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## SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE 'BETTER SCHOOLS' REPORT FOR SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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The mid eighties has seen remarkable change to the policies of the State education system in Western Australia. The election of the State Labor government in early 1983 saw to the build up of a political agenda for system level change in education. The expectation of the Government was that public schools would raise their standards of achievement, be more responsive and be more accountable. Following a comprehensive review of educational policy and practice (Beazley 1984) it was announced that a Functional Review Committee would investigate the structure and operation of the educational bureaucracy. In January 1987 the newly established Ministry of Education (Western Australia) released 'Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement.' The document is a blue print for a new style of school operations. The determination of the Ministry of Education to commence implementation of the proposals according to a timeline brought criticism from the teachers' union and the principals' associations. The main contentious issue was the speed at which the proposals would be implemented. In the period of political brinkmanship which followed side issues emerged concerning the rights of groups to be consulted as well as concerns about staffing, workloads and career structures. Clearly there was a need to scrutinize the document. A period of review was agreed to between the Ministry of Education and the State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia. This paper attempts to assess the implications of Better Schools for school management practices during the period of review.

The section of the Better Schools document headed 'New Directions for Schools' contains a vision of the 'good school' or a school for the very near future. The proposals relating to the school grant, school staffing entitlement, school staff management, the selection of teachers, school programme administration, the school development plan, school based decision making groups and administration support capacity will, if implemented, collectively and perhaps individually bring significant change to the operations of Government schools in Western Australia. This section of the report proposes that new elements of organizational design are either added on to the existing organization of schools or are substituted for present practices. Alteration of the organizational design of the school will also have repercussions on what can be termed the cultural characteristics of the school. This refers to the attitudes, expectations, collective meanings of the participants and of how they

feel about life in the school. All schools accumulate a culture which is intimately linked with how people develop their preferences for problem solving and their preferences for acting. This core set of assumptions, shared understandings and implicit rules govern daily behaviour.

Recent developments in organization theory and school administration recognize the importance of the cultural dimension of the school. (cf. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Sergiovanni and Corbally 1984; Schein, 1985) A basic tenet of organizational change is that the culture of the organization should be given special attention in the planning of change. Better Schools contains a functional perspective and ignores the cultural dimension of the school system. In a mature organization there will be strong connections between elements of organizational design, the cultural characteristics of the school and the leadership behaviour of key participants. School level management practices are related to elements comprising each of these phenomena.

Better schools contains judgements as to what constitutes 'good' school management practices. In the early part of the document a preference is expressed for a 'management style' in education, with emphases on:

- responsiveness and adaptability to the needs of the community and to government priorities;

- flexibility in the use of resources to meet these goals; and

- accountability to the Government and the community for the standard of service and funding.

(Better Schools, page 1)

The value orientations contained in these proposals mirror those of an earlier Government white paper 'Managing Change in the Public Sector' (June, 1986), 'The Financial Administration and Audit Act' (June, 1986) and 'The Financial Administration and Audit Act; Regulations, Treasurer's Instructions' (July 1986). These policy documents set in place a new set of requirements for the management of all public sector organisations with each government department or statutory authority. The Better Schools document acknowledges the need for the Ministry of Education to have the same administrative style that is to be found in other Government departments. (Better Schools, page 2)

Discussion in the Government white paper reveals the value climate in which this new management style has been proposed. Firstly, the Government is determined to live within its means and to get value for money on behalf of all Western Australians. There is a concern about community resistance to extension of the tax base. Static or declining levels of resources are anticipated. It could be said that the Government has been responsible and forward looking by commencing preparations some time ago for a period of financial constriction. Secondly, there is a belief that large bureaucracies have insoluble problems. It is difficult to get individuals to have a commitment to large bureaucracies which do not respond to social change. If individual workers

and clients feel powerless to influence policy then centrally determined policies may have unintended and ineffectual outcomes when applied in any particular organisation within the public service. The paper recognises the erosion of the legitimacy of centrally determined policy. This has occurred because of the diversity of clients needs across the state network of 800 schools during a period of social change. Change only has meaning for participants in the context of a specific school organisation.

In the white paper a preference is expressed for organizations which are characterized by democratic participation. The preference for participation underpins a concern by the Government for the motivation of both the workers and the clients of the public service. Local control of policy and services through participation enables workers to transfer their low level of commitment from a large bureaucracy to a discrete organization where it can be re-established and developed. Similarly the clients develop greater confidence in the operations of a discrete unit of the public service. In the educational world this translates as a problem of motivating teachers and of getting the commitment of parents and students. The Better Schools document does not mention the need for Government schools to stem the drift of what may be the 'best' students and parents to the prestigious independent and Catholic school systems. In Government schools there are strong demands for a new administrative style which provides greater accountability and also motivation. To compete Government schools should have publicly acceptable goals and be guided by clear policies and plans. The constriction of public sector resources and the loss of confidence of workers and clients in large bureaucracies are factors in the current value climate which influence any policy makers.

The Better Schools document can be interpreted as a vehicle for the transmission of corporate management practices and culture from business and industry into school organizations. The emphasis is on devolution of authority, participation, flexibility in the use of resources, clear priorities and accountability to the Government and the community for the standard of service and funding. The school rather than the educational bureaucracy is seen as the unit at which greater accountability and decision making will be focussed. The current value climate in which policy makers of the Western Australian state schools operate is one which leads to expectations for stronger school accountability requirements and for school leaders to become 'managers'. This reflects a situation where corporate management approaches which have been identified in effective private sector organizations are now being transferred to the public service in Western Australia. The completion of the report of the Functional Review Committee' and the release of the Better Schools document creates a situation where corporate management ideology will spill over into school management practices.

Two criteria are proposed to assess the implications of the new elements of organizational design as described in Better Schools for school management.

Firstly, for each new element there is a need to assess the strength of the connection between the stated purpose, the proposed actions of school participants and the expected outcomes as outlined in the document. Use of logic and reference to existing research is needed to test the linkage of purpose-action-outcome in the new organizational design which has been proposed for Western Australian Schools.

Secondly, since the document proposes new values and elements of organizational design for schools it becomes important to consider how fully operational schools will respond to the change process. It is recognised that Better Schools is not an implementation plan. However it does contain a timeline and policy orientations which imply an implementation strategy. The process of intervention is a critical part of educational change. Unfortunately the history of educational change shows a neglect of the change process. At the time of writing the implementation plan appeared to be negotiable. It is important that such a plan should be public and should be free of gamesmanship whereby interest groups attempt to maximize their credibility.

The Treasurer's instructions for the implementation of The Financial Administration and Audit Act specify the accountability requirements which heads of each organization must meet. Public sector managers should establish objectives which are in line with the corporate plan of that department or statutory authority. They are then responsible for the development and maintenance of performance indicators and of the reporting of this information. The indicators should measure organizational 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness'. These are defined as:

- (i) 'Efficiency' means the management and utilization of resources for maximization of outputs with minimization of inputs.
- (ii) 'Effectiveness' means the achievement of the objective set by the legislative or other authorizing body.

(Financial Administration and Audit Act; Regulations and Treasurer's Instructions, 1986, p.904-905).

According to these instructions school principals now have responsibility for specifying objectives and for ensuring that cost effective means of managing resources are used to achieve these objectives.

Four substantive issues are now considered from which to critique the Better Schools document. Each of these issues has implications for school management.

### 1. The Future of Educational Leadership in Schools

There is a need to assess the impact of corporate management practices as proposed in Better Schools on the capacity of school staff to provide educational leadership. For example, will the transmission of corporate management values such as flexibility, responsiveness, cost efficiency and accountability 'wash out' the educational values which underpin school practice and culture?

Currently the school system still has a significant agenda of Beazley reforms which must be addressed through any new administrative structure. These relate to community participation, merit promotion and implementation of the unit curriculum. It becomes important that educational values which are central to the teaching-learning process are not disturbed or lost with the introduction of new elements of organizational design. In any school the staff promote educational values which are central to their collective vision of the teaching-learning process. In some schools there may be preferences for giving students choice in teaching situations, providing a caring school environment, or of relating learning activities to student interests. It becomes important that values emphasizing administration do not overwhelm values which relate to education in the culture of the school.

Better Schools challenges the knowledge base which underpins the professional identity of school based educators. The adoption of corporate management practices and the accompanying culture could result in the replacement of some of the educational values and teaching-learning skills with administrative skills. Collectively school level staff have a set of educational values and skills. Better Schools will place higher priority on administrative skills in such activities as planning, budgeting and communication. In this new era of school management school level staff should know whether their professionalism centres on the values and skills associated with the teaching-learning process or whether education is the outcome of efficient administration.

Better Schools will bring principals much closer to other public sector managers in their style of operation. Principals may well be expected to become managers without the training that has been invested in the managers of other departments and statutory authorities. School level staff who assume leadership roles will become project managers with a concern for identifying problems, marshalling information, assessing resources, choosing alternatives and then implementing a plan. Principals should go beyond an operations role of handling logistics and interpreting policy. 'Input-output' perspectives of management may further reduce the time and effort which is given to educational leadership at school level. Expectations for the cost effective use of declining levels of resources create a need for principals to become educational leaders who can build an organizational climate where school staff choose to invest effort in cooperative activities which enhance school culture. The provision of a worthwhile educational experience for students is influenced by judgements which have to be made about the quality of school life. Educational leaders articulate values and transmit a vision of the 'good' school environment. This sense of direction is critical to the motivation of staff and for human resource development in the school.

There have been many complaints about the lack of educational leadership as opposed to operations management in government schools. In the new administrative structure the provision of leadership from central and district

offices will be reduced. Greater school level decision making is recognized as being necessary for best use of resources. It becomes even more important in the present period that school staff, and especially principals, are encouraged to be educational leaders as well as managers.

Better Schools creates pressures for school level staff to also become project managers in addition to their other duties such as teaching. This could result in a reduction of the range of facets of responsibility which principals and senior teachers now perform. In terms of the well known Sergiovanni (1984) hierarchical model of leadership forces this represents the concentration of the effort of a school administration team at only the technical level. Here emphasises on planning, organising scheduling and optimizing strategies to achieve tasks leads to competence rather than excellence in schooling. The latter requires investing effort in the attainment of symbolic and cultural levels of leadership. The articulation of school purpose and mission, definition of the uniqueness of the school and the induction of new members of the school community into this vision are important components of leadership in school organisations. Efforts to turn principals into managers may not necessarily improve the quality of educational leadership at school level.

## **2. Administrative Decentralization and the Operation of Schools**

The administrative decentralization which is proposed in Better Schools to give school site staff greater control over their affairs will require allocation of more time and resources to activities which were once the responsibility of the central and regional offices. Increased effort will have to be given to the following:

- The establishment, maintenance and use of a data base containing information relating to staff work loads, the school timetable, students records, school policy and public relations communications and the school budget. (Secondary schools with a unit curriculum will have a greatly enhanced demand for this service)
- Personnel management, including staff appraisal, staff selection, maintaining effective working relationship among staff and professional development.
- Financial management including the planning of a budget, budget control and auditing.
- Preparation of a school development plan.
- A sophisticated committee structure to manage school level policy making and promote effective communication of information among these committees and the school community.

The effective management of these tasks is beyond the current capacity of senior staff in most schools. Many of these tasks depend upon the participation of teaching staff for success. Participative decision making takes time and adds to the workload of teachers. The formalization of management activities in

a network of committees means that more effort has to be used for the coordination of the activities of these groups so that schools are responsive, flexible and accountable. At school it will become necessary to monitor the amount of time and effort which teaching staff invest in school administration. The time, effort and goodwill of teachers is finite. School principals will have to decide what proportion of teacher time should be focussed on teaching and preparation for teaching. As schools take up the new management style principals should review the effects on the quality of the teaching programme.

Information is needed to assess whether the proposed administrative supports and the technologies for managing a school data base will compensate for the expected increase in workloads. In Victoria administrative decentralization and devolution of authority to schools created a situation where the newly established regions were not able to provide the same level of specialist advisory staff (Chapman, 1986). Teachers had to invest time in obtaining support and knowledge from informal colleague networks. The establishment of school councils and the associated committee work also impinged on teacher time. (cf. Chapman, 1986) It is clear that much can be learned from the Victorian experience as to the pacing and timing of school level change and of the effects on the quality of the teaching programme.

## **3. The Impact of a New Management Style on School Development**

There is a need to consider the interactions among the new elements of organizational design as they are established in schools. Attention should be given to the way in which each of these elements has positive, neutral or negative effects on other elements which comprise the new administrative structure and style. Attention should also be given to the sequence by which these elements are introduced to schools. It is important that organizational elements which are dependent upon other new elements are introduced to schools later in the sequence. To illustrate the possibility of problematic interactions between the new elements of organizational design the expectations of Better Schools for school development are now considered.

School development is a common denominator of much of the Better Schools document. It could be argued that this is the 'premier education policy' which is proposed in the document. School development is a collaborative activity where quality information is used to establish priorities from which programme development, implementation and review can take place. The problem has enormous potential to harness the professional energies of staff and the support of parents. Prior to Better Schools, school development has been seen as a process or a way of bringing about school level change. By comparison Better Schools views school development as a product or as an outcome. All schools are now required to have a school development plan. One of the functions of this document is:

...as a means whereby schools are accountable to the Ministry of

From this perspective the plan is the equivalent of the performance agreement of the Government white paper. Here the emphasis is on the extent to which organizations identify measurable targets for the year which are departmental priorities and also have an approved management strategy.

Consideration should be given to the interactions between school development and new accountability measures which are now expected in each Government department. Better Schools does not specify criteria of effectiveness and efficiency as required by The Financial Administration and Audit Act. However, since the release of Better Schools the Audits and Review Branch of the newly established Policy and Resources Division of the Ministry of Education has commenced work on the identification of a set of about fifteen indicators of efficiency and effectiveness. Although the final choice of a set of process and product indicators will inevitably be a controversial process it is an activity that can be achieved relatively quickly by a team of researchers. By comparison school development is a phenomenon which depends upon the evolution of a distinctive culture. The creation of the right conditions takes time. This culture has the potential to encourage teachers to develop a critical perspective of school operations, to believe that it is worthwhile to invest effort in school wide issues, to take risks and to be open and honest in social relationships. Although some schools are impressive laboratories for school development most schools have not developed the capacity to support a school staff driven development process. Premature exposure of schools to the tough accountability requirements which are now expected by the Government could have a disastrous effect on schools where there is an attempt to initiate or even to maintain sophisticated school development programmes.

Pressures of being cost effective and the possibility that the objectives specified in the school development plan could be used as indicators of effectiveness have potential to subvert legitimate school development activities. School development requires that school staff take risks. Not all school development will end in success. There are inevitably unknowns, no matter how rigorous the planning and monitoring of the implementation process. Caution should be taken to ensure that school staff are not forced to undertake school development activities without adequate understanding and supports, that allow evolutionary processes to emerge. The culture which supports school development is a fragile, delicate phenomenon. It cannot be achieved by an administrative fiat which demands a school development plan. Such pressures on school staff could threaten the emergence of a culture which sustains school development. In these circumstances the preparation of a school development plan becomes a conservative and ritualized activity. The plan itself becomes an artefact rather than a real part of the culture of the school.

Historically in Australian education systems what has been assessed or reported

on has become the real anchor point for the energies of educators. If the new expectations for school management which are contained in Better Schools are not carefully introduced this could return Western Australia's schools back to the 'administering' and 'prudential' traditions as identified by Connell (1970), or even the era of 'education for efficiency' as suggested by Kandel (1938). Here there was a concern for obtaining a tangible value from the money spent on schools and for making school system administration measurably efficient in an expedient, frugal way.

#### 4. School Management and the Process of School Level Change

Better Schools contains prescriptions for the processes of change and a timeline for the introduction of the new elements of organizational design into a restructured school system. The 800 schools which comprise the system are not monolithic in their current management policies and culture. This presents a problem for those with responsibility for planning the change process. Each school requires a unique mix of external and internal initiatives to adapt, develop and assimilate the new elements of organizational design. In this period of transition the management style of the principal will be of critical importance in gauging the pacing and timing of a sequence of activities depending upon the readiness of the school staff. The management of school level change may well be an underdeveloped aspect of the professional repertoire of principals in the Western Australian school system. Attempts to implement Better Schools will make new demands on the capacities of principals to manage schools.

The change process which is to be chosen by the implementation steering committee (see Forward, Better Schools, 1987) will be of critical importance to the success of attempts to change school management practices. Attempts to strip away or replace what are, in the new era of school administration, 'non-rational' or 'sloppy' management practices may not be as easy as first thought. Some of these undesirable practices may have unexpected connections with the quality of learning in the school. For example, staff may resist participating in meticulously prepared in-service programmes because it means leaving their classes to the care of relief teachers who put their efforts at risk. Alternatively, in a school with a simple committee structure the principal may have more time to mix with staff and so transmit personal educational values than in schools with more formal policy making structures. Not all attempts to establish new elements of organizational design will result in the replacement of existing practices. It is possible that some schools will develop an amalgam of old and new practices which will undergo significant evolution. The history of educational reform shows the tendency of staff to revert back to the old ways, especially when new roles are not adequately supported.

The school management practices outlined in Better Schools are part of a broader government sponsored, but imposed, change on the whole public service. There is almost no possibility that the school system can remain insulated from these expectations. Two types of change processes are possible.



One is 'incremental'. This allows for evolution of the new elements of organizational design, including the management practices that are to be adapted to the existing culture of a particular school. This process is slow and there are risks that no real change may result. However when school level staff have opportunities to understand the context of education then 'school driven' management of change is possible. Another approach is 'metamorphic'. Here school level staff respond to external time lines and may work with change on a number of fronts. There is a greater chance that there will be real change after school operations achieve a new equilibrium. However there is no guarantee that the application of 'heat' and 'pressure' will enable school participants to see the 'light' of the new administrative style. For both patterns it is essential that professional development activities precede the implementation of the new management approaches. School staff should be in-serviced at two levels. They should not only acquire skills such as those relating to the planning of a budget or for the use of new information technologies. They should also have knowledge of why school grants and public accountability are necessary in the current political and social context of education.

The above discussion of the implications of Better Schools for school management suggests a number of areas of inquiry and research. Analysis of the logic of the connections between the stated and unstated purposes, actions and outcomes of the Better Schools document will further clarify the worth of the proposals for school management. Much valuable knowledge about the response of school level educators to change can be obtained from observation of attempts to implement the unit curriculum in Western Australian secondary schools. The reorganization of the Victorian education system during the eighties has seen a transformation of the style of school management. The Victorian experience should not be ignored. It represents a laboratory of experience for viewing the capacity to school level staff to adopt new policies relating to school management during a period of administrative reorganization. Review of the school management practices of exemplar schools in the private school system may also be of use. Finally there is a need to review the research literature relating to effective schools, school management and organizational change. The following topics are suggested as a focus for inquiry:

1. In what ways will the professional identity of principals and other school staff in promotional positions change with the adoption of new management practices?
2. If principals and other staff in promotional positions become managers then how will this influence the quality of educational leadership in schools?
3. How will the new corporate culture which is to be transferred to schools mesh with existing organizational cultures?

4. What are the independent and interactive effects of each new element of organisational design on school operations? (Including the culture of the school).
5. What is the balance of administration and teaching which is required to maintain school operation during a period of school system reorganization?
6. Will the new technologies and administrative supports compensate for losses of teacher time and effort after schools have adopted the new administrative style?
7. What is the capacity of schools to embrace administrative change?

Each of the above can be considered for various categories of schools. It should be recognized that there may be special problems associated with adopting the new management practices in schools which have a small staff or are characterized by a high staff turnover.

There is a sense of inevitability about the implementation of the broad outline of Better Schools. During the period of review school based professional development programmes should be designed to improve the collective administrative experience of a school staff. Such programmes must go beyond management skills relating to planning, organizing, motivating, monitoring and control according to criteria of efficiency and effectiveness. Knowledge of how a school culture works and of how it can be transformed is needed to find ways of introducing new elements of organizational design into schools so that staff retain a sense of control and purpose. Leadership is required from some staff in order to focus attention on the formulation of a mission statement or agreement about the direction of change. A vision of the possible future of the school is also needed to clarify the specific educational values which will guide staff activity. These values have to be communicated among staff through a flow of unifying images of the school. Team building and human resource development are ways of providing temporary stability and emotional reassurance to staff during a period of change. It is after school staff have a readiness for planning and policy making that the more conventional aspects of management - such as defining objectives and establishing time lines - become appropriate.

Professional development should focus on administrative competencies and a choice of strategies for change which are sensitive to the culture of the school. (cf. Bennis and Nanus, 1984; Wynn and Guiditus, 1986; Hickman and Silva, 1986) If school staff do not have opportunities to participate in the rebuilding of culture to accommodate new elements of organizational design, then accountability pressures and their powerlessness to control externally imposed change may set the agenda for *de facto* professional development. In these circumstances school administrators will give attention to survival needs such as the best selection of data to highlight organizational performance and the setting of school objectives which minimize the risk of failure. Attention will

be given to artefacts, such as school development plans, rather than the process of school development. A 'black market' of sophisticated formats for school development documents, could attract the attention of principals who have not had opportunities for professional developments.

It is evident that Better Schools represent a watershed in Western Australian education. The document contains recommendations for a new management style which is clearly part of the ideology which is being transmitted throughout the public sector. There is a determination by the government to implement Better Schools. It now becomes important during the current period of review to take the point of view of an educator when assessing the impact of the document. It is essential that the final recommendations have potential to improve the quality of learning for all categories of students. The implementation committee must now find a way to give school level staff the responsibility, knowledge and power to undertake effective school management in a way that does not compromise good education. School staff cannot become managers by decree. The provision of significant, but carefully chosen support is necessary to help school level staff meet this challenge. Failure to do this will put the credibility of the state sponsored education system and its key personnel at risk.

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## A PROGRAMME OF PROFESSIONAL SELF-DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS IN NEW ZEALAND TECHNICAL INSTITUTES

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Since 1973, a Tutor Training Unit (TTU) has provided professional education for teachers newly appointed to full-time teaching positions within the New Zealand Technical Institute system (the equivalent of Australian TAFE colleges). In a twelve-week course, organized into four discrete blocks, nurses and plumbers, accountants and secretaries, artists and technicians, community developers and computer programmers are together given basic instruction in educational thinking, teaching techniques, teaching aids and evaluation procedures. In an attempt to systematically assess the current and future requirements of Technical Institute teachers, a research programme was designed to identify professional skills which, when mastered, would enable them to teach competently in ever-changing circumstances.

The intention of the research was two-fold: to obtain data that would shape pre-service and in-service courses for technical teachers and also to enable them to assess their own personal professional requirements.

The research was accordingly designed as an analysis of teaching tasks in which technical teachers engage. This type of curriculum design is variously labelled 'systematic', 'performance-based' and 'objective' and is particularly influenced by Tyler (1951), Taba (1962) and Bloom (1956).

## Background to the Research

The professional development programme was shaped by four assumptions. Firstly, it was assumed that most training given to Technical Institute Teachers could be seen as a means towards an identifiable end in terms of competencies that had to be mastered. Secondly, it was assumed that such training should be planned systematically along lines suggested by Taba (1963). Accordingly,