

School-Based Management within the Context of Locally-Driven Development

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I am most grateful to the organizers of the conference for having given me the opportunity to attend these proceedings at least partially, and to share a few thoughts with you. I must admit, however, that I come under somewhat false pretenses, if hopefully useful ones. I represent Mr. Chris Thomas of the World Bank, who would have dearly loved to be here – and, as a humble consultant, am at best third in order of succession. I am put in mind of an old movie starring Alec Guinness, the superb British dramatic actor and comedian, called “Kind Hearts and Coronets.” Those as crotchety as I may remember it well. The young star, whose name I forget, discovers that he is 12th in line to become a duke and has to find a way to kill off all eleven others. Alec Guinness, by the way, played not the protagonist, but all eleven of his victims.

I didn’t have to kill off quite so many to earn my invitation to your proceedings, but it did take a little maneuvering. I have in any case been charged by Chris and his colleagues with conveying to you the strong interest of the World Bank for the progress of school-based management and its support for your work. I would like in the time allotted me to share with you the capsule remarks that he wished to have made in his behalf and then to add a few less weighty thoughts and suggestions of my own, based on a good deal of work in matters of decentralized service delivery and a bit of research and authorship on the specific topic of SBM, not to mention parenthood of two adolescents now navigating their way through locally-managed schools.

When not masquerading in this fashion, I myself am principally involved in adult education and human resource development, a related field, and am in fact here in Bangkok with a World Bank colleague to represent the institution at the CONFINTEA Mid-Term Review of progress in adult education worldwide now drawing to its close. I am able to be here in part because my colleague is making parallel remarks as we speak to the CONFINTEA assembly.

World Bank support and cautionary notes

Let me start then with the important matters: the message from Chris Thomas and the support of the World Bank. Chris is concerned first and foremost to emphasize that the Bank recognizes the critical importance of working at the school level and sees SBM as a way to empower people there to work to their full potential. He is much encouraged by results with SBM in Cambodia and in China and looks forward to tracking the outcomes that are beginning to become apparent in Indonesia.

SBM can have a big payoff in highly centralized systems that have tended to underutilize human capacities at the local level. Moreover, Chris notes, the absolutely critical importance of the local link in the chain of educational reform is amply illustrated by the number of large scale reforms that have been stopped, so to speak, at the schoolhouse door. Aaron Wildavsky, the theoretician of policy implementation, once coined the term “street-level bureaucrats” to describe the local parties who so often have the power to determine whether grandiose schemes conceived in the legislature or the Ministry ever in fact get carried out in anything resembling their intended form on the ground.

Moreover, SBM can help us finally get the “pace and scale” of educational reform right, for it enables and forces us, Chris remarks, to move only as far as the schools themselves are ready to move and only as fast as genuine buy-in materializes at the local level.

His concluding reflection and caution, however, would be that SBM is no panacea, no silver bullet. It helps us make better use of existing capacity – but it does not guarantee results or automatically protect us from some of the real dangers of decentralization. We must remember at the same time --

- to continue raising the bar of our expectations and standards for school performance;
- to provide the kind of technical assistance that will help schools go on growing and broadening their horizons,

- to guard against inherent risks like discrimination by gender, income, ethnicity or migrant versus resident status,
- to monitor investment decisions that have to be made with limited access to research,
- to keep an eye as well on problems of inappropriate scale, as when people make decisions that may be right for a given school but wrong for the district, and
- to be ever vigilant about the potential incursions of nepotism and local politics.

Here ends the important part of this presentation. Never one to leave well enough alone, however, I would like to add a few remarks from a relative outsider like myself – a cousin, perhaps, within the educational family – that may provide a somewhat external perspective on the critical domain of school-based management

Taking the outside view

In fact, we in adult education have a lively interest in SBM, and not just because governance of service delivery in our own field is undergoing many of the same changes or because domains like community education, family literacy and local learning centers create large zones of overlap and productive mutual reinforcement between childhood and adult learning. Over and beyond these factors, we see SBM as a critical education-centered instance of a broader movement of decentralization, beneficiary empowerment and local capacity building that has immense significance for us.

The larger decentralization movement, as you know full well, is pushed by factors as diverse as the fiscal crisis of the State, the emergence of civil society and renewed currents of cultural awakening – and it is having consequences in domains as different as natural resource management, health service delivery, agricultural extension, credit intermediation and enterprise development. One could trace the ramifications in each, but in general it is increasingly recognized that both the effectiveness and the sustainability of programs depend greatly on the degree to which

they are taken over and directed by local beneficiaries and their institutions. At the same time, initiatives of fiscal and administrative decentralization in government and movements toward democratization in civil society, while uneven at best, are beginning to give this phenomenon of empowerment and local participation additional bite.

It may be useful to see the phenomenon of School-Based Management in this larger context occasionally, to trace the parallels with what is going on in other sectors, to learn lessons from their experience and to explore growing zones of overlap – perhaps you are already in the habit of doing so. In any case, these phenomena have a major importance for adult educators like me for a simple but highly significant reason. One of the prime common denominators across sectors concerned is the increased needs for local capacity building or reinforcement that soon come to the surface. In fact, in our day and age the requirements of such empowerment and transfer of authority are one of the most important sources of motivation for everything from basic literacy to continuing education.

The challenges of local capacity building

There is an old saying in adult education, only slightly exaggerated for effect: “The art of teaching is the art of putting people in situations from which they cannot escape without learning.” Decentralization movements, local management initiatives and participatory processes, whatever else they do, create what we adult educators would call genuine “teachable moments.” That, it seems to me, is no less true in SBM than it is in community-driven natural resource management, cooperative marketing or localized health service delivery. Depending on the type of SBM involved, training needs may extend to school directors, teachers, school staff, parents, local school boards, community leaders and/or students themselves, to name a few.

Unfortunately, the fact that we are educators – and childhood educators in particular – does not necessarily mean that we are good at the kind of local capacity building required. In fact, as I look across sectors, I find that paradoxically it is often people working in areas like cooperative marketing or natural resource management who have become much the best at this craft. In Africa, for example, with which I am more familiar, food security agencies have developed remarkably clever and useful

ways for assessing the level of individual, collective and institutional capacity at the local level and for helping local actors overcome the deficits. Health and agricultural personnel are sometimes quite adept, moreover, at taking indigenous knowledge into account and building on – rather than over – these existing capacities. There may be very valuable things to be learned from these counterparts.

Moreover, all these dimensions of decentralization and democratization are increasingly related to each other. If schools are to be locally financed or “resourced” to an increasing if still partial degree, then obviously quality improvements in education will be tied in interesting ways to the success of other community-centered enterprises and to the training and competence of those charged with local fiscal management. If teachers are to draw elements of curriculum or at least illustrations for them to a greater degree from local contexts, then action research in health or articulation of indigenous knowledge in literacy centers becomes highly relevant. And beside these examples is emerging a critical economic phenomenon: the progressive articulation – and increased awareness – of the local or subregional labor market and the new environment for educational planning that that creates. The days of schools as loan outposts of an imported civilization are over, perhaps happily.

Trade talk from a neighboring subsector

I would like to supplement these remarks by quoting briefly from the presentation that my colleague, Maman Sidikou, is making at this very moment to a similar number of people at the CONFINTEA conference, for it may serve to illustrate the productive convergence among K-12 education, adult education and other sectors of local development that is arguably coming to pass. Please excuse the self-plagiarism. I ask you simply to “listen in,” for a moment, on a discussion under way among your first cousins.

First, we take to heart the advice from the workshop on “Training the Trainers” that *we need to broaden our conception of adult education and of the adult educator*. It is clear that many kinds of people perform critical training functions who do not consider themselves adult educators and whom we too rarely include in our understanding of the field. As one of the participants in the Poverty

Reduction workshop pointed out, microfinance officers in Egypt are themselves adult educators and their curriculum – a very dynamic one – is the loan process.

In fact, we would carry this notion a bit further. Many speakers remarked on *the importance of the transfer and application of knowledge and competencies acquired in adult education programs*, whether we are talking about literacy, workplace training, citizenship education or life skills. But most of these critical applications *lie in neighboring fields like microfinance, agriculture, governance and health*; and they depend on the degree to which our participants are collectively as well as individually empowered to take over such functions and gain access to resources that enable them to manage and direct the work themselves. That means that adult education must be thought of as including in some sense each of these neighboring fields and that its effectiveness depends to a critical extent on our coordination with the decision makers in each -- and on our ability to help them and to pressure them into building genuine “curricula of application.”

This leads us to a second remark. It seems clear from the foregoing that adult and nonformal education are as relevant and essential to the accomplishment of Millennium Development Goals as they are to achievement of Education For All – in fact, that the two thrusts are highly complementary, even interdependent. Some speakers here – and elsewhere – have understandably complained that adult education is nowhere mentioned in the MDGs. Participants in the Poverty Reduction workshop moreover observed that it is scarcely in evidence in the new generation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

This is true but, we would argue, more in the nature of appearance than of underlying reality. In point of fact – and insofar as all development strategies include these days an increasing dose of decentralization, local empowerment and related capacity building – there is simply no way that Millennium Development Goals can be reached or Poverty Reduction achieved without careful provision for the training of local actors and for parallel intensification of opportunities for continuing education and lifelong learning.

In short, if adult education is not explicitly mentioned in the MDGs and the PRSPs –certainly an oversight – it is implicitly essential and we should doubtless be

champions rather than detractors of this effort. In fact, since adult education has traditionally and necessarily been more closely associated with neighboring social and economic domains than have – say -- primary and secondary education, it is probably also incumbent on us to remind our close colleagues in other subsectors of the educational system that *Education For All, as important as it is, cannot be accomplished unless it is achieved by local actors at a local level*, and that this necessarily means tending in tandem to the other millennium development goals that strengthen the requisite local capacity.

How can one get all children in school or all adults involved in lifelong learning in a community that is unable to address its own problems of health, natural resource management, local governance, savings, food security and gender equity? And how can these be effectively and democratically addressed without reliable means for adult education and stakeholder training? It is not entirely a coincidence that the other member of our two-person team is at this very moment involved in speaking to delegates at an international conference here in Bangkok on School-Based Management in primary and secondary schools and in suggesting to them this self-same set of relationships.

This also means that one of our most critical responsibilities as adult educators – or as educators of any stripe, for that matter – is to become active *learners* ourselves. We must manifest a capacity for delving into other sectors like health and agriculture and enterprise development and for grasping learning challenges and opportunities there. We need to be familiar enough with some of these fields to help those responsible identify, fashion and articulate the inherent adult education “curriculum” in their work, to rethink their professional domain as an arena that can be taken over and directed by local beneficiaries and to design the joint educational and empowerment strategies by which this will in fact happen.

If we make ourselves truly “literate” in such domains, then it is a short step to creating new fields for the transfer and application of what our students learn – in short, to complementing the supply-side verities of Education For All with the demand-side emphases of the Millennium Development Goals. Different workshop reports here at the mid-term review emphasized the expansion of our systems of education into true “systems of learning.” We should certainly be on the forefront of

this effort by uncovering the curriculum implicit in so many domains that local actors are now called to direct.

End of citation!

Keep the wheat, chuck the chaff

These thoughts overheard from another context should at least help to illustrate the ways in which, and the degree to which, SBM is immersed in movements of societal learning that are considerably broader and perhaps to begin highlighting ways in which it can benefit from and adapt to them. Learning has escaped from the school walls, if it in fact it was ever contained there, and we should doubtless rejoice, because schools can now even more fully grow into their vocation of facilitating, sparking and providing models for much broader processes of social renewal.

The key element in this equation – local capacity building – is, of course, subject to abuse and misuse. We sometimes joke in adult education that our proper motto is “Last year I couldn’t spell agronomist, and now I are one!” There are certainly dangers of excessive pretention, shoddiness and charlatanism here, but the game of propelling lifelong learning at the local level is certainly worth the candle.

Thank you.