



SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT AND ITS POTENTIAL TO ENHANCE DECENTRALIZATION IN EDUCATION

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PROPOSITIONS AND THEMES

Twenty propositions are drawn from international experience and these are organised in nine themes:

- Definition of school-based management
- Scope and scale of the practice
- Theory of centralization and decentralization
- Driving forces for school-based management
- Impact on learning
- Impact at the centre
- Models for resource allocation
- Capacity building
- Re-focusing the concept to highlight leadership and learning



DEFINITION OF SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

1. School-based management in a system of public education is the systematic and consistent decentralization to the school level of authority and responsibility to make decisions on significant matters related to school operations within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards and accountabilities.
2. While the term ‘school-based management’ has international currency, the practice has different names in different settings, including self-management and local management.



SCOPE AND SCALE

3. Systems differ in the scope of the ‘significant matters related to school operations’ for which decisions have been decentralized and the scope and specificity of the ‘centrally-determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards and accountabilities’.

4. There are now few nations that have not moved down this track. There seem to be three major tracks for change in public education: the building of systems of self-managing schools, an unrelenting focus on learning outcomes, and the creation of schools for a knowledge society and global economy.

THEORY OF CENTRALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION

5. Centralization and decentralization are in tension, with centralization indicated when the values of control, uniformity and efficiency are in ascendance, and decentralisation indicated when freedom, differentiation, and responsiveness are preferred.

6. Some practices are similar to but are conceptually different to decentralization. Notable among these are déconcentration and dispersion that involve moving people who previously worked at a central location, such as a capital city, to another location, such as a region or a province or a city, closer to the action.



DRIVING FORCES FOR SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

7. These include demand for less control and uniformity and associated demand for greater freedom and differentiation, interest in reducing the size and therefore cost of maintaining a large central bureaucracy, commitment to empowerment of the community, and desire to achieve higher levels of professionalism at the school level.

8. School-based management has been contentious because different driving forces have shaped policy and these often reflect ideological orientation.

9. There is now an alignment of views that a primary purpose for school-based management is the improvement of educational outcomes

IMPACT ON LEARNING

10. For much of the three decades of experience with the approach, there has been little evidence that school-based management has had either a direct or indirect effect on educational outcomes. Critics have frequently seized on this finding.

11. There have been three generations of studies and it is only in the third that evidence of impact on outcomes has emerged, and then only when certain conditions are fulfilled. The first was when impact on outcomes was not a primary purpose. The second generation was when the database was weak. The third coincides with a pre-eminent concern for learning outcomes and the development of a strong database.



IMPACT ON LEARNING [CONTINUED]

12. Many of the most constrained approaches to school-based management that have yielded little evidence of impact on learning have been long-standing practices in western nations, and many of the more broadly-based approaches that have yielded early evidence of impact are in developing nations.

13. Recent case study research has highlighted the importance of building the capacity of staff to design and deliver a curriculum and pedagogy that meets the needs of students, taking account of priorities in the local setting, including a capacity to identify needs and monitor outcomes. Also evident is the building of the capacity of the community to support the efforts of schools.

IMPACT ON LEARNING [CONTINUED]

14. At a macro-level, international studies of student achievement such as TIMSS and TIMSS-R and PISA and PISA+ have confirmed the importance of a balance of centralization and decentralization, with a relatively high level of school-based management being one element of decentralization.

15. It will take many years for a shift in the balance of centralization and decentralization in favour of the latter to have impact on outcomes. It is one thing to pass legislation shifting power, authority, responsibility and influence from one level to another – such a shift is a change in structure. It is another thing to build capacity to have the desired impact on learning and to change the culture at all levels.

IMPACT AT THE CENTRE

16. The change in culture required at the centre is just as powerful as the change in culture required in schools. Personnel at the centre frequently resist the change, for they perceive and often experience a loss of power, authority, responsibility and influence. Forces that may drive a return to centralization may soon appear. This need not occur if there is appreciation that the change may call for an increase in power, authority, responsibility and influence in matters related to the centrally-determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards and accountabilities. There is a need to provide strong support for schools, at regional or district level, through déconcentration and dispersion of non-school based personnel.

MODELS FOR RESOURCE ALLOCATION

17. An important feature of school-based management is the decentralization of the budget to the school level. Some school systems have decentralized to schools decisions related to the allocation of more than 90 per cent of the total system budget for school education. The challenge is to design an appropriate resource allocation model that will distribute resources in a fair and transparent way, ensuring that schools have a 'global budget' that enables them to resource efforts to meet the unique mix of local learning needs. A resource allocation model usually takes account of the number of students, level of schooling, special education needs, and the location of the school.



CAPACITY BUILDING

18. Capacity building is a key theme in successful experience of school-based management. For teachers, this has taken the form of professional development that deals with such topics as needs assessment, curriculum design, research-based pedagogy, and continuous monitoring. For principals and other leaders at the school level, these topics are also relevant, but others are essential, including strategic leadership, human resource management, policy making, planning, resource allocation, community building and boundary spanning. Building these capacities is important for creating what some have called a ‘new professionalism’ in education that is research-based, data-oriented, team-focused and outcomes-driven.

CAPACITY BUILDING [CONTINUED]

19. These needs give rise to the new field of knowledge management in schools. This refers to building the intellectual capital of the school, and involves the creation, dissemination and utilisation of professional knowledge that takes account of a rapidly expanding knowledge base, and the need for access to that base in a timely and easily understandable manner. Universities have an important role in building capacity and undertaking research on the processes and outcomes of school-based management. These are best conceived as partnerships with schools and school systems. Also important are national initiatives such as the National College for School Leadership in the United Kingdom.

RE-FOCUSING THE CONCEPT

20. It is unfortunate that the concept of school-based management is still in vogue. First, because it is associated with a constrained set of practices that were not designed – although they may have been assumed – to have an impact on learning, when evidence suggested that their impact was minimal. Second, because once implemented across all schools and institutionalised, the term no longer has currency. Third, and extending the first and second reasons, the essence of the approach has more to do with leadership and learning than it has to do with management.

THE WAY FORWARD

- These themes summarise the common ground in school-based management in an increasing number of nations over the last three decades. There are differences in design and delivery in the various settings and that is the value of forums such as this that provide a rich range of case studies.
- There will be a further opportunity for nations in the Asia Pacific to share their experiences in a recently approved project in ‘best practice’ education governance in APEC nations.



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