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ABSTRACT

This article presents an abbreviated report of a study to develop a model for achieving student participation in the governance of senior high schools. It also presents a blueprint for the implementation of this model in existing schools. For the study, a survey was done of a representative sample of senior high school students, teachers, and administrators in the Calgary public school system. The survey revealed that students are not now participating in decision-making concerning the governance of schools. Findings also indicated that students, teachers, and administrators look favorably on more sharing of decision-making concerning school rules and regulations but not concerning curriculum and evaluation. Researchers concluded that a model for increased student participation should not radically alter the existing organizational structure of the school. The model of participative decision-making derived from the study and presented here is the "control assembly." The control assembly is an elected body intended to serve as a forum at which differing views may be presented, debated, and amalgamated into a jointly shared long-range planning decision reflecting the views of students, teachers, and administrators. (Author/JM)

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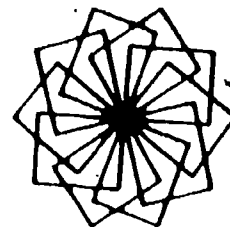
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No. 16, September 1979

*Dennis L. Treslan: **THE CONTROL ASSEMBLY: An Administrative Alternative in Canadian Senior High Schools**



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Current literature abounds with the necessity of involving all organizational members, either directly or indirectly, in selected facets of management decision-making. Industrial organizations, in particular, report favourable progress in this realm through participative management styles, workers' councils, and other collegial governance structures. Senior high schools, on the other hand, have been slow to utilize the research findings emanating from member participation in industrial organizations. Seemingly content with the status quo, these social entities have made few, if any, attempts to innovate in this area.

Throughout the sixties and early seventies, numerous educators elaborated on the necessity of involving students in educational decision-making - venturing to suggest potential areas for this participation, and expounding the advantages to be accrued therefrom. A few alternative high schools were established but never flourished. Strangely enough, avenues or vehicles for achieving student decision-making input in traditional high schools were rarely elaborated on. Student senates and student faculty committees were proposed, but have since disappeared - their ineffective and short-lived existence attributed to exaggerated goals

and ill-conceived conceptual frameworks.

Notwithstanding the fact that ultimate responsibility for education rests with provincial governments and local school boards, contemporary literature reveals an absence of a viable mechanism through which students can become involved in senior high school control. The traditional senior high school continues to exist as an efficient bureaucratic organization, providing limited member (student, teacher) participation in control decisions. Students' councils, though never intended to give students a greater voice in school control, currently serve as the only avenue for student input in educational decision-making.

This writer recognizes that involving students in educational decision-making within the control process of senior high schools constitutes a major challenge to educators in general, and has implications for the administrative style and organizational structure of the senior high school. What follows is an abbreviated report on a study recently undertaken to develop an alternative model, reflective of in-school member perceptions, for achieving student participation in senior high school control, plus a blueprint for the implementation of this model in existing schools.

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Four major assumptions governed this study (1) students, teachers, and administrators are genuinely interested in realizing change in the existing control structure of senior high schools in the direction of increased member participation, (2) research implications of member participation in industrial organizational control, with some modification, can be realized in the senior high school, (3) learning experience gained from participation in senior high school control can provide students with an additional opportunity for gaining citizenship skills, and (4) the development of a model for student participation in control is possible within the existing bureaucratic school organization.

To counteract the lack of current Canadian data on member participation in educational decision-making, the major problem of this study necessitated a recent survey of student, teacher, and administrator perceptions of shared decision-making and senior high school governance as an initial phase in the model development. Six specific questions were posed for this phase of the study. Among these were the following (1) Whom do students, teachers, and administrators perceive to be presently participating in selected areas of school decision making? (2) In which areas of school decision-making do students, teachers, and administrators perceive shared decision-making? (3) Whom do students, teachers, and administrators perceive should be participating in selected areas of school decision-making? (4) What are the discernible patterns pertaining to student, teacher, and administrator satisfaction with the present high school governance structure? (5) What are the discernible patterns pertaining to the type of high school governance structure preferred by students, teachers, and administrators? (6) What are the discernible patterns pertaining to similarities or discrepancies between the existing and preferred governance structure perceived by students, teachers, and administrators?

This first phase was carried out among a representative sample of senior high school students, teachers, and administrators working within the Calgary Public School System in April-May 1976. The 40 areas of decision-making analyzed in this survey were classified as curriculum, in-school rules and regulations, and evaluation.

Some of the findings, relative to each of the six questions posed earlier, were

1. The vast majority of educational decision-making presently occurring in the high schools surveyed was being performed by teachers and administrators, either unilaterally or on a partially shared basis. Students, teachers, and administrators all attested to the fact that students presently play a minor, nearly insignificant, role in decision-making related to curriculum, in-school rules and regulations, and evaluation.
2. Shared decision-making, either partially or jointly shared between all three in-school groups, was not perceived of as presently occurring to any significant extent in the schools surveyed. This was attested to by the fact that only one decision area was presently so identified.
3. All three in-school groups preferred to have considerably more shared decision-making occurring in their schools than at present. However, this future sharing of decisions appeared to be limited to the realm of in-school rules and regulations, with 13 decision areas being so identified. Given the interest expressed in future shared decision-making, it would appear that all three in-school groups could be counted on to work towards the development of a strategy to allow greater shared decision-making to occur in their respective schools.
4. Students displayed some dissatisfaction with the present high school governance structure

by generally agreeing that it was stereotyped, non-participatory, and authoritarian. Teachers appeared to agree with students in their display of dissatisfaction with this entity, also by generally agreeing that it was stereotyped, non-participatory, and authoritarian. Administrators were generally satisfied with the present high school governance structure, viewing it as somewhat traditional, but otherwise favourable on all other descriptors listed. The similarities displayed between student, teacher, and administrator views of the existing governance structure suggests that these groups perceived this entity in much the same manner.

5. Students, teachers, and administrators expressed a mutual desire to experience a high school governance structure that was progressive and original in design, flexible in format, allowing considerable member participation, and very democratic in nature. All three in-school groups seemed anxious to have a highly organized type of governance structure, one in which rights and responsibilities would be clearly spelled out. Again, the similarities displayed between student, teacher, and administrator views of a preferred governance structure suggested that these groups perceived this entity in much the same manner.

6. The inordinate difference existing between student views of the existing and preferred governance structures in their respective schools pointed out a keen interest on the part of this group to experience change. The immense differences existing between teacher and administrator views of the existing and preferred governance structures, respectively, was evidence of a keen interest on the part of these groups also to experience change.

These empirical data findings reflected the

following propositions pertinent to the development of a model for realizing participation in senior high school control.

1. The existing senior high school governance structure does not provide an avenue for student participation in school management decisions.

1.1 All three in-school groups currently perceive students as "spectators" in the arena of educational decision-making.

1.2 All three in-school groups perceive the present governance structure as non-conducive to member participation in control decisions.

1.3 Shared decision-making is generally non-existent in the senior high school organization.

2. The current senior high school environment is amicable to the realization of student participation in the control process of this organization.

2.1 All three in-school groups are interested in realizing shared decision-making in the realm of school management (long range planning) decisions.

2.2 All three in-school groups are interested in realizing change in the existing governance structure -- innovative change in the direction of increased member participation and a trend toward democratization.

3. Innovative change in the existing senior high school governance structure, to allow for greater member participation in control decisions, must comply with in-school member perceptions of a preferred governance structure.

3.1 The proposed model will not eliminate, or otherwise radically alter, the existing organizational structure of the senior high school, reflective of in-school members' desire for retention of organization, rationality, and formality.

3.2 The proposed model will provide a

channel for increased member participation in senior high school control, reflective of in-school members' desire for realizing greater participation, in conjunction with a more progressive governance structure.

- 3.3 The proposed model will have a democratizing effect on the entire school by contributing towards a school climate reflective of in-school members' desire for respect, equality, acceptance, simplicity, originality, and flexibility.
- 4 The proposed model for realizing student participation in senior high school control excludes decision areas related to curriculum and evaluation.
- 5 To become a reality, the proposed model for realizing increased student participation must be an in-line authority structure.

A major challenge for this study was to develop a solution to a field problem, which might function simultaneously to meet participant needs and operate within the confines of the traditional senior high school governance structure (utilizing the existing students' council and administrative cabinet to maximum advantage). Furthermore, application of industrial research findings to the senior high school, relative to member participation in organizational control, necessitated the drawing of an analogy between these two entities as comparable social organizations. Having done this, it was possible to construct a control assembly model whose conceptual framework hinged on the empirical data propositions, and on six major constructs, namely, democratic participation, group process, power equalization, decision-making, control, and the individual.

Students, teachers, and administrators constitute the human resource base of this model. Students are representative of different grade levels and/or academic streams (inclusive

of students' council executive); teachers represent the teaching faculty of the school; and administrators embrace the principal, an assistant principal, and a subset of the department heads (inclusive of administrative cabinet representation). The process of actor (member) selection constitutes an activity of extreme importance in the model construction. This membership must be representative of all three in-school groups. Concomitantly, the selection procedure must be conducted democratically, and in as short a time span as possible.

The student membership component can be elected through the existing school house system. In that the control assembly is reflective of the present students' council, whose executive is usually comprised of a grade 10, grade 11, and grade 12 student, it is suggested that this executive be automatically included in the student component of this model. Therefore, 2 additional students must be elected from each grade level, constituting a total of 9 students.

In compliance with the concept of power equalization, the professional staff membership must not exceed 9. Therefore, 4 teachers will be elected from the total teaching staff, and 4 administrators will be elected from within the existing administrative cabinet. These 4 administrators will consist of 3 department heads and 1 assistant principal. Hence, the human input component is comprised of 18 actors, evenly divided between students and professional staff. Once created, the control assembly is designed to function in conjunction with, not in opposition to, the existing control process of the senior high school. The development of this model is depicted in Figure 1.

The control assembly is intended to serve as a forum at which differing views may be presented, debated, and amalgamated into a jointly shared long range planning decision, reflecting the views of each in-school group.

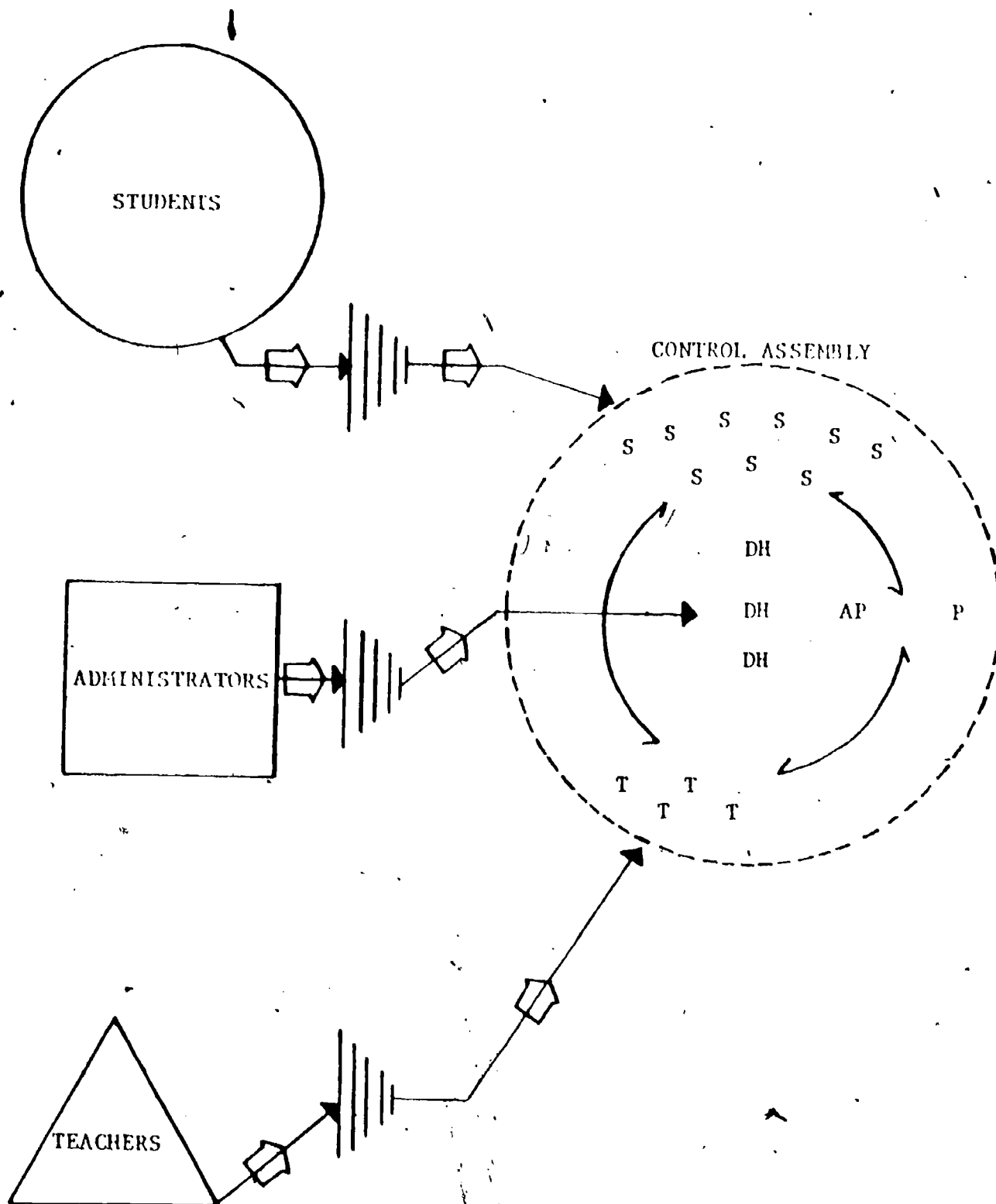


Fig. 1. Control assembly development.

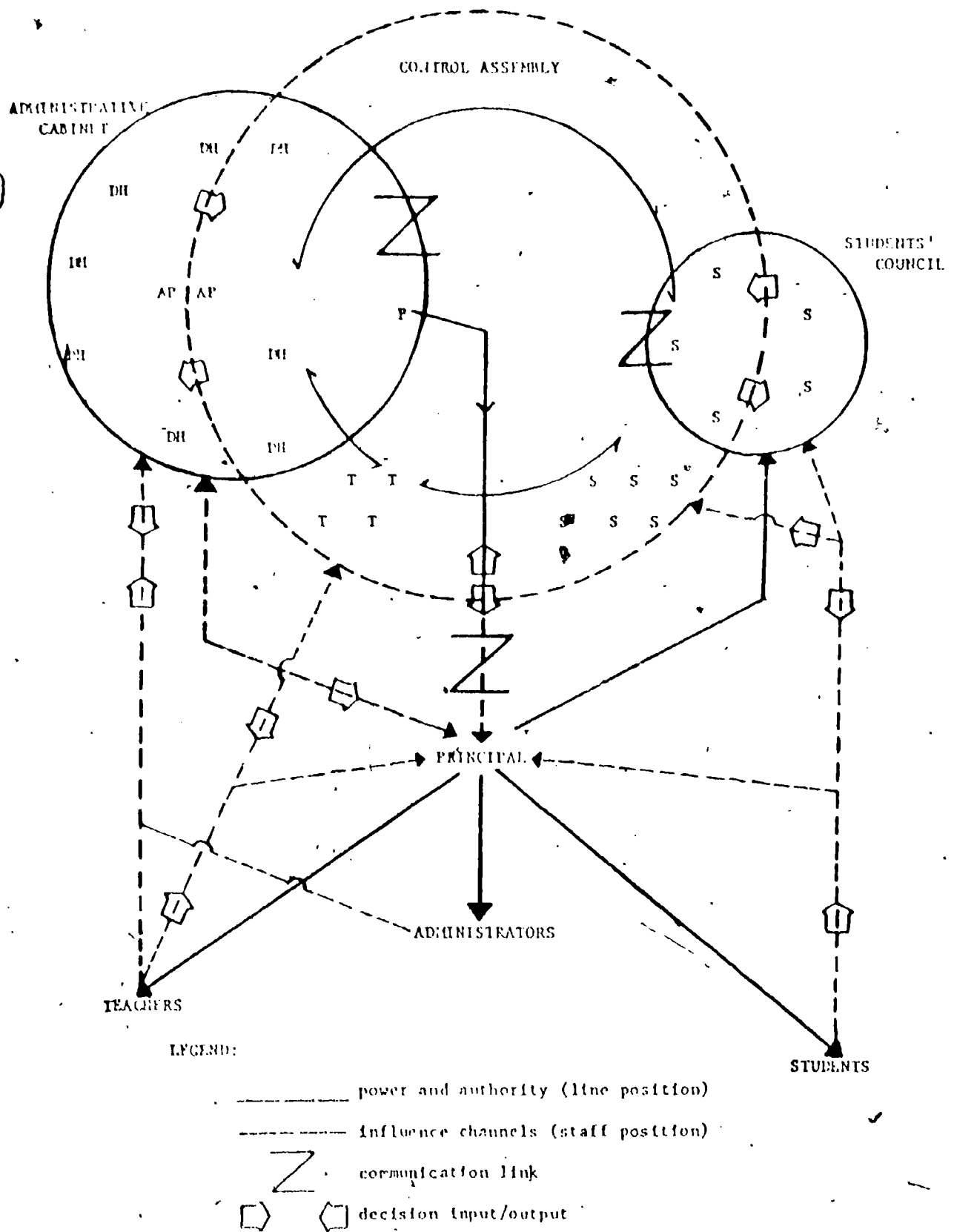


Fig. 2. Operationalization of control assembly within traditional senior high school organization.

(See Figure 2). Along with the administrative cabinet and students' council, this unit will serve as an additional influence on the principal, as legal head of the school. The principal will provide the strongest communication link between the control assembly and the school as a whole. Since the principal acts as chairman of this control unit, he will serve as major spokesman for the entire group -- an action necessary for the preservation of the bureaucratic school structure. Additionally the principal will be charged with the responsibility of constructing the operating agenda for this structure.

The operating fuel for this model will normally consist of decision inputs from three different centres within the school; administrative cabinet, students' council, and principal. In addition to these avenues, it is possible for in-school members to go directly to the principal and have their requests placed on the operating agenda.

As presently conceived, the control assembly should serve a useful role as an alternative influence channel for member input to control decisions. Students, in particular, will now have 3 avenues for decision-making input, namely, students' council, principal, and control assembly. Teachers will likewise have 3 channels for decision-making input, namely, administrative cabinet, principal, and control assembly. For administrators, in general, and the principal, in particular, the control assembly offers a viable alternative for long range planning or policy decisions. It is anticipated that the principal will choose to utilize this mechanism whenever he wishes to have input from representatives of all three in-school groups. Most important, the control assembly is conceived as an additional power centre for educational decision-making within the high school. To this end, it is designed to function as an appendage to the existing governance structure. Actual implementation

of this control unit in any given senior high school should adhere closely to the implementation strategy outlined in Table 1.

Having elaborated on both the development and implementation of the control assembly model, it is necessary to reflect on the ability of this control unit to meet the hopes and aspirations of students, teachers, and administrators, as well as contribute towards the realization of a participative management style in the senior high school organization.

As a functioning control unit, the control assembly should contribute towards the progressive component of school governance. Through this appendage, an opportunity will be extended for all in-school members to experience increased decision-making input in senior high school control. Though this opportunity will be both direct and indirect, in-school members should view the resulting governance structure as more progressive than at present.

The control assembly should furnish all in-school members, particularly students, with an added opportunity to learn about the nature of long range planning or policy formation relative to organizational control. This opportunity should contribute to a perceived simplification of the existing governance structure, in that students and teachers will become aware of an additional avenue of input into control decisions heretofore unavailable to them. In this manner, increased knowledge of the existing governance structure might be obtained with the resulting feeling by all concerned that the existing governance structure is not as complicated as originally believed.

The concept of a control assembly originates from industrial organization experience with workers' councils. Consequently, the functioning of this unit should cause any particular

Table 1. Control assembly (C.A.) implementation strategy

Implementation Substage	* Suggested Time Frame
Initial Implementation	
Examination of C.A. by school principal	June - August
Preparation of C.A. information for student registration week	August
C.A. information given to student body	September (wk 1)
C.A. schema presented by principal (or change agent) to administrative cabinet and students' council for their information	September (wk 1)
Feedback from administrative cabinet and students' council to principal (or change agent)	September (wks 2 and 3)
C.A. schema presented by principal (or change agent) to general staff meeting for staff information	September (wk 4)
Feedback from individual staff members or departments to principal (or change agent)	September (wk 4)
C.A. membership selection process	October (wks 1 and 2)
Continued-Sustained Implementation	
Inaugural meeting of C.A. assembly	October (wk 3)
Establishment of C.A. "monitoring system"	October (wk 4)
C.A. business session No. 1	November (wk 1)
C.A. business session No. 2	November (wk 4 or sooner, if necessary)
C.A. business session No. 3	December (wk 3 or sooner, if necessary)
End of C.A. "trial period"	January (wk 2)
C.A. evaluation	January (wks 2 and 3)
Decision relative to C.A. retention	January (wk 4)

*It should be noted that the Canadian academic year commences in September (ed.)

school to be unique in its approach to involving in-school members in organizational control decisions. That the operationalization of this model will require determination and creativity on the part of all concerned, will serve as an indicator of school flexibility and creativity.

The control assembly is designed to serve as an alternative avenue for in-school member input in general, and student input in particular, to be realized in senior high school decisions. Though operating on the basis of representation, opportunity will be afforded all in-school members to participate indirectly, through elected representatives, in decisions reached within this model. In this manner, it is anticipated that the control assembly will create a general feeling of sharing with others in a majority of control decisions reached.

As presently conceived, the control assembly is designed to comply with in-school member preferences for a highly organized governance structure. This is accomplished by upholding the current bureaucratic control structure and conceiving of the control assembly as a formalized sub-system within this general framework. Hence, the normal tasks allotted to the students' council and administrative cabinet are generally unaffected by this innovation. Thus, the formal senior high school organization is preserved, with innovative change being realized within its confining structures.

All in-school members will be given the opportunity, through the membership selection process, to become active participants in this new control structure. This invitation to participate either directly or indirectly in control decisions should connote an added faith in human potential, and a growth in respect for individuals.

Adherence to the aforementioned implementation strategy will assist in-school member

comprehension of the rationality implicit in the control assembly design and function. The goals and functioning procedure of this unit must be carefully spelled out so that all may understand that this structure does have the potential of providing a much needed alternative for student, teacher, and administrator participation in senior high school control decisions. Moreover, awareness of the dependency of the control assembly on both the students' council and administrative cabinet for functional stability should intensify the rationality intended for this innovation.

Professional staff and students are balanced in this decision-making group in compliance with power equalization requirements. As a result, students, teachers, and administrators can function as decision-making colleagues in long range planning (policy formation) manoeuvres. Each participant will be expected to contribute according to personal expertise and his/her school role. Not only might a sense of equality be experienced in this manner, but dissemination of information from this unit to the school in general should assist in the development of a greater equality among all in-school members. It must be noted that this will be in addition to the accepted norm that students learn, teachers teach, and administrators administer.

All in-school members should have an added opportunity to air their views, either directly as control assembly members, or indirectly through their representatives in this control unit. In this way, the control assembly will serve as a sounding board -- continually monitoring the school pulse by receiving input from the in-school environment. Flexibility, relative to alternative avenues for school member input to control decisions, will be an added realization emanating from this structure. An additional avenue will now become available for student and teacher input to many school control decisions. For

administrators, this control unit will provide the principal with the option of choosing a decision-making group best suited to a given decision item. It is anticipated that he will favour the control assembly in most long range planning matters crucial to the welfare of the entire school. Again, the human resource base and decision data contribute towards further control assembly flexibility. In fact, periodic membership changes, along with variation in meeting times, should enable this control unit to become easily adapted to any senior high school governance structure.

The control assembly is designed in compliance with in-school member preferences for a highly organized governance structure. This innovation is conceived as a formal decision making body, functioning within the ongoing control process of a senior high school. It is bound by procedural rules, and aims at the maximum utilization of the informal communication network in the creation of sound control decisions. In this manner, it serves as a control mechanism receptive to influence from the total school population.

Adhering to democratic procedural norms, such as equality and majority rule, the control assembly attempts to extend equality by a form of "grass roots" decision-making input. In fact, the four democratic themes of involvement, freedom, responsibility, and respect form an integral part of the conceptual framework surrounding this structure. In this context, freedom to participate in shared decisions with others, and sharing the concomitant responsibilities for all decisions reached, should provide a concrete learning experience in democratic citizenship. Thus, respect for others and the opinions of others might be learned, in addition to increased awareness of the complexity of human interaction.

Functioning as an in-line co-determination

structure with rule-making authority, this control unit should contribute towards participative management in senior high school control. This model allows for talent or competence, as well as influence of authority, to provide a basis for achieving an organizational goal - in this instance long range planning or policy formation. Through direct or indirect participation in this formal decision-making body, initiative, creativity, and responsibility of all in-school members, but of students in particular, is afforded an opportunity to find constructive expansion through decision-making information in conjunction with opportunity to solve problems and set school goals. Thus the control assembly should function in much the same manner as a primary group or team does in an industrial setting - fostering the crucial conditions of mutual trust, mutual support, genuine communication, conflict acceptance, and mutual respect for individual differences.

Just as participative management styles in industrial organizations attempt to alter the traditional functions of management by allowing member participation in management decisions, so too, the control assembly might assist in narrowing or eliminating the social distance alienation extant between professional staff and students in senior high schools. (See Figure 3).

Operationalization of the control assembly occurs within the existing senior high school governance structure. Administrators will continue to act as leaders of their schools, as well as planning, organizing, and controlling this organization. However, existence of the control assembly will allow students and teachers to share in the activities of planning, organizing, and controlling - relative to long range planning or policy formation. It must be noted that teachers and students will continue to retain the task of "doing", in compliance with the traditional control pyramid. That the

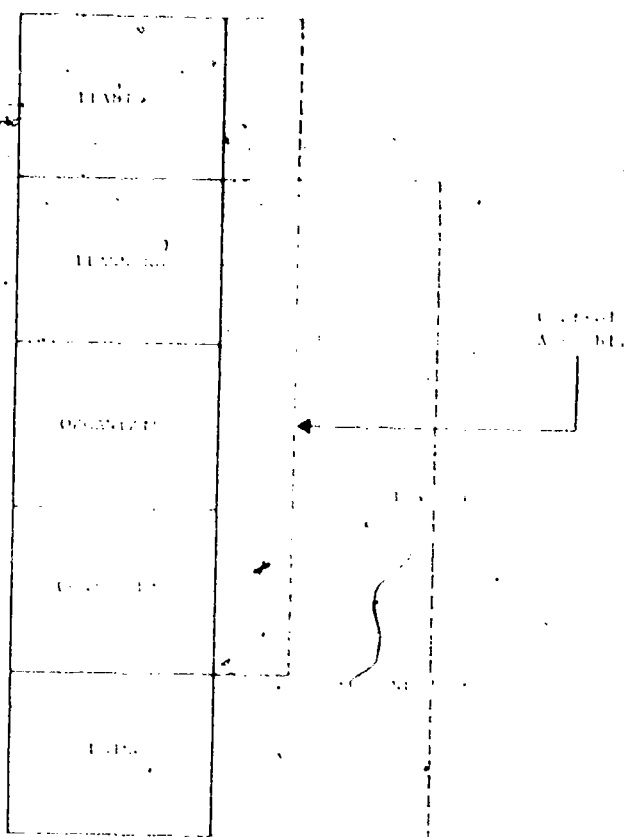


Fig. 3. Control assembly effect on senior high school governance.

control assembly should encourage the foregoing is anticipated because this unit is designed to facilitate and encourage high total inclusion of a large number of in-school members by utilizing their capabilities and fostering their identification with the school organization. This should contribute to the development of a strong interaction influence system within the senior high school organization. In that neither a large body of systematic knowledge nor well developed procedures for dealing with the problems of building the ideal kind of interaction influence system exist, the control assembly might serve as an innovative vanguard in this instance. Relying heavily on the success of "worker's councils" in industrial organizations, and reflecting the perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators, the control assembly should contribute significantly to a new awareness of the integrating

principle and the principle of supportive relationships, as they apply to all members of the traditional senior high school environment.

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