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Rod Chadbourne

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ISSUES FACING AND SHAPING THE ROLE OF DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS DURING A PERIOD OF RADICAL CHANGE

Rod Chadbourne
Principal Researcher

The International Institute for
Policy and Administrative Studies

School of Education

Western Australian College
of Advanced Education

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> "If you ask us to define the role of the district superintendent you'll get 29 different versions."
>
> "Superintendents were like the Jews in the wilderness - wandering forty days and nights with no idea where they were going and no defined role."
>
> "We have a problem. The role of the superintendent has not yet been identified and there are current practices which significantly prevent the role being adequately explored. So we fly by the seat of our pants."
>
> "Our role is shaped by what happens in the field, not in principle from Central Office."
>
> "We've been waiting for the Executive to reveal the grand plan, the end product, what the final product looks like because we're confused. Now we realise they don't know what the end will look like, they haven't got a grand plan."
>
> (District Superintendents, March-April, 1990)

Before 1987, the work of superintendents was well known throughout the state education system. Their role had evolved over a long period of time and was firmly established - materially and in the minds of school staff. Sometimes people disagreed with how that role was discharged but they did have a clear idea of what it entailed. Superintendents also enjoyed a high profile. They were commonly seen to occupy powerful and prestigious positions, presiding over teachers' careers and curriculum developments. The Better Schools Report changed much of that.

After 1987, the superintendents became fewer in number and lower in profile. They were reduced from around 75 to 29 and placed in response mode. They were also largely removed from direct involvement with

classroom teachers and syllabus reform. Ostensibly they lost power, status, and leadership.[1] Those changes created uncertainty in the minds of school staff about what the real role of the new superintendents was. Consequently, perceptions of their work became based on hearsay and speculation. Rumours of more restructuring and confusion over the meaning of 'auditing' muddied the waters even further.

Not surprisingly, the nature of the district superintendent's role has been a subject of ongoing debate over the past three years and is likely to remain so for sometime yet. Such activity is necessary if all the stakeholders are to reach common understanding and agreement. This report is offered as a contribution to the eventual achievement of that goal. It explores a range of pressing issues which affect the definition of the superintendent's role. In doing so, it attempts to avoid duplicating the work of the Organisation Development Unit and other groups.

The issues were identified in several ways, namely: by interviewing thirteen West Australian superintendents,[2] three Ministry officers in this state, and a range of educationists in New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia; and by reviewing some of the literature on restructuring in Australia and New Zealand. On the basis of material collected from those sources, a draft report was written and circulated for comment to 31

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[1] One superintendent questioned this claim. He said, "I don't agree that the position is necessarily less 'powerful'; it's more a change in emphasis - less observable with teachers, more with principals."

[2] Of the thirteen interviewed, five were 'new' (appointed to the superintendency after the Better Schools Report) and eight were superintendents before 1987; a third were from country districts and the rest were in the city.

district superintendents and a small informal reference group.[3]

Twenty seven superintendents took time to offer feedback. Overall, their responses endorsed the general themes or theses of the draft report. They also provided information for correcting factual inaccuracies, qualifying some general statements, and confirming broad claims. As a result, the amended report is stronger than the original and has been constructed from communication with nearly all the superintendents. At an individual level, different superintendents disagreed with or questioned different particular points and comments. Generally, where those responses were brief or solitary, they have been included as footnotes. The longer and less isolated dissenting responses are presented in a separate chapter at the end of the report.

Most of what is said in the following pages consists of ideas provided by superintendents. However they are not responsible for the way their comments have been selected, interpreted, and structured. Therefore, despite the fact that on different aspects of various issues the superintendents have been left to speak for themselves, this report can not be taken as necessarily representing the views of the superintendency. Similarly, whilst the study was carried out under the auspices of the International Institute for Policy and Administrative Studies (IIPAS), the researcher was given a free hand to conduct an independent inquiry. Consequently, the report should not be seen as a position paper of the Institute.

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[3] There are 29 district superintendent positions in Western Australia. One superintendent declined to participate in the study. The extra three were those on leave or seconded to Central Office. The reference group consisted of a school principal, two district office consultants, and four people at Central Office. Because these people never met as a group, they are better regarded as a collection of individuals who constituted a reference set.

Unless otherwise indicated, all the inset single-line-spaced quotations are comments made by superintendents. The same applies to the footnotes. In a few instances the term Executive in these quotations has been substituted for the name of particular individuals. Moreover, some of the quotations have been "edited to remove the hesitations and repetitions of ordinary speech ..... and sometimes with intervening statements on other topics deleted" (Connell 1985:7).

After the draft report was circulated, a few reviewers claimed they could put a name to nearly all the superintendents' comments quoted in the text. Several said words to the effect, "I can identify comments made by Superintendent X and Superintendent Y." Interestingly neither X nor Y were interviewed. It would be a pity if anyone became preoccupied with that type of exercise. The superintendents' comments bring to the study a degree of richness, authenticity, and urgency that would not be possible had they been excluded. The comments were made in good faith, reported in good faith, and deserve to be received in good faith. This is not to say they must be agreed with, but it does mean they should be examined constructively and openly rather than treated dismissively and prejudicially. When examining these comments, then, it is important for readers to focus on the issues rather than the individuals, on points rather than personalities, and on what was said rather than on who said it.

The study owes a lot to the thirty four people who, despite busy schedules, made time to be interviewed and respond thoughtfully to the draft report. Also, it would not have been conducted or completed without the support and encouragement of Dr Margaret Crowley, Director of IPPAS.

A final point warrants particular mention. This report does not document the substantial contribution made by superintendents to the development of Better Schools throughout the state; that is one of the

drawbacks of an approach which focusses on unresolved issues. Furthermore, because of the issues-based approach, the spotlight in this study tends to settle on areas of dissatisfaction, confusion, and conflict caused by radical change over the past few years. For that reason, the report reflects the superintendents' perspectives on events leading up to the present rather than their visions for the future. Unless readers keep these methodologically driven constraints constantly in mind they may form the view that superintendents are a less-than-optimistic group. Such an impression would be quite unfair. As people who have seen superintendents at close quarters will testify, any pessimism conveyed in this report is decisively outweighed by the high level of professionalism that characterizes their work and the positive nature of their outlook on the direction of education in Western Australia.

CHAPTER TWO

A TWO TIER SYSTEM

Restructuring

> "In most western countries, two apparently contradictory developments seem to have been occurring over schools. There has been a tendency to push more and more responsibility on to the local schools ..... This tendency has carried labels like decentralisation and devolution, privatisation and participation ..... It is a movement away from the centre and toward diversified control.
>
> The second development is recentralisation; governments and ministers have tried to reassert control in several key areas like resource management, measuring outcomes, programme budgeting, teacher appraisal and setting global priorities. This second transition has been accompanied by formal restructuring of education systems so that the lines of control are simplified and made more direct .....
>
> The two movements - a simultaneous decentralising and recentralising - are implied in Peters and Waterman's term 'loose/tight structures', a common characteristic of their identified excellent companies. It is as though in areas of central importance to the health of the whole organisation there is firm central control; and where creativity, entrepreneurship and local initiative are needed, there is wider freedom given to the member units" (Beare, Caldwell and Millikan 1989:71).

In some places, the simultaneous recentralising and decentralising has led to a two tier system. For example, before 1988, the administration of the Victorian state education system was divided into three tiers - the centre, the regions, and the schools. In that year, a new structure was implemented. It consists not of three tiers but of two - a unified State Office and schools. The centre, as previously known, was abolished. The regions, as previously known, were abolished. There are still branches at the centre and offices in eight regions but they are combined to form a

unified State Office (Victorian Ministry of Education 1987:6).

Similarly, before 1988, the administration of New Zealand's state education system was divided into three tiers - the centre, the regions, and the schools. In that year, the Picot Report recommended a new structure. It consists not of three tiers but of two - a central Ministry and schools. The regions were abolished and no formal administrative structure was set up at district level. Instead, within the proposed new system, "each institution receives most of its funding directly from a central agency, undertakes responsibility for defining its objectives within national objectives, and has control of the resources available to it" (Picot 1988:53).

In Western Australia, before 1987, the administration of the state education system was divided into three tiers - the centre, the regions, and the schools.[1] In that year, a new structure was set up along lines recommended in the Better Schools Report. Arguably, it consists not of three tiers but of two - a unified Central Office and schools. That is, the district offices are not a third tier. The district superintendents are part of the unified Central Office and the other staff in the district offices belong to the schools.[2]

Responses

1 "Administrative control in primary schools only. Secondary was controlled from the centre."

2 "I think this is simplistic. All district office staff operate between Central Office and schools. Their alignment depends on the task being undertaken."

"Not quite true. 'Other staff' (S.D.O's) are expected to be curriculum missionaries as well as school-owned facilitators."

Rationale

Western Australia established education regions some fifteen years ago. They were a form of middle management designed to broaden the administrative base of the Education Department and bring centrally determined programmes and services closer to schools. In practice, they limited the scope of schools to respond to the needs of their communities and they restricted the capacity of Central Office to respond to the needs of schools. Their removal was intended to rectify this situation and increase the power of schools and the centre.

Up to a point the regional offices did provide more decentralisation of decision making - but only for the regional superintendents, not for the schools.[3] If anything, they brought schools under closer central scrutiny than was the case in earlier times when schools were better placed to be 'out of sight, out of mind'.

At the primary school level, the regional offices also perpetuated a culture of paternalism and learned dependency, both of which effectively prevented schools becoming the optimal units for educational change. (At the secondary level, subject superintendents based at Central Office performed that function.) For example, before 1987 it was the superintendent who assessed individual teachers and recommended their permanency - not the principals. It was the superintendent who evaluated the school programme and determined the most effective way of raising students' performance - not the people in the school.[4] It was the

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Reponses

[3] "A negative view. Opportunities existed for 'having a say' through the regional superintendent and for cooperative planning."

[4] "True, but the <u>how</u> was important. Schools and teachers provided the evidence for the report - not very different from demonstrating accountability."

superintendent who was responsible for causing significant changes to occur - not members of the local school community (Organisation Development Unit 1990A). As some former regional superintendents explained, those times have changed.

> "In the old days I was king of the regional office. We had a separate identity. Now the district office only exists to the extent that it helps schools develop the school development plan; that is, we are only facilitators, not curriculum experts."
>
> "The regional superintendent was seen as the super principal. If any problems arose then the superintendent would tell people what to do."
>
> "We don't have the same professional autonomy that we used to have. In the past I could send out my own regional policies that I made up by myself.
>
> "The regional offices were proactive in putting up and funding professional development programmes, making schools an offer they couldn't refuse. Now we don't do anything unless requested; we are in response mode. We are always leading from behind. The Ministry and schools set the state of play."[5]

Apart from inhibiting the development of self-determining schools, the regional offices - as mini Education Departments - added to the fragmentation of Head Office, weakened its control, and thereby obstructed the management of change. In the interests of setting up a responsive bureaucracy they had to be disbanded and replaced by district offices. A responsive bureaucracy focuses on the needs of clients rather than the needs of the system. In the case of education, that means a desire and a

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Responses

[5] "It should be made clear that some former superintendents who are now district superintendents considered there were major weaknesses in the regional structure. Similarly, there were major problems with the secondary subject superintendency. Too many of this group saw themselves as 'heirs apparent' to key Central Office positions. I saw many prospective teachers with strong academic and performance backgrounds 'turned off' teaching as a result of their dealings with some arrogant subject superintendents."

capacity to respond quickly and flexibly to the needs of schools (Victorian Ministry of Education 1985:5.5). It also means that, "The administrative system should be simple and uncomplicated with as few layers and sections as practicable. There should be no services overlapped or paralleled by others" (Picot 1988:4). To regard district offices as a separate tier, then, places the prospect of a responsive bureaucracy at risk.

There is another reason why the 'districts' should not be seen as an independent third tier; they are supposed to be only the sum of their parts. A high school is more than the sum of its subject departments; for example, it has whole school policies. The state education system is more than the sum of its schools; for example, there are system-wide policies.[6] But districts can not impose things like goals, priorities, policies, regulations, curriculum frameworks, and staffing decisions on schools in the same way that Central Office can.[7] Furthermore, they have no basis outside of the education system for their existence or identity. They have no social, political, or economic reason to be.[8] Their boundaries do not coincide with any sporting, cultural or government divisions.[9] They cannot raise funds through local rates and taxes.

Responses

6 "Only a handful."

7 "To be only the sum of its parts would hardly allow for effective operation. The district office staff need a home base of support, a team awareness, a coherence, and a knowledge of their team strength."

8 "Try doing away with district offices in the country and there will be political reasons to be."

9 "We've redrawn PCAP boundaries to fit state education district boundaries."

Factors Confounding a Two Tier System

Under a two tier system, districts are simply nominal entities which house two separate groups - superintendents from Central Office on the one hand, and consultants for the schools on the other. Unless that distinction is accepted and observed, the change from a three to a two tier system will not occur. Nor will it happen unless it is recognised that tiers exist not only organisationally but also in the minds of people. The obstacles to be faced are cultural as well as institutional. It is useful then to examine some of the factors that so far have confounded the development of a two tier system.

Throughout the first year of the new system (1988), it might have seemed that not a lot had changed. The 28 regional superintendent positions under the old system were replaced by 29 district superintendents.[10] Like their predecessors, the district superintendents were made responsible for some 25-30 schools and given the task of supervising the performance of the whole school, not just one subject within schools. In many cases, they simply took over the offices of the regional superintendents. On top of that, the Better Schools Report explicitly outlined the setting up of three levels - school, district, and Central Office.

Also, during the early stages of setting up the districts the superintendents were often portrayed as leaders of their own distinct domain. For instance, when they visited schools, met community groups, and were written up in the local media, it was as 'district

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Responses

10 "Though, the 28 regional superintendents worked out of only 15 regional offices."

superintendents' - not Central Office superintendents. Inside the district office they were required to act as managers - supervising staff, chairing major committees, and authorising financial transactions. Frequently, that led to a sense of ownership and a view that the manager of the district office had to be the superintendent. Again, these perceptions reinforced an impression that superintendents were leaders of their own distinct domain.[11] At times it was more than an impression.

> "Initially I had trouble changing. I wanted to own all the district office staff."
>
> "Superintendents who have 'I am the principal of 37 primary schools' mentality are those who want to be the boss of the district office."
>
> "When I first became a superintendent I tried to be the principal of thirty principals."
>
> "I've stayed a mother hen because school development planning is such a complex business. I needed to keep it going and add my experience to it and prevent five district office staff going out and giving five different messages on school development processes. At the beginning the district office staff needed my hand at the tiller. But I'm stepping away now because I've got more and more work to do."
>
> "The traditional role of the superintendent has involved being in charge of the district office. Where the PEO's have been used it has led to some difficulties in schools. The PEO comes to be regarded as an assistant superintendent and is cast into a decision making role across schools in the absence of the superintendent, and schools have objected to the difficulties of getting to the superintendent because he has been screened from the principals by the PEO."
>
> "Most district offices have the superintendent in charge. It'll come to a head when the audit role takes on the dimensions that it should. Then the district superintendent will have no time to manage the district office. Up till now they have."

Responses

[11] "They still are. I think to some extent they shall continue to exert some leadership because district superintendents have leadership ability and to some extent it is needed."

> "The district office needs the superintendent for unity."
>
> "Principals have enough to do managing their own schools. They shouldn't have to manage the district. I have responsibility for the management of the district office. I'm an integral part of the district office and its services because when I'm out in school I'm able to keep in touch with their needs and a lot of what goes on in the district office should reflect what goes on in schools. I prefer to operate out of the district office, not from a separate office. It if gets to the point of me having to be out of the district office then I'd resign because I'd be just a police person."

Several other factors continue to confound the two tier system. For example, the districts, like the regions, have a material identity of their own: geographical boundaries; buildings that are physically separate from Central Office and schools; district mottos, logos, letterheads; and 'district' personnel - superintendents, consultants, and support staff. As several superintendents observed:

> "There is considerable misunderstanding throughout the Ministry about the two tier system. But while we exist physically, there will always be confusion."
>
> "The three separate locations (school, district, centre) create a perception of three tiers. Confusion, in the perception of schools, has resulted because of this matter. The superintendent was proclaiming a support-to-principals' role while on site and this seemed to contradict the idea of the superintendent being part of Central Office."

Also, group dynamics ensure that the staff in each district office become more than a collection of individuals. The superintendent, consultants,[12] and clerical staff share the same accommodation, interact on a daily and collegial basis, and are generally employed under

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[12] NB: Throughout this report, the term district 'consultant' refers to district education officers, school development officers, and student service officers - even though that is not the official meaning of the word within the system.

conditions that differ from those of staff in schools.[13] Over time they become a group with their own culture, structure, ethos, identity, and set of loyalties.[14] The superintendents are an integral part of this group. It is unrealistic to expect them to be otherwise. Thus, in the words of one superintendent, "The best moments come when I'm with my own district office staff." Almost invariably they become the leader of the group, partly because:

> "We're only allowed one promotional position. Therefore the district office staff don't have the status and experience to manage things, they are just teachers. So the superintendent needs to be in charge, to sympathize, and keep the overall direction right."
>
> "Superintendents still have to make the 'hard' decisions in district offices. No one else has the authority or power base at present."

For their part, the consultants want the superintendent to be the leader of the district office - at least according to some superintendents.

> "The district office staff want a superintendent as someone to identify with, someone they know they can talk to about career and personal situations."
>
> "Why don't superintendents delegate their authority? Because district office staff want to relate to a manager at the superintendent level rather than to a PEO."
>
> "The district office staff don't want to lose contact with the superintendent. They want direct contact, mainly to talk about their career and promotion."

The end result of such group dynamics is that frequently the superintendent and consultants come to see themselves as belonging to the same tier, and an independent one at that.

Responses

13 "Guidance officers in district offices work under the same conditions as teachers in schools."

14 "There is no problem with this as long as all efforts of the group are to support schools and achieve their own and Ministry of Education determined priorities."

For historical and organisational reasons, school staff also see district superintendents and consultants as belonging to the same tier. From long experience of working in a hierarchical organisation they have come to regard districts as being "somewhere in the pecking order between themselves and the Central Office, but if anything more closely aligned to the Central Office than to them" (Organisation Development Unit 1990B:1).[15] Within the present structure, the existence of line management reinforces an image of the organisation as being hierarchical and centralized rather than flat and devolved.

Another obstacle to establishing a two tier system is that Central Office uses district offices to perform a range of tasks, such as: promoting Ministry initiatives, handling ministerials, organising inservice work, and carrying out various administrative functions - particularly those related to the collection and distribution of information and money. For instance:

> "We divvy up some money: for example, the minor works programme. It's a role we have. At present we operate as a distribution point for Ministry funds. We have at least a dozen committees. Some of these functions will disappear because schools should be allowed to govern themselves."
>
> "If parents phone Central Office, then Central Office deflects the calls back to us."
>
> "Take the new language, maths, and art syllabuses. Central Office has given us responsibility for monitoring the implementation of them and actually implementing them. We run the induction programmes, the inservice programmes."
>
> "The district office is not determined just by schools. The Ministry installs people in the district office to do Central Office things, industrial things, tied Commonwealth things."

Responses

15 "Schools see our district office as being aligned with them, not Central Office."

"I don't think so! More closely aligned to schools would be the general perception."

"Our role is too big. I shouldn't have to handle ministerials. One Minister tied up my officers for two weeks getting information and we never knew if it was of any use."

"Much of the confusion occurs at top levels in Central Office and when Central Office staff try to use district office staff to do the 'hard' things."

Sometimes these delegated tasks take priority over the district office's primary function of providing support to schools.[16] As a result, district office staff run the risk of being seen as Central Office functionaries rather than auxillaries of the school.[17] They also face the problem of trying to please multiple masters - the superintendent, other Central Office people, and the schools. An associated problem is that of having to choose between different groups competing for their loyality, as was the case during the industrial dispute last year.

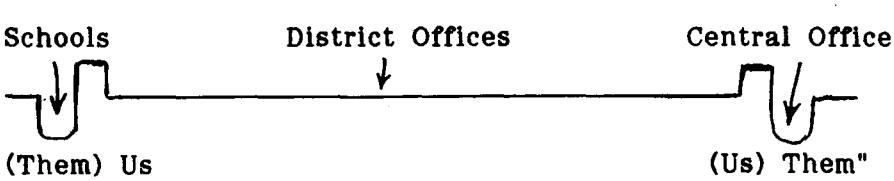
A Clarifying Step

A number of superintendents have thought about a straightforward way to negate the factors confounding a two tier system. It involves formally separating the office of the superintendent from the office of the district consultants. The two offices could remain in the same building but they would be officially independent of each other.

Responses

16 "Yes, and most district office staff want to be seen as having some sort of 'power'.

17 "Put another way, district offices are located within the demilitarized zone between schools and Central Office, thus:



The office of the district superintendent would:

- o be controlled from Central Office
- o have its own executive support staff and budget
- o handle all tasks currently delegated from Central Office to the districts, and any other tasks that may be delegated
- o have line management responsibilities towards staff in schools and the office of the district consultants.

The office of the district consultants would:

- o be managed by a principal education officer (PEO)
- o have its own executive support staff and budget
- o be staffed by people who have no line management responsibilities towards the schools
- o be controlled by a district-based decision-making group (DBDMG), or district management committee (DMC), consisting of an elected group of principals, deputy principals, and other school staff in the district
- o not handle any tasks delegated from Central Office, without authorisation from the DBDMG or DMC
- o be renamed school support centres (as in Victoria) or education resource centres (as in N.S.W.).

Under a structure where the district superintendent is formally separated from the district office, the relationship between the two is similar to that between superintendents and schools. In effect, the district office becomes another school in the district: the PEO[18] is the principal, the other district office staff are the school staff, and

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Responses

18 "This (PEO) is a title with unfortunate connotations." [The term PEO conflicts with the spirit of a flat structure. However, it does highlight and enhance the idea of the district office being another school in the district, complete with a 'principal'.]

the DBDMG is the SBDMG.[19] A slight difference is that the DBDMG is more of a management committee than the SBDMG; it has a more prominent role in producing a district plan than the SBDMG does with the school development plan. Correspondingly, the PEO is more a manager and less an instructional leader than is the school principal.[20] The principals on the DMC collectively constitute the instructional leader of the district office.

Furthermore, under such a structure, the superintendent is responsible for auditing the district plan and for managing the performance of the PEO. The PEO, in turn, is responsible for the performance management of the district office staff. In other words, "the manager of the district office is accountable to the district superintendent and the board of management, just as the principal is accountable to the district superintendent and the school decision making group. The district superintendent can no more direct the staff in the district office than he or she can direct school staff" (Organisation Development Unit 1990B:5).[21]

This proposal relieves superintendents from managing the district office and being responsible for the professional development and appraisal of all district office staff. It thereby allows them more time to

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Responses

19 "This is a much easier task in the metro area. It is not as simple in the country, and it is costly. Also, many principals in country districts are young and inexperienced and are busy enough learning their new positions without taking on yet another committee chore."

"There is a danger of schools getting what they want rather than what they need, based on quality information. It would be okay for some principals but more training is still needed for others."

20 "The district officer should do the administration tasks. The PEO manages the support functions for schools."

21 "I think 70-80% of superintendents would not like or agree with this statement."

supervise the performance of all schools in their district and provide principals with professional support to manage the development and implementation of school plans.[22]

District consultants also benefit from the proposal.[23] No longer would they need to feel responsible for ensuring that schools are working within Ministry policy or implementing Ministry initiatives - that job would rest exclusively with the office of the district superintendent. No longer would they be caught in the middle of competing claims for their loyalty and services - their clear commitment would be to the schools. No longer would they have to feel like outsiders or intruders when visiting schools - they would be delivering programmes and services requested by the schools. On the last point, however, there is evidently a danger that:

> "As long as staff arrive in the district office without a clear understanding of what their purpose is, yet determined to be useful to schools, they will very likely fall into the trap of busily responding to school requests regardless of their nature. The skills of consultancy are complex and only acquired with difficulty over a long period of time. It is unrealistic to expect that teachers can be plucked from the classroom and installed as a consultant a few weeks later with almost no preparation.
>
> Instead of consulting with schools, what tends to happen is that the consultant tries to solve the problems the schools serve up in order to gain some credibility or be of use. If he or she is successful at solving the problem, the school will continue to refer problems to the consultant for solutions rather than get better at solving its own problems. If the consultant is unsuccessful at solving the problem, schools decry the value of such people and feel unsupported.
>
> To be able to take the problem tendered by the school, frame it in a way that encourages the school to examine it

---

Responses

22 "The above advocacy tends to gloss over the diversity principle. Do all district offices have to be the same? I think not. Discharge of the functions must be in the context of local factors. You could just as easily obtain the same outcome with differing structures and various role relationships."

23 "What about the public servants? Consider how they would need to be deployed."

in a context of self determining schools, and then assist the school to mobilize its problem solving capacity, is not easy. If we want district consultants to enhance the school's ability to solve its own problems (something fundamental to self determining schools) then we need to commit resources and develop the human resource policies to support this. Putting people in district offices and expecting them to behave like skilled consultants is not good enough" (Organisation Development Unit 1990B:4-5).]

Future Prospects

Despite the obstacles referred to earlier, there are grounds for claiming that a two tier system is evolving along the lines of the proposal outlined above. Now that the district offices are largely established, the superintendents are disengaging from much of the day-to-day administration. They are concentrating more on providing professional development and support for principals and supervising the implementation of the school development plan guidelines.

Also, district boards of management are being set up and controlled by school principals.[24] In some districts, principal education officers have been appointed on a trial basis to oversee the running of the office. In other districts, an office manager has been appointed from the ranks of the school consultants. These developments allow the superintendents to spend more time in schools and less time in the district office.

Responses

[24] "Is this real?"

"What does this mean? These boards are not controlled by anyone."

"This is easier in the metro. It is not desired by principals in my district."

Two other developments warrant mention. One is that some districts are thinking of combining forces to provide one large resource centre.[25] In doing so they will highlight the district office's primary role of providing support for schools.[26] The other development involves information technology. In future Central Office will have progressively less need to use the district as a medium for collecting and distributing data related to schools. Instead it will be able to interface directly with schools through faxes, computer noticeboards, and so on.[27]

Finally, as the following comments indicate, some superintendents have a concept of the present and a vision of the future consistent with a two tier type system.

> "The district superintendent will gradually come out of the district office and principals will have total control. I'd rather be in, but I think I'll end up outside - auditing. But if I'm in I'll be the big daddy over the top.
>
> "The district office is resourced from the school resource allocation to perform functions of economies of scale that schools can't perform by themselves. The alternative is to distribute district office staff to the schools without remainder."
>
> "The district superintendent is an extension of Central Office; the Chief Executive Officer determines the future of the district superintendent. The district office is an extension of the schools; the schools determine the future of the district office."
>
> "The district office operation is in two parts: the office of the district superintendent is seen quite rightly as 75-25 Central-Office-related rather than school-related. The rest of the district office is a support and service centre and should be seen as 20-80 Central Office versus schools."

Responses

25 "This is the case in a number of districts. It is more a legacy of the old regional structure."

26 "Dependent on the resources provided; that is, 'book' resources should be in schools."

27 "I wonder when - 2001?"

"In our district office management plan there is no directional role, only assisting and supporting. Leadership comes from the centre, not the district office."

"There is a problem because some superintendents can't separate themselves from the district office. Others can. I would have a job to do without the school development officers. They could go to become part of big support centres which are needed because of economies of scale. These centres will happen because we need to devolve staffing closer to schools."

"We made a bid for the district office to be owned by the schools. The district management committee decides our profile and budget; that is, the resources in the district office are owned by the schools. The DMC has authority because it appoints the E.O.1 and the P.S.4. Only me and my secretary are decided by Central Office."

"Our District Plan clearly states that the district office is owned by schools."

"We're heading in the direction of the district superintendent working independently of the district office operation. We've rationalised our resource centre. We've sent items that really belong to schools back to schools. We only have resources that schools can't afford. We're here to help schools become self-determining. Half our staff are located in schools working on the spot with teachers. We are purists on Better Schools. There isn't a half way house on this. The district offices do not exist to suit the people who work in them"

CHAPTER THREE

THE CENTRE TIER: SEPARATING OPERATIONS FROM POLICY

Restructuring took place in Victoria so that the unified State Office could provide effective educational leadership. Before 1988, the regions in that state were meant to relieve Central Office of direct involvement in the administration and management of schools and the system. However, the transfer of operational functions to regions was partial and incomplete. As a result, the centre continued to concentrate on operations "at the expense of the development of a strong policy focus for the Schools Division." It therefore lacked a strategic planning capacity to "anticipate and respond to the changing education needs of society, schools and students."[1]

The Picot Committee identified a further reason for separating operations from policy.[2] Until 1988 in New Zealand, there was "a blurring of policy making and provider roles in that policy makers also have responsibility for putting their proposals into effect - so that an overcommitment to preconceived ideas may result." Picot argued that, "Where these roles are separated, it is easier for the policy implementers to see that a particular policy is unsatisfactory" (1988:30).

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1 Victorian Ministry of Education (1987), The Structure and Organisation of the Schools Division, Melbourne, page 5.

2 The separation of policy from operations is also a feature of the Collaborative School Management Cycle developed by Caldwell and Spinks. This model advocates at the individual school level, there be a "clear and unambiguous specification of those phases which are the concern of the group for policy-making ['policy group'] and of other phases which are the concern of the groups responsible for implementing policy ['programme teams'] - (Beare, Caldwell and Millikan 1989:133).

In Western Australia, apparently a similar need was seen for separating operations from policy. Within that separation, the district superintendents are clearly located in the operations rather than policy section. It is a position some are most unhappy with. For example:

> "The issue of input to policy really is frustrating. Our input is nil because our feedback to Central Office is or seems to be disregarded. I believe we must form and write policy guidelines related to operations because surely we are gaining 'expertise' in this division."
>
> "I think Central Office undervalues and underestimates the ability and potential of the district superintendency. No other group is both closer to where the 'rubber hits the road' and in touch with Central Office 'visions' and efforts."

The Operations Directorate and Policy Development

Until July 1990, the Schools Division in Central Office consisted of four directorates - Curriculum, Corporate Services, Human Resources, and Operations.[3] Unlike the other directorates, the Operations Directorate had no discrete policy branch. By name and function it was concerned with operations. It consisted of four directors and the 29 superintendents. The four directors were members of the Schools Division Executive and therefore had a formal opportunity to participate in policy making. However, there is a widespread view among the superintendents that the directors of operations made little impact on policy, either inside or outside of Executive meetings.

> "The directors meet once a week and anyone can introduce a project at these (Executive) meetings which gives them a certain democratic nature but the chair is all powerful. We get minutes from these meetings."

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[3] Before July 1990, Central Office consisted of the Schools Division and the Policy and Resources Division. Recent changes have disbanded the two-divisional structure and replaced it with a four-divisional one. The old Operations Directorate is now located in the new Schools Operation Division which consists of Operations, Curriculum, Executive Support, and the Organisation Development Unit.

> "The directors of operations are on the superintendents' side. There is no advantage for them to buck the superintendents. They are on Corporate Executive and have the power to argue for resources. But they get outgunned and fail to represent our interests."
>
> "Central Office has a low regard for superintendents. $15 million of Commonwealth money was spent without even consulting the directors of operations."
>
> "The superintendents had no input into the Corporate Plan (Schools Division). I made suggestions to my director of operations but he said, 'It's too late now because it has gone to the printers.' We should have discussed it if we are to implement it, if we are to feel involved with it."
>
> "They are trying but they haven't got it right yet. They get the feedback but don't incorporate it in policies. The directors of operations should be formulating policies but they aren't."
>
> "I was accused by principals of not handing feedback up the line and was told that line management won't work because the directors of operations don't give the feedback to Corporate Executive."
>
> "There was a feeling of a powerful clique in the Executive and that the directors of operations were not privy to that exclusive group."

At Executive level, policy on curriculum and human resources comes through the directorates responsible for those two areas. It might be thought that because superintendents are responsible for supervising the formulation and implementation of school development plans in individual schools, then the directors of operations would generate policy guidelines for constructing those plans and monitoring school performance. However, that task has been performed by the Organisation Development Unit, a body which operates outside the four directorates and reports directly to Executive.[4] A number of superintendents explained the director of operation's position on this matter in these terms:

> "The directors of operations had no staff or funds to do it (policy development). No budget, no support staff, nothing."

Responses

[4] "The ODU has reported to a director of operations. It probably reports to an executive director now."

"The directors of operations were kept 'barefoot and pregnant'. Apart from the limited resources they can filch from the Executive Support Branch, they each have a secretary. Policy development and generation requires time for thinking, investigation, writing - and many hands. I have more resources in my district office to do policy development than my director of operations had in Central Office."

"These four August persons lack the arms and legs and time to be involved in real policy making. They rarely get above the administrative level."

The superintendents visit Central Office mainly to attend senior officer meetings and meet with their directors of operations. The senior officer meetings are held about every seven weeks. So far they have been largely briefing sessions with the superintendents being 'talked at' by their superordinates or an expert on some new policy or programme. Apparently, there is very little debate or opportunity for meaningful comment from superintendents at these meetings.

"At senior officer meetings we get documents and go into small groups and are asked, 'Do you agree with this or not?' But there isn't enough time to consider it."

"The Executive are managerially naive. They should get groups, including superintendents, to give state of the nation reports. They don't know they are not telling us! They don't attempt to inform superintendents about curriculum initiatives."

"The senior officer meetings are briefings to bring us up to date. But often we get stale information because of leaks. There is no debate because the decisions have already been made. It's hard to be told, 'You will do this and this'."

"When something difficult comes up, like post compulsory schooling, we are told, 'We need to pick your brains,' which means 'We want you to agree with us'."

"It's difficult to get consensus with 29 superintendents. Sometimes our recommendations are taken away and bounced off principals and then modified and you can get a bland melting down and that's not always the best thing. Then we are told, 'But you were consulted'."

"The senior officer meetings are called SOB's - senior officer briefings. There is no managing upwards, just top down rhetoric."

> "At the senior officer meetings, the directors of operations say nothing, except (.....). They are not leaders. They don't make statements on directions. They don't make educational statements. They don't make a difference."[5]
>
> "Some speakers are frivolous at senior officer meetings. The overheads (transparencies) are poor, there are no documents, no proper information or feedback."
>
> "The history of these meetings is fascinating and significant. They started off with briefings from the Executive being a small part and the professional development of superintendents being a big part. Then we had a few bad ones and a joint committee of some Executive members and superintendents was formed to organise them. After awhile that committee was suddenly scrapped - no one knows why - and the meetings changed from being development to being briefing sessions and they became top down all the way."[6]

Sometimes, on the day before or after senior officer meetings,[7] the superintendents get together with their directors of operations. On these occasions, policy issues can be raised and discussed on a collegial and collaborative basis. Significantly, the four groups of superintendents meet separately, never collectively. Most of the sessions are devoted to policy clarification rather than policy development - though on this point there are perceived variations between the groups.

> "Our director of operations usually chairs the meeting but sometimes shares it around. It is up to the directors to say how often these meetings are held, what's on the

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Responses

5 "This comment fails to recognise who called these meetings and in most cases it wasn't the directors of operations. Also, agendas in most cases were not what the directions of operations wanted."

6 "All these comments highlight the communication/consultation problem in our organisation. If we asked principals we'd get the same response - if teachers, again the same response."

7 "These meetings are becoming more appropriate to meet the needs of district superintendents and to enable more effective input/ feedback through the district superintendents."

agenda, and who presents what. There is a huge variation between groups. Our group moved ahead because of our director of operations. He gave us responsibility, got us on committees, and gave a good leadership model. Other directors of operations said, 'I'm not going to tell my superintendents what to do because they are professional'."

"The director of operations meetings are wimpish - just talk - blanc mange - what we discuss doesn't go to Corporate Executive. (.....) does what he wants. There's no consultation."

"Most superintendents meet quarterly with their directors of operations on a one-to-one basis for the purpose of performance management and appraisal. These meetings are useful for our own personal professional development but not for offerring any input into policy.

"Our input into the agenda is zero. The director of operations decides the agenda and whether we'll be able to contribute to policy making."

"The director of operations' meetings deal with nuts and bolts issues; for example, any trouble in the districts, computers, the school fees debate. Sometimes we hold our hands up in horror and we have a debate about some issue and that is taken note of and reflected up to Executive."

"Our director of operations was charged with developing regulations about school-based decision-making groups and had to deal with seven varieties of regulations. We debated the regulations ourselves in our group. It almost got to the final stage, then WACSSO had their say and it went back to square one. In that case we were able to influence policy."

"With my director of operations there is some scope for us to exercise educational leadership because he gave us a chance to contribute to a policy paper he was writing, to share ideas and use each other's ideas across the districts."

A few superintendents are invited to sit on Central Office committees that do form policy. These provide, "a mechanism to have a real say, but you only get on them by invitation" - and some superintendents are unclear about how many are invited.

"I've made expressions of interest but I'm on no Central Office committee. I don't even know which superintendents are representing superintendents on committees. The

> directors of operations haven't set up a structure for that. It's their responsibility."[8]

Although the predominant view is that they do not have much opportunity for participating in policy making, some superintendents did say they were adequately consulted - at least on a number of issues.

> "The superintendents had a big input on post compulsory schooling policy, occupational health and welfare, lower secondary studies (the 160 hours requirement), and the guidelines for school development plans."

> "The superintendents' policy domain is school development. We had an opportunity to provide input on the school development guidelines because there was a draft and we had a workshop on it. Those who complain are probably the same ones who complain they are too busy anyhow."

> "The School Development Plan Guidelines - we had input. The Schools Division Corporate Plan - we had input."

> (And, more obliquely) "Lots of documents fall off backs of trucks. We're not sure of the status of these. We told Executive to have one central distribution point - that if this is a policy or draft document then it has to have the stamp of the Corporate Executive on it. If it doesn't have that stamp then it's an opinion paper. That would avoid confusion as to whether a document is official or not. The Executive wants to manage and control by having a shortened line management - executive, director of operations, superintendent, principal. They keep trying to say that this is the only line. I'm saying it's not the only line that exists - because of gossip and documents that fall off backs of trucks."

Most superintendents would reply to those claims by saying that their input is reactive, not proactive; they tend to be given drafts of policy documents to respond to rather than an opportunity to be in on the ground

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Responses

8 "I've seen a list - saw it in mid 1989."

> "Is it? Or, is it up to the district superintendents to show some initiative?"

> "It would appear to me that district superintendents are recruited for Central Office policy developing committees on their perceived expertise rather than to represent the body of superintendents."

floor.[9] Furthermore, because these documents seem to be fait accomplis, the level of consultation is regarded as tokenism.[10]

Some Options

A range of options can be suggested in relation to the superintendents' feelings outlined in this chapter. One is to explore ways of strengthening the capacity of the Operations Directorate (or the new equivalent) to influence policy. For example, perhaps the Organisation Development Unit could become the formal policy branch of that directorate and function as the equivalent of the policy branches of the Curriculum and Human Resource Directorates (or the new equivalents).[11] A second option involves superintendents forming their own professional association or institute to provide an effective voice for directly influencing policy. A third option is to examine the extent to which effective corporate management does in fact require the separation of operations from policy and then encourage superintendents to accept the consequences of the findings.[12] Of these three options, the superintendents had most to say about the second one.

Responses

9 "I have received more information regularly than the various comments here suggest is the average."

10 "Yes, I guess so. But it's sort of like saying that a swimmer drowned because he/she refused to swim."

11 "This has happened with the latest changes in Central Office."

12 "Perhaps a fourth option is by communicating - by being informally political. I know there is a limit to this, but...."

Superintendents Institute

Before the Better Schools Report, the superintendents belonged to a Superintendents Institute. It provided a vehicle through which the superintendents could form and present a group opinion on matters of policy. Not all superintendents saw it as an influential body.[13]

> "The old Superintendents Institute was not effective. It was basically a senior officers' meeting, not an educational forum. It was gutless, just a Head Office briefing with a bit of an industrial arm."
>
> "Before (1987) there were different types of superintendents - secondary general and subject superintendents, regional primary and building superintendents, and so on. The old Superintendents Institute therefore represented a cross section and the diffused power weakened it."
>
> "The superintendents had little input (before 1987). Individually they did but not as a group. The Institute was a professional arm - our bosses were part of it."

Despite these perceptions, the Superintendents Institute was regarded by the post 1987 Executive as a threat to the management of restructuring - at least according to some superintendents. Consequently, they claim, steps were taken to render it inactive and prevent a new group forming.[14] The sort of examples cited in support of this belief include the following. Since first appointed some three years ago, the 29 superintendents have never met alone as a group with their own agenda.[15] Their meetings have always been with other senior officers or

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Responses

13 "The Institute was always supportive. Senior Officers were members."

14 "Not really. Everyone was kept too busy."

15 "We met as a group for the first time on June 14, 1990, on the subject of the Memorandum of Agreement."

in small groups with a director of operations. In the early days of restructuring, these small groups met at separate venues. Moreover, the organisation of superintendents into four groups, each under a director of operations, was not on a geographical basis.[16] As a result the groups could not form a sense of regional identity and organise themselves accordingly. In short, say the superintendents, the whole process has been carefully managed to prevent them operating as a formal interest group and presenting a collective statement to the policy makers.[17] Typical comments were:

> "We meet as senior officers, not as superintendents. There is no forum for superintendents alone and that inhibits superintendents reviving the Superintendents Institute."
>
> "The Ministry wanted the new superintendents to be a part of the system, not a separate power base. It wanted the superintendents to have professional development rather than a professional association."
>
> "At the senior officer meetings the agenda is determined by the Executive; it's done deliberately to prevent district offices developing power bases."
>
> "We have never ever met as a group of thirty superintendents and four directors of operations. We've only met as a director of operations group of eight or as a senior officers' group."
>
> "We used to meet (before 1987) once a month as a total primary superintendency. Whilst there were differences, there was a groupness. Now we meet separately in our director of operations' groups. There is no geographical rationale. The power bases are divided, it's deliberate."

Responses

16 "I'm not sure whether a better geographical relationship would have made any difference. It shouldn't have been necessary. Identity needs to emerge from policy matters and the contribution of district superintendents to policy formulation." [In their restructuring, N.S.W., S.A., and Victoria grouped their districts/clusters into regions/areas on a geographical basis. Their directors of operations, in the form of regional/area directors are located in the regional office, not Central Office as in W.A.]

17 "Sounds paranoid to me."

> "The Superintendents Institute represented the senior officers of the Education Department. Then all superintendent jobs were abolished and existing people and others were invited to apply for 29 positions. The professional arm became controlled by people on high. It was a fear type thing. People went from permanent to acting and thought they may not get reappointed. So they became passive and didn't want to cross the management.. It's a matter of the past now. I wouldn't be surprised to see the professional arm form again. At present there is a series of informal networks which are not visible or recognised in a formal way."

> "There is a fear that the 29 superintendents will form a powerful group so a lot of deliberate strategies are employed to prevent the 29 getting together; for example, seven at one hotel, six at another place. Central Office makes sure we don't get together. If the 29 are got together, then it's for briefings, there's no scope for us to form a collective viewpoint on something and organise consensus. It's deliberately done and well done. We were told that the only way to get change is to keep everyone in a state of apprehension, to make everyone unsure. It worked but there would have been more acceptable, positive ways of making it work."

Most superintendents would like to see that situation change. In their view, the Ministry need no longer feel threatened by the re-establishment of a superintendents institute.[18] Indeed for some of them the thrust behind such a move would come more from an interest in their own professional development than from any urge to form a pressure group.

> "A superintendents institute doesn't need to play power games. It would be used more for professional exchange."

> "The immediate threat of superintendents bucking the system has gone because superintendents realise power goes through the director of operations system so the Ministry won't oppose superintendents forming a professional association, but it will be mainly for professional development.

Other superintendents pointed out that without an association of their own, they are industrially vulnerable.

> "We're under a five year contract. In two and half years times there may be a spill again."

Responses

18 "Recent further moves have been made."

> "We don't have an industrial arm to represent superintendents on salaries, etc. The old Superintendents Institute did. We are an isolated group within the public service; we have no say."
>
> "The top end (of the Ministry) are paranoid about us forming a power base. But we need a superintendents institute, not to shoot at the boss, but for a professional association to protect our interests against the government. We wouldn't be having a shot at our boss. If its unprofessional why do doctors have a professional arm? Take one issue - superannuation. If we go collectively to the CSA they'd fight it for us but if we go individually they won't."

Clearly, then, not all of the superintendents' reasons for wanting some form of professional organisation relate to their interest in gaining a greater say in policy development. Nevertheless, a desire for more effective representation on decision making committees does form a major part of their case for establishing a formal association.

> "Now and again, the Ministry samples the views of superintendents but it's only tokenism because a representative superintendent speaks as an individual not as a formal superintendents' representative who is able to say, 'The superintendents feel this way'."
>
> "The directors of operations aren't on all committees and any one of them only represents one quarter of the superintendents anyway. So representation of the superintendency by the directors of operations is not a satisfactory arrangement."
>
> "It's easy to provide superintendents with the opportunity to have input. A list of all committees of interest can be circulated to superintendents. Then they can be asked to list all the things we want to be proactive on, to make our opinion known on. If I'm the representative for the superintendents on a committee I just fax all superintendents before a meeting and take the results to the meeting. Fax, collect, and collate. It requires a professional time commitment."
>
> "We should ensure that there is a superintendent on every Ministry committee, that a pairing system is organised to fill absences, and that individuals adopt a process to adequately represent the opinions of the superintendency. That kind of representation should be set in place by the directors of operations"

A recent event represents a variation on some of these themes. Several months ago (June 1990) the country superintendents organised a meeting for

themselves. The agenda related to business matters for the superintendency in country districts and focussed on interdistrict sharing and the cost effectiveness of operations. According to one participant:

> "It was essentially a business meeting, but the appetite for collegiate sharing of issues beyond district operations has resulted in a planned August meeting of this group."

Closing Comments

In the management of a two tier education system, superintendents essentially perform a control rather than leadership function; they are guardians, not philosopher kings.[19] By definition and by deed, the people who exert most influence are those who: determine the overall structure and function of the system; shape the dominant ideology and culture; make the rules; formulate the broad goals, objectives, priorities, performance indicators, and policies; and develop the long range corporate and strategic plans. Superintendents do very little of this. They are supervisors and custodians of change rather than architects and captains of change.

Some superintendents have experienced difficulty coming to terms with what they see as a relegation of their role from a position of leadership to something less influential. A number of them described the process as involving a lengthy psychological adjustment. For example

> "I used to think, 'Why can't they make up their minds and tell us what our role is?' Then I realised it was too early for that and I became tolerant of the delay. Then I realised, 'Why do I need them to tell me?' The pieces of the puzzle were pre-determined in the Better Schools

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Responses

19 "The principals in this District expect and accept leadership. We share ideas - develop a team approach - and it works."

> Report. All one had to do was put them together. So I formed my own view and when I saw all the pieces come together I became comfortable. I accept my role now. I accept that creative leadership has been destroyed, though the principals still have it. I accept being a facilitator ..... The biggest problem of the superintendent's role is the limited scope for creative leadership, though helping principals with their school development plan may provide creative leadership for me. I'll have to wait and see."

Other superintendents, from the beginning of their appointment, had no problem accepting that they were role takers rather than role makers.

> "I need to know my director of operations' goals to help work out my goals and strategies. It's more or less a matter of saying to him, 'I'll try to accommodate you in achieving your goal. You're my boss'."

> "All the new superintendents are in the Ministry mode. The older ones disagree. The result is factionalisation."

> "The Ministry as an organisation has a right to set the parameters and superintendents have to accept the role as defined by the management. Superintendents know what they are applying for. If I hadn't liked it, I wouldn't have applied. In 1987 the superintendents applied for the job blind because there was no clear defined role - the top wasn't telling them and schools expected them to be like the old days."[16]

The next chapter documents a list of eight key accountability areas that the superintendents formulated for themselves. Interestingly, the list contains virtually nothing related to policy development; the focus is overwhelmingly on operations.[20]

Given the tensions outlined in this chapter, it is appropriate to end not with Plato but with Pericles of Athens. When speaking for the Open Society in about 430 B.C. he said, "Although only a few may originate a policy we are all able to judge it."

Responses

[20] "Why? Have we been brainwashed?"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SCHOOL TIER: DIFFERENCES THAT CAUSE DIFFICULTIES

Devolution gave schools more freedom to be self-managing and more responsibility to demonstrate accountability to the Ministry and the local community. It also gave principals the job of managing the implementation of those changes. These moves reflect two modern maxims: "let the managers manage; make them accountable." The reforms did more than simply charge principals with additional managerial tasks. They amplified the principal's role as change agent and instructional leader - a role made particularly necessary by the removal of superintendents from the business of supervising teachers and providing curriculum expertise.[1]

Within the context of these changes, it can be argued that the superintendent's job is predominently twofold: to support and audit schools; and to support and appraise principals.[2] Prior to 1990, superintendents were prevented from focussing on these roles by factors such as: the need to get district offices established; industrial action in schools; and some uncertainty within the superintendency about what was really expected of them. Those obstacles have now receded into the

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Responses

1 Superintendents were not completely removed from direct contact with classroom teachers: "merit promotion and unsatisfactory reports are just some examples of direct involvement." Another superintendent said, "It is interesting that the CEO has brought the Curriculum areas under the Operations mantle in the latest restructuring."

2 "I find it difficult to see the relationship between the word 'support' and the separation of the district superintendent from the district office as outlined on pages 16-20 earlier."

background. There seems to be a common understanding and agreement among superintendents that their role consists of the following tasks and time allocation:

Key Accountability Areas For District Superintendents

1. Ensures that effective audit and review processes are in place in schools so as to achieve educational outcomes consistent with Ministry priorities and policies and community expectations (25-50%).[3]

2. Ensures the effective performance management of school principals, including promotion by merit (25%).

3. Ensures the effective and efficient operation of the District Education Office (5-10%).

4. Ensures that procedures are in place for the effective resolution of conflict (5-10%).

5. Ensures the effective and efficient allocation of resources within the school district (5%).

6. Ensures that Ministry policies and other significant items of information are effectively communicated to schools, and that appropriate feedback is provided to Central Office regarding the functioning, climate and emerging issues within schools (5%).

7. Ensures the Ministry is effectively represented in the local community (5%).

8. Participates in performance management and professional development with the Director of Operations (5%).

This list was formulated by two groups of superintendents last year during a two day retreat at El Caballo Blanco. They did so partly by modifying the public service position data form. The major items are numbers one and two. Item one covers the support and audit of schools, as does part of items four and six. Two covers the support and appraisal of principals. The other items collectively add up to as little as one fifth of the

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Responses

[3] "The way this is worded, it seems that superintendents don't audit and review but only set up processes so that they can occur. I'm not, and never have been, in favour of this document."

superintendent's work. Three and five cover the audit of the district office referred to on page 18. The second part of item six covers the superintendent's role in policy making referred to in Chapter Two. Seven and eight are reminders that superintendents work for the centre tier.

On the basis of the superintendents' experience and observations over the past two and half years, a number of issues can be identified in relation to their support and audit functions. This chapter outlines those issues. There is no need to analyse what the functions involve; that has already been done in the recent Memorandum of Agreement and in material produced by the Organisation Development Unit. Also, an even more detailed set of practical guidelines should emerge from a pilot study currently being conducted by the Ministry entitled the 'Demonstrating Accountability Project'.

Internal versus External Review

Superintendents face the problem of having to carry out an auditing role in a context where, although industrially schools have agreed to educational auditing, the intellectual argument for that role has still not been comprehensively won - or understood. Some principals are not convinced that external monitoring of their school's performance is necessary.[4] They point out that universities and TAFE colleges have been allowed to manage themselves but are not made accountable. They know that senior high schools in Western Australia before 1987 were excluded

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Responses

4 "Particularly in large secondary schools or with recognised, top performing principals."

from triennial inspections by regional superintendents and operated without external reviews. They are aware that in Victoria there are no district superintendents or external audit agencies such as exist in South Australia, New South Wales, and New Zealand. They question where the push for educational auditing is coming from because they have run their schools for years without complaint from the local community. And they believe that while periodic public attacks on levels of literacy and numeracy may be allayed by the Demonstrating Accountability Project, the effect of the superintendents' audits will be negligible. Several comments by superintendents capture the viewpoint of these principals and indicate that even among the superintendency there are reservations about the efficacy and necessity of external auditing.

> "Where is the demand for audit coming from? What are we going to get out of auditing that will reassure the community? In the past the community never got any more information than it gets now."
>
> "Provided we produce quality principals and good curriculum leadership sense, then I don't think we need any greater assurances about student outcomes."
>
> "Is auditing a straw man? It was redundant for decades. It's now a fetish. How long will it last?"

Unconvinced principals regard auditing more as a mechanism for managing change than for increasing community confidence in educational standards. Consequently they see superintendents, not as agents of public accountability, but as instruments of centralist control. For industrial reasons, these principals will comply with the requirements of educational auditing, but not wholeheartedly. That will add to the difficulties confronting superintendents. It would help if more was done to win the intellectual argument for external monitoring and create a climate of acceptability within which the work of the superintendents could flourish. For their part, most superintendents accept the need for educational auditing, even if not unconditionally.

"I accept audit because it is necessary to give principals feedback."

"Once the principals are competent and committed to self evaluation, then the superintendents can withdraw. But there'll still be the need for accountability."

"If we had to choose, 50% of the superintendents would go for audit and 50% would go for educational leadership. The old primary superintendents would go for audit because that's their background and the old subject superintendents would go for leadership."[5]

"Auditing will be negotiated between superintendents and principals. It will be a shared thing, collegial. We always knew that would be our job."

"Auditing doesn't worry me providing I have other jobs like human relations type things; so long as I'm not an HMI or just operating from a filing cabinet in the back of the car."

"Schools have to be audited, but we should do it in a professional way."

"If we don't audit, then self-determining schools won't survive."

"I am the agent of accountability. I represent the Ministry."

School Consultant versus System Auditor

In South Australia and New South Wales, the district superintendent provides a consultancy service to help schools conduct internal reviews of their performance. External reviews of schools are carried out by independent panels under the leadership of a central education review unit. In Western Australia, the external review is conducted by the same person who helps schools with their internal review - the district superintendent.

Responses

5 "What about the 30% new superintendents?"

"Wow!! What an unfounded generalisation."

Clearly, the West Australian model is cheaper,[6] and it allows for an educational audit of each school every year. In South Australia and New South Wales, schools receive a three day visit by a team of external reviewers only once every four or five years. Annual, or even biennial, visits would require a massive increase in the size of the external review unit. Apart from the expense, the sheer size of the expanded unit would convey overtones of heavy central control - something inimical to devolution.

There is another advantage of the West Australian model. The integration of consultancy with auditing allows district superintendents to monitor schools in a more ongoing, developmental, collegial, formative, and remedial manner than can be achieved by a central audit and review agency. Superintendents are aware of these advantages.

> "Thirty superintendents accepted the role assuming their job was more formative than summative. If auditing is summative then it is potentially creating a higher level of risk because schools will have done things before the judgements are made and 'preventative medicine' can't be practised. If you know the history of the patient, then that collectively is the audit. It's a lot easier to deal with little issues if they are dealt with on an ongoing basis. It's hard to suddenly undo big aggregated issues."
>
> "As data is collected, if it's given to superintendents progresssively rather than at the end of the year, then it's better because schools can make adjustments before it gets to be too late."
>
> "With auditing the school development plan, each visit is monitoring. If I'm coming in as a part of ongoing support and consultation, then the end of year audit is only a formality."
>
> "To carry out the audit and review role, I'll be in schools more. It is possible to decrease the judgemental and negative terms by having them negotiated and shared. I'm

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Responses

6 "This is apparent with the publication of the percentage the W.A. Government allocates to education; that is, much less than other states."

> there not as a policeman but in a positive supportive role to help achieve objectives. As a bottom line I might have to say, 'These problems need addressing.' But there won't be any surprises and we'll develop common strategies to address them and use some district resources. It's hard to convince principals that they stand to gain, not lose, by this process. However, if someone is not doing the right thing, then I shouldn't back off, and I can't exclude the old time hardliners."

The Western Australian model, however, contains a potential danger. If superintendents play a consultancy role during the formulation stage of school development plans, their objectivity may be compromised when it comes to endorsing them. A similar concern existed in New Zealand before 1988 because the department's inspectors had advisory and regulatory roles which were sometimes in conflict. Evidently an inspector was required to approve the organisational outline of a school and then inspect that school and report on its programmes and educational outcomes. "The same inspector may also have run in-service training courses or been called upon by the principal for advice and guidance. However, the educational outcomes may have been influenced by deficiences in the inspector's advice or by weaknesses in the organisation outline she or he approved" (Picot 1988:30).

Individual schools may not see this conflict as being detrimental to their interests because, unlike appraising principals for merit promotion, superintendents are not required to rank schools on a graduated scale of 1-5. Satisfying community demands for accountability, though, is another matter. A problem may arise if public and professional confidence in the auditing process is weakened by a perception that the superintendent's objectivity is compromised by having to simultaneously perform "advisory and regulatory roles."

One way around this conflict is to restrict the superintendent's role to that of either auditing or providing consultation. Another is for superintendents to perform both roles but limit the support function to

providing principals with information, clarification, and materials on Ministry policy: essentially this is the stance taken in the Memorandum of Agreement. A third option is to ensure that full consultation with principals occurs in a fashion that does not leave the superintendent responsible for the outcome. For example, according to one superintendent:

> "The functions of educational leadership and audit can be a contradiction - like an accountant auditing his own books. If I work with a principal to construct a framework to audit, then I risk basically auditing myself. My problem was: how could I audit what I'd helped to structure because there would be a conflict of interests. I would be disposed to positively audit because a negative audit would be a condemnation of myself. So I reversed it - principals made the decisions and had the power. My role was to influence those decisions. That inverted the usual picture people had and made me feel better about auditing because the principal made the decisions. I said, 'You can do it that way but are you prepared for these consequences'. I pointed out that they had freedom to choose but not freedom to choose the consequences. The process of auditing then became a simple one and was not a conceptual problem of auditing myself."

Professional Development versus Performance Appraisal

Most superintendents in Western Australia agree that part of their job is to ensure "the effective performance management of school principals, including promotion by merit."

Performance management encompasses professional development and performance appraisal. Insofar as principals make or break a school, the level of support they receive and the monitoring of their work have always been important. The Better Schools Report bestowed an added sense of urgency to the delivery of those services. It made schools the primary units of change and principals the lynchpin in the new structure. Consequently the work of superintendents in supervising principals occupies an important place in the new system. It also presents a number of problems.

The Picot Report claimed that the role of adviser and the role of assessing performance can be in conflict and should therefore be conducted separately. It argued along these lines. Superintendents are required to give advice to principals - but these principals are subsequently visited by the same superintendent for an appraisal leading to the issue of a personal report. Because the personal report is vital to their chances of winning promotion, principals feel reluctant to admit to deficiences about their leadership when these concerns could later be reflected in the personal report made by the superintendent.[7] The less principals disclose their real difficulties, the less the superintendent can provide real support. A number of superintendents alluded to a tension within the dual role of supporter and assessor.

> "The superintendent's role is developmental, not judgemental - though superintendents will say to a weak principal, 'Go and pull up your socks, do courses, or we'll sack you'."
>
> "An adverse report could be used to settle a conflict of interests with a principal. But if principals know this is a possibility will they be up front at the beginning in declaring goals, needs etc at a performance management interview? Will they take risks or play it safe and not open up? The old system was a game of hide and seek. The principals would hide their inadequacies and say to the inspector, 'Find them if you can'. Now the superintendent can say to principals, 'If you have inadequacies declare them and I'll help you, but if you fail I'll have to take that into account.' In the old system the superintendent didn't help principals overcome inadequacies."
>
> "There is a conflict between developing principals and appraising them. The principal has the same problem with his staff."
>
> "Superintendents build up the self esteem of principals by being encouraging and not pointing out weaknesses. If you are honest at the beginning and tell a principal, 'You're fairly weak', the principal might lose heart. If you lie and say 'You're strong', and the principal fails at the end, then the principal feels misled."

Responses

7 "The smarter ones realise they get 'brownie points' by successfully solving problems. So a few get set up and solved very effectively."

> "The principals need pastoral care. Some have poor houses, wives in Perth, and get sick. They need the superintendent for support so in a way I'm the parent of 25-30 kids - principals who need some TLC and who need to be constantly patted on the back. There needs to be more in the field of liaison to get to know them. But it's difficult because we have to write a report on them for promotion and the new performance management system. That will force superintendents to relinquish the pastoral care role because we have to audit the principals. We're human too. We like the pastoral care role. That's why the Executive thought of bringing us back to Central Office - so we don't get too close to the principals, so we can be impartial."

Another type of tension can arise when the same person has to be both supporter and assessor. Self-determining schools require self-determining principals.[8] To achieve that objective, the superintendent/principal relationship must not be characterised by paternalism and dependence. As one superintendent explained:

> "The old system bred principals who said, 'Tell me what to do and I'll do it to perfection and therefore aren't I a good principal'. Under the new system, principals are not supposed to be told what to do; there are to be no clones."

But in practice, the superintendent is still seen as both advisor and judge. Consequently,

> "Principals ask, 'Give me a list of deficits,' because then they tick them off and say, 'I'm a top operator,' and they twist my arm to give the A+ mark."

These tensions[9] do not arise if the superintendent/principal relationship is collegial, non-threatening, and characterised by openness

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Responses

8 "I would argue that a self-determining principal is an obstruction. Self-determining schools require a principal who can facilitate and guide the process."

"Self-determining schools do not require self-determining principals. In fact if we have self-determining principals we may have principals dictating what he/she wants. This is far from the expressed philosophy of self-determining schools."

9 "The same dichotomy occurs with the performance management of district superintendents and the directors of operations."

and trust. According to performance management theory, that type of relationship can be developed if both parties reach early agreement on the principal's job goals, performance outcomes, inservice training needs, and the level of support required to meet those needs. Appraisal then takes place in terms of outcomes rather than inputs: that is, in terms of achieving performance objectives rather than the principal's behaviour, personality, or occupational character traits; or, in terms of "the extent to which the principal has been able to raise the performance of the school through effective problem solving rather than what the principal actually did" (Organisation Development Unit 1989:9). In this way the process of supporting and appraising principals parallels the process of supporting and auditing schools. However, as mentioned earlier, there is a crucial difference. Whereas superintendents only have to declare the performance of schools to be satisfactory or unsatisfactory, they have to rank the performance of principals applying for promotion on a five point scale. Since the mark makes a significant difference to an applicant's career prospects, the non-judgemental, non-threatening nature of the superintendent/principal relationship is placed at risk.

Lack of time, say the superintendents, also impedes the development of a collegial relationship with principals based on openness and trust.[10] They consider that a satisfactory performance management programme for 25-30 principals can not be supervised by one superintendent. Apparently research recommends about eight as the maximum. For that reason the superintendents believe directors of operations are able to make

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Responses

10 "Has anyone analysed the amount of time a country district superintendent spends in a vehicle or plane? Often in our own time!"

performance management work for them, though even then there are some reservations.

> "Another part of the cultural change is performance management based on the public service model: goal setting, personal development, ascertaining needs in relation to school development. But it depends on a superordinate-subordinate relationship of one to five. It works with the director of operations and seven superintendents but not with one superintendent and 28 principals."
>
> "The good book say 6-8 maximum. I have to work with 30 principals on performance management."
>
> "Middle management theory says the supervisory ratio should be 1:8. Superintendents have a ratio of 1:30 schools. That makes our work superficial and inadequate and it will remain that way until an alternative has been found."
>
> "I'll be canvassing my own staff and principals for feedback on my performance. The director of operations won't have time. He's off site, the same as I'm off site for the principals."
>
> "The performance management system is new. It won't work in the true sense however because my director of operations won't know me well enough. He'll be battling to see me once in action each year."

The requirement to appraise teachers as well as principals for merit promotion exacerbates the shortage of time. There is an expectation among the superintendency that reforms to the merit promotion system will relieve them of having to inspect and report on staff other than principals, and that more of the onus will be placed on applicants to establish their own case for promotion.

> "Last year (1989) one superintendent had more reports to write than days to do it in. The sets of applications come in waves. You have to complete one set by a deadline before the next set comes in. It takes at least a day for each person who applies. It's okay when assessing principals because we see them through professional development but with teachers it's more difficult because we haven't seen them and we have to verify all the evidence and claims made."
>
> "Superintendents assess principals applying for promotion. It's time consuming and lacks comparability and moderation. How my colleagues do it in another district I've no idea. We get no feedback from the Promotion Board. How does the Board assess my rating of principals?"

"Superintendents can't do both - auditing and merit promotion of all principals and teachers. The superintendents should only write reports on principals. But if principals did the superintendent's role of writing reports on teachers then the principal would become overloaded and would have to be relieved of some duties. Perhaps no one should write reports and we could do what the public service does and applicants could write their own reports."

"The projected percentages are 30% accountability and 5% promotion by merit. At present the figures are reversed. I spend 30% on promotion by merit and 5% on accountability. The number of applications should be restricted. We need filters and smarter merit promotion based on a performance management programme."

The tensions that arise when the same person acts in an advisory and regulatory capacity are not confined to superintendents.[11] Some people argue that they apply equally to the principal/teacher and teacher/pupil relationships. However, is the comparison valid? Are superintendents supposed to be instructional leaders of principals in the same way that principals and teachers are for their subordinates?[12] Should the professional development component of performance management be mandatory, or, supervised by superintendents only on request from the principals? If mandatory, does it then become more an instrument of Central Office control rather than professional development? Within a system of self determining schools, should not principals be allowed - indeed, encouraged - to choose their own provider of professional development?

Responses

11 "This 'friend and enemy' distinction does not fit my experience. The schools accept my dual role. A friend of mine is in the central audit unit in New Zealand. She has some grave concerns because with the disappearance of the district superintendent there is no system support at all for principals."

12 "I question the term 'instructional' rather than 'educational leadership.' It worries me that if superintendents are seen to lose their educational expertise they lose their credibility too."

Principal Performance versus School Performance

Should superintendents assess the performance of principals in terms of the performance of their schools?[13] If the school development plan fails has the principal failed? Those questions divide the superintendency and the broader educational community.

Advocates for keeping the appraisal of principals and schools separate argue that principals should not be held accountable for outcomes beyond their control. And, they say, the key factors affecting the success of a school are outside the control of principals. For instance, principals have little control over the type of pupils who attend their school and the quality of teachers apppointed to their staff. Furthermore they are stuck with a wide range of centrally determined policies, frameworks, and regulations that shape the operation and outcomes of their schools. To take a small example: how can principals be held accountable for the image of their school in the community if regulations prevent them making school uniforms compulsory?

'Separationists' point out that the complexity of some school communities makes it very difficult to assess whether the school is successful or not. However, they say, that does not prevent the performance of principals in these schools being assessed. Supervisors who observe principals in action can rate various aspects of their work without knowing details of the school's performance. For instance, the Ministry's merit promotion application form asks referees to do just

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Responses

13 "I don't believe we are assessing. We are auditing the quality of the planning in the schools to meet the perceived needs. This includes the audit of the use of resources and the development of participatory decision making."

that on a wide range of points under the headings of communication, decision-making, educational leadership, and management skills.

'Separationists' also argue that judging principals by the success of the school development plan will encourage them to take on an unhealthy sense of personal ownership of that plan instead of trying to foster genuine community involvement. For example, one superintendent said that in his district, a lot of time was spent during principals' conferences exploring the notion of performance appraisal and trying to get principals to see that their role was distinct from the school development plan.

> "Some of them, in fact most of them, saw themselves as being appraised in terms of the success or failure of the school development plan. If that was the case, it was logical that they would tend to want the school development plan to be a statement that they had created and made - in short, if they were to hang for something, then it had to be something they wanted to hang for. It became clear to a lot more of the principals that the school development plan is a statement made by and belonging to the school and performance appraisal is about appraising the role that the principal has in managing the school development plan."

On the other hand, those in favour of appraising principals in terms of their school's performance argue that assessment should be based on outputs, not inputs. If that does not occur then principals will be judged on the trappings of management rather than on their efficiency and effectiveness;[14] principals will be judged on things like dress, zeal, industry, and leadership style rather than on whether they are making a significant difference to the operational performance of the school in achieving its stated objectives. That, in turn, could lead to bizarre judgements equivalent to: "The operation was successful but the patient

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Responses

14 "You can be fabulously efficient and effective at completing tasks which are totally irrelevant to the school's purposes. Unless that is recognised, principals will be judged on their competency to carry out tasks rather than their contribution to the stated educational outcomes of the school" (a reference group member).

died"; and, "The teacher performed beautifully but the pupils learned nothing."[15] It could lead also to the promotion of those who "look good rather than produce the goods."

Moreover, the principal is the chief executive officer of the school and has ultimate on-site responsibility for how well the school is doing. As such, he or she can not escape the requirement that, "Those who exercise power and responsibility on behalf of others must expect to have their performance monitored and be accountable for what they have achieved" (Picot 1988:60). Accountability here does not mean being subjected to judgemental assessment or being held responsible for factors outside the principal's control. It means being able to account for what happened. It means being able to show that decisions to improve a school's performance were made in a rigorous fashion - that is, "based on proper monitoring, with appropriate benchmarks, following a collaborative problem solving process, and with due regard to Ministry policy" (Organisation Development Unit 1989:3). In other words, accountability does not mean assessing how well schools solve problems but how they go about generating strategies to solve their problems - a process for which principals can legitimately be held responsible. Thus, say some superintendents:

Responses

15 "True up to a point. But it begs questions. The operation on the bowel for the removal of a cancerous growth was immaculate and successfully achieved. Unfortunately the patient died of a massive stroke. That is not a bizarre judgement. It's a fact. I guess the point is to distinguish between that which a principal/teacher can and cannot be held accountable for. I have trouble seeing how a teacher performing beautifully could have a class full of kids who learned nothing. Even a teacher performing badly can be credited with teaching kids something - even if it's all negatives"

> "Performance management of principals, and school development plan support, complement each other; they can't be done in isolation. The principals know I'm appraising them all the time."
>
> "You can't divorce principal appraisal from school appraisal.
>
> "Auditing has introduced another card into the pack. Principals now get brownie points for making mistakes, for being up front with the problem and showing they know how to solve it."
>
> "If outcomes haven't changed, the superintendent doesn't declare the school inefficient but encourages the school to question the method of getting there. That could be compromised by principals seeking merit promotion; that is, principals could see failure of school outcomes as being judged as failure as a principal."

Secondary versus Primary Schools

Most superintendents consider that their support and review roles are more difficult to carry out in secondary than in primary schools. Tradition is partly responsible here. Under the pre-1987 structure, senior high schools had little to do with the regional offices. The secondary principals tended to deal directly with the Director General and the Director of Schools while the senior masters operated through the subject superintendents from Head Office. It was the primary schools that used the regional resources and were triennially inspected by the superintendents.

> "Primary principals objected to the extra duties mainly because of the fear of being found wanting. They weren't worried about the workload. It was the anxiety of being incompetent because they were dependent on the regional superintendent and were constrained and the superintendents shouldered the responsibility. Now they are seeing they do have freedom and they are less resistant to being audited than secondary principals."
>
> "The secondary principals were not accountable because they had no triennial inspections. They did their own thing."
>
> "The senior high schools buck more because they are not used to it."

> "Previously senior high school principals had direct access to the Director General. They were disdainful to subject superintendents. Some senior high school principals are still anti-superintendents because they doubt our expertise."

During the early '80s, secondary generalist superintendents were appointed to regional offices. Apparently, they made little impact because their role was less defined, understood, and accepted than the primary superintendents. According to a reference group member: "When the secondary generalist superintendents were appointed no one knew what they were going to do. They had to eke out a role for themselves. One of them told me that they were roving confidants for first year teachers. They would roll up to a school, announce their presence, and wait for teachers to come and talk to them. Their role should have been more active. The district superintendent role is a bit like a grander secondary generalist superintendent." The present superintendents would agree with some, if not all of that statement.

> "The notion of the generalist superintendent - secondary, was introduced and seen as equivalent to primary superintendents but its relationship to the subject superintendents was never defined. It was a nebulous pot."

> "The secondary generalist superintendent came out about 1980-1. No one seemed to know their role. They felt a sense of frustration in that teachers felt they owed their loyalty to subject superintendents - they had the power and expertise."

The current district structure does little to attract the interests of secondary schools. Most districts have only a few senior high schools and some as few as one. Therefore, secondary principals often find district principals' conferences less collegial and relevant than do their primary counterparts.[16]

Responses

16 "In country districts, secondary principals are newly promoted and eager for training."

Senior high schools have less need for superintendents to monitor their performance than is the case with primary schools; they have inbuilt auditing mechanisms in the form of TEE results and SEA subject moderation and certification.[17]

Secondary schools are large, less child-centred, and more fragmented by subject departments. Those characteristics have impeded progress on school development in the past. For example, a reference group member pointed out that, "Secondary generalist superintendents were based on the notion that there was an entity about a school and their role was to help find and enhance that entity. The problem was most secondary schools didn't have a distinct entity, they only had subject entities." Similar comments were made by the superintendents.

> "The primary schools were used to being treated as a school as a whole. They put up no resistance to school development because they were on the verge of getting it in place. The secondary schools are fragmented because the different faculties make it hard to get school vision, purpose, priorities. They used to be funded direct from Head Office."
>
> "The high schools are behind on school development compared with the primary schools. They used to have subject superintendents. Now they say the district office staff don't provide much. We have 7.5 staff, of whom only 4.5 are directly available to schools, so we can't match what they used to have."

For a number of reasons, superintendents have more difficulty establishing their credentials in senior high schools. Secondary principals tend to have higher status in the community and more subject

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Responses

17 "Only for Upper School. What about Years 8-10?"

> "I doubt the efficacy of this. What careful analysis is done? By whom? With what results? Even the data can be rationalised away given a close knowledge of the events."

specialist academic qualifications than their primary counterparts. They are less convinced that superintendents can offer much in the way of relevant experience and expertise - particularly when the superintendents are recruited from primary backgrounds.[18] This is not to say that superintendents accept that judgement.

> "High schools think they are superior because they are larger, have more money, and kids doing Year 12 exams. They have a nonchalent, superior manner, and large egos, and see themselves as the most important cog in the system. They can affect the culture of the district."
>
> "I haven't any high school subject expertise but I have process skills and management expertise so I don't have any conflicts or hang ups about going into secondary schools."
>
> "The only way to keep in touch with high schools is to sit in with subject departments. I'll go to fortnightly social studies meetings at (.....) senior high school to find out how a faculty gets access to the school grant and fits in with school priorities. But this is not a big point. I have more difficulty keeping in touch with the Ministry."
>
> "I go into classrooms for teacher morale purposes - to provide teachers with the link they believe they lost; that is, someone other than the principal to discuss their own performance and aspirations with. This only happens at the primary level; I get into every primary classroom but never below the level of senior teachers in high schools."
>
> "The power of the superintendent has changed from overt to influential. The span of control has increased. It goes from K-12. In the old days it was from 1-7. That tests one's credibility, particularly for primary superintendents when they talk with senior high school principals. Because of our lack of expertise we have to shut up."[18]

Responses

18 "Generally this is true. But it depends a lot on the district superintendent's style. There is a district superintendent/secondary school agenda; the district superintendent has to define it and be assertive."

"I disagree. I have a totally primary background but find high schools are ready to discuss their development and the planning process."

Closing Comment

Clearly, the role of the superintendent can vary according to how the issues outlined in this chapter are resolved. Further variation will occur if the issues are settled on a district by district basis rather than in a way that applies uniformly across the board. That raises the question of how the interests of a system of self determining schools are best served on this matter - by variation or by uniformity? Two superintendents gave answers to that question.

> "At least in the initial stage I would suspect that variation was the way to go. Perhaps the time is now ripe for some uniformity."

> "Both will exist. Variation will exist because of interpersonal links and variations in superintendent/ principal relationships. Uniformity will exist in terms of: audit and review happening, time-lines, Ministry policy and directives, compliance with Memorandum of Agreement implementation, and references to common 'standard' goals."

CHAPTER FIVE

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TIERS

Ideally, a system of self-determining schools is characterised by unity within diversity. That is, all schools accept a basic minimum set of centrally determined core values, goals, and priorities, but beyond that they exercise freedom to develop their own structures and sub-cultures. When those conditions prevail, Central Office and schools work in harmony with each other and a two tier system becomes pluralistic rather than monolithic in nature.

Over the past three years in Western Australia relations between the two tiers have not always been marked by mutual trust, respect, and support. Instead of peaceful co-existence there have been significant periods of suspicion, rancour, and conflict. The bases of the discord are historical, industrial, and ideological. They bring into question the possibility of ever reaching the ideal of unity within diversity. They also make certain demands upon the role of the superintendent.

Historical Basis of Division

No one should have been surprised by the radical reforms proposed in the Better Schools Report. They were clearly foreshadowed in the events leading up to 1987. The press for school-based decision-making groups had been fostered by the Australian Schools Commission during the '70s, the Teachers Union campaign for democratic decision making in the '80s, the Beazley Report in 1984, and the Education Department pilot studies on

community participation in 1985. The progression towards full scale merit promotion began in the early '80s and was pushed along by the Beazley Report. The same can be said for principals determining the permanency of new teachers. During the 1980's, Annual Reports of the Education Department announced moves to promote more corporate management. The first restructuring of Head Office took place in 1986. The well publicised work of the Functional Review Committee in reorganising other departments began in 1984. The blueprint for modernizing all government departments, 'Managing Change in the Public Sector', was published in 1986. And most of the 1985-6 editions of The Western Teacher and The W.A. Education News contained accounts of plans to introduce the new directions for schools announced in the Better Schools Report.

Yet, when the Better Schools Report was released, many people in the education system felt ambushed and violated. They accused the management of hatching the Report in secrecy, failing to consult with the rank and file, and deliberately releasing the Report while teachers were away on Christmas holidays. One event in particular caused deep dismay and outrage. Immediately prior to the release of the report, some 75 superintendents were addressed at a meeting in Central Office, told that their permanency had been revoked, and informed that at the end of the year they would have to apply in open competition for jobs in the new structure. The move was widely condemned as an entirely inappropriate way to treat officers who had served the Department loyally for many years. Rumours that subject seniors in high schools and principals might meet with a similar fate added to the anger. Furthermore, school staff were incensed by what they saw as the politicisation and corporatisation of their system, the hypocrisy of introducing bottom up reforms by top down edicts, and the imposition of new duties without the provision of adequate resources. In short, the manner in which the radical restructuring took

place in 1987 seriously injured relations between the schools and Central Office.

During 1988 and '89, this division between the two tiers hijacked the role of the superintendents. Instead of focussing on quality control, they became agents of damage control. As the front line Ministry officers in the field they served as punching bags, absorbing the anger of people who hit out against the Central Office. Much of their time was spent trying to defuse discontent, present schools with the human face of the Ministry, and repair the cracks in trust. The superintendents also functioned as apologists for the system. They had to. The rationale for radical change presented in the Better Schools Report was limited to a one page set of bald assertions. Not surprisingly, when superintendents decribe their work they make comments such as:

> "The district superintendent's role is one of team building and damage control of morale at all levels."
>
> "The superintendent's major role is to fix the bridges that have been destroyed. We have to explain to the principals why the Ministry has made changes and convince them that it is good. It's hard."
>
> "Lately we've been told by our directors of operations that we have to show teachers the Ministry does care. But superintendents can't really do this, the Ministry has to do it.
>
> "If superintendents become just auditors, who will assure teachers that the Ministry cares?"
>
> "All the explanations since 1987 have been about what was going to happen, not why it was going to happen. There was no attempt to win the hearts."
>
> "An early lesson for me was that I was expected to explain and support Central Office policies and plans when I had no input to these and very little understanding of them and no professional development to do the work. I waited, searched for more information, contacted more people. I think the principals in the district felt disadvantaged because they were not up-to-date as quickly as others."
>
> "There is no reality to auditing; it's a dreamworld. We have to be totally capable of living with ambivalence. Central Office just doesn't know. The principals and teachers hatred of Central Office is real and interesting."

> "I'm aware of the gap between me and the schools. There is buyers' resistance to change out there."
>
> "Many of the new 29 metro superintendents have paid the top price for the System's inept implementation of massive changes. In schools, 'Better Schools' is associated with 'blood on the toga' and the career ambitions of non-educationists in Central Office."

What made this reconciliatory role heavy work for some superintendents was that they themselves had serious reservations about the way the reforms took place. The reservations do not end there. They extend to some current Central Office practices and standpoints.

> "Philosophically I'm in favour of direction. I don't think any major, long term strategic grand plan has been set up by the Ministry. It is just groping its way forward. The Ministry spouts forward planning as the preferred practice, but it just hasn't been happening. There is a gap between rhetoric and reality. It's 'do as I say, not do as I do' which decreases the effectiveness of the change. The Ministry is not practising what it preaches. It's still a top down process. Better Schools is in its fourth year now and there is nothing radically new."
>
> "I have to be honest with principals. If I protect the Central Office against poor methodology then I lose an investmment. For example, the release of news of the new Chief Executive Officer. We could have been told about it at the senior officers' meeting. Instead we read about it in the press the next morning. If we protect the Ministry then a 'them and us' attitude will develop and principals will lose confidence."
>
> "My view is more cautious. I get less excited because I've seen the politics and the Ministry's rhetoric. I'm not cynical, just a hardened veteran. I've been through lots of changes. I realise how difficult changing a bureaucratic organisation is. The future of the Ministry is no where as likely to happen as readily as some people might suggest. When people say, 'This is the grand plan, this is the vision' I temper that - we'll never reach it.
>
> "My experience in curriculum change scenarios is that change requires a change in the way people perceive things. Unless you get to people's hearts and minds and start explaining how they win from participating in a new system, unless that is done first, then any change is shallow and short lived.
>
> "Superintendents are locked into a role which is a reflection of poor change implementation by Central Office. The resources were not looked at nor were the industrial expectations."

"2000 years of experience walked out the door three years ago."

"The perceived sacking of loyal and competent superintendents is part of the organizational folklore. This scepticism is also on the current superintendents' informal discussion agendas. This weakens the organisation."

"The Ministry is trying to effect changes in the processes and structures before changing values and attitudes and personal perceptions. They haven't been addressed because of naiveity and political expediencies. There have been a lot of junior people involved in the change planning.

"The Executive never workshopped the Better Schools Report with us. The senior officers need a residential two day course on the philosophy behind it to develop greater commitment."

"The idea of the Better Schools Report was to de-resource Central Office. But in practice Central Office hasn't been streamlined. There is still centralist thinking and influence on professional development, the school development operation, and industrial areas - the Human Resources Directorate are preventing changes occurring."

With the passing of time, it is possible that the wounds will heal and changes in the organisation's culture will catch up to the structural reform. When that stage is reached, the superintendents will no longer be required to play the role of shock absorber, punching bag, system apologist, corporate missionary, damage controller, and agent of deep coping.

Industrial Basis of Division

One source of division between the two tiers that is unlikely to disappear with the passing of time is the conflict of interests that traditionally exists between management and labour. Central Office executives, directors, and managers are judged by the Ministry's level of productivity in relation to the level of resources available. That applies particularly in times of economic rationalism when added

importance is attached to efficiency and effectiveness, and when new needs have to be met not by increasing resources but by redistributing existing ones. For school staff, resource restructuring should mean different work, not extra work. Different work, however, is often seen by staff as constituting a threat to their interests, particularly if it involves retraining and the risk of failure - without any compensatory rewards.

For much of the time, the inherent conflict of industrial interests between the two tiers lies dormant. Last year (1989) in Western Australia it erupted into a statewide dispute. On a smaller scale, industrial unrest can occur within an individual school over matters such as replacing asbestos roofs. Moreover, conflict does not always directly involve teaching staff - disputes can arise between Central Office and groups such as school cleaners.

Generally, the superintendents are not required to play a conciliatory role during disputes between Central Office and schools. So far they have been largely, though not entirely, side-lined by both groups. To some extent it has been recognised that any involvement by them would compromise their credentials to provide principals with collegial support upon settlement of the conflict.[1] On the other hand, superintendents do experience discomfort during disputes. In some cases, they are unsure of their role. In other cases they find themselves the meat in the sandwich.

> "I investigated some Ministry phone calls about principals during industrial unrest and I had to tell some principals they'd got it wrong. But I didn't influence or victimize anyone. I didn't push the party line. I allowed a conscience vote."
>
> "I sat in the staffroom (of a school) during a union meeting. I was invited to stay as an observer. Some superintendents would not have received that invitation."

Responses

1 "A bit weak. It's more because we have no power in decisions on these matters (settling disputes) and everyone knows that."

"The schools and Union said, 'We are not part of the Ministry.' The directors of operations and Central Office said, 'We are part of the Ministry.' The superintendents had to tread a delicate line - gently. They made it clear where they stood but left the principals alone. And most principals didn't go out of their way to make it into a confrontation with the superintendents. So after it was over, it was easier for superintendents and principals to come together because neither made the other side difficult during the dispute."

"The principals wanted to know, 'Are you on our side or the Ministry's side'?"

" 'Whose side are you on?' That came out in the strike a lot. We were the meat in the sandwich. Central Office expected corporate loyalty from us and said, 'You are the employer's representative in the field and you will send in notes of who doesn't attend meetings'."

"In 1989, teachers united with principals against the common enemy. This year they are challenging principals."

"The cleaners dispute was a crisis time. No direction comes from Central Office about what role superintendents play in these times. Should superintendents visit schools and give moral support? Do I have a role talking to teachers about the cleaners strike? The directors of operations should give superintendents advice on these things. I didn't want Central Office endorsement. I just wanted helpful advice. I had to rely on gut level intuition. We're constantly thinking on our feet in this job and negotiating our role because there is no history to it."

Ideological Basis of Division

To the extent that a centralized, authoritarian, paternalistic system of educational administration produces dependence and conformity, there is little tension between the centre and the schools. To the extent that a corporate management structure is based on a recentralization/ decentralization dualism, it contains the ingredients for continual conflict between the two tiers.

Ideologically, the conflict between schools and the Central Office can be conceptualised in several forms. It can be seen as the outcome of attempts to strike a balance between general dichotomies such as: freedom

versus authority, independence versus conformity, and needs of the individual versus needs of the state. It can spring from the two tiers having different opinions on the composition of the common core of values, goals and priorities that Central Office sets for schools. It can take the form of schools disagreeing with Central Office over what counts as being inconsistent with Ministry policy and regulations. It can result from some schools interpreting self-determination as complete autonomy and resenting any interference from outsiders - particularly Central Office. According to superintendents,

> "Fifty percent of the principals say, 'Disband the district office and give us the money.' They don't want anyone challenging them. They are authoritarian."
>
> "Some principals want to be totally autonomous. They don't even want the Ministry."
>
> "Schools are not autonomous and never can be. The Executive overstated the case. It gave the wrong impression to schools. Schools are only self-determining in how they will go about things but even then within constraints like industrial agreements - and rulings on things like school uniforms and teaching English."

In relation to this constant struggle, superintendents are agents of the centre, not the schools. As such they have the task of ensuring that conflict is resolved in a way that does not compromise the Ministry's definition of the situation. At the same time they have a responsibility to encourage schools to be self-determining. The result, as one superintendent observed, is that:

> "Superintendents have to identify acceptable shades of grey. We are moderators and have the authority to say, 'That is acceptable and that is unacceptable.' Almost weekly, principals challenge our authority to intervene on a range of things. And each week I have to counsel a principal on the wisdom of his judgement on day to day management decisions which in themselves are not major educational decisions but which collectively could be disastrous if not checked.
>
> The alternative is to have detailed regulations, but these wouldn't allow for discretion and shades of grey - the world isn't that simple, it's not black and white. The grey nature of human relationships means that boundaries are always shifting on personal and local issues. We need

> to make judgements relative to cases. We need to identify the range of tolerance. If a principal steps outside the range of tolerance and there is an adverse reaction, the superintendent has to make a decision. The superintendent's role is concerned with monitoring and testing the shades of grey."

Closing Comment

The work of superintendents would be easier if the divisions referred to in this chapter did not exist. And that would be the case if most people in Central Office had their wish. They take a consensus view of the state education system. They believe there is no inherent conflict of interest between the two tiers or between groups within each tier. They say to schools, "We are all the Ministry, the Ministry is all of us, there is no Them and Us."[2] However, those are statements of a preferred position rather than statements of social reality. The fact is that many people in schools believe the Ministry is Central Office.[3] They believe that institutionalised differences in power, rewards, and opportunities within the system make some members feel less valued than others. In their view as long as these differences exist, individuals and groups will be divided not only by unequal conditions but also by unequal loyalty and commitment. Or, as several superintendents said:

> "The issue of corporate identity and the 'them and us' mentality will remain a problem until people in Central Office realise that they work in the Central Office of the Education Ministry and not in the Education Ministry."

Responses

2 "The Ministry consists of three parts - Central Office, district offices, and schools. I believe that schools are the most important part of the Ministry, certainly not Central Office or district offices."

3 "So do people in Central Office."

> "The politics of a bureaucracy the size of ours involves 'knowledge as power' still. This keeps alive: the belief that things still run top down because all the knowledge is in Central Office; field personnel feeling subservient to and dependent on Central Office; and the conviction that little in the field is important or relevant to the direction setting and policy creation of the system. Maybe this is a set of perceptions felt more keenly by country personnel."

One response to these divisions would be to to allow schools to opt out of the system and sever links with Central Office so that the two tiers would not be forced into conflict with each other. Another approach is to accept constant tension between the two tiers as an inevitable fact of life and temper expectations about removing it accordingly; and, as one superintendent said, "use the conflict as a means of producing alternative possible solutions."

CHAPTER SIX

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S POWER IN RELATION TO PRINCIPALS

"In fact, superintendents are the prime agents of change. If I hadn't pushed and said, 'I'm coming back to check,' then there would have been no change. Eighty percent of change comes from the superintendents and the district office, not the principals."

"A significant number of principals have some intent on changing but they'll acquiesce rather than value change scenarios. They don't value the direction of the change or they have reservations about it to not actively foster it."

"Some principals buck the system and knock the employer. They have no corporate loyalty and have negative opinions of their employer. They see us as pro employer."

"In the (.....) district there is a distillation. We have very experienced principals. Some are resistant to change. My challenge is to convince them of the value of the new system. Some of those who are very critical have nothing to lose because they are over 60 years old. But I can't wait for two years for them to retire because a similar aged person might replace them, so we have to change the mechanisms in the school."

"Many principals who applied for district superintendent positions and failed were suspicious of the new breed and determined not to accept line management and their authority in it."

Superintendents are agents of change and control. Without their work with principals it is questionable whether the reforms outlined in the Better Schools Report would ever be achieved.[1] Once those reforms have

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Responses

1 "In my district 80% of change comes from the young upward mobile principals."

been put in place, the superintendent's role as change agent will become more one of system maintenance - unless a further radical restructuring is introduced. The control role is endless. It involves protecting hard won gains and ensuring quality control - that is, assuring the highest levels of performance, whatever stage of organisational development the system is at.

According to Stoner, Collins, and Yetton, quality control entails four steps: establishing standards and methods for measuring performance; measuring the performance; determining whether performance matches standards; and taking corrective action if performance falls short of standards - by either changing the activities or changing the standards. The last step is important because unless superintendents see the control process through to its conclusion, "they are merely monitoring performance rather than exercising control. The emphasis should always be on devising constructive ways to bring performance up to standard, rather than merely identifying past failures" (1985:728). The superintendent's job is not to personally carry out those four steps in each school. Rather, it is to ensure that each school carries them out effectively for itself.

Responses to organisational change

The amount of power superintendents need to function effectively as agents of change and control depends on how much resistance they face from principals. That, in turn, depends on how principals react to the new responsibilities which a system of self-determining schools places upon them. Conceivably, their responses could range from complete rejection to complete acceptance. In fact, using those extremes as end points of a continuum, at least four ideal types of principals can be identified, namely: active opponents, passive dissenters, pragmatists, and system

supporters. "Briefly and broadly, the characteristics of each ideal type[2] can be outlined as follows.

Active opponents attack the new system by criticising and complaining about it in whatever forums are available to them - staffrooms, principals' associations, political parties, community organisations, informal networks, the mass media, and professional journals. Their approach entails obstructing the implementation of the reforms, undermining public confidence in the new order, and mobilizing support for a return to the old system.

Passive dissenters are also comprehensively opposed to the extra duties assigned to principals, but they are not prepared to engage in either open or guerilla warfare against the changed order. Instead, they withdraw to the sidelines and, wherever possible, pursue a policy of non-involvement. Their resistance, then, takes the form of refusing to publicly endorse the reforms, taking no initiative to make the new process work, and having to be led or carried every step along the road to 'self-determination'. With them, it is a case of devaluing organisational change by treating it with studied indifference.

Pragmatists share some of the active opponent and passive dissenters' reservations about the new responsibilities assigned to principals; at the same time they accept that some change is inevitable and desirable. Therefore they are prepared to cooperate with the management provided they are given scope to be role-makers rather than simply role-takers. This means the negotiation of concessions about the number of extra duties to be carried out and the style in which they are performed.

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[2] Ideal types are abstractions from reality that are based on observations of concrete instances but are "not designed to correspond exactly to any single empirical observation (Theodorson, G.A. and A.G. (1969), A Modern Dictionary of Sociology, Barnes and Noble, New York, p.193.)

System supporters are committed to making a success of self-determining schools. They do everything the management asks of them - willingly, wholeheartedly and enterprisingly. They defend the new sytem against attack, 'talk up' its strengths in appropriate forums, and generally convey optimism about the future outcomes of the changes.

Only four ideal types have been outlined above; there are others.[3] Also, in reality there are variations within any one type. For example, some passive dissenters may occupy a point on the continuum close to that of the active opponents, while others may be more appropriately placed near the pragmatists.[4]

Reasons for different responses

Why do principals react differently to the same set of extra responsibilities? Two factors account for a lot of the variation; self interest and ideology.

A common reaction to organisational change by principals, and indeed any one else affected, is to ask, "What's in it for me? Do I stand to gain or lose?" Principals opposed to self-determining schools are likely to be those who lack faith in their ability to handle the extra responsibilities involved. For them, the new order represents a threat to job security, job success, and job satisfaction; they see it as reducing

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Responses

3 "I think this section on Responses to Organisational Change is a bit glib ..... sorry. It seems too superficial and too selective because it is a huge topic which could warrant another paper."

4 "Others change their position almost on a daily basis. Others are not even on the scale" (a reference group member).

their prospects of promotion and as being simply more work, more worry, and a waste of their time and effort. System supporters, on the other hand, are likely to be principals who believe that their interests will be enhanced by the reforms. From their viewpoint, self-determining schools offer increased opportunities for career advancement, professional autonomy, and personal achievement. Moreover, system supporters are inclined to have confidence in their ability to capitalize on those opportunities.

Another type of question that a principal is likely to ask about radical change is this: "Will self-determining schools do more good than harm to the education of pupils and to the well-being of the community?" The answers to this question will vary because principals have different sets of beliefs, or ideologies, about what constitutes a good education system. Clearly, principals who answer the question in the affirmative will be inclined to provide system support. A negative answer, on the other hand, will point principals in the direction of active opposition" (Chadbourne 1989:54-55).

Superintendents' Power

When combatting resistance to change and development, superintendents can employ two types of power: force and legitimacy. Force involves pulling rank (formal authority) backed up by the threat or application of sanctions.[5] It can have some effect on self interest, but not on

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Responses

5 "Sanctions were talked about a lot in '87 but have not been discussed or mentioned of late. There are no sanctions other than under the regs (old system!)."

"I don't use this at all. I haven't needed to. I'm told it's different in the city."

ideology. That is, in the face of force, principals are likely to see that it is in their interests to comply with what the superintendent wants. It is far less certain that they can be forced to change their ideology. When it comes to winning hearts and minds, legitimacy is required.

Force

The superintendents gave varied accounts of how much formal authority they have. For instance, some said they did have authority to direct principals, whereas others said they could only make suggestions or recommendations.

> "Industrial disputes have held up most issues like school development plans. Hence we can't direct yet."
>
> "If schools are not complying with Ministry policy, the action is very clear."
>
> "District superintendents have considerable authority. This is vested in the audit and policy function."
>
> "If the school development plan guidelines are not complied with, the superintendents can direct principals to do it. Some superintendents have wanted to intervene but are not sure whether the system would support them, or they ring up the director of operations to double check because there is no clear policy."
>
> "Superintendents can direct principals - it's in the regulations."
>
> "The power of superintendents? Very little. We can't direct. We do the groundwork and the director of operations then directs the principals. I provide counselling but the principal can choose to ignore my suggestions. I could ask the director of operations to direct but it would take a long time before anything was achieved. The superintendents superintend and the directors direct."
>
> "A major reason for tension between principals and district superintendents is that some superintendents have attempted to operate very much in an audit role almost from the outset. Some claim to move from school to school 'auditing and approving school development plans.' And this was done well before the emergence of the policy statement concerning school development plans and obviously well

> before the Memorandum. No wonder relationships have been a bit ordinary. Some of the directors of operations may need to wear some of this difficulty too. They may well have been instructing superintendents to operate in this way."

Several steps can be taken to add to the authority of superintendents. One is to publish a clear statement of the directive powers that they do have. Another is to publish a more comprehensive set of policies that can be referred to when their counsel is questioned by principals. More broadly:

> "The power of the superintendents depends on four conditions being present: interpersonal skills such as negotiation, conflict resolution, problem solving; a framework of policies so the system knows what is expected of it; line management relationships defined and practised as defined; and superintendents need authority."[6] [How many of those are in place?] "Professional development for superintendents is not fully in place; in fact principals get more professional development than superintendents. The policies are coming very slowly, two or three years after they're needed. Line management - that is frequently forgotten by the Ministry in terms of some major strategies Central Office is planning; for example, professional development programmes and communication - the Executive meets more frequently with principals' associations than with the superintendents. Authority is provided when the first three empower the superintendents."

Theoretically, if principals refuse to comply with legitimate requests, then superintendents can apply a number of sanctions. For example, a superintendent could: send an adverse report on a principal to Central Office; make a negative recommendation in relation to promotion; refuse to approve the school development plan; deny resources, services, facilities, and equipment; reject invitations to attend school functions; withhold support if trouble arises with parents, staff, students, and the local community; and refuse to endorse applications for

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Responses

6 "Many superintendents have the first three - but this is often negated by the fourth which is very powerful."

special leave, projects, funds, jobs outside the system, and transfers within the system. With the exception of merit promotion reports, such sanctions are rarely applied.[7] And even with promotions, superintendents feel they have lost some power. For example:.

> "In the old days I'd write a little screed on principals seeking merit promotion. Then all the names would be put on the board and the superintendents would gather around and sort out the pecking order.[8] The superintendents had power then. They've lost that now. Now it's done independent of superintendents who write a big screed on applicants."
>
> "We haven't got the dollar we used to have. We can't enter into staffing arrangements. In the old days my opinion on promotion was sought and all transfers came across my desk. Now it is more clinical. The schools go straight through to Central Office."[9]
>
> "The superintendent has no decision making power except executive support from the district office staff. The only bit of power left is the power to distribute support."
>
> "We have no financial clout. The Executive got rid of superintendents' discretionary funds. There are more committees formed to distribute resources like minor works. The special promotion system used to give superintendents more clout."
>
> "We can't withold resources because that would punish the school, it would hurt the school community. It's what I call biting your bum."
>
> "Any principal wanting promotion is civilised and less antagonistic towards Central Office."
>
> "We only have clout with principals seeking promotion."

Responses

7 "Are you sure? I believe that quite often minor works applications, requests for support on funding matters, etc., are decided on the basis of a 'disagreement with the superintendent', though legitimate excuses are always found to substantiate refusal" (a reference group member).

8 "This system was not always fair and it was an exclusive club, making career decisions."

9 "Is the superintendency about power or something more important - educating kids?"

> "Using adverse reports is heavy stuff. And a case could go on for two years because the battle lines would be drawn."
>
> "We could write an adverse report, but as an absolute last resort because of the human element. We always hope something else will work."
>
> "You can use the director of operations but that is similar to adverse reports - the principal can run to the union."
>
> "A lot of principals get away with murder because we can't take a hard line because of a lot of changes. It was easier under the old centralized system to get short term success and employ sanctions."

On the positive side, and in addition to recommending promotion, the superintendents referred to two forms of rewards at their disposal:[10]

> "You've got the gen, the good oil. You're the bearer of good or bad tidings. You have privileged information. Principals love the gossip. They will keep on the right side to get the good oil."[11]
>
> "Each superintendent is given a budget to offer principals private and confidential personal development. That increases the power and credibility of superintendents."

Several measures could be taken to increase the range of sanctions available to superintendents and reduce their reluctance to apply them. One is to place all principals on five year contracts and make them renewable subject to a positive recommendation from the superintendent. At present, for all practical purposes, principals not applying for promotion are untouchable. Another measure is to limit the

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Responses

10 "This is the salvation of the role. If only we could negotiate rewards with principals based on performance management criteria we would have all the 'power' we need. A holiday in Fiji? Why not? A conference in Thailand? Why not? But only for the achievers, as judged by the district superintendents."

11 "Principals often know before superintendents do."

"Generally, principals have more 'gossip' than us through a very effective network."

superintendents' role to that of auditing schools and principals.[12] As long as superintendents feel required to provide principals with support, they will be reluctant to impose sanctions. The underlying concern is that punitive action might adversely affect the type of collegiality necessary for effective professional counselling. A third measure is to form a superintendents institute to combat the moral and political force of the principals associations.[13] Superintendents would be more confident about applying sanctions if they knew they had the collective support of their colleagues.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is the alternative to force. Superintendents possess legitimacy when they have authority in the eyes of the principals, when they are granted the right by principals to act as supervisors. In terms of superintendent/principal relations, the system can bestow authority on superintendents but not legitimacy - only principals can do that.

Superintendents who have been granted legitimacy are in a position to gain the cooperation of principals through persuasion and respect rather than by pulling rank or employing sanctions. Legitimacy enables superintendents to get a fair hearing from principals - it permits reason to prevail. In extreme cases, though, legitimacy may allow unquestioning acceptance of what the superintendent says, out of deference for either the person or the position.

Responses

12 "Where would the trust be then? Them and Us would be entrenched."

13 "This idea of principals associations being a threat doesn't hold."

"This support base needs to be established."

Expertise is one basis of legitimacy. Actually having expertise is not sufficient. Principals must perceive that superintendents possess it. In most cases real ability shines through. However, the superintendents feel that principals' perceptions of them are sometimes based on stereotypes. In some instances lack of formal qualifications, no school administrator experience, and being female were seen as barriers to legitimacy.

> "Superintendents with no paper qualifications have to earn respect."
>
> "Principals see superintendents as a reward for serving the Ministry well. They think all superintendents should be appointed from the ranks of principals."
>
> "One has to win one's spurs and to demonstrate one can do the task we ask of principals. When a superintendent has little school or principal experience then naturally their ability to question what a principal does will come under scrutiny."
>
> "Some superintendents have never been principals. Principals feel those superintendents don't know what they are doing."
>
> "I fear I intruded on the mateship of primary principals, their male bonding. If any of my principals go to my director of operations with a management complaint I told him I want to be present."
>
> "Sexism? We are gradually overcoming that. Women superintendents were regarded as 'boundary riders' - appointed only to work out in the sticks."[14]
>
> "The principals are improving. Some used to be rude. They did not give me much leeway to sort out my role or give me open invitations to address staff. It's hard for me to work out if this is because of their antagonism toward Central Office or because of stereotyped thinking about females in authority."

Responses

14 "Legitimacy comes from doing the job. The red herring of sexism should not be allowed to enter the debate."

Another factor affecting principals' perceptions of superintendents' expertise is networking. Evidently, it can boost or block an individual's legitimacy.

> "One strategy to gain legitimacy is networking; the word gets around."
>
> "Having different groups causes problems because districts get compared. Principals play one superintendent off against another. They phone each other up."[15]

Some superintendents considered that their credibility in schools suffers because the position of superintendent has very little standing in the eyes of certain principals. One factor seen to be responsible here, is antipathy towards anything associated with the new system. Another is, a view among some principals that if district offices were disbanded it would take months for schools to notice. A third factor is the high turnover rate in district offices, often as a result of superintendents being seconded or taking leave: for example, "I'm the fourth superintendent in four years at the (.....) district." Furthermore:

> "An added factor is the high turnover of principals in country schools. It takes time to establish the bond between district superintendent/principal roles.
>
> "We have no clear direction from Central Office about how to do merit promotion. I try to fit the normal curve but some other superintendents are too generous. The system is amateurish and that decreases our standing."
>
> "As superintendents we face stress because of unclear directions, inconsistency from Central Office, lack of strategic planning skills at Central Office, and the historical bloodbath of the Functional Review Committee - the sacking of the superintendents showed a profound lack of understanding."
>
> "Until the industrial agreement, the school development guidelines have no offical sanction by the teaching fraternity."

Responses

15 "This is also a Central Office/district problem."

Up till now, the legitimacy of some superintendents apparently has depended as much on personal qualities as on professional expertise. That situation can leave them feeling vulnerable and at the mercy of the principals' goodwill.

> "How much I can influence depends on my personal resources."
>
> "Some superintendents maintain power by 'bonhomie'. They establish a personal relationship with principals. Other superintendents are hardliners, thick skinned, bombastic, and give orders. Most superintendents however actively try to get power through their endeavours, earning respect via an ability to lead."
>
> "We achieve a lot from goodwill generated from personal relationships."
>
> "I've had no problems with principals because I waited till I got a good profile. After three years in the district I'm running performance management for the first time."
>
> "The two fundamentals to a good relationship between superintendents and principals are the school development plan and an appropriate supervision or performance management programme. Until these are in place the relationship relies on goodwill and personalities. How do you give good non-threatening feedback in a situation where there are no rules."
>
> "Although most principals are individually courteous and professional, the System reached an all-time low in some displays of emotive rudeness at principals' and deputies' conferences over the last two years. At the district level too, a negative and pugnacious minority of principals can dictate the quality of debate and cooperation. I even had to phone one of my principals to confirm whether he had been insulting to my secretary. He carefully explained he meant the insult for my education officer. I asked him to desist from insults. He did not apologise. A few weeks later, another district office staff member expressed surprise at how pleasant this principal had been to her. I suspect this was not my discussion with him, but a little resourcing power which the Central Office had dropped into supers' laps that contributed to this change of attitude."

Closing comment

The material presented in this chapter suggests the amount of power that superintendents have is determined by three factors: their own

personal qualities and professional expertise; the regulations, policies, and political will of the system; and the power of school principals. It also raises a range of questions such as: How much power do superintendents need? If superintendents are the agents of accountability, do they have enough power to carry out that role effectively? Is the amount of power superintendents have determined by their role or is their role determined by how much power they have? Can superintendents increase their power only at the expense of principals losing some of theirs?

As has been the case throughout much of this chapter, the closing words on these issues will be left to the superintendents. There are two broad perspectives. One perspective is represented by comments which indicate that superintendents feel they do not have enough authority, force, or legitimacy.

> "I tried to bring about a change in the management style of a principal but in the end there was nothing I could do about it."
>
> "One old principal in my district has hated the Ministry for 35 years. He has alienated the school community, has no school development plans, and always wants me to solve his problems. All I can do is stimulate him and keep his interest"
>
> "A key issue in our organisation is that a manager at superintendent level must have prescribed power and status and a role which is educationally significant - one that enables us to make a difference. We should be doing more than swanning around using influence and being supporters and facilitators. Just relying on influence is wimpish."
>
> "I lack power in the secondary school situation because there are no structures in place to do my job. Where does the power come from?"
>
> "I find audit threatening because if I find faults I have to do something about it. Some superintendents lost power and can no longer structure principals to do what superintendents want them to and if they find fault then they have no power to change it and therefore the superintendent gets a black mark."

The other perspective is represented by comments which indicate that superintendents feel they do have enough power in relation to principals.

> "One principal ruled that all pupils must wear uniforms because he picked up from the shopping centre gossip that uniforms set the tone. I got 20 calls a day from parents complaining about it and discussed the matter with him. He said, "Don't you trust me?" I said, "Yes, but it's not in the regulations." I knew what his strategy was and he knew my situation with the regulations. So we agreed to get extra money to buy extra uniforms for children without them. It took a while but we worked out an effective strategy which lead to a good relationship. Some principals expect superintendents to close ranks against parents who complain."

> "Fundamentally I don't want district superintendents to be directional in a school, like some other superintendents do. They want power for what? To influence the principal to do what?"

> "My philosophy has changed. Previously I'd say, 'That's no good. Fix it.' Now I take more time and keep wearing away. I use all the subtleties, not overt power."

> "Why should principals do what superintendents want them to do? Isn't the scheme for schools to be self-determining within Ministry guidelines?"

> "Performance management is a legitimacy factor. I think the principals perceive it as important and very professional, relevant and fulfilling a need, and bringing monitoring into the arena in a positive way and linking the two tiers of the service in a trusting and collegial spirit - we hope."

> "We have influence, not power, and that makes schools more self-determining. The leadership role for the superintendent is to secure commitment, not compliance from principals."

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to Stoner, Collins, and Yetton, management consists of four processes: planning, organising, leading, and controlling. A recurring theme throughout this report has been that in the management of the state education system, the district superintendents' primary role is - control. In the final analysis, schools and the system do not need superintendents for planning, organising, and leading. They can do those things for themselves. This is not to say that superintendents cannot offer leadership. Clearly they can, but within a system of self-determining schools it is a more limited type of leadership than was the case with superintendents before 1987. As one district superintendent said:

> "The superintendents are only leaders in the sense of being a skilled courtroom lawyer. We have room for transactional leadership because we shape principals' interpretations of Ministry policy. There isn't much room for transformational leadership."[1]

It is the superintendents' job to pursue the control process through to its conclusion by taking corrective action if schools go down the wrong track or do not go far enough down the right track. They should not have to negotiate with schools to perform that function. Principals can

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Responses

1 "But we can do this (transformational leadership) and have to consciously work on it."

rightfully refuse to accept assistance from superintendents when developing and implememententing their school plans, but they can not refuse to have those plans audited. What they can legitimately expect is that the monitoring be conducted fairly and constructively and that they are not held responsible for factors outside their school's control. To meet those expectations, superintendents need time to collect sufficient information to validate claims about each school's performance. They also need time to establish non-threatening relationships with key members of school communities. In practical terms that probably means being responsible for no more than fifteen schools - in other words, doubling the size of the superintendency.

Some educational futurologists may question whether self-determining schools will need superintendents in the long term, even for control. Their vision includes a further radical restructuring in which the two tier system is reduced to one tier, namely, publicly funded independent schools. The use of educational vouchers and 'opting out' along Thatcherian lines provide mechanisms for pursuing that scenario. Several superintendents made comments intimating that for them the prospect of a one tier system is not beyond the realms of possibility.

> "District offices exist to help schools become self-determining. Eventually we should become redundant."[2]
>
> "Ultimately there is no need for middle management. Central Office could give a license to schools on the right track."

Responses

[2] "Having no district office doesn't mean a one tier system. We still would have Central Office and schools" (a reference group member).

"There is a need to differentiate between district office and superintendent."

> "Provided we produce quality principals and good curriculum leadership sense, then I don't think we need any greater assurances about student outcomes."
>
> "We should train principals so they do their own self-evaluation, their own school evaluation."
>
> "If I do my job properly, I won't be needed in five years time."
>
> "I question whether we'll need district offices when schools develop expertise and can buy expertise from providers outside the Ministry."

Before going too far down the one tier path, it should be remembered that in performing a quality control role, superintendents are not just agents of excellence, they are also agents of equity. Without effective central regulation, some self-determining schools would become co-opted by the forces of unbridled self-interest. For example, in the wake of deregulation and privatisation, the first step for some school communities would be to declare themselves academically selective and cream off the high achieving students without any thought or concern for the social consequences of their actions.

It might seem that assigning superintendents predominantly to the area of control devalues their role, given the negative stereotypes surrounding the notion of 'control'. The reality is quite different. The type of control which superintendents exercise is an integral part of a broader challenge, namely: to bring into balance the conditions for excellence, enterprise and economic growth on the one hand, with the conditions for equality of opportunity, participation and social worth on the other. It is difficult to think of a role more demanding, or more important.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISSENTING RESPONSES

In order to enable members of a wider group to participate in the study, Chapters 1-7 were circulated as a draft report to thirty one superintendents throughout the state, for comment. Copies were also sent to a small informal reference group outside the superintendency (see page three). Twenty seven superintendents replied within the four week period allocated for this activity. Overall, their responses can be summed up in three interrelated ways: none of the general points, themes or claims in the draft report was challenged by a majority of superintenents; all the general points, themes and claims were supported by most superintendents; in broad terms, the superintendents endorsed what was said in the draft report. This does not mean they agreed with every comment, or thought the report covered all the important issues. As the footnotes in previous chapters indicate, different superintendents disagreed with different particular statements. This chapter presents other dissenting responses, made by a minority of superintendents.

Chapter One: Introduction

In introducing the study, Chapter One outlined why the role of district superintendents is seen to lack definition and direction. A number of respondents considered the account to be either excessive or dated.

> "When superintendents took up their appointment in 1988, they knew the changed role in some detail."

> "I always had a fair idea of what my role was and would be. As it turned out I read the play - and as our role becomes more formally stated it coincides with what I anticipated."

"The role is increasingly becoming clarified - for example, through the Demonstrating Accountability Project."

"The role is clearing significantly as a result of events during the May-July period."

"The Agreement provides focus."

Chapter Two: A Two Tier System

The central theme of Chapter Two was that the new structure set up in 1987 should be seen as consisting not of three tiers but of two - a unified Central Office and schools. That is, the district offices are not a third tier. The district superintendents are part of the unified Central Office and the other staff in the district offices belong to the schools. Except for several respondents, that notion received widespread, though often qualified, support.

One superintendent found difficulty with the view that the district office was only a nominal entity housing representatives from the other two tiers. He said:

> "I would agree that regulations, curriculum frameworks and staffing decisions are largely, though not completely, Central Office responsibility. However, I argue that districts, through their boards of management can and must structure goals, priorities and policies as an agreed district statement to make the best possible use of resources and time in a cooperative and consensual way. Unless this occurs through a district board of management, what is the purpose of having such a board?
>
> From this rationale, I return to the point I made about regulations, curriculum frameworks and staffing decisions not being completely a Central Office responsibility. By this, I mean that while Central Office can make statements of intent, a board of management, representing schools, can respond to those statements in such a way as to promote the need for and even an alteration of any of the three elements. I guess what I'm saying is that policy can be influenced, and this begs the question of whether influencing a stated policy bears any comparison with developing a policy. I happen to believe that it does, while acknowledging that it is a point needing careful consideration. For all that, I argue at this point that superintendents can and do affect policy, both in its formulation and its implementation, through their involvement with boards of management charged with developing district policy."

The perspective outlined by this superintendent is consistent with the 'nesting' concept underlying the South Australian system. In that state, the "activities of the operational (area/regional) directorates are nested within the framework provided by the Central Directorates above them. Likewise, the operation of schools is nested within the structure provided above them by the Area Directorates" (Education Review Unit 1989:8).

A number of questions arise from these perspectives. Is it any more appropriate for superintendents to be members of district management boards than school councils (SBDMG's)? Should an individual school's adaptation of Ministry policies to the particular circumstances of its own community be constrained by the collective interpretation of those polices by all the schools in the district? Does 'nesting' re-create the blanketing effect which the regional offices under the previous system exerted on the schools' progress towards self-determination and Central Office's responsiveness to schools?

A second superintendent saw a need for some connecting unit between Central Office and schools because "there is too long a line, particularly in the case of remote schools." She said that for a lot of principals who are new or not strong, "the district office serves as a collection and dissemination point, a security connection." In her view,

> "We won't be ready for a two tier system until schools become more self determining, till schools have more power - particularly over their own staffing. Until we go down that track a lot further, the two tier system won't work."

A third superintendent objected to parts of Chapter Two on the grounds that, "You can't slap a two tier template across W.A. and expect to make it work. It works in the city with secondary schools but not in some country schools." He divided superintendents, and models, into purists and pragmatists:

> "In the purists' model of Better Schools, the notion of self-determination is such that the superintendents have very

> little power at all and no control over their staff; district office staff are controlled by principals. With pragmatists it is business as usual.
>
> According to the purist model, district offices should not have a culture, they should not be an impediment to the flow of devolution from Central Office directly to schools. What it forgets is that we are running a system of education in one of the biggest states in one of the most centralized countries in the world. District offices need to develop a culture that schools can attach themselves to because of the geographical isolation and the schools' distrust of Central Office.
>
> Pragmatists know better and have developed a district office culture. I'm very tolerant of the impurity of the model. I can happily live with the joint role of educational leadership and audit and the fusion of district superintendent and district office .....
>
> The models that came out of the Organisation Development Unit are too pure for the system. For example, to say that the district superintendent should not control district office staff may well be possible in the metro area but not in my country area. Also, the purist model is based on us having 100% highly competent principals. We haven't got that."

Several other responses suggest that some superintendents have mixed feelings about the two tier system and might identify themselves as either reluctant purists or reluctant pragmatists.

> "The concept of separating the district superintendent from the district office creates ambivalence within me. I do not worry about this happening as long as I am left with the resources to do my job - the supervision of schools."

> "The last section ('A Clarifying Step') is good. But there is no need for such a complete split. There is a relationship between the district superintendent and the district office which is different to that of the district superintendent/school relationship. The district superintendent needs to be able to closely interact with the district office, especially in contributing a district 'global view', continuity, and leadership."

> "I can identify with the superintendent who said, 'The best moments come when I'm with my own district office staff' - but not for the same reason. If we run as a two tier system then being a superintendent is a lonely job - we don't have a lot to do with the district office, the district superintendent is not part of the team. At present we get ongoing interaction working in a team instead of being a lonely character on our own. Some of the frustrations of the job and the harsher comments on the lack of consultation in this report come from not being part of a team and being out on our own. I have a half way step to separating the offices. While conceptually there are two offices, the district office provides me with executive support, so district office staff straddle both

> tiers. Superintendents in some cases have gone the regional mode and created a third tier. I dichotomize the district and the district office. The district has a superintendent and some resources. It is not synonymous with the district office. That's how I try to overcome a misconception.'

Several superintendents emphasized that the three tier system of the past only applied to primary schools. Secondary schools, they said, were left almost untouched by regional offices and therefore operated basically under a two tier system consisting of schools and subject superintendents based at Central Office. That two tier system, however, differed markedly from the one outlined in this report. In several ways it undermined, rather than promoted, the development of self-determining schools. For example, it allowed teachers to appeal to a subject superintendent for a ruling that conflicted with what a school saw as representing its best interests. It also allowed teachers' professional identities and loyalties to become bound more to their subject and superintendent than to their schools and principal (Chadbourne and Quin 1990).

One superintendent was critical of the section headed 'Factors Confounding a Two Tier System.' In his view, the basis for confusion lay not simply with structural influences, such as: Central Office issuing superintendents with a brief to get districts set up; the Better Schools Report explicitly outlining three levels - school, district, central; and the Ministry physically housing district superintendents and consultants under the one roof. An equally important source of confusion was the construction that superintendents themselves actively placed on those external constraints. Thus, said the superintendent who made this point,

> "I am arguing that the confounding factors were not so much caused by the setting up of districts, but by the wishes and interpretations of people involved in the role of the superintendent of those districts, me included. Very simply, the interpretations and alternative realities of people involved would have done as much, if not more, to create the confusion. Our current attempts to make sense of the present in terms of the past must logically look at what was said, but

> we must also ask the question of how what was said was interpreted, and for what reasons, vested or otherwise.
> I don't find the latter point coming through in your work. Sure, there are reasons to look 'out' at all the factors creating the confusion. But in pointing out those factors, and thus shifting responsibility to the facilitators and implementers of the change, which up to a point is fair enough, there is also the need to look inwards and ask what superintendents themselves did to create the confusion."

Three people questioned the commonly accepted view that superintendents are, or should be, in response mode. A reference group member said that contrary to popular thought,

> "Better Schools put the district superintendent in an active quality control response mode - but people didn't know enough about what that meant."

On a different tack, one superintendent made this observation regarding his colleagues comments on page nine:

> "These four comments imply that power is something that is formally derived through money, status, authority. Thus 'we are in response mode' must hold true. But doesn't this overlook informal aspects of power? Surely 'we' can still be proactive rather than simply reactive. Maybe these comments are saying that now subordinates won't necessarily do what subordinates say they should. Is that right? Food for thought."

More descriptively, another superintendent commented:

> "We are in 'response mode' is not entirely true. Some district offices were quite proactive."

Chapter Three: The Centre Tier - Separating Operations From Policy

Chapter Three examined how the district superintendent's position in Central Office has been affected by the separation of operations from policy within the Ministry since 1987. Nearly all the superintendents agreed with the main findings, which were as follows: the formal structure largely excludes superintendents from the development of

system-wide policy; some consultation occurs but only at the level of tokenism; the limited scope for influencing policy makes superintendents supervisors and custodians of change rather than architects and captains of change; and a desire exists among superintendents to play a greater role in policy development.

In constrast to the high level of general agreement on those matters, a few superintendents raised points of qualification and disputation. One superintendent claimed that he and the principals in his district did have an opportunity to significantly restructure centrally formulated policy that they decided "was not in the best interests of their schools." Sometimes this meant slowing down "irrelevant or inadequately thought out policy." He also said that whilst superintendents contributed little to state-wide policy at the formal level, informally there was considerable scope for providing meaningful input. For those reasons, he said,

> "I always saw myself as being able to be involved in and to affect policy formulation ..... To explain, let's start from the statement that 'the (.. my ..) District is different.' That is a fact. Whatever policy is set centrally, it is always possible to make it look from slightly to totally ridiculous relative to the (.....) District, and for the whole time I was part of the district, we (the principals and I) argued that if policy was to be set centrally, it should be done in terms of setting a policy that was applicable to the (.....) District. From that policy, the 'makers' could then 'work back' to see if that policy fitted a city district. We argued that what happened constantly was the reverse. An example was the First Steps Programme - structured to apply to city districts, and had no chance of being cost or resource effective in the (.....) District.
>
> We were saying that rather than set policy and then look at its implementation, people should see implementation as the umbrella under which policy must always be defined. If that is accepted, then the district, in consultation with and through its superintendent, must be involved in policy formulation. Who knows the district better than the superintendent who represents principals who represent the school community .....
>
> I never relaxed from what became a vigil - contacting people in Central Office to warn, disagree, argue, promote and cajole about what was being planned for education relative to the (.....) District. I found, most interestingly, that people from the Executive Director to the Health Education Consultant, listened, thought about what was

put to them, and responded. I have to admit that the responses were rarely ever exactly what I wanted them to be, but I also claim that most often, the original intentions (including mine) were modified. Thinking retrospectively, I trod on some toes, made a few enemies, and probably was seen at times as pedantic and obstructive. However, certain things did alter - not necessarily in the way that policy was set, but certainly at times in the way policy was altered, and certainly, frequently, the way that policy was to be implemented .....

This then leads to another statement you make, that of the notion of superintendents being supervisors and custodians of change which they do not define. I find it to be problematic. We are only supervisors and custodians if we refuse to become involved in what schools and the district are about and why. I argue that the role depends on how superintendents seek to set, participate in, or influence policy, and for what reasons. If it is to satisfy their own need to see education functioning as they believe it should, then devolution doesn't happen, change only happens according to the wishes of the superordinate - communities and principals get left out and we return to 'regionalization'. If it is to help individual schools or groups of schools achieve a policy which suits their needs, then devolution, and thus policy making at school and district level, has some chance of occurring.

I saw it as my role to participate in, to influence, and to restructure if necessary, central policy formulation and implementation where both the principals and I decided it was not in the best interests of their schools. In those terms, I think I was more than a supervisor and custodian of change. In that sense I was a facilitator and a producer of change at the local level for reasons which belonged to the local level."

Another respondent felt that although superintendents had been largely excluded from policy development in the past, several developments make that situation unlikely to continue for much longer.

"The Memorandum of Agreement clearly indicates that the policy issues it covers will have to be monitored. The Organisation Development Unit has helped clarify the 'what' aspects of monitoring. On Thursday, 14 June 1990, the 29 district superintendents met as a group to refine the 'what' aspects, but more importantly develop the 'how' process associated with monitoring. This was the first time that the superintendents had met as a group. This input into policy formation was appreciated.

Another factor indicating that perhaps the district superintendent's role is in line for greater classification is the recent changes in the structure of the Central Office. The creation of a new division to be known as Schools Operations, headed by an executive director, will, I believe, give schools a more defined link with Central Office. I envisage that superintendents will play a significant role in linking schools and Central Office in this new structure.

> Input into policy formation may be part of this link. One of the reasons given by the CEO for the structural changes is 'to enable Central Office to be more responsive to schools as they move towards self determination'.
>
> The industrial events of 1989 also indicated to Central Office that schools had to be listened to. The district superintendents are the closest senior officers to schools. Their knowledge about what is happening in schools will become, I believe, increasingly important to policy makers.
>
> Along with this, as the audit function of the district superintendents is developed and put into place, a logical end point in the process must be policy input. Audit processes naturally, I believe, lead to change. If policy implementation is consistently failing, as the Equal Opportunity Commission suggests is the case with equity issues, then change to either the policy or the implementation process is necessary. District superintendents must be in the the best position to signal what changes are needed."

Several respondents challenged the majority view that superintendents should be centrally involved with state-wide policy formulation:

> "My job is not to set policy for the state. I don't have the overview, knowledge, or data."

> "How can you be a field-based person and actually write Ministry policy. Some superintendents think they are going to drive policy. Their expectation of an involvement in policy formulation is quite strange because we don't have the time for that."

Finally, one superintendent expressed concern that Chapter Three presented an unbalanced and negative account of the work of the directors of operations. He made the point that,

> " (.....) has been an outstanding director of operations as far as I am concerned. He has been extremely supportive and loyal to myself and to the principals and their schools in my district. He has gone out of his way to foster my own professional development as well as to enhance my role as a superintendent. The principals in my district recognise (.....) for his positive role and they are appreciative of his efforts."

It should be acknowledged that during the initial round of interviews with thirteen superintendents similar tributes were paid to the directors of operations. Most of these were not included in the draft report because they fell outside the study's framework of analysis. Chapter Three dealt

with perceptions of the director of operations' role in relation to policy development. Had it focussed on the provision of professional support for superintendents, more comments of the type quoted above could've been documented.

Chapter Four: The School Tier - Differences That Cause Difficulties

Chapter Four focussed on the district superintendent's role in supporting and monitoring the performance of schools and principals. It outlined five issues which affect the definition of that role, namely: internal versus external review, school consultant versus system auditor, professional development versus performance appraisal, principal performance versus school performance, and secondary versus primary schools.

The superintendents made little comment on this chapter. To some extent this is understandable given the clarification provided by the recent Memorandum of Agreement and the draft guidelines on demonstrating accountability being produced by the Organisation Development Unit. Even so, some mild dissent was registered. For example, one superintendent said:

> "Generally this was a chapter with which I have little argument. I don't think there is as much conflict between roles and duties as you often suggest. The majority of district superintendents have excellent executive level skills and they can be very good at wearing numerous hats."

None of the respondents indicated a preference for setting up external review units along South Australian and New South Wales lines; all seemed satisfied with the West Australian approach. Some superintendents, though, intimated that by the end of the decade Western Australia should be able to shed external monitoring and adopt the system of internal

reviews exemplified in the Victorian model. Also, the dichotomy between support and appraisal raised some mixed comment:

> "Organisations which separate policeman and supporter roles don't work."
>
> "Helper and judge - these two roles are diametrically opposed."
>
> "The conflict situation associated with the 'consultant' versus audit issue is real. The solution is to split the functions so that each is dealt with by different personnel. This also applies to the professional development versus appraisal issue."

Of the five issues discussed in Chapter Four, the one which attracted most comment was the difference between supervising primary and secondary schools. According to some superintendents, no significant difference exists.

Finally, one superintendent raised the possibility that we might be trying "to resolve conflict without seeking the value that it may offer in terms of alternative solutions." Instead of an issue-by-issue critique, he made a general response to Chapter Four in these terms:

> "You seem to have picked out the essential contradictions very well. The criticial point to me, however, is not that these contradictions should be sorted out but rather, how can those contradictions be used to help us all work out what is needed? The former process usually degenerates into an 'either-or' scenario, while the latter process has the virtue, if managed properly, to throw up a whole lot of alternatives. Contradictions are essential features of the process of self-determination, as they facilitate and create alternative solutions for differing circumstances and problems. Such a position, I realize, is open to challenge in terms of such things as equity and equality, and of how we come to some form of uniformity and a set of standards. I think a couple of questions can be posed as starting points to discuss such a challenge, such as firstly, if what we now have in terms of equity and equality is a legacy of the previous system, then why not try something different. Secondly, are we about self-determination or are we about standardization; and when, where and for whom?
>
> The last question is a fundamental one. So, of course, is whether we can be centralized and decentralized at the same time, whether we can be idealistic and pragmatic concomitantly, or resolve individual needs as we balance those against system needs, or set in place flexibility, innovation and responsiveness as we seek effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. All I can say is that answers to such

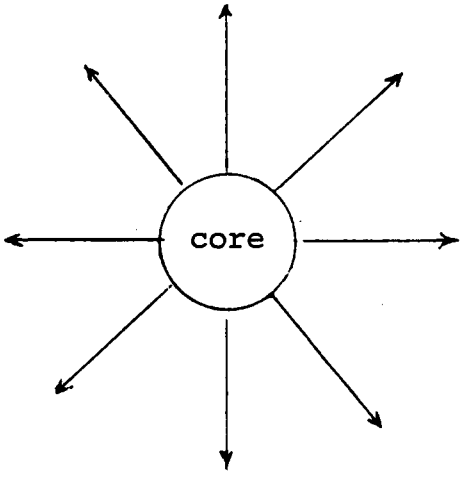
> contradictions are not found by setting in place 'the rules' or 'the system' or 'the structure'. They are found by grappling with each situation or contradiction relative to person, time, place and circumstance."

Chapter Five: Conflict Between the Tiers

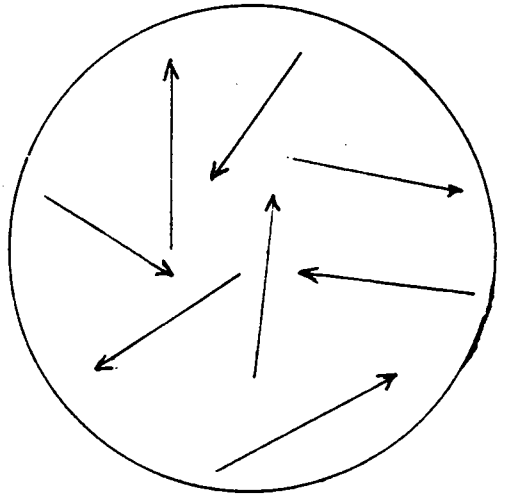
Chapter Five began with the statement that ideally a system of self-determining schools is characterised by unity within diversity. It went on to examine how the prospect of achieving that ideal was threatened by conflict between Central office and schools, and how the role of the superintendent, in turn, was affected by that conflict. The analysis attracted very little dissent.

One superintendent, though, asked, "What's the difference if I argue that it is 'diversity within unity' - a set of boundaries within which to operate?" Diagrammatically, the difference between the two perspectives can be represented as follows.

Unity in Diversity

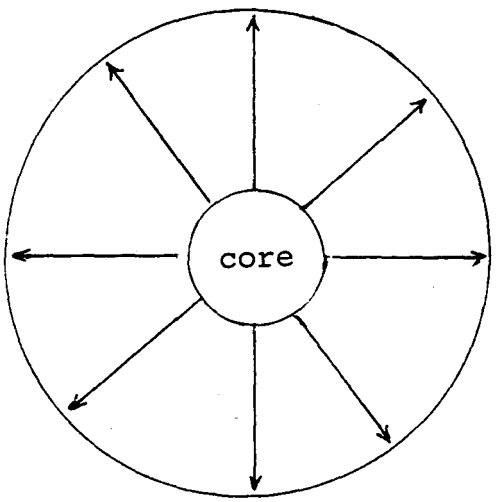


Diversity in Unity

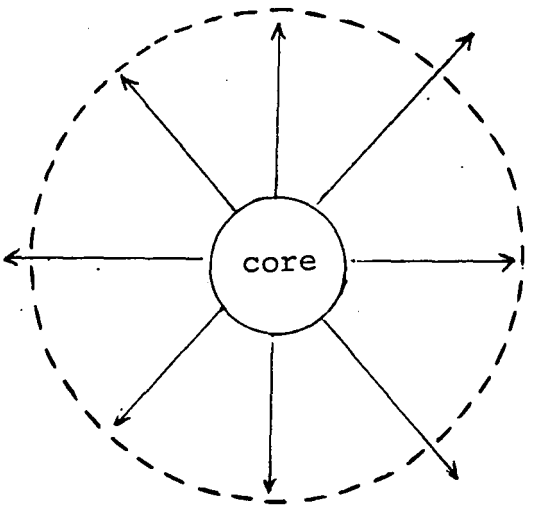


A third possibility is 'unity within bounded diversity'. A fourth is 'unity within broken bounded diversity' in which the boundary forms a break to slow down rather than prohibit 'way out' non-conformity.

Unity Within Bounded Diversity



Unity Within Broken Bounded Diversity



One, in fact the only, sustained response to Chapter Five suggested that conflict between the two tiers is better regarded as a phenomenon than a problem:

> "Are you intimating that ideology played a hugely significant role in what happened? I can see that historically, it is possible to make a powerful and logical argument that the need for two tiers was, on the one hand, to make the system more flexible and creative, and on the other, to make it more efficient and accountable. To do that, there needed to be change. Change, of itself, brings conflict and in this sense, I see the industrial division as no more than an outcome of the process of change, and the ideological base as the reason for the change. My framework is grossly oversimplified and hierarchical; that the ideology of certain people (including politicians) created the need, need caused the change in structure (both system and curriculum), and the industrial division was the means by which people were able to make their feelings known about what had happened. Sure, the work of a superintendent would be easier if the divisions did not exist, but if they didn't we would be inert and incapable of working towards self-determning schools. Thus, let's see conflict as a positive process."

Chapter Six: The Superintendent's Power in Relation to Principals

Chapter Six examined the nature and extent of the superintendent's power in relation to principals - particularly with respect to the

management of change and the exercise of appropriate quality control in schools. Two types of power were identified: force (formal authority backed by sanctions) and legitimacy.

Most reviewers agreed with the analysis in Chapter Six but some said it did not go far enough. For example, one superintendent said he was still left with the conceptual problem of finding the balance between promoting self-determination, giving away power, and retaining accountability. The question he posed for himself was: "How can anyone look to give people responsibility and still state that ultimately the giver of responsibility remains accountable?" In more detail, he said:

> "I seek legitimacy for my actions. I'm an idealist - I only want power so long as I can give it away. But if I'm going to give it away, then I must also give away accountability, otherwise I will spend my life dominating others so I can be accountable for whatever happens. There are many who argue, and actually state to my face, that I can't give power away because I can't give accountability away. I admit to having trouble in doing it, not only practically but conceptually, but it is something I need to be able to do. It is what I am searching for, and is why I said to you, and I've said to others, that in the best of all possible worlds, if I do the role properly there should be no role left for me. Unless I go on searching for that, I can never see devolution working or any form of self-determination taking place, because people will never be able to be accountable, and thus responsible, for their own actions. I will be the one accountable, and thus responsible."

Another superintendent suggested that separating power into force and legitimacy allowed other important distinctions to slip through the sieve. One of these was the difference between the contextual and component variables associated with supervision. In his experience, principals considered the contextual variables more important than the component ones; they say to him, "Who does your job is more important than the job." Thus the amount of power a superintendent has depends largely on "principals' perceptions of the authenticity and integrity of the supervisor."

In relation to the power and influence of district superintendents, a reference group member said:

> "I feel this issue of line management in education is causing a lot of angst amongst district superintendents and principals. There is confusion about just what 'being the principal's boss' means. I reckon the key is to focus on the difference between doing what you're told - and - being accountable to someone for your performance. District superintendents have swung on the pendulum of 'we can tell them what to do' to 'we can only suggest/influence/guide.' They haven't really explored the position, 'the principal must demonstrate to me that the school is performing satisfactorily.' Maybe this is not the place to tease it out, I feel it is a theme which is going to be played out a lot over the next couple of years."

He also offerred the observation that:

> "Much of the focus for the district superintendent's role has been on how it is a less powerful, more restricted leadership role. District superintendents have privately wondered whether it is substantial enough to justify a Level 8 status. I think more could be said about the complexity and subtlety of the 'audit' role, the challenging business of appraising a school, the higher level management skills involved, etc. The demands that these high level skills place upon superintendents are not appreciated by most people."

Several superintendents emphasized that the need for power only becomes an issue with principals who are opposed to the new structure. With other principals there is no problem. For example:

> "Some 'merit promotion' principals are racing ahead of teachers in implementing the Better Schools Report and I have to put the reins on them. Other 'seniority principals' are still trying to shut the gate on changes rung out by the Better Schools Report four years after its release."

Chapter Seven: Concluding Remarks

Chapter Seven concluded that the essential role of district superintendents in a centrally supervised system of self-determining schools is control, and in performing that role they are agents of equity as well as excellence. A few superintendents challenged aspects of that

conclusion. One said that the term 'control' sounded too much like "speed cop". Another objected to the term and concept of 'control' on the grounds that "it is a bit foreign" and it does not sit easy with "androgynous management". Furthermore, said this superintendent,

> " 'Control' is the wrong frame for me. It's the frame of the old inspectorial mode. It's too regulatory. It locks us out of training and development and fails to convey the sophistication and complexities of the nature of our work."

And for a third superintendent,

> " 'Control' is the synonym for audit and hence the current buzz word. Have we internalized it to such a prominent extent as you express so succinctly?"

Two respondents suggested that the report could have done more to develop and endorse the notion that superintendents are agents of equity. Both commended the Equal Opportunity Commission Reports S.82 (b) as documents with significant implications for the work of superintendents, particularly with respect to monitoring the contestation of resources and the implementation of central policies at the local level.

A Concern About the Report

Overall, most superintendents welcomed the report as a useful and timely document for taking stock of the past and clarifying ideas for the future. Several, however, expressed concern that it was too negative. One superintendent wondered where responsibility for the pessimism lay - with the interviewer or the interviewees. He suggested that had a more directive interviewing style been adopted, a more optimistic picture would have emerged. For example, superintendents could have been asked, "What do you see for the future." Or, "Do you see the future of the superintendency with pessimism or optimism and why?" That would have prevented them becoming pre-occupied with their dissatisfaction about the

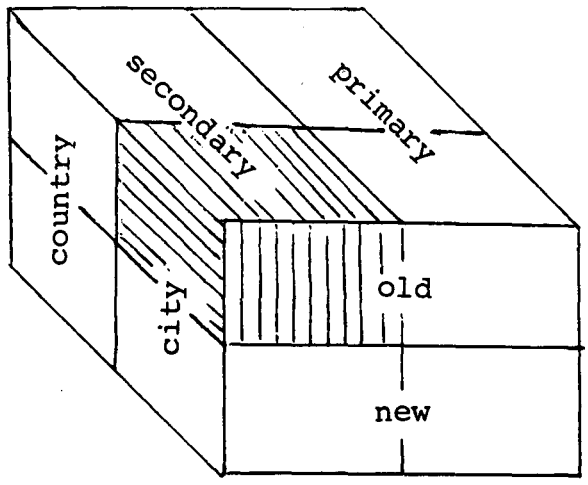
past. Speaking for himself, he said that he was "pessimistic looking backward - retrospectively, but optimistic looking forward - prospectively." On the other side of the ledger, said this superintendent, because the non-directive interviewing style left the agenda largely with the interviewees, they had an open opportunity to say how they felt and in the event "conveyed pessimism and suspicion."

Another concerned superintendent accounted for the pessimism in terms of two factors. Firstly, he said that, apart from a meeting in January 1988 when a document was handed out about the superintendency,

> "There has never been an inservicing on how a district office should be run. So, each superintendent made his or her interpretation depending on whether they were young or old and city or country. Had we been brought together for two days and taught how to run an effective district office then we wouldn't see the negativism displayed in the report."

Secondly, he thought the views coming through the report were predominantly those of 'old' (pre-1987) city superintendents who had to deal with secondary schools. So far as he could see, it was those superintendents who faced most difficulty maintaining optimism, partly because "secondary schools feel they can't get much out of district offices and there are more of them in the city than in the country."

That theme was taken up by a superintendent who constructed a three-dimensional matrix to depict his perceptions. According to him, the superintendents most likely to be less than optimistic were those represented in the shaded section of the matrix below.



In line with what proved to be a somewhat common theme, two other superintendents made these observations:

> "Many comments reflect a cynicism which could also show the difference between the 'old' (i.e. pre 1987) and the 'new' (first appointed in 1988) superintendents. The report does not seem to take into account these different perspectives - i.e. one group who are critical and who feel frustrated and disempowered by the changes and another group who have taken up the challenge of the new order. Does the variation between districts reflect these attitudes?"

> "Of the thirteen superintendents you spoke to, the vast majority must have been 'old' superintendents. The quotes in Chapter Three are all from one point of view. If you had spoken to a greater range of people you may have got another side to the argument as well. When I read those quotes I got an impression they came from people who had been superintendents before."

Not surprisingly, some other superintendents took a different perspective on these matters. For example:

> "There is no simple dichotomy. Superintendents are spread along a continuum and some of the 'old' believe there are many major improvements to the system under Better Schools."

> "Some of the new superintendents are running districts like the regions. The old superintendents know what not to do; they are more in the new mould. The new superintendents are modelling themselves on the old regional superintendents, though some new superintendents have a good understanding of the new system"

Of the thirteen superintendents initially interviewed, five were not superintendents before 1987 - they were 'new'. Judging from the collective comments made during the interviews, it would be fair to say that, as a group, the 'new' superintendents were no more or less optimistic than the 'old' superintendents, as a group.

Late Response

A number of respondents considered that this report, "does not speak about the role, the theory of the role, or the variety of approaches to the role of the district superintendent." Instead, it focusses on "the human dynamics in a very changing government organisation." It deals with "the uncertainties, confusions, and contradictions of our circumstances since 1988." Though not necessarily a dissenting response, the following letter from a district superintendent bears out those impressions to some extent. It is reproduced without analysis or comment because it arrived late in the piece and there is a certain unity to it.

> Rod, I have been a little tardy in getting these notes into some kind of form, however for what they are worth, here they are.
>
> My judgement is that we are heading in the direction of the two tier system to which you allude. Initially, extreme difficulties were experienced by all major players as the concept of decentralising and recentralising simultaneously is quite novel to those in the teaching force of Western Australia. It was clearly not possible to explain to 25,000 just exactly what was encompassed in this complex concept. In truth, there wasn't very much explaining to anybody at all. Most of the awareness phase consisted of Ministerial statements, newspaper articles and some public addresses - a load which was carried by a very small group in Central Office.
>
> As Superintendents were not involved in framing the new visions/directions involved for the education system, some did not necessarily agree to this way of doing things. They didn't clearly understand the major concepts and it seemed some didn't accept the importance of the vision. My observations indicate that this interferred with communication between Central Office and the school face, because teachers quickly perceived a diffidence on the part of some Superintendents to give confident, wholehearted commitment to this new vision.
>
> It is my observation that a similar scenario has developed between principals and their school staff. It's probably reasonable to observe that in some stances, official Ministry polices do now exist on paper but they have yet to transfer into the hearts and minds of the teaching population. Conversely, it might be argued that many time worn and successful practices in schools continue to exist for that very reason. These make a significant impact on the role that Superintendents are obliged to take, but may well not be sanctioned by official policy. An example is that schools desire to be identified with the District Office because it has the Superintendent who will be a leader and a decision maker, thus removing this responsibility from teachers. There is also the problem of principals gathering together to discuss and define

district perceptions of Ministry policy and the tendency to look to the Superintendent for decisions in this area, where in fact, Better Schools policy is that Central Office policies take precedence - districts do not create policy. If there is to be any variation of Central Office policy, it is to be at school level and designed to meet local needs that have been identified by analysis of data.

The role of the Superintendent has been clearly established in the minds of teachers and principals over a period of some one hundred years. These people exert pressure to maintain aspects of that role they believe to be effective in the running of efficient schools. As you rightly point out, some of them also exert pressure to maintain aspects of that role that has advantages to them.

One quote on page 36 indicated that Superintendents look to Directors of Operations for goals and leadership, as principals look to Superintendents, regardless of the fact that leadership may not be part of the future Superintendent's role; this applies to a limited number of Superintendents. My view would be that the Director of Operation's role is very diffuse, interpreted in at least five quite different minds and defined by 29 diverse Superintendents.

I believe a large number of Superintendents have formed their own definition of the role. The fact that Superintendents are largely concerned with control puts them, as pointed out by your report, in the response mode and unless the Superintendent can operate very adroitly, principals respond with the defence mode. This aspect of the role is frequently perceived by the schools in a negative light and removes a considerable amount of the job satisfaction available to the Superintendent.

Prior to 1987, there was more scope for Superintendents to act as an educational role model/leader. It is also pertinent to observe that much of the power Superintendents ostensibly have in the decision making area is often eroded when Central Officers reverse decisions without giving a rationale and where it appears they have not fully considered the various local factors that impinged upon the Superintendent's decision. There are times when a great deal of time and effort are expended by a Superintendent and there is no evidence that Central Officers appreciate this contribution.

It is clear the role is an evolving one with many significant changes still to come. It's my view that this report is an interesting and useful beginning and much research still remains to be done.

Best wishes

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