 1989). These provisions were embodied in the *Education Reform Act* of 1990 and the school principals were strongly encouraged to implement the recommendations made by the school councils.

### Initiatives Towards SBM in Other Countries

In the Canadian Province of Quebec, the *Education Act* of 1988, provided for School Committees and Orientation Committees comprised of parents, teachers, non-teaching staff, and (in the case of secondary level) students. The Orientation Committees were empowered to advise the principals on the aims and objectives of the schools, approve rules of conduct and safety; and changes to regular student schedule proposed by the principal in consultation with the School Committee. Further, the Orientation Committee was empowered to advise the School Board while the School Board was required to consult the Orientation Committee in matters pertaining to the school. In 1989, British Columbia amended its Schools Act establishing the right of parents to have a Parents Advisory Committee in each school to advise the School Board, and the principal and staff of the school in relation to any school policy (Levin and Young, 1994). In Yukon the *Education Act* of 1990 has gone beyond both Quebec and British Columbia in decentralizing and democratizing its education system. Under the new Act, the previously established advisory committees are encouraged to evolve into school councils or boards with substantial authority over the operation of the school. School Councils of three to seven members with guaranteed representation for Yukon First Nations, have authority (subject to ministerial approval) over such matters as the selection of the principal, approval of school rules, the development of school curriculum, and the evaluation and dismissal of teachers. Further, at least being in existence for one year, the local community is empowered to decide by majority vote to change the status of the school council to that of a school board and assume increased authority over all matters relating to the management of the school (Levin and Young, 1994).

On the other hand, "Canadian First Nations" are empowered to take-over the Federal Government controlled schools for band or tribal control. Once taken over, the Chief and Council either appoint or elect a Board of Education or authorize a Council Member to manage the Band School. Such a Board is empowered to determine the aims and objectives of the school, select the principal and teachers, approve the educational program, determine the salaries and the budget of the school out of the funds allocated by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. By April 1993, in Manitoba alone, 42 First Nation schools were operating under Band-control (Lagorio, 1992).

In 1990, Western Australia also amended its *Education Act*, requiring state schools to establish School Decision Making Groups (SDMGs) in an advisory capacity (WADE, 1990). In 1993, Hong Kong 7 public schools followed the British educational reforms by introducing school boards. Sri Lanka, which inherited an education system based on the British model, also enacted legislation in 1993 to establish School Development Committees (SDCs) in an advisory capacity.

## Latest Trends

In the early 1990s, both Queensland and Tasmania, the only states in Australia which have not enacted enabling legislation for community involvement in school-based management, were taking action towards that goal. The Queensland Government report, entitled *Focus on Schools*, proposed that within strong system-wide policies, state schools should gradually move towards self-management in certain areas. The report emphasized the importance of considering education as a partnership between the school and community enabling both of them to participate in school-based decision making via the forum of school councils (Dempster, 1991). In 1993, as the first step for the transformation, 64 Queensland schools established Advisory School Councils on a trial basis. In Tasmania, on the basis of a paper entitled *School and College Councils*, state schools were encouraged to make them self-managing entities with the involvement of local communities. Councils were expected to take a decision-making role in areas such as buildings and grounds, staffing, finances, and monitoring school improvements (TDEA, 1990).

In 1993, Manitoba's *Report on the Panel on Education Legislation Reforms* envisages the establishment of Advisory School Committees for parental and community participation in school management. The Report has recommended that the legislative reforms should include provision for the establishment of School Advisory Committees (SACs) with a majority of parent members. It also recommended that a SAC be empowered to advise the principal and the School Board on matters relating to the school; School Boards should delegate some of the duties and functions to be performed by the SACs; and School Boards be required to frame regulations for the establishment and dissolution of SACs (Manitoba, 1993).

In 1994, Manitoba introduced a high degree of autonomous self-government for French Language schools with the establishment of a Francophone Schools Division along with regional and school committees. The parents were empowered to elect the members of the School Committees and those members in turn the Regional Committees and finally the members of regional committees to elect the Divisional Board. The School and Regional Committees and the Board are required to consult each other in the formulation of school policies (Manitoba, 1993).

According to a Ministerial communique issued in January 1994, Alberta is embarking on a major restructuring of the provincial system of education. Alberta proposes to legislate wide-ranging educational reforms resulting in a smaller Head Office of the Department of Education and a drastic reduction of the number of school districts/ divisions from 140 to 60 including a reduction of their authority and devolution of authority to the school level. The right of the School Boards to impose an education levy is to be replaced by the allocation of all funds



by the Provincial Government. Increased involvement of parents, the community and business with authority for decision-making in the delivery of education including deployment of resources and determining how the results are to be achieved are the key features of the Reforms. Introduction of Charter schools with more flexibility and autonomy of operation for achieving better results are also envisaged under the new legislation (Alberta, 1994).

The Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic directed their state schools to establish school boards to be effective from 1 September 1993. The School Boards are comprised of representatives of the parents, community, employer organisations, other interested parties, the school, and, at the secondary level, students. The Board is required to give its opinion on educational achievements, pedagogical problems, efficiency of teaching process, the curriculum, school finances, staffing, work plans and student numbers, and also empowered to approve the annual report of the school.

In UK, the *Education Act* of 1993 enacted a new framework for schools in England and Wales making it more convenient for schools to become self-governing grant maintained schools with provision for more effective use of resources. These provisions come into effect from September 1994 (Council of Europe, 4/93).

More importantly, the 1993 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), in the final analysis of its deliberations on *Access to and Participation in Education*, amongst other things included a recommendation for effective involvement of students, parents and the community in school management. It is believed that consumer involvement helps to ensure effective access and participation in learning (Council of Europe 5/93). If this recommendation is implemented in the near future, it is likely that almost all Western education systems would be functioning under school-based management.

### **A Concept of Private Management of Public Schools**

It is reported that in the United States, many school districts are plagued with low student achievement, high truancy and dropout rates, poverty and sporadic violence. As schools struggle to address these increasingly complex challenges, the question of privatisation is emerging as one of the alternatives to face these problems. Some educational administrators believe that if public schools are to survive, far reaching changes are needed to improve the teaching/learning environment in the affected schools. Questions are being asked about whether public schools should be operated like public utilities which are overseen by public boards but managed by private firms operating for profit.

In response to these questions, a private company to manage public schools has become a reality in Minneapolis. The company, Education Alternatives Inc (EAI) has already started managing an elementary school in Miami Beach

since 1991. In 1992, EAI was successful in taking-over the management of nine schools in Baltimore, and in 1993, the number of Baltimore schools managed by this company has increased to twelve. Current trends indicate a strong likelihood for this number to go up rapidly as EAI has already started negotiations with a dozen other school districts who are potential clients (ASCD, 1994).

It is true that the idea of private firms managing public schools could be appealing to some while it could be appalling to others. However, another firm which originally planned to create a nationwide system of private schools, now intends to get into the business of managing public schools providing a further boost to the concept of private firms managing public schools. David Bennett, EAI's President states that their relationship to the schools should be seen as 'a Public-private partnership', and not as privatization. According to him EAI offers several advantages to its clients. The most important advantage appears to be accountability as EAI signs a performance contract with the school district with provision for the school board to terminate the contract in the event of any dissatisfaction on its performances (ASCD, 1994). Is this a trend that will continue to grow in American education systems with the possibility of spreading it to other parts of the world? It is important to note that a school could be entrusted to private management only with the approval of its local community.

## **Conclusion**

In the past, the people believed that the Principal or the Head-Teacher was vested with traditional, legal, and functional authority for the total management of the school. Yet, with the advancement of technology, breaking down of the trade barriers, and increased competition in the world market, the job opportunities are becoming increasingly difficult. The spread of the political philosophy of the New Right and the adoption of the policy of community participation and parental choice in education as alternatives could help to make the school administration more efficient and effective within the limited resources available. In the meantime, as the problems and issues facing the contemporary society became so complex, more and more responsibilities were placed on the school systems while the available resources were becoming less and less. On the other hand, when school leavers were facing an increasingly bleak future forcing them to lower their expectations for a better life, student motivation and their achievements were adversely affected. This situation in the face of parental choice has made it very necessary for all the relevant stakeholders in education to form a partnership. It is clear that even the private firms would be able to grab a share of school management only with the blessings of the local community and more specifically the parents. In view of the fact that the set goals of SBM are autonomy, flexibility, efficiency, productivity, and accountability which are similar

to those of private firms, the challenges facing the school leaders to collaborate with school communities and making the SBM work are becoming greater and more real.

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