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ABSTRACT

The theoretical and practical notions of school-based management (SBM) are critically examined in this paper. Literature is summarized pertaining to the definitions of SBM, philosophical and theoretical issues, leadership, productivity, the degree of innovation, market factors, and funding. Conclusions are that structural change does not always lead to increased autonomy for those in lower levels of the organization or to overall improved productivity, and it creates problems of funding equity. Principal leadership does not always empower others. The recommendation is made for SBM to be restructured around the notions of improvement, equity, and equal opportunity. (Contains 29 references.) (LMI)

SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT: WILL IT FLY?

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by

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The call for restructuring of schools has come from many quarters. Most would agree that schools need to be restructured to meet the challenges facing our society. Yet there is no consensus as to how this restructuring should take place. Some argue for increased autonomy for schools, others call for increased testing and standardization of curricula, and still others contend that schools should be held more accountable for their results.

The debate about school restructuring has centered on three themes: empowerment, accountability and academic learning (also sometimes referred to as autonomy, accountability and efficiency) (Elmore, 1990). The term empowerment is often connected with teachers (Maeroff, 1988), but also refers to students and parents. Underlying the rhetoric of empowerment is the notion that the growth of school bureaucracy has undermined the authority of teachers, "blurred the responsibility of schools toward students and parents, and deflected attention from the central task of teaching and learning" (Elmore, 1990, p. 5).

Another theme of restructuring is accountability. As schools have become more complex and the purposes of schooling more diffuse, it has become popular to hold schools more accountable for the results they produce with students. The high student drop-out rates, the concern of North American industry with competitiveness, and the poor performance of students have resulted in a call for greater accountability.

A final theme of school restructuring has been that schools do a poor job of engaging most students in learning of academic content. Students tend to find schooling dull, perfunctory and disconnected from real life. Teachers, for their part, have lowered their expectations for student performance and have made accommodations with students that allow each to co-exist. The students adjust by disengaging from schooling and seek engagement in the social life of the school (Goodlad, 1984; Elmore, 1990). In essence the schools are not efficient in their use of resources and in the outputs that they produce.

One way out of this morass the "restructuralists" feel is that schools must change in the way they are governed and the way that decision making takes place. According to the restructuralists, only when the school governance and control management have changed dramatically - so that the school is less restricted in its authority and decision making processes - is substantial improvement likely to occur (Guthrie, 1986). The solution advocated by this group is school-based or school-site management.

School-based management (SBM) as a theoretical construct has been around since the 60's. It has only recently, however, become the centerpiece of the current wave of reform. Various forms of SBM have been mandated in England, New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, and North America. The growing number of districts in North America restructuring all make reference to some form of increased school autonomy. It is, therefore, timely to examine critically some of the theoretical and practical notions of SBM. Much has been written advocating SBM, but little has been written that critically examines the concerns, practices and outcomes of this reform movement. In this paper we attempt to examine some of these issues.

What is SBM?

SBM is a proposal to decentralize and debureaucratize school control (Guthrie, 1986). For some of its advocates, it is also a proposal for shared decision making within schools (Brown, 1990). And for some, it is a method of increasing the influence of parents in school decision making (Raywid, 1990).

SBM advocates recommend that curriculum, personnel and budget decisions be made at the school level. Typically each school receives its budget (the amount being determined by its enrollment) in a lump sum for its own allocations (Brown, 1990).

Most school-based management schemes call for the establishment of a school advisory council - for obtaining systematic input on school decisions from teachers, parents, and sometimes from other citizens and students as well. There are great

variations in decision-making powers of these councils. In some cases schools of choice are combined with school-based management (e.g., Edmonton Public Schools). However, in North America at least there is variation from district to district.

Philosophical and Theoretical Issues

The school-based management reform movement assumes that the problems in today's schools are caused by the highly centralized controls to which schools have become subject. Essentially the argument is that the highly bureaucratized system is incompatible with the professional organization.

School-based management has been viewed as a proposal to debureaucratize system control and to make the school more responsive (flexible) to the needs of its clientele. The assumption is that if decisions are made closer to the client, better decisions will be made and greater satisfaction will prevail (Conley, 1991).

Philosophically, school-based management calls for a shift from a heavy reliance on a structural-functionalist paradigm to one characterized as being much more "interpretive" and "humanist" in orientation (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The individual, according to this paradigm, is held to be important and there is more emphasis on what Habermas (1984) calls communicative rationality and consensus building. Such a view entails a much more collaborative and participative approach to decision-making. Unfortunately what sounds good in theory does not always translate into practice. What may happen under SBM is that one level of bureaucracy may be juxtaposed on another.

Simply changing the organizational structure does not result in more autonomy for those in the lower levels of the organization. Both David (1989) and Brown (1990) found that it was difficult for those holding power to relinquish their authority. Unless those in charge are adamant about the transfer of autonomy very little may change. Because there is a tendency for the mind-set to be rooted in the old paradigm, it may be difficult for

those in control to empower those below them. What SBM could end up being is numerous "branch plants" (Calvert, 1989; Ball, 1990).

Organizations can maintain control over the actions of those in the lower levels in one of two ways: (1) by centralizing decision-making, or (2) by decentralizing decision-making, but prescribing the "rules of the game" (Sackney, 1976). Because of the accountability mechanisms imposed under SBM, control may still rest with those in charge.

Wise (1983) argues that educational policies such as SBM often fail because policy makers tend to hyperrationalize. Hyperrationality occurs when those in power want to appear "to share authority without, in fact, surrendering authority. The response is a procedural rather than a substantive change". (p. 95) Existing procedures are not removed; rather new procedures are simply added to the old. A rational system of decision making, according to Wise, "gives way to a hyperrational system as added procedures rather than redistributed authority becomes the response" (p. 95).

Finally, the organizational culture literature (e.g., Ott, 1989) indicates that culture tends to be pervasive and difficult to change. Consequently, there is a tendency for those in charge to hang on to the old values and ways of doing things, since these approaches have worked in the past. It is difficult to change values, beliefs, norms and assumptions based on the old paradigm. In essence what is being argued here is that the traditional, rational bureaucratic organization may still be well and alive even though structural changes have taken place.

The Leadership Issue

Under school-based management the school is the primary unit of educational decision-making. Decisions concerning expenditures, curricula and personnel are made by principals and staff with the participation of parents, students, and members of the community. The school board continues to define the policies and objectives for the

district. The central office role, on the other hand, shifts from that of "telling" to "facilitating" individual school action (Lindelow & Heynderickx, 1989, p. 109).

In a school-based management system, the principal becomes the key player. The principal, just as board and central office staff, finds it difficult to release authority while still retaining responsibility (Lindelow & Heynderickx, 1989; Brown, 1990). One reason Block (1987) argues is that power is asymmetrical. "It is easier to use authority to tighten up, shrink, and make an organization more cautious than it is to use power to open up, expand and make an organization more courageous" (p. 68). What this implies, he contends, is that empowerment is a state of mind as well as a result of position, policies, and practices. Consequently, there is a tendency for us to "become more powerful as we nurture those below us" (p. 68). Operating in a bureaucratic culture we see ourselves as vulnerable, losing control and somewhat helpless. The antidote to the bureaucratic cycle Block contends is the entrepreneurial cycle. This means empowering ourselves and others and ultimately improving the school; however, this is not an easy leadership task.

School-based management also means extra work for the principal (Lindelow & Heynderickx, 1989; Brown, 1990). The principal has to attend to a larger set of managerial tasks tied to the delivery of educational services, including program planning, development and evaluation, personnel selection and assignment, staff development and evaluation, and budget management. In addition, the principal is burdened by the increased time committed to collaborative decision-making. The principal is expected to involve staff, students, parents and the community in the decision-making process.

A mechanism used for giving teachers, parents, and community members a role in decision-making is the school-based management council. Procedures for selecting council members and defining their authority must be specified in policy at the start of the process (Lindelow & Heynderickx, 1989). Generally the principal serves as chairperson but cannot veto council decisions. Such a system entails a great deal of

trust. Where the system breaks down, according to Lindelow and Heynderickx, is when the Council wants to take control of the decision-making processes of the school. They found some parent groups had to be restrained from setting up their own central office.

In exercising leadership principals have to decide to what degree they will involve teachers. Teacher involvement is thought to promote commitment to decisions and to increase motivation to carry them out (Conley, 1991). Conley claims that teachers' expectations and desires vary substantially among teachers and across decision domains. Teachers tend to express greater expectations for and desire to participate in decisions related to classroom instruction, but have considerably less desire to participate in administrative and management decisions. Smylie (1992, p. 63) explored the organizational and psychological antecedents to teachers' willingness to participate in personnel, curriculum and instruction, staff development, and general administration duties. He found that teachers willingness to participate was influenced primarily by their relationship with their principal. Teachers were more willing to participate if their relationships with their principal was more open, collaborative and supportive. They were much less willing to participate if their relationship was closed, exclusionary, and controlling.

In essence, the degree of staff involvement is contingent on the principal. The reality, according to Calvert (1990), is that the degree of involvement varies from school to school. Similarly Davies (1992, p. 17) in a study of English reforms, argues that little change is evident in management style. The degree of delegated decision-making in the schools is dependent on the previous operant norms.

What leadership styles do principals tend to use under SBM? Young (1986) and Brown (1990) found that while leadership styles vary, most choose to use a consultative as opposed to collegial or collaborative approach. Proponents of SBM argue that the principal under this scheme would have the authority and autonomy to become the "total educational leader". Unfortunately this has not occurred to date. The scant research

points to an emphasis on the technical or managerial role as opposed to the instructional role (Calvert, 1989; Brown, 1990).

Some (e.g., Calvert, 1989), argue that principals may devote too much attention to the managerial role so that the pedagogical functions suffer. The downside according to Calvert: "If principals are to perform functions analogous to branch managers and schools are to be considered from a budgetary perspective as the franchises they manage, it may be difficult to ensure that such business values do not come to dominate all other aspects of the school's operation" (p. 38).

What is being argued here is that the principals' role under SBM is much more complex. It requires skills which few principals may possess. Much more professional development is required under such a scheme. Working collaboratively, involving teachers, parents, and the community is a skill that many principals do not have. Furthermore, assessing performance and planning for the future requires considerable expertise and time. It may well be that no one individual can perform all the functions.

The Productivity Issue

A major reason for the implementation of SBM is to improve productivity. While the concept pertains to effectiveness, efficiency, and equity, for this section the term will be used in a narrower sense to capture the pay-off of increased autonomy and flexibility. In other words, does SBM provide advantages in terms of increased student learning and improved satisfaction of stakeholder groups? How is education better in these restructured schools?

Looking first at student learning, the relationship between SBM and learning achievement is not at all clear. According to the production function model, one should be able to gain an understanding about how changes or variance in the inputs and processes of production affect output. In SBM systems, financial delegation enables the school to make decisions about what mix of labour (teachers and other personnel) and

capital (equipment, computers, library resources, etc.) is to be used to equip and staff the school. School staff also have considerable autonomy and flexibility with regard to process, i.e., how to use the resource inputs to provide educational programs and services. Unfortunately, the decisions about inputs and process are made largely in a vacuum of ignorance about what the impact might be on student learning. To date educational theory and productivity studies provide some optimism but no certainty about the complex relationships that exist among input, process, and output variables (Jones, 1985, p. 206). Therefore, arguments supporting school-based budgeting and decision-making as means of improving student learning are at best speculative.

On the matter of other outcomes, Brown (1990, p. 244) and David (1989) provide some research evidence that SBM improves the satisfaction level of students, parents, teachers, and principals. Brown's conclusions were tentative since increases in satisfaction were variable across groups and individuals, and factors other that SBM may have influenced levels of satisfaction. Although improved satisfaction is to be valued in itself, the real challenge and test for SBM is to see if it does produce the types of changes in educational inputs and processes that result in enhanced and improved learning outcomes. Until this connection can be shown, educators must continue to justify SBM on outcomes other than improved student learning.

Change Issue

Does SBM result in increased innovativeness? Brown (1990) concluded that decentralization does not hamper initiative taking, but neither does it reward attempts at innovation. The evidence appears to be that schools do not look different under SBM. The changes have been marginal at best (Brown, 1990; David, 1989).

David (1989, p. 50) found that schools made few changes: some marginal choices about staffing; a small discretionary budget for materials or staff development; an annual performance report; and some provisions for parental involvement. Similarly,

Glickman (1990) argues that most schools involved in SBM do not look much different from schools that have not been involved.

Proponents (e.g., Glickman, 1990; David, 1989) argue that change has more to do with leadership and culture than with SBM. It nevertheless raises the question: Where is the substance of decentralization and empowerment? What is being restructured?

A number of writers (e.g., Brown, 1990) have made the connection between SBM and school effectiveness. The evidence does not substantiate such a claim. School effectiveness is not contingent upon SBM. That is not to argue against the suggested link. It should be easier for empowered schools to engage in improvement activities; however, what we know to date is that school personnel tend to continue to behave as they did under the previous structure. What is required, as we have argued previously, is for the cultural norms, values, assumptions and belief systems to change. Only then will SBM realize its potential.

Survival of the Fittest

Traditionally educators as a professional group have been highly skeptical of using business or the market as a model for how society should provide schooling for pupils, so it is somewhat puzzling to see the flush of enthusiasm with which many educators greet the move to school-based budgeting and school-based management. Survival of schools operated according to the market model depends upon customer (parent and pupil) satisfaction. School staffs operating in SBM formats may have all kinds of autonomy as to how they will provide educational programs and services, but if the product does not satisfy the clientele, the school's health and survival are in jeopardy. This happens because most SBM policies feature open admissions and formula financing based on numbers of pupils enrolled which, according to Davies (1992, p. 11), result in pupils moving around among schools according to parental choice, with the money following the pupil. Schools that gain pupils gain revenues and the ability to buy more

teachers and more equipment, thus becoming bigger and better. Schools that lose pupils, lose money, becoming smaller, less efficient, less prestigious, and less able to compete for and attract students. As in the market system, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer unless there is some centralist intervention on the part of governing authorities to provide adequately for the educational welfare of all pupils.

Expressions of concern about the market features in SBM systems have been raised by several writers. Alexandruk (1985, p. 114) in his evaluation of the Edmonton system found that competition among schools for students, uncertainty about future enrolments and about funding increased stress for principals with regard to future program and budget planning. Calvert (1989, p. 38) decried the shift from focusing decision-making on educational matters to business matters under school-based budgeting. He used the analogy of the principal serving as the business manager of an educational franchise that must be kept viable under the constraints of community expectations and preset formula financing. Reviewers of Kent County schools in England reported that "competition between schools (for pupils and prestige) is an increasingly significant issue at the secondary level and, although less apparent, is manifesting itself in the primary sector. The Department should consider the merits of developing county-wide `ground rules' on competition issues" (Kent County Management Review Team, 1991, p. 3).

One of the probable outcomes, therefore, of SBM with market features, is that there will be winners and losers among schools. In the business world, this is a desired outcome since presumably economic productivity and efficiency are optimized. Businesses that cannot compete do not survive. In education, schools cannot perish since it is in the state's and in everyone's interest that all children regardless of where they live or what their circumstances have access to equal educational opportunity. Even under SBM, it is apparent some degree of centralist control and intervention will be

reintroduced into education to remedy dysfunctional and undesirable developments as they arise due to market factors.

Adequacy

There is some hint in the literature that inadequacy of funding and school-based budgeting (SBB) go together. Brown (1990, pp. 215-217) notes that budget constraints and SBB seem to occur simultaneously. Calvert (1989) writes,

> School-Based Budgeting was first developed in the United States. Its development corresponds with the shift towards fiscal restraint in U.S. educational budgets. It was seen as a method of making restraint more palatable and encouraging greater efficiency in the use of limited school resources by involving principals in administering their own budgets. (p. 32)

The Kent County Management Review Team (1991, p. 1) also noted that underresourcing of Kent County schools was a serious problem, and that flexibility and other advantages of SBM were difficult to achieve because of inadequate budgets. SBB does provide school boards and other school governing authorities with a convenient mechanism for controlling expenditures in hard times. They make the primarily political decision of how much educational revenue can be feasibly generated given the public mood and then delegate to central and school-based administrative staff the tasks of implementing budgets according to formula. Principals are held accountable to stay within the limits of their decentralized budgets.

SBB not only enables school boards to determine and control levels of funding, but also divests them of much responsibility with regard to program planning, since this planning basically devolves to the school level. Calvert (1989, pp. 36-37) points out that the normal process of budgeting is thus inverted, since financial planning precedes program planning. The same inversion occurs at the school level as noted by the following comment of a Langley, British Columbia school principal: "the total amount of money available is determined in advance by the school board whereas the educational priorities

are set by schools much later.... The educational priorities should be determined before resources are specified" (Staff, 1992, p. 9). Inversion of the budget process creates a tendency to fund schools at less than adequate levels because school boards are now primarily preoccupied with raising revenues rather than with evaluating programs and looking at new needs. Divested of the latter responsibilities, they are less sensitive to or less aware of program needs. Under the centralized system, program planning was integrated with financial planning, with program largely determining funding. School boards were, therefore, in a better position to analyze adequacy of funding in relation to program needs and to use their fiscal powers to raise the necessary revenues.

Calvert (1989, p. 40) notes a disturbing development related to adequacy occurring under SBM: increasing reliance on fund-raising, donations, and free use of community and parent volunteers to supplement decentralized but inadequate school-site budgets. There are several problems with this development. Adequacy of funding should be provided through normal sources of grants and taxes and should not be dependent on school fund-raising initiatives. Fund-raising in wealthy communities is more successful than in poor communities, so that equity problems among schools is exacerbated. Finally, unions representing non-professional school employees such as clerical and maintenance staff are not happy with volunteerism because it displaces workers and because volunteers often do poor work which in the long run increases rather than decreases costs. The latter problem also occurs when, to save money, schools contract out maintenance and repair work to the cheapest bidders rather than having the work done by regular school employees (Calvert, 1989, p. 40). The overall problem with fund-raising and volunteerism is that the more successful it is, the more it will perpetuate inadequacy of funding from public education sources.

Equity and the Broader Public Interest

Perhaps the greatest single worry of educators and parents in a decentralized school system is the problem of equity. A generation or two ago, North American education was restructured by centralizing schools and establishing larger units of school administration. This restructuring was done to ensure that society's interest in a well-educated citizenry was being well-served through making quality education universally available to all. Few would dispute that the goals of improved education, universal access, equality of educational opportunity, equalization of tax burden and other desirable objectives were relatively well-met by this reorganization. Now governments and educators seem to be bent on decentralization. Will decentralization revive some of the original shortcomings of early schooling, particularly lack of equity? Equally important, will school-based diversification in programs and standards serve adequately the state's interest in education?

Statements have been made in the literature that greater diversity may imply less equity (e.g., Levin, 1992, p. 31). Alexandruk (1985, pp. 113-114) reported in his thesis that the second most frequent concern voiced by teachers and principals in the Edmonton school system was that school-based budgeting formulas did not provide equity for smaller schools or for schools with unusual needs. Keast (1992, pp. 1-2) echoes a similar concern about SBM in England, noting that formula funding produced great inequities for small rural schools. Calvert (1989, p. 35) implies that budget allocations subject to the whims and values of the principal will result in very different program offerings from school to school and, therefore, very different educational opportunities. He is concerned that costly and important programs such as fine arts and special education may be sacrificed when budgets are not adequate or when an objective such as lowering the pupil-teacher ratio receives higher staff priority. SBM facilitates local autonomy, diversity, and responsiveness to individual student and community needs, and is valued

for this reason. However, both state and local authorities need to monitor the impact of SBM since there is potential for violation of equity to occur.

What happens in public schools is very much determined by the goals of education established both by the state and by local school systems. There is an assumption that the state possesses a superior wisdom vis à vis local authorities concerning what the goals of education should be and what programs need to be implemented to achieve these goals. Similarly at the local level, school boards or local governing authorities are in a better position than are local schools to determine district-wide or system goals. When goal setting and program decisions are delegated to the school-site level it is inevitable that differences in goals and programs among schools will increase at the expense of uniformity. Depending on one's value framework, this may not be a problem since the purpose of decentralization is to recognize and enhance differences among schools. However, the question arises as to whether individual schools in making goal and program decisions that serve the interests of their own clientele are also making decisions that serve the broader public interest in education. To avoid uncertainty as to what the answer to this question will be, some countries, notably England, have designed SBM systems that preserve centralized state control of curriculum and academic standards. Interestingly, this centralization or recentralization of control over curriculum and standards is occurring voluntarily in some school systems that have already implemented SBM (Lindelow & Heynderickx, 1989; David, 1989). The adoption of centralist policies with respect to curriculum and standards reflects the fear that the possible diversity created by SBM may not serve either equity or the broader public interest.

Conclusion

School-based management is an attempt to decentralize and debureaucratize school control. Proponents argue that the problems with today's schools are caused by

the highly centralized controls to which the school has been subjected. Their solution is SBM, an organizational arrangement whereby the school principal, staff, students and parents are empowered to make curricular, personnel and budgetary decisions that will better serve the needs of the student.

In this paper we have raised a number of issues that need to be addressed if SBM is to be successful. We have argued that structural changes do not always lead to increased autonomy for those in the lower levels of the organization; nor does leadership naturally evolve that empowers others. The minimal research seems to indicate that most principals tend to use a consultative as opposed to collegial style, and that there is a tendency to emphasize managerial over instructional roles.

More importantly, there is the issue as to whether schools under SBM are more innovative and productive. The minimal evidence indicates that schools under SBM reassemble conventional schools. The changes are at the margin and there is mixed evidence of stakeholder satisfaction.

The issue of equity and equality was also raised. It was argued that problems relating to this may be exacerbated under SBM. Finally, it was noted that the broader public interest may not be well served under SBM.

Given the issues, the uncertainty and the relatively small changes which have emanated under SBM, one could question the desirability of making SBM a high reform priority. Might we better invest our time and energies in instructional improvement?

While we are not opposed to SBM, we are saying that much more research needs to be done before it is accepted as a major educational reform movement. In particular the issues of structure, leadership, productivity, equity and opportunity need to be addressed.

In our view, if SBM is to work, then more attention will need to be focused on instructional improvement. Only when it can be demonstrated that SBM makes a difference will it be institutionalized. It also appears to us that school systems need to

transform their culture from one of control to that which values autonomy and empowerment. Such a restructuring also entails more attention to professional development in the areas of shared decision-making, team building, conflict resolution, effective communication, planning, and evaluation. Finally, we feel that SBM must be restructured around the notions of improvement, equity and equality of opportunity. Otherwise, SBM will be another educational reform that will not fly.

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