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**MUTUAL TRANSFERENCE EMPOWERMENT:**

a proposed reconceptualisation of partnerships between central government and local agencies using empirical evidence from nineteenth century Tasmania.

This conference paper engages both of Professor Thody's interests in local and central government relations and in the history of educational administration.

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**Abstract**

This paper suggests a new concept, 'mutual transference empowerment', to describe partnerships between central/local governments and school-based governance. School governing bodies, councils, trusts or boards are being developed in many late twentieth century educational systems as a means of facilitating partnership between schools and their communities. It is not often realised that such structures for partnership could be seen as a revival of a nineteenth century model but a model in which the local partners lost virtually all their power to their central governments by around 1900. The prevailing explanations for this are that centralising forces took over either because local school-based direction of education provided insufficient and inadequate schooling, or because of an irresistible, central, desire for power. These explanations hide the apparent contradiction that localism continued to be encouraged throughout the century by the centralised authorities and that there were local successes. This paper suggests that, in addition to centralising forces, the local communities themselves, inadvertently or willingly, may have colluded in handing power to centralising structures through lack of interest in continuing with local responsibilities. The terminology of 'mutual transference empowerment' has been suggested in this paper for this process in which centralising and localising forces each attempted to ensure they passed responsibilities to others in the structure of education government. Empirical evidence for the study is drawn from nineteenth century Tasmania. Readers are invited to reflect on whether or not mutual transference empowerment will repeat itself there, or in other twentieth century contexts, as institutional, local and central governments focus again on who will lead schooling.

Keywords: local government; central government; education; educational administration; Tasmania; community

**TRANSFERENCE EMPOWERMENT:  
an investigation of a reconceptualisation of partnerships between state and  
community using empirical evidence from nineteenth century Tasmania.**

**INTRODUCTION: Concept - Context - Conduct - Content**

**Concept**

During the nineteenth century, Tasmania's central government absorbed provision and direction of education from community and religious groups, a process not dissimilar to that elsewhere in Australia and England. Until the 1960s, common explanations for absorption suggested that the centralising governments became dominant because local education provision was deemed inadequate. In contrast, late twentieth century reassessments of the nineteenth century view local communities, teachers and families as having played extensive roles in educational developments, and view central governments' irresistible desire for power as having unfairly denigrated local efforts. Investigated here is the possibility of an alternative explanation, i.e. a concept of 'mutual transference empowerment'. This implies that local communities, inadvertently or willingly, colluded in handing power to central government which tried to resist it, striving instead to force local community groups to continue making provision instead.

**Context**

Past experience may be a testing ground for apparently new assumptions such as transference empowerment. School councils, governing bodies, trusts or boards are being developed in Tasmania (Education Act 1994) as elsewhere around the world in the late twentieth century in order to organise partnerships amongst school managers, school communities and central and local governments. Such partnerships existed in Tasmania and elsewhere during the nineteenth century too. Past experience is also deemed of interest in its own right (Seaborne,1966:38&41) especially for education management which needs to discover its history (Sharpe,1992:4;Sungaila,1982;Thody,1994). School management was a compulsory subject in nineteenth century teacher training and there were many popular text books on school management which enjoyed large sales in both Australia and England and which were recommended by the Tasmanian Department of Education.. I have, however, located only one study of the micro-issues of school management in the nineteenth century but this relates only to governance and concerns England (Gordon,1974). Hence this contribution to concepts and to history.

**Conduct**

Primary sources for this paper were school and central government reports, letters, memoranda, circulars and inspectors', local committees' and teachers' records together with some school histories (Tasmanian State Archives). Secondary sources are dominated by centrist perspectives, an attitude found in studies of other Australian states and of English education for the same period. Reassessments of local and community involvement from Tasmanian secondary sources are rare although there are such reassessments for other Australian states and for England and these have stimulated ideas.

**Content**

The paper surveys the school establishment and funding activities of individuals, families and denominational groups and the school administration and inspection activities of local volunteer agencies appointed by central government in nineteenth century Tasmania. The evidence indicates that there is not a clearly demonstrable case for either the suggestion of a power-hungry centralising state nor of totally adequate and committed local bodies, whether self-appointed or established by central government. Hence the new concept of 'mutual transference empowerment' suggested here as a description of the process in which centralising and localising forces both pushed to pass responsibilities to each other. Discussion of the concept concludes with speculations on its twentieth century applicability.

## ASSESSING THE ACTIVITIES OF THE LOCALITIES

### **School Establishment and Funding**

#### **School Administration**

#### **School Visiting (Inspection)**

### **School Establishment and Funding**

The early Tasmanian nineteenth century schools were provided by local private or denominational groups or individuals, as they were in England too. By 1850, Tasmania's central government decided to rationalise schools, to make instruction non-denominational, to appoint local volunteers in a superintendence capacity (Barcan, 1980:64) together with monitoring by inspectors employed by central government. In these developments, community groups were 'empowered' to provide schools by grants in proportion to public subscription and the 1851 Code of Regulations 'provided for local committees to manage schools if so desired by the community' (Reeves, 1935:49). The onus to establish schools remained with parents and local committees until transferred to the central Department of Education by the 1886 Education Act., presumably because central government perceived local provision as inadequate. How justified was this view ?

Immediately prior to the 1886 Act, there were 191 schools established by local initiative and in receipt of public funds. In 1824, there were two such schools. One third of the establishment costs and half of the on-going building costs of each school were provided by the local community; fee income from parents paid for equipment, books and part of teachers' salaries. Such participation was warmly supported by central government administrators and by public opinion (Howell, 1986:30; Reeves, 1935:44; Watson, 1983:2: *The Launceston Examiner*, September 1, 1847).

The determination of local communities can be judged from numerous requests for the central government grants, requests which were often refused as the centre disputed local communities' estimates of needs. In 1891, for example, parents who had been refused a grant, themselves converted a hut, made some rough desks and attracted 16 pupils (Correspondence, 9893/2, 20 September, 1897), an initiative found elsewhere in Australia. On taking over Dulcote School in 1894, the master wrote: 'Mr John King is willing to contribute one third of the cost and I [the schoolmaster] will assist myself if necessary' (Correspondence, 8 June, 1894:5820/123). Community support also showed in parents' fee payments. The maximum central government provided salary for a male teacher in 1885 was £156 (A\$312) per annum plus two thirds of the school fees raised locally. These averaged around 9d per week (3.6p, A\$.07) and were expected to provide quite substantial additions to salaries paid by the central government. In two cases, for example, school principals' salaries rose as high as £420 (A\$840) p.a., half the salary of the Minister for Education (Zainu'ddin, 1981:69)

Despite these successes, the numbers of schools and the involvement of parents were judged inadequate by the central government. Local communities were deemed to be using unsuitable buildings for schools. Some parents did not pay fees even when they could. Some parents, once having achieved the establishment of a school, failed to maintain their interest. Some parents kept children at school for only the minimum legal time. Some parents did not favour educational developments. 1880s parents

were unwilling to buy even inexpensive instruments for scale drawing (Hudson, 1976:97). Parents' indifference to education was considered noteworthy (Reeves, 1935:59).

### **School Administration**

The criticisms noted above were insufficient to alter central faith in the efficacy of local involvement (Smith, 1990:84-85) and the 1868 Education Act established Local Public School Boards, fostering 'local interest and supervision' (Hudson, 1976: 28). The Boards were: 'To report to the Board of Education any want of repair in the school Buildings or insufficiency of accommodation, suitable furniture or School apparatus; To take precautions for excluding from the School all books not sanctioned by the Board of Education; To inspect periodically the School Registers and Records; To use their influence with parents to induce them to send their children to school (Circular 22, February, 1869). The Boards consisted of volunteers, nominated locally but appointed by the central government as unpaid administrative agents.

There was further centralisation of Tasmanian education in 1886 but local empowerment statutorily remained; Local Boards of Advice succeeded the School Boards. Boards of Advice supervised districts with varying numbers of schools. The seven members of each Board of Advice were nominated by the central government's Governor (on local proposals) and reported biannually to the Department of Education. The Boards had limited powers to advise the Minister, to suspend teachers for misconduct when urgent response was needed which could not await Ministerial action, to control expenditure on repairs, cleaning and fuel, to protect the teacher of the district from frivolous complaints, to consider applications from parents for remission of fees and to agree any temporary school closures.

In areas where these Local Boards of Advice operated satisfactorily, there was 'a noticeable improvement in the conditions of the school-houses' (Hudson, 1976:80) and Boards were efficient in responding to parental complaints about teachers. There were, however, criticisms. Some Boards did not repair their schools nor assist teachers with arrangements for cleaning them. By 1883, of eighty-one Boards, ten had never met in five years, fifty-one had never visited their schools and fifty-five had never delivered their compulsory reports to the central Board. There was 'considerable difficulty managing their accounts' (Twentyman, 1901:452). Ninety eight of 126 teachers surveyed said that their Boards took no interest in their schools (Hudson, 1976:69) and the Department of Education considered Boards to have failed in their duties (Circulars to Teachers, 120, 9 September, 1895). The 1904 Director of Education considered them to be the main blocks to reform (Rodwell, 1992:35).

Central authorities did not, however, make it easy for Local Boards to be successful, limiting their funding, assigning uninteresting work and offering minimum discretion with maximum bureaucracy. The Education Office, for example, required precise returns of the tiny amounts spent on fuel and had to grant permission for virement of funds. Board Secretaries had their salaries reduced with no diminution of duties.

Perhaps one reason for central criticisms of Local Boards was less because of their claimed inefficiency and more because they warmly praised their local schools, hardly a message which a centralising state would welcome. Comments following school visits indicate that local Board members were 'Gratified by what I have seen and heard'. 'Very much pleased with the appearance of the children and the order of the school', 'In my monthly visits...I find great improvement'.

### **School Visiting (Inspection)**

Local community visitors were enjoined to make observations in schools' visitors' books for school monitoring; (Reeves,1935:32). Visitors in the early years were district chaplains, deemed to be sufficiently efficacious in their supervision of less able teachers, that expensive trained teachers from England need not be employed (Barcan,1980:65). Official sanction of these informal local visits came in 1840: 'In each district...Ordained Ministers, Police, Magistrates, and respectable inhabitants, are earnestly requested to communicate with the Board whenever they have any suggestions to offer which may tend to the benefit of the Schools' (Board of Education, 1840:15).

From 1854, visitors had free access to any public school, but as spectators only, not having the right to ask questions nor to interfere in any way with the business of the school' (1854 Regulations, Reeves,1935:57). In 1868, Local School Board members were regularly to: visit and report upon the School under their supervision; To take care that the School Buildings are not used for any purpose contrary to the Rules and Regulations of the Board of Education; [To report to] the Board of Education any occasion on which the School is not open on all the usual School Days and when the Teachers are not present at their work (Circular 22 February,1869.Circulars to Teachers, 44). After 1886, the local Boards of Advice had to appoint a Special Visitor as teachers' guide, counsellor and protector of teachers from frivolous complaints. The Special Visitor could also grant half holidays such as that for, polling day on Australian Federation.

Some Boards of Advice were punctilious in their visiting. Latrobe School had frequent visits from 1858 until 1891, recording 47 local visitors in 1890. A survey for this research of inspectors' reports on 169 schools in 1893, showed that twelve were very frequently visited and a further thirty seven received frequent visits, including those of the Special Visitors, 'tourists' and 'casuals'. Despite this evidence, Boards of Advice and their predecessors were regularly castigated for failing to visit schools and amongst the sample of 169 schools were twenty seven which had few visitors and for which the absence of the Board of Advice members was recorded. Even when there were visitors, their views were considered less than appropriately critical. In 1862, for example, Inspector Stephens noted worsening results from one school and threatened the teacher with dismissal. Inspector Stephens expressed surprise that the community had not reported the situation to him: ' "Why did you not tell me...?" I asked. "Oh, it was no business of mine"' or "Oh! he was badly off and I didn't want to be upon him"... were invariably the answers [from the parents]...who rendered me not the slightest assistance'. It should be remembered, however, that the Boards were small, the members were spare time volunteers and might have up to 16 schools to visit.

## COMMENTARY

During the nineteenth century in Tasmania, the central authorities gradually took over local roles in the establishment, resourcing and inspection of schooling. Local community boards, though statutorily empowered by central government, became marginalised. Previous interpretations of these changes in Tasmania and elsewhere in Australia and England, have suggested that central domination was necessitated by the perceived inadequacies of community provision. Some of these inadequacies in Tasmania have been described above. Reassessments of nineteenth century developments indicate that there were community, parental and teacher successes, as the above evidence for Tasmania also demonstrates, but central governments denigrated these, presumably because of negative attitudes to localism arising from conceptions of the state in class terminologies, in moral or cultural ascendancies assumed rather than justified, in the state as the natural provider of personal services or as the umpire of social demands from different factions or as the manipulator of social trends (all these are admirably summarised in Vick, 1986:9-11). All these deemed local initiative to be inadequate and in need of replacement. The centre transferred power to itself and local communities were too weak to resist the transfer.

Suggested here is an alternative conceptualisation of the reason for the development of centralisation, i.e. mutual transference empowerment, a process in which centralising and localising forces each attempted to ensure they passed responsibilities to each other. Each felt the moral imperative that duty belonged to the other. The centre wanted to avoid funding schools or providing extensive administration or inspection. Local communities wanted to avoid direction and finance of schooling which were time consuming, onerous and dull once excitements of initiating schools passed. Local communities which established schools included parents with only transient interests in schools. Respectable local people whom the central government asked to serve on Boards were not those whose children attended government supported schools. For want of local and central commitment, there was mutual transference empowerment which could be said to have resulted, not in central success in acquiring power, but in central acquiescence in being forced to step in since local communities were apathetic about retaining power. As local powers decreased, localities had less and less practice at controlling education; expertise, confidence and experience declined. Local communities might be said to have relinquished their empowerment, albeit largely tacitly (but in political theory, tacit consent is deemed to be as legitimating as active consent)

It is important to acknowledge that the localities, just as much as the centre, may have wanted to transfer power to the centre. This is not a comfortable idea either for interpreters of nineteenth century history who have rediscovered local achievements nor for late twentieth century believers that the re-invention of school governance or parent councils is the best way to lead schooling. If local communities were once apathetic, reluctant to take responsibility and denigrated by the central authorities for inadequacies, could they be so again ?

The case for the transferability of the concept of mutual transference empowerment from the nineteenth to the twentieth century must rest on the assumption of adequate commonality of context between the two periods. It might be argued, for example, that the late twentieth century is more concerned with equity than was the late nineteenth century and that this predisposes central government to push harder to remove local power. It could equally, however, predispose local providers to feel the need for greater central government assistance given the costs of a technologically, internationally competent education. I would also suggest, that there was a similar aim in the late nineteenth century since the objective then was to provide basic education for those who had none - a different interpretation of 'equity' from that of today but one that, de facto, must have led towards greater equity. The internationalism of the late twentieth century would seem to give central government strong reason to intervene in local provision as children have to be prepared for life in the 'global village'; for the late nineteenth century educators, there was an empire for which to prepare children and economic competition with other nations for which pupils had to have skills in order for both Tasmania and England to access world markets effectively. In both periods there have been conceptions that the central state could not afford the full costs of education which must be passed instead to the local agencies, state or voluntary. While there is, today, a greater understanding of the effect of central government intervention on the macro-economy, the tools for effecting this intervention through the restriction of local borrowing powers and taxation were as much used in the late nineteenth as in the late twentieth century and central government prevented extravagant local spending in both periods. In both periods, the local agencies pushed to obtain more central funding.

Local people drifted away from service on the nineteenth century Boards, arguably because of the trivial matters over which they were given control. The twentieth century advent of the self-managing school appears to ensure that School Councils in Tasmania and school governors in England control important issues such as finance, but control of the curriculum, inspection and the format of schooling (in England and Tasmania) and of significant academic staff appointments and salaries (in Tasmania) remains with the central government. Are Tasmania's twentieth century School Councils or England's school governors yet agitating for partnership in the control of these larger issues? Is the centralised state attempting to transfer responsibility for the daily grind of funding and system administration to its partner local communities, as it did in the nineteenth century? Are the local community partners trying to avoid taking on uncomfortable powers over staff salaries and conditions of work? Are parents and others resigning after short periods on governing bodies? If so, I would suggest that the process of mutual transference empowerment is here again, though, as an academic, I would not risk forecasting the outcome of the process. Would you?

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