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Peterson have demonstrated clearly the great advantage of the simultaneous use of alternative frameworks or models. Both their studies illuminate, with special clarity, the facts that no single model accounts for more than one facet of the totality of the situation (as Peterson says, 'Each is only a snapshot of a multi-dimensional event'[42]) and that the lenses we use affect our understanding of the phenomena we study (to quote Allison, 'Conceptual models are much more than simple angles of vision ... Each ... consists of a cluster of assumptions and categories that influence what the analyst finds puzzling, how he formulates his question, where he looks for evidence, and what he produces as an answer'[43]). Of course, using a combination of models has problems. There is tension between the models; there are competing sets of explanations; and choice among these explanations depends to a large degree on the scholar's concerns and interests.

42 Peterson, School Politics Chicago Style, p. 137.

43 Allison, Essence of Decision, p. 246.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING

Marelle Harrison

ABSTRACT

The paper reports a case-study of school-based curriculum decision-making in one primary school, using an ethnographic approach and participant-observer methodology, supplemented by survey data. The study involved participation in the school as observer and, later, as curriculum consultant, for a period of 18 months.

The problem investigated was the identification of the content of, participants in, processes and factors involved as a school staff engaged in decision-making.

Data obtained suggested models which might describe and explain the context of curriculum decision-making within this particular school, and generated hypotheses for future testing in a variety of educational institutions with autonomy in curriculum processes.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SCHOOL BASED CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING

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1.0 Introduction

Over the past decade in each state in Australia, Departments of Education have issued policy statements granting increasing autonomy to the staffs of schools for curriculum decision-making (Skilbeck, 1976:1; Brown, 1977; Swan, 1977). This shift in decision-making from the central educational authority towards the school has been called "school-based curriculum decision-making (SBCD). Within New South Wales, SBCD

> ",.. may be interpreted....as describing a situation in which schools are assuming greater freedom and responsibility in curriculum matters within an agreed framework" (Kemp,1977:3).

Despite a growing emphasis on devolution of curriculum responsibility towards the school, there have been few studies documenting the response of school staffs to this freedom in decision-making.

There has been increasing use of ethnographic approaches to the study of schools and schooling (Barker and Gump, 1964; Smith and Geoffrey, 1968; Gross, Giaquinta and Bernstein, 1971; Sarason, 1971; Smith and Keith, 1971; McPherson, 1972; Cusick, 1973; Wolcott, 1973; Bentzen et al, 1974 ; Fitzgerald, Musgrave and Pettit, 1974; Sharp and Green, 1975; Goetz, 1976; Harrison and Cohen, 1977; Harrison and Clayton, 1978). However, at the time of the commencement of the study described herein, none appeared to be focused upon curriculum decision-making within the context of a school. In particular, the factors or variables involved in the implementation of SBCD have been inadequately identified in empirical studies, though such investigations are currently being undertaken (Evans, 1977; Cohen and Harrison, 1977; Harrison et al, 1977; Harrison and Clayton, 1978).

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Lack of research evidence to illuminate the trend to SBCD indicated that an in-depth case study of the decision-making processes used by the staff of one school could give needed direction to implementation of these initiatives and to future research in the area. Because of the lack of empirical evidence about the factors involved in SBCD, it was decided to undertake a descriptive study, using ethnographic methods based largely on participant-observation.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study here reported were, first, to develop a methodology or methodologies for studying school-based curriculum decision-making, in order to contribute to the mapping of the field, and to the development of theory in relation to SCBD. In order to investigate this problem, some concrete questions were identified as foci for the development of that methodology. These were:

(a) Which aspects of curriculum are considered by a school staff in their decision-making?

(b) What processes and strategies are used by a schoolstaff in making curriculum decisions?

(c) What are some of the factors related to curriculum decision-making in a school?

(d) What techniques could be used to assist a school staff to become more effective, as they perceive it, in curriculum decision-making?

Question (d) will be the subject of a later report.

3.0 Definitions

For this study, the following definitions were used:

3.1 Curriculum

On the one hand, curriculum as intention comprises a progressively-modifiable plan of areas of learning and growth for an individual or group of learners, focussed upon an educational centre, incorporating a set of objectives, a set of learning experiences and suggestions for their organisation and techniques for evaluation of learning outcomes.

On the other hand, curriculum as reality is what actually happens to the person or persons, arising from a complex network of interactions between people, responding to a diverse array of influences, explicit and implicit, human and physical.

Note: (1) An 'educational centre' may be a school, community centre, "Open University, school of nursing, etc.

(2) An 'area of learning' may be defined in terms of subject area, grade or developmental level, inter-disciplinary theme, a specific school, or geographic region etc.

(3) 'Learning experiences' mean what is to be learned and how it is to be learned. 'Organisation' is interpreted as the scope, sequence and interrelationships between learning experiences" (Cohen, Deer, Harrison and Josephsen, 1978)

3.2 Decisions

Decisions are defined as choices made by persons for action. Such choices may or may not be made between two or more alternatives. They identify what the participants in the decision-making process consider the most desirable action for the particular circumstance(s).

Curriculum decisions are therefore choices made by the participants in the school about any aspect of the curriculum as defined above. Thus decisions about underlying educational principles, objectives, organisation of the school for learning both within and outside the classroom setting, materials, staffing, the role of teachers, physical facilities, evaluation of learning outcomes and of the plan for learning, together with ideas on how the curriculum plan may be implemented and improved are all curriculum decisions.

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In this study, evidence of decisions being made was obtained from a variety of sources, both written and oral, within formally-constituted meetings of staff and other informal staff interactions, as well as from reports of decisions gained in interviews and in documents emanating from the school staff.

3.3 Levels of Curriculum

Goodlad and his associates (1975) have defined a number of levels at which curriculum may be considered. In terms of these levels, the focus of this investigation was the decisions made by staff in relation to the "formal" curriculum (or the plan of the curriculum as recorded in documents) for the total school curriculum, rather than for the classroom level. The school curriculum as"perceived" by the participants was also studied. The "operational" curriculum as implemented in the classroom was only documented as it was reported on by those participants in discussions, interviews and surveys.

4.0 Development of the Methodology of the Study

4.1 Design

In order to study SBCD, the investigator acted as a participant-observer within one school for a period of 18 months, from July 1976 to December 1977. During the first six months, a pilot study was undertaken to develop and refine observational instruments and methods of data collection, analysis and reporting. During the ensuing year, insights gained and tentative hypotheses formulated during the observational period based upon ongoing analyses of the data, led to modification of these methods.

A time-series design (Campbell and Stanley, 1963) was used to give direction to the longitudinal study. Initially, four staff meetings were observed, to provide baseline data on decision-making, and to trial ways of recording the content of discussions plus the interactions between participants. During third term 1976, the researcher began to "intervene" as a participant as well as an observer, providing feedback of information and summarising data obtained from observations made during each preceding meeting of the staff group, as descriptions of the processes used. During 1977, the observer extended these "interventions" to include suggestions about possible ranges of decision-making and curriculum processes from which staff could choose, or which they could reject in favour of their own suggestions. Such interventions were only made at the request of staff members. To summarise, the observer acted as a "process consultant" (Schein, 1969) to the staff on decision-making and curriculum processes. This function entailed remaining non-involved in the determination of the content of both the curriculum and decision-making. The consultant engaged in activities which helped the school staff "...to perceive, understand, and act upon process events which occur[red] in the client's environment" (Schein, 1969:4-8) in order to help the group sharpen their skills of self-diagnosis and problem-solving.

There was no premature advance of solutions by the process consultant, because it was considered that the client group needed to see the problems for themselves, identify what they considered to be the issues, and to be actively involved in generating their own solutions. All choices for action were made by the participants in the school. The aim of the consultant-client relationship was to enable the clients to become "self-directed" and "non-dependent" upon others for solutions to their problems. The criterion used by the consultant to guide the interventions was

"I will not do for you what (I think) you can do for yourselves".

During the last eight weeks of the observational period, no interventions or feedback on curriculum decision-making were undertaken. In this way, observational data were obtained as comparison with the baseline data from the commencing weeks of the study.

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4.2 Data Source

The sources of data on curriculum decision-making were the staff members and other adults (ancillary staff and parents), and the students from one first class primary/infants school(approximately 1100 students and 46 staff members) in the western metropolitan area of Sydney, New South Wales. It should be noted that at the beginning of the second school year of the observation, there was a change of school principal, deputy principal, and four other members of the executive staff, as well as nine new members of the teaching assistant staff.

4.3 Sample

The focus for sampling was the phenomena of SBCD. During the pilot study, all formally-constituted meetings of the primary department staff of the school were observed, giving complete data on this setting for SBCD. However, as time progressed, it became clear that curriculum decision-making occurred in other places and at other times than purely in staff meetings. It was therefore decided that a more complete sampling of the range of events in which the staff of the school engaged should be undertaken over the ensuing 12 months. Data were therefore obtained from observations of meetings of total staff, departmental groups, grade groups, work groups, parent groups and executive staff, of social gatherings of staff, informal gatherings of staff members in rooms and grounds, informal gatherings of parents and parents with staff, and of events in which children engaged with staff and/or parents. Interviews with a range of participants in the life of the school were undertaken, to obtain reports of events as perceived by those participants. Surveys of opinion were administered to obtain broader indications of participants' perceptions about issues which emerged as analyses of data progressed. The resulting number of observations is reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Observations undertaken, reported by school term

Type of sample		Term 2 1976	Term 3 1976	Total 1976	Term 1 1977	Term 2 1977	Term 3 1977	Total 1977	Total
Meetings observed	n	4	5	9	18	12	4	34	43
	%	9.3	11.6	20.9	41.9	27.9	9.3	79.1	100.0
Events observed	n	0	1	1	8	19	1	28	29
	%	0.0	3.5	3.5	27.6	65.5	3.5	96.5	100.0
Perceptions, in interviews	n	0	24	24	119	164	62	345	369
	%	0.0	6.5	6.5	32.3	44.4	16.8	93.5	100.0
Surveys of opinion	n	4	5	9	2	1	1	4	13
	%	30.8	38.5	69.2	15.4	7.7	7.7	30.8	100.0
Documents collected	n	5	12	17	25	29	17	71	88
	%	5.7	13.6	19.3	28.4	33.0	19.3	80.7	100.0
Totals	n	13	47	60	172	225	85	482	542
	%	2.4	8.7	11.1	31.7	41.5	15.7	88.9	100.0

It should be noted that more observations were made in second term 1977 than in any other term during the study. During that particular school term, the staff began their involvement in 19 "appraisal" committees considering different aspects of the total school curriculum.

4.4 Instruments

During the period of the pilot study, instruments were tried and modified in order to give more adequate data about decision-making. Those used during the total observational period were:

(a) tape recordings of meetings of groups, using three microphones and a mixer with a reel-to-reel tape recorder,

(b) transcripts of tape recorded discussions,

(c) observational records of the content of discussions,

(d) observational records of the interpersonal communication patterns of the participants during meetings, documented for leadership functions performed as classified in research studies of small groups (Bales, 1950; Likert, 1961) modified by Harrison (1976),

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(e) diary notes of interviews and other observations, in sections according to methodology used, observational records, and theoretical insights gained, made for each visit to the school or contact with participants,

(f) surveys of opinion, both adaptations of those used in the Study of Change(Bentzen et al, 1974) to suit Australian terminology, and others specially developed during the study.

4.5 Data Collection

During the 62 weeks of the observational period, documents circulated within and from the school were collected for analyses, in addition to the data collected using the instruments described above.

4.6 Data Analyses as the Study Progressed

As data were collected by the investigator weekly from meetings, they were analysed and reported back to the participants in the following ways:

Reports, duplicated and distributed to each staff member, giving

(a) tables reporting the participation levels in discussion of all participants in the meeting,using leadership function categories,

(b) flow charts of the content of discussions, analysed for the categories of:

initiator of the discussion,

resource/information used in the discussion of the issue,

discussion topic,

decision made for action,

decision-making style, and

decision-maker(s).

Each of these content categories was documented in sequence as they occurred during the discussion from observational notes and transcripts.

(c) summaries of results of questionnaires and surveys completed by staff members.

Verbal comments on trends emerging from the data, as the basis for staff discussion of the feedback documents.

Each of these types of analyses were reported at the visit following the observation or collection of surveys.

Summary reports of results of all analyses at the end of the pilot study and the completion of the total study, in December of both years.

4.7 Data analyses at the Completion of the Study

On completion of data collection, data were analysed to itemise all decisions documented in any of the observational records discussed above. Each decision was listed in the terms in which it was recorded together with related details according to the clusters of variables listed below:

(a) the school term in which it was documented,

(b) the week in which it was documented,

(c) the person(s) or group who made the decision,

(d) the style of decision-making used,

(e) the person(s) or group who initiatied the discussion of the issue,

(f) the source(s) of the data,

(g) the type of information used in making the decision,

(h) whether the decision was implemented or not, and

(i) the influence involved, that is the major consideration related to the subject of the decision evidenced in the discussion.

The listed decisions, with their coded numbers for week, school term and decision number, were then copied and given to three independent judges qualified in curriculum studies. Instructions were given to classify each decision according to one of the defined categories already identified in preliminary analyses of the data. Each judge classified decisions independently

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after which the three judges and the investigator met, discussed the appropriate classification of each decision until complete agreement was reached about the category label. The investigator then recorded the classification against each decision. As additional categories were identified by the judges, they were added to the list of possibilities, with their definitions.

Classification of the other ten sets of variables for each decision was completed by the investigator, from the observational records from which each decision had been identified. Decision data were then coded and analysed descriptively (percentages and chi square) using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

4.8 Assumptions

It must be assumed that the investigator was capable of making observations which could be considered reliable and valid and that the data obtained from participants as reports of decisions were also reliable. Indications are given later in the paper of the extent to which multiple sources were used in the documentation of decisions, a factor which could be considered to lend credibility to the data reported herein.

5.0 Results

Results reported in this paper are given mainly as illustrations of the nature of data obtained, and to demonstrate that quantifiable data can be obtained from a case study using participant-observation as the methodology. Data describing SBCD in the school concerned are reported from the analyses described in the previous section (4.7), according to the 11 sets of variables listed. Descriptive statistics only are given. Later publications will report more complete data, use more complex analyses, and summarise the results of diary records as well as documenting in more detail the role of the investigator as consultant.

All analyses reported herein should be considered in the light of the more comprehensive data collection methods in 1977. Table 2 reports the documented decisions according to the proportion of the total by term identified in each source used.

TABLE 2

Data Sources of recorded decisions, reported as percentages by school term

Sources of data	School term					
	1976 2	1976 3	1977 1	1977 2	1977 3	
Minutes of meetings	46.8	7.6	32.8	22.5	27.1	
Staff procedure bulletin	0.0	0.0	28.0	6.8	9.4	
Written communication with parents	0.0	0.0	4.9	9.6	15.3	
Special communication with staff	8.1	1.3	0.0	10.9	2.5	
1.Documents	(54.9)	(8.9)	(63.7)	(49.8)	(54.3)	
Observational records of meetings	41.9	79.7	17.3	14.1	19.7	
Diary notes	0.0	0.0	11.6	19.6	11.3	
2.Observational records/reports	(41.9)	(79.7)	(28.9)	(33.7)	(31.0)	
Minutes and observational records	3.2	11.4	3.6	16.1	13.8	
Minutes, observational records and diary records	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.3	1.0	
Observational records plus staff procedure bulletin	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	
3.Multiple sources	(3.2)	(11.4)	(4.8)	(16.4)	(14.8)	
	n =62	79	329	311	203	984

During the five school terms, 984 decisions were documented from these various data sources. Sixty-two (6.3 per cent) were recorded in second term 1976, 79 (8.0 per cent) in third term 1976, 329 (33.4 per cent) in first term 1977, 311 (31.6 per cent) in second term and 203 (20.6 per cent) in third term of that year. These 984 decisions formed the basis of the analyses reported in this paper.

5.1 Decisions made

In all 26 different categories of decisions were identified by the independent judges. Only seven of these categories related to the task of the school in planning the curriculum itself. In every school term, less of the documented decisions related to the intended curriculum than to

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other aspects of the school. During each school term, decisions about 19 other aspects of school life were identified. These data are reported in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Proportion of documented decisions for school terms, reported by type

Type of decision	School term					n
	1976 2	1976 3	1977 1	1977 2	1977 3	
	%	%	%	%	%	
1. Analysis system	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4
2. Curriculum objectives	0.0	0.0	33.3	55.6	11.1	9
3. learning experiences	10.8	13.5	24.3	18.9	32.4	37
4. organisation of learning experiences	8.0	6.8	29.5	34.1	21.6	88
5. evaluation of learning outcomes	11.1	5.6	27.8	33.3	22.2	18
6. curriculum development, implementation and evaluation	12.9	8.1	19.4	40.3	19.4	62
7. response to external events	3.6	14.3	35.7	17.9	28.6	28
Task of the school/curriculum	9.8	9.4	26.4	31.7	22.8	246
8. administrative/organisational	4.8	4.8	38.6	33.7	18.1	83
9. curriculum materials	0.0	6.3	35.4	27.1	31.3	48
10. fund raising, money	0.0	0.0	57.9	21.1	21.1	19
11. buildings/grounds/equipment	2.9	12.9	50.0	22.9	11.4	70
12. parental and community involvement	10.6	2.1	17.0	38.3	31.9	47
13. human resources/ancillary staff	33.3	33.3	0.0	0.0	33.3	9
Resource utilisation	5.1	7.3	37.3	28.6	21.7	276
14. staffing allocation	3.3	6.7	30.0	33.3	26.7	30
15. teacher role	5.8	3.8	15.4	53.8	21.2	52
16. industrial/political matters	0.0	0.0	37.5	37.5	25.0	8
17. teacher development	2.4	9.4	22.0	48.0	17.1	41
18. hidden curriculum	9.0	4.5	43.3	25.4	17.9	67
Structure	5.6	5.6	29.3	39.4	20.2	198
19. teacher-pupil relationship	0.0	0.0	16.7	16.7	66.7	6
20. school philosophy (shared meanings)	0.0	0.0	28.0	48.0	24.0	25
21. decision-making processes	8.0	14.9	43.7	14.9	18.4	87
22. staff amenities	0.0	23.1	46.2	15.4	15.4	13
23. communication with parents	3.9	2.0	37.3	49.0	7.4	51
24. communication - internal to school	6.6	13.1	37.7	23.0	19.7	61
25. staff relationships	0.0	0.0	40.0	45.0	15.0	20
26. teamwork/leadership style	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	1
Human relationships	4.9	9.5	39.0	28.8	17.8	264

n=984

Types of decisions are reported according to each individual category, as well as for clusters of categories, grouped according to sub-systems within a social organisation, as adapted from Leavitt (1965).

From Table 3, it can be seen that decisions about the response of the school to external events, administrative matters, curriculum materials, fund raising and money, buildings/grounds/equipment, the hidden curriculum (rules and regularities of the school), decision-making processes, staff amenities, teamwork or leadership style, and communication within the school were all recorded more frequently in first term 1977 than during the other school terms. The emphases in observed decisions about curriculum objectives, curriculum processes, organisation of learning experiences, evaluation of learning outcomes, parental and community involvement, staff allocation, roles expected of teachers, teacher development, school philosophy, communication with parents, and staff relationships all occurred during second term 1977. During term three 1977, decisions about learning experiences and teacher-pupil relationships were observed to occur more frequently than in other school terms.

When data are considered according to the four sub-systems (the task of the school/the intended curriculum, the structure of the school as an organisation, the use of resources - both human and physical, and the human relationships within the social system), results show that recorded decisions about curriculum (31.9 per cent) occurred more frequently in term two 1977 than in other terms. Emphasis on decisions about structure of the school was observed also in second term 1977 (39.4 per cent), whereas those related to the use of human and physical resources (37.3 per cent) and human relationships (39 per cent) occurred most often in term one 1977.

Table 4 reports the recorded decisions as percentages of all those recorded within each school term, together with proportion of the total of decisions and their rank order of frequency. This provides further evidence that the foci of decision-making varied over time, considered according to school terms.

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TABLE 4

Recorded decisions, reported as percentages of those recorded within each school term

Type of decision	School Term 1976 2 %	1976 3 %	1977 1 %	1977 2 %	1977 3 %	% of Total	Rank Order n
1. analysis system	3.2	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	25
2. curriculum objectives	0.0	0.0	0.9	1.6	0.5	0.9	21
3. learning experiences	6.5	6.3	2.7	2.3	5.9	3.8	13
4. organisation of learning experiences	11.3	7.6	7.9	9.6	9.4	8.9	1
5. evaluation of learning outcomes	3.2	1.3	1.5	1.9	2.0	1.8	19
6. curriculum processes	12.9	6.3	3.6	8.0	5.9	6.3	6
7. response to external events	1.6	5.1	3.0	1.6	3.9	2.8	15
Task of the school/curriculum	38.7	29.1	19.8	25.1	17.6	25.0	
8. administrative/organisational	6.5	5.1	9.7	9.0	7.4	8.4	3
9. curriculum materials	0.0	3.8	5.2	4.2	7.4	4.9	10
10. fund raising, money	0.0	0.0	3.3	1.3	2.0	1.9	18
11. buildings/grounds/equipment	3.2	11.4	10.6	5.1	3.9	7.1	4
12. parental/community involvement	8.1	1.3	2.4	5.8	7.4	4.8	11
13. human resources/ancillary staff	4.8	3.8	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.9	21
Resource utilisation	22.6	25.3	31.3	25.4	29.6	28.1	
14. staffing allocation	1.6	2.5	2.7	3.2	3.9	3.0	14
15. teacher role	4.8	2.5	2.4	9.0	5.4	5.3	8
16. industrial/political	0.0	0.0	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.8	23
17. teacher development	1.6	5.1	2.7	6.4	3.4	4.2	12
18. hidden curriculum	9.7	3.8	8.8	5.5	5.9	6.8	5
Structure	17.7	13.9	17.6	25.1	19.7	20.1	
19. teacher-pupil relationship	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.3	2.0	0.6	24
20. sbhool philosophy (shared meanings)	0.0	0.0	2.1	3.9	3.0	2.5	16
21. decision-making processes	11.3	16.5	11.6	4.2	7.9	8.8	2
22. staff amenities	0.0	3.8	1.8	0.6	1.0	1.3	20
23. communication with parents	3,2	1.3	5.8	8.0	2.0	5.2	9
24. communication - internal	6.5	10.1	7.0	4.5	5.9	6.2	7
25. staff relationships	0.0	0.0	2.4	2.9	1.5	2.0	17
26. leadership style/teamwork	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.1	26
Human relationships	21.0	31.7	31.3	24.4	23.2	26.8	
TOTALS	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

n = 984

In Figure 1, the trends in decision-making for the ten most frequently recorded decision-types are presented, illustrating the decrease in variance of frequency over time for these types of decisions.

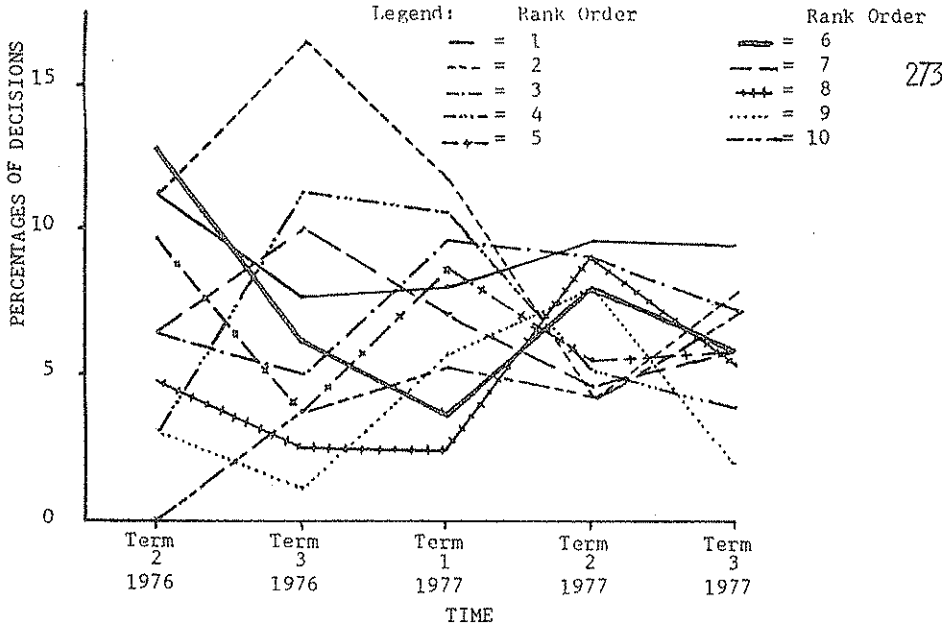

FIGURE 1

Topics of recorded decisions, reported by school term, for the ten most frequent decision types

Figure 1 shows that second term 1977 was the period of time when recorded decisions for these ten types varied least in frequency.

Recorded decisions, analysed at the macro or sub-system level, also varied over time. Decisions about the intended curriculum were the most frequent of those recorded in second term 1976. Decisions about human relationships were the most frequent of those recorded in third term 1976. In term one 1977, decisions about resource utilisation and human relationships were equally most frequently recorded, whereas in second term 1977, decisions about all four sub-systems were virtually equally emphasised in the documented decisions. These trends are illustrated in Figure 2.

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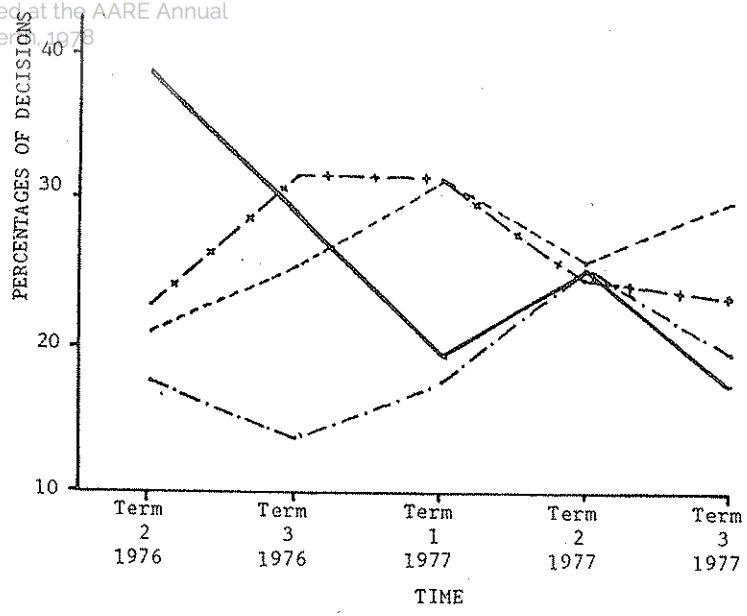

FIGURE 2

Topics of recorded decisions, reported by school term, for decisions analysed for the four sub-system categories

Legend: —— = task/intended curriculum
---- = resource utilisation
—·—· = structure of the system
—•— = human relationships

From an examination of Figures 1 and 2. term two 1977 emerged as the period of time when documented decisions varied least in frequency between categories.

5.2 Decision-makers

Data were classified according to the types of decision-makers identified in observational records. Results showed that there were 43 different types of decision-makers over the observational period. In Table 5, data recorded show that the most frequent decision-makers within that school setting was the principal (39 per cent of recorded decisions).

TABLE 5

Recorded decisions, reported for types of decision-makers, by percentages of recorded decisions for each school term

Types of decision-makers	School term					% of Total
	1976 2 %	1976 3 %	1977 1 %	1977 2 %	1977 3 %	
Principal alone (as an individual)	41.9	49.4	43.2	29.6	41.9	39.0
Other executives (as individuals)	6.5	0.0	2.7	12.8	8.9	7.2
Teachers (as individuals)	6.5	3.8	2.7	9.0	1.5	4.8
Individuals	54.9	53.2	48.6	51.4	52.3	51.0
Executive members with other staff	2.2	3.8	3.3	7.7	9.9	6.0
Staff groups (meetings and Informal)	36.5	38.0	33.1	27.3	20.7	26.3
Groups of staff	38.7	41.8	36.4	35.0	30.7	32.3
External agencies	3.2	1.3	4.6	7.1	8.4	5.8
Parents/parent groups	0.0	1.3	2.7	4.8	8.4	4.3
Pupils	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.5	0.2
Unknown source	1.6	2.5	7.6	1.3	0.0	3.3
1. Teaching staff (individually or in groups)	51.7	45.6	41.8	56.8	41.1	44.3
2. Principal as individual	41.9	49.4	43.2	29.6	41.9	39.0
3. External	3.2	1.3	2.7	4.8	8.4	5.8
4. Parents/parent groups	0.0	1.3	2.7	4.8	8.4	4.3
5. Pupils	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.5	0.2

Staff groups(26.3 per cent) were the second most frequently recorded decision-makers, while the executive staff members (apart from the principal) were third in relative frequency (10.3 per cent). It should be noted that there was a shift in the locus of decision-making in term two 1977, when the principal (29.6 per cent) and staff groups (27.3 per cent) almost equally shared in responsibility for decision-making. Individual teachers (4.8 per cent), parents and parent groups (4.3 per cent) and external agencies (5.8 per cent) were relatively uninvolved as recorded decision-makers, while pupils (0.2 per cent) were least often responsible

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for documented decisions. The gradual increase in the recorded involvement of parents as decision-makers is noteworthy.

Decision-making was basically individualistic, with the principal most often the person concerned as decision-maker. However, the decrease in proportion of recorded decisions made by the principal in second term 1977 and the corresponding increase in participation of the rest of the staff (56.8 per cent) as decision-makers is worth noting.

5.3 Decision-making strategies

There were four basically-different strategies for decision-making identified from the data. The style most frequently documented was again largely individualistic (that is, unilateral or request/direction) (51.2 per cent). Consensus decision-making, defined as being evident when all members have had a chance to air their views and then agre to agree, was observed in almost one-quarter of all decisions (24.1 per cent). The incidence of consensus increased dramatically after the first term of observation. In all other school terms, consensus was used more frequently than in term two 1976, and individualistic decision-making less. There was also a decrease in frequency of recorded voting strategies during the period of observation. These data are reported in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Decision-making strategies recorded, reported for proportion by school term

Type of decision-making strategy	School term 1976 2 %	1976 3 %	1977 1 %	1977 2 %	1977 3 %	Total %
Unilateral	56.5	48.4	49.2	51.7	52.7	51.2
"Handclasp"(Mutual agreement between two persons)	6.4	5.1	3.3	10.3	11.3	7.5
Consensus (agreement to agree)	19.4	35.5	22.8	25.0	21.7	24.1
Voting	14.5	3.8	1.2	2.5	7.4	4.0
Unknown	3.2	6.3	23.4	10.3	6.9	13.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

5.4 Influences on decision-making

Data were analysed for the recorded influences on decision-making. An influence was defined as being the issue most often considered in dicussions, apart from the topic of the decision itself. Twenty-nine different influences were recorded. Most frquent of these were "personal values of the participants" (15.8 per cent of decisions) and "time for planning" (8 per cent). Time for planning remained the second most frequently recorded influence in all school terms apart from first term 1977. Both "curriculum implementation" and "learner factors" increased in frequency as recorded influences over time.(Table 7)

During first term 1977, "parents" and "the principal's own role perceptions" increased as identified influences (7.3 per cent). "Personal values of participants" was seen to decrease most over time as an observed influence on decision-making.

Initiators of discussion topics which resulted in recorded decisions could be considered an influence on decision-making. The principal was the most frequently recorded initiator of such discussions (45.8 per cent). In second term, the frequency with which he initiated decision topics fell to 28.9 per cent, while individual teachers, groups of staff, parents and external bodies increased proportionally as initiators. Parents as initiators of decision topics increased gradually over time. These data are illustrated in Figure 3.

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TABLE 7

 Recorded influences on decisions made, by school term

Influence	School term					
	1976 2 %	1976 3 %	1977 1 %	1977 2 %	1977 3 %	Total %
1. External agency	4.8	10.1	3.0	1.9	5.4	3.9
2. Internal event	1.6	0.0	2.7	1.3	1.5	1.7
3. School counsellor	4.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
4. Regional office/district inspector	1.6	0.0	0.9	2.9	0.0	1.3
5. Parents	0.0	2.5	7.3	4.5	5.4	5.2
6. Media	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	1.0	0.4
External environment	12.8	12.6	14.5	10.6	13.3	12.8
7. Finance/money	4.8	12.7	4.3	8.0	3.9	6.1
8. Time for planning	11.3	16.5	4.6	9.3	7.4	8.0
9. Space/buildings etc	1.6	1.3	2.1	2.9	3.0	2.4
10. Timetable	0.0	2.5	0.6	0.6	2.0	1.0
11. Human resources/ancillary staff	0.0	0.0	5.2	3.9	4.4	3.9
12. Curriculum guidelines	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.5	0.2
Resources	17.7	33.0	17.1	24.7	21.2	21.6
13. Staffing	4.8	6.3	2.4	2.6	3.9	3.3
14. Promotion system	0.0	1.3	4.6	2.6	3.0	3.0
15. Structure of the system	0.0	1.3	1.2	2.3	6.9	2.6
16. Curriculum skill of participants	0.0	2.5	1.2	1.9	2.0	1.6
17. Principal's role expectations	0.0	0.0	7.3	1.6	3.4	3.7
18. Individual innovator	0.0	0.0	1.5	3.2	2.0	1.0
19. Age/experience of staff	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.2
Structure of system	4.8	11.4	18.2	14.8	21.2	16.3
20. Personality clash	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	3.0	1.6
21. Staff needs and morale	0.0	2.5	4.3	3.5	6.9	4.2
22. Communication system	0.0	3.8	2.1	1.6	0.0	1.5
23. Department of Education policy	3.2	8.9	7.0	4.8	7.9	6.4
24. Personal values of participants	46.8	19.0	18.2	11.9	6.9	15.8
25. Values conflict	0.0	1.3	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.4
Human relationships	50.0	35.5	31.9	25.3	25.2	29.9
26. Research project	1.6	0.0	6.4	4.2	0.5	3.7
27. Feedback from researcher	1.6	0.0	1.2	1.6	1.0	1.2
Research project	3.2	0.0	7.6	5.8	1.5	4.9
28. Curriculum implementation	0.0	0.0	0.6	5.8	3.4	2.7
29. Pupil progress; learner factors	0.0	0.0	6.1	9.0	14.3	7.8
Curriculum implementation	0.0	0.0	6.7	14.8	17.7	10.5
Unknown	11.3	7.6	4.0	3.9	0.0	3.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

n = 984

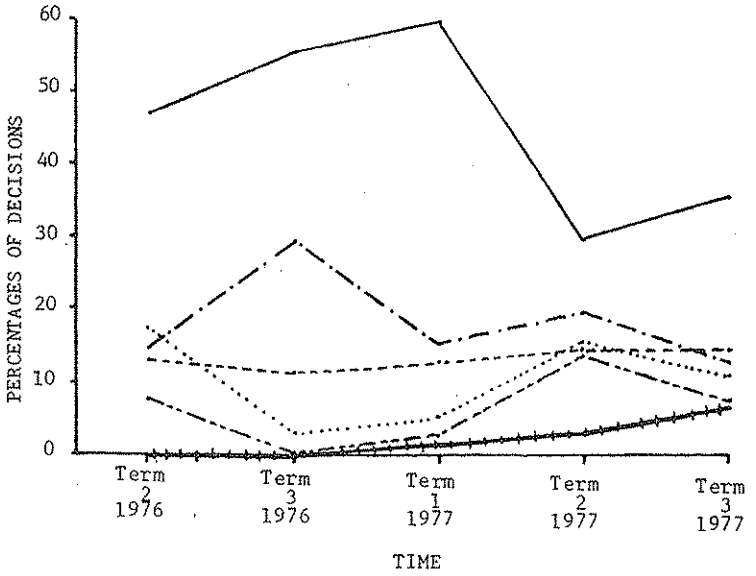

FIGURE 3

Initiators of discussions on decision topics, reported by school term

Legend: —— = principal
--- = other executive staff
-·-· = individual teachers
····· = groups of staff
+++++ = parents
——·—= external agency

There have been suggestions in literature that decision-making should and can be "rational" and "scientific" (Gregg, 1957; Griffiths, 1959; Feyereisen, Fiorno, and Nowak, 1970). It has been asserted that decision-makers can learn to base their decisions on data from trialling a range of choices, rather than upon value judgements alone. From the data recorded, it was observed that the staff of the case study school used "informal" information gleaned serendipidously by staff in their daily experiences of teaching less often than information deliberately collected in trials, surveys and documents for feedback into decision-making processes.

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Decisions made on the basis of "no information" decreased in recorded proportion over time. These data are reported in Figure 4.

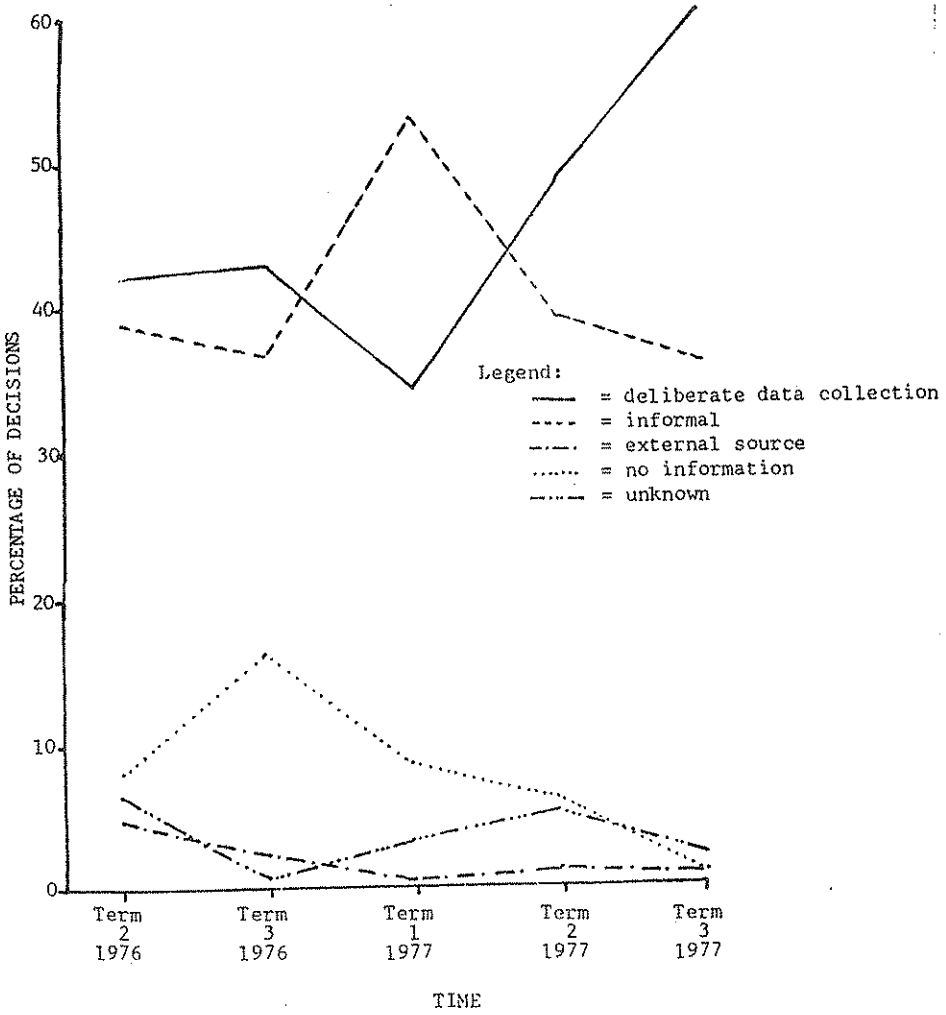

FIGURE 4

Proportions of types of information used to make decisions, by school term

It could thus be said that forms of deliberate data collection by the staff to gain information for decision-making exerted an influence on their decision-making processes to an increasing extent during the observational period. Evaluation of possible choices was seen to exert an increasing influence, indicating that "rational" decision-making also increased.

5.5 Overall results

In addition to the incidence of deliberate information collection as an indicator of effective decision-making, the implementation of recorded decisions could also be regarded as an index of "efficiency" in decision-making. Data analyses show that the proportion of non-implemented decisions decreased from 17.7 per cent of reported decisions in second term 1976 to 0.0 per cent in third term 1977. Implemented decisions increased in the same period from 75.8 per cent to 95.6 per cent. Proportions of reported decisions for which implementation details were not documented remained reasonably constant in the same period (6.9 per cent). It could therefore be said that the school staff increased in the efficiency of their decision-making during the period of the observation.

The various changes on the 11 clusters of variables during second term 1977 is open to explanation from other data, not reported within this paper. It should be noted, however, that second term 1977 was the time period when several events occurred:

(a) the staff were engaged in appraisal of their school curriculum using inter-departmental staff groups,

(b) feedback from the researcher has been provided to the staff for the maximum period of the study, and

(c) the end of that term marked the end of the feedback and intervention process.

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6.0 Discussion of Results

6.1 Research Methodology

From the results reported on preceding pages, some statements can be made about the use of ethnographic methods for research on SBCD:

(a) an ethnographic case study of one school can provide data about curriculum decision-making in that setting,

(b) participant-observation can provide complementary sets of data from a variety of sources to describe aspects of SBCD,

(c) data collection methods within ethnographic studies of SBCD need to be varied, in order to obtain adequately sampled data about the phenomena involved in a setting, and

(d) descriptive data, carefully documented, can be quantified.

Participant-observation within a case study has proved a fruitful approach for the study of SBCD.

6.2 School-based Curriculum Decision-making

From the descriptive data obtained from the study of SBCD at Talktown Public School, it appears that

(a) decision-making focused on the intended curriculum varied in degree over school terms,

(b) SBCD in that setting involved making decisions about more than just the intended curriculum; implementing decisions (about resource use, the structure of the school, and relationships between participants) were complementary decisions to those made about the curriculum per se. The social system of the school as an organisation was a factor in SBCD,

(c) the total school, considered as a complex social organisation with the four interacting sub-systems of task/curriculum, resource utilisation, structure, and human relationships, was a useful perspective from which to study SBCD,

(d) SBCD did not necessarily depend upon and proceed from decisions about objectives; the sequential model (Tyler, 1949) of curriculum was not an adequate description of the reality of SBCD in the setting studied,

(e) SBCD as observed at Talktown school involved the processes of initiation, resource/information use, discussion, decisions for action, and implementation of action,

(f) decision-making was able to be extended to involve teachers, parents, and pupils to an increasing degree in decision-sharing, especially when focused upon curriculum processes,

(g) SBCD was not always "rational"; personal values of participants and their value judgements influenced the decision-making process,

(h) SBCD was influenced by a variety of factors both within and outside the school, though the major influences were internal to the setting,

(i) the school principal was a key influence upon SBCD, as an initiator of issues and as decision-maker,

(j) the context of the school was itself an influence on SBCD,

(k) SBCD by the school staff became more efficient over time, as indicated by increased implementation of decisions and decrease in influence of personal values, through the process of "reflection-upon-action" or "praxis" (Freire, 1970) facilitated by feedback of information about that implementation, and

(l) the participant-observer was an influence on SBCD in the setting studied.

6.3 Theoretical Insights

From these findings, the investigation has been directed towards further in-depth analyses of some tentative hypotheses relating to SBCD:

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(a) Indicators of efficient school-based curriculum decision-making as a participative, shared process are:

- use of consensus and small group decision-making strategies,
- the degree of participation by staff members, parents and pupils,
- the extent of the implementation of decisions,
- the extent of the use of evaluation or reflection-upon-action,
- the variety of groupings used for decision-making, and
- degree of flexibility of use of human and physical resources in making release time available for shared decision-making.

(b) Major influences upon SBCD are

- the values of participants,
- time available for planning together,
- parental expectations,
- the progress of learners,
- the availability of finance as a resource,
- Department of Education policy,
- the principal of the school,
- the structure of the social system of the school,
- the availability of physical and human resources ,
- relationships between staff members,
- feedback from curriculum implementation, and
- the processes of decision-making used.

(c) A process of decision-making which a staff can learn to use more efficiently to facilitate SBCD is an inductive learning cycle of

- initiation of a dilemma or dissatisfaction
- discussion of the dilemma or dissatisfaction,
- invention of alternatives; choice between possible actions on which data is available, or new approaches identified intuitively,
- action on decision choices, on a trial basis,
- evaluation of the results on the basis of feedback of information on the trialing, and
- reflection-upon-action to generalise, apply and integrate the learnings.

The phase of reflection-upon-action is a crucial one in the process, and leads to the initiation of a new dilemma or dissatisfaction.

Two models could explain the processes and context of SBCD as observed in the particular school. These will be critically evaluated in further data analyses.

(a) SBCD processes as they exist in reality can be explained by the "interactive people-centred model of curriculum" developed by Cohen, Deer, Harrison and Josephsen (1978), which suggests that the intention and the reality may not be congruent, and that decisions about the four major curriculum elements can be and are made in any and every possible sequence and are interactive. Figure 5 shows this model with intention and reality within the one representation.

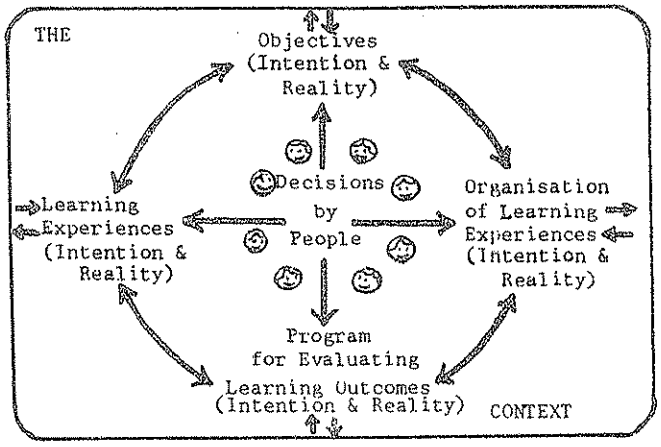

FIGURE 5

Interactive people-centred model of curriculum

(Cohen, Deer, Harrison and Josephsen,1978)

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(b) The context of SBCD is the complex social system of the school, where decision-making brings the sub-systems into interaction. The interaction of the four sub-systems is related to the degree of achievement of the task or goal of the school.

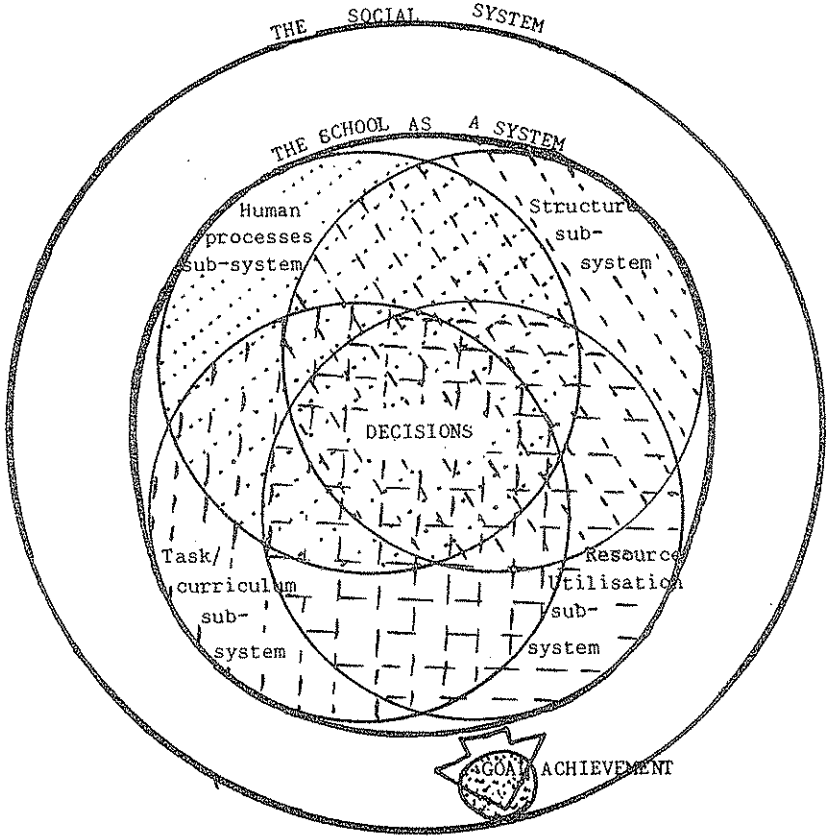

FIGURE 6

The context of curriculum decision-making

Further analyses of data from the varied sources within this ethnographic study will be used to critically evaluate the hypotheses and models discussed herein. More case studies of SBCD are needed, however, before adequate, empirically-based theory in this area of investigation can be developed, and hypotheses accepted. Ethnography could give direction to the methodology of such studies.

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THE USE OF POST HOC TIME-LAG ANALYSES TO COMPARE THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOLING ON GROUPS OF PUPILS, CONTROLLING FOR AGE-RELATED FACTORS

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