An Evaluation of the Policy  
of Devolution of Decision-Making  
and Responsibility to Queensland  
State Schools.  
Brigid Limerick, Clarrie Burke, Roger Slee,  
John Cawte and Sharyn Exelby.  
November 1992  
for AARE "Education Research: Discipline and Diversity"  
Deakin University  
Introduction  
Major organisational restructuring has occurred in the Queensland Department of Education to facilitate devolution in the education system. These changes are based on the recommendations and operating principles set out in the Department report Focus on Schools (1990). One of the key stated purposes of the restructuring is to locate decision-making relevant to schools in the local community. Cynics have argued that this is a cost cutting mechanism, whilst optimists have greeted the move as a return to grassroots democracy where schools are concerned (although, as we shall point out in this paper, it is certainly not a return to grassroots democracy as Queensland has never experienced that in its schooling system). The research reported on in this paper was set up to review and begin the process of evaluating the effectiveness of this policy of devolved decision-making. This was to be done through documenting the perceptions of key personnel and stakeholders at the levels of Schools, School Support Centres, Regional Offices and Central Office as to the effectiveness of the policy in its initial stages. The research is part of a longitudinal research plan which will monitor the process of devolution in Queensland and aims to provide the base data for the on-going project.  
The paper presented here is divided into five sections. The first section contextualizes the research by providing background information on community involvement in Queensland and the rhetoric underpinning the move to devolving decision-making responsibility. The second section looks at the recent documentation about devolution emanating from Central Office, that is, the setting out of the ground rules. The third section describes the structure derived from Focus on Schools, specifically looking at the Forums which are a crucial and integral part of the new look Education Department. The fourth section
looks at the research and outlines
the construction of the questionnaire and the problems raised when one is
attempting to catch the perceptions
of a wide range of people on an issue as complex as decisionmaking. The
final section indicates some of the
issues that are beginning to emerge
from the data. As the research is still in progress these issues are
mainly derived from the pilot study and an
early scan of the questionnaires which are still arriving and have yet to
be analysed.
Section 1 - The Queensland Backdrop
Readiness for devolution
In the late months of 1988, before the present government won office, the
Brisbane daily newspaper,
the Courier Mail, headlined with the news that the Education Department was
to introduce school-based
budgeting. This newsbreak was fast followed by expressions of distrust
about the motives for such a
move voiced through the newspaper by parent and teacher groups. In an
earlier article (see Limerick
and Meadmore, 1989) we have argued that throughout the history of State
education in Queensland,
involved in schools has not been encouraged and has remained in the
main at a minimal and superficial level. In addition there is a strong
tradition in which teachers regard active
community members or parents as "deviant and threatening strangers"
(Lightfoot, 1978:31) who are likely to
threaten the status quo and attempts at involvement have been categorised
generally as interference.
Since the 1875 Education Act, Queensland has had a centralized,
bureaucratic education structure. The size of
the state, the thinly spread population and the low level of education of
the majority of the inhabitants have all
contributed towards dependence on the authority of a centralized structure
to make all administrative and
educational decisions. Australians according to Matheson (1984), one of
the directors of education in
Queensland in the 1980's, have never had the fundamental experience of
grassroots democracy that characterised
the early life of small settlements in places such as New England. This
generally assumed inability of the
Australian, and particularly Queensland, population to participate in
educational decision-making is often
voiced.
However the new Labor government in Queensland elected in 1989 had two
clearly
stated objectives where education was concerned - and these related to
social justice and community
involvement (Lingard and Collins, 1991), and so the reforms already foreshadowed in the 1988 statement on budgeting moved ahead rapidly. A new structure was proposed arising out of the Focus on Schools (1990) document which gave scant consideration to the prevailing culture. Moves towards devolution of decision-making had occurred (Robertson, 1979, 1981a, 1981b) prior to the Labor party taking government, but these moves seem to have occurred within an uncompromising stand against any actual power-sharing on important decisions of principle or future planning. The present government faces the same issue in that in many ways community involvement and social justice may be seen to be contradictory terms and therefore the central authority needs to keep tight reins on policies that relate to social justice if any changes are to occur in this area. Exactly how one does this if one is serious about devolving responsibility and empowering local communities is the dilemma. From the outset it is also necessary to point out that there is continual confusion in the literature (see Limerick, 1988), particularly that emanating from the department, over the use of the words involvement and participation. Participation is generally accepted to indicate power sharing whilst involvement accepts a more limited system of interaction. So which is devolution, when it is played out in the schools, attempting to achieve? Participation or involvement?

Clarifying the Rhetoric of Devolution

During the lead-up to the implementation of devolved policy processes in Queensland State Schools, the Department of Education was busy producing and issuing a range of explanatory material to the school system and general public. From this material it was apparent that the term devolution implied a commitment to certain participative democratic ideals reflected in such statements as:

% The School is an integral part of the community, and the continued promotion of active community involvement in collaborative decision-making will ensure that the education provided at the 'school-face' meets the unique needs of each individual and each community (Department of Education 1987, 1988, 1989, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1989d, 1990, 1990a, 1990b).
% People (i.e. total school community) directly (and indirectly) affected by educational decisions

Participative processes of power sharing enable all members of an organisation such as a school, to deliberate over educational means and ends as well as administrative functions and processes (Department of Education, 1988a, 1989, 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1990a, 1990b).

If we think of the Department's policy on devolution as a value position, as well as a process designed to achieve certain purposes, it is necessary to clearly determine just what exactly these purposes are. This is not to say that the values issue is unproblematic. Statements of principle can be particularly misleading if divorced from their complex bureaucratic imperatives (Slee, in press). Critical reflection of the value positions suggested in the statements reproduced above prompts a number of questions which need to be asked as devolution policy is progressively implemented:

- What is expected out of the Department's move towards devolution?
- What knowledge, attitudes, values and skills should people involved in the move towards devolution at the school-level possess?
- What changes does the Department wish to bring about in the nature, purpose, direction and operation of schools?

Careful thought needs to be given to the means, and the different human resources and styles, used to achieve the goals derived from the answers to these questions. What emerges out of this is crucial because it will largely determine the differences between the ways that so-called devolution policy is interpreted and played out in practice.

Leading up to the implementation stage in 1991 the discourse among senior officers within the Queensland Department of Education about the development and operation of devolution policy suggested an acceptance of devolution basically as an administrative exercise well couched in its historical context (Burke, 1992). There was clear evidence of a pragmatic attitude among senior officials toward devolution in the State school system, but little in the way of deeper critical reflection, or substantive social critique. For this reason, the discourse in the pre-implementation stage could be characterised in mainly instrumentalist (i.e. administrative/operation) terms, rather than in socially critical terms. There was little to suggest political understanding of who really controls and
scripts the underlying ideological framework. As has been demonstrated elsewhere (Ball, 1987; Ball, 1988)
discursive practices do serve political agendas and this was apparent in Queensland as people flexed their new vocabularies to maintain or expand their positions in a changing bureaucracy.
What began as a review of the restructuring of the administration of the Department toward a leaner bureaucracy, evolved through the consultative process into the philosophy underlying the report Focus on Schools (1990). This represented a profound philosophical shift, demanding the initiation of a new Department culture characterised by the espousal of key organisational value of equity, effectiveness, participation, responsiveness and public accountability. Stemming from these values were the key operating principles which were supposed to guide all activities. These operating principles are those of:
% communication;
% community participation;
% service orientation (to clients/students); and
% valuing people.
Thus the dismantling of the Department to meet the demands placed upon organisations in the 1990's and the subsequent restructuring process has had profound effects on the operation and ethos of the State school system. The process for collecting feedback and the guidelines of Focus on Schools (1990) reflect much of the inclusive, participative, democratic ideals espoused in the Department's pre-implementation rhetoric but also reflect the ideal of a leaner department based on principles of economic rationalism.

So is there then a significant gap between the rhetoric underpinning the move towards devolution and the reality as experienced in the schools?
Section II - Recent Documentation
Devolution in the context of the post-industrial world
It is clear that organisation of public education in Queensland has undergone dramatic changes since the late 1980's (Lingard and Collins, 1991). This restructuring of education has not occurred in isolation and needs to be seen in the context of global and national trends towards private and public sector change in the post industrial world (Bash and Coulby, 1989; Ball, 1990; Pusey, 1991). Considine (1988), Yeatman (1990) and Pusey (1991) are three writers who have identified the emergence of a market ideology and economic rationalism as
features of the contemporary Australian state. The emergence of these trends in education and their reflection of similar moves in other parts of the Western world have been well documented (Caldwell and Spinks, 1987, 1988; Beare, 1988; Duignan, 1988; Bash and Coulby, 1989; Ball, 1990). Much of the literature sounds a cautionary note against the prevalence of corporate rhetoric in the discourse of education (Bates, 1987, 1992; Ball, 1990; Bowe, Gold and Ball, 1992) and the use of an economic agenda as a major force in educational change (Knight, Lingard and Porter, 1991). Despite these warnings the pervading themes seem to be the need to make changes which are appropriate and adaptive to the times (Nadebaum, 1991; Murphy, 1991); which give opportunities to foster creativity and diversity (Beare, 1988) and which allow genuine participation and sharing of authority by all concerned (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, 1992). In addition it is argued, such participation produces ownership and commitment to group decisions and can have a very positive impact on the performance of students (Murphy, 1991; Slee, 1992).

In response to these moves, public education in both Australia and overseas has undergone rapid change and restructuring (Rizvi, 1986; Duignan, 1988; Watkins, 1988b; Watt, 1989; Caldwell, 1988, 1992; Ball, 1990; Bowe, Gold and Ball, 1992). The literature of devolution has documented these changes in the administering of education in Britain and Europe (Caldwell, 1987; Rust and Blackmore, 1990; Ball, 1990; Geddes, 1990), the United States and Canada (Carnegie Forum Report, 1986) and New Zealand (Lange, 1988; Picot Report, 1988; Macpherson, 1989; Cardno, 1990). Though each movement would seem to have evolved in different ways (Caldwell, 1987), it is possible to discern from the literature some common trends which are also apparent in the Australian experience.

As has already been indicated there is a strong trend towards a corporate ideology which is applied to public systems of education (Bates, 1987; Beare, 1989). Similarly there is a move reflecting the private sector experience in the adoption of nontraditional organisational structures. Such school structures are seen as independent, self-sufficient and consisting of loose linkages of groups who share common goals and interests (Murphy, 1991). These systems are characterised by a tendency
towards centralising functions co-existing with decentralisation of operations (Caldwell, 1987; Caldwell and Spinks, 1992) and a greatly increased focus on collaboration and empowerment of stakeholders. Attendant to this is a concern for professional development for all. Other common themes are that of accountability linked to giving schools the responsibility to manage their own governance. A major pre-occupation is a concern for equality of provision as an outcome of devolution where the key word in the rhetoric is freedom rather than equality (Watt, 1989). However, concern for issues of equity and social justice in the moves to devolution are also expressed (Lingard, 1990).

A final trend is the significant implications for leadership practice involved in these changes (Fullan, 1990; Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Leithwood, 1992). Murphy (1991) asserts that decentralisation of system and school management and the increased involvement of teachers, students, parents, and members of the community requires dynamic leaders who are able to adapt their practices to suit the changing situation and the needs of all concerned. The autonomous school, characterised by entrepreneurialism, participative decision-making, product-marketing, consumer demands for greater choice and government pressure for higher levels of excellence, requires a different type of leader (Murphy, 1991: 69). Caldwell and Spinks have asserted that "a powerful capacity for transformational leadership is required for successful transition to a system of self-managing schools" (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992: 50).

The review of the literature of the Australian experience of devolution reflects the commonality of the trends identified internationally. The move to devolution in the education system began in Australia with the publication of the Karmel Committee Report (1973) entitled Schools in Australia. This report first proposed devolution of decision making to school communities and proposed a decentralised operation of schools (Karmel, 1973). Since the publication of this national report there have been moves to devolution at state level across Australia. The first and perhaps the most far reaching moves to devolution occurred in Victoria (Rizvi and Kemmis, 1987; Frazer, Dunstan and Creed, 1985; Rizvi, 1986; Chapman, 1990). Since then a series of governmental reports in each of the
states resulted in restructuring of education systems in South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. Following similar trends devolution in the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales occurred in the late 1980's.

Devolution in the Queensland Education Systems.
Though the move to devolution had been apparent in Queensland education for a number of years, (Harold, 1989; Kidston, 1989, 1990) there was no clear government policy until the late 1980's (Burke, 1992). Lingard and Collins (1991) have argued that educational reform in Queensland coincided with the election of a Labor government which, like its federal counterpart, was committed to public sector reform achieved through the practices of corporate managerialism.

Departmental policies such as "The Agenda for Excellence" (Queensland Department of Education, 1987) which encouraged wider involvement of stakeholders pointed to earlier moves towards devolution but did not signify any major change of direction. A Departmental report (1989) entitled New Zealand 1989 Changes in the public sector and in education made observations that Queensland could learn from the New Zealand experience in public sector change, including educational reform.

In prefiguring the changes that were to come the report concluded that the moves towards user-pays, marketing, corporatisation strategic planning and performance appraisals, already experienced in New Zealand, would accelerate in Queensland with a focus on efficiency, delegation and accountability. In drawing attention to the lack of local community involvement in decision-making in Queensland, the report called for increased devolution in the Queensland Department of Education over an extended timeline (Queensland Department of Education, 1989: 19).

The moves to devolution in Queensland were thus based on an educational rationale supporting decentralised decision making and school based management. In keeping with these sentiments the proposals for the decentralisation of the Queensland Department of Education were outlined in the policy statement Focus on Schools the future organisation of educational services for students (Queensland Department of Education, 1990). Arising from a consultative process entitled Have Your Say involving all stakeholders in Queensland education, this report presented a model for department restructuring to enact the principles of devolution.
The report highlighted two characteristics of an effective organisation as relatively flat organisational structures with decision-making capacity delegated widely and processes that allow all involved people, regardless of position, to contribute to ideas (Queensland Department of Education, 1990: 37).

Thus the participation of all stakeholders was seen as central to the policy. Also seen as crucial was the need for a sharing of responsibilities. A persistent theme of the document is the need for a reciprocal relationship between schools and departmental agencies with obligations and responsibilities, as they relate to the policy formulation process, being shared mutually. "Such devolution of power has the potential to reduce the alienation from schools, increase job satisfaction of employees, promote direct participation of all relevant groups and raise community understanding" (Queensland Department of Education, 1990: 37).

Key operating principles of schools have been formulated to promote certain values: "a quality public education; service for students; teachers' professionalism; the value of people and a vision of the future" (Department of Education, 1990: 38-40). It has been argued that in conjunction with these equal weight should be given to the current public sector imperatives of equity, public accountability and commitment to consultation (Macdonald, 1992: 3). Valuing the professional needs and contribution of all employees is a major characteristic of the model for the future. The report also points out that management and leadership practices are high priorities in the restructuring of the department (Queensland Department of Education, 1990). By increasing the emphasis on people and the way they are treated by the Department, employees have the opportunity to accept greater professional responsibility (Queensland Department of Education, 1990: x).

In consideration of these changes, recent literature produced by key officers in the Queensland Department of Education has also posited the need for a wider involvement of all stakeholders and a reshaping of leadership roles within the restructured department. Scott (1992) has proposed that to be an effective principal, it will be necessary to have a strong teaching background as well as the skills that relate to the management of a complex organisation. Macdonald (1992) has drawn from the work of Fullan (1991) to point to similar emerging trends in leadership
practice. In describing the move away from centralised operations, he has argued that such organisational shifts are built on basic assumptions about the changing role of all those involved in schools. The commonality of trends identified in both the international and Australian experience can be clearly seen in the recent literature of devolution which has been implemented by the Queensland Department of Education.

Section III - The Forums

Management forums are a key feature of the restructured department. In a flatter organisational structure these forums are seen to be crucial to the development of policy and the movement of ideas throughout the system. They are intended to facilitate the flow of information from the centre to schools and from schools to the centre so that policy can be responsive to the needs of school communities and the priorities established by the system are clear to all affected. Through School Support Centre Advisory Councils, needs that have been identified at the school level can be addressed on a wider basis using the available human and material resources. If there are policy issues which are considered to have broader implications, these are then referred to the various regional management forums. Because these have been developed to match the specific requirement of the different regions, there is some variation in the number and function of such forums. In general each region has a Studies Forum, a Human Resources Forum, Resources and Administration Forum, and a Review and Evaluation Forum. In a small region, such as South Western, these forums are compressed into one Collaborative Forum. The Regional Executive Management Forum then has the two fold task of strategic planning and policy directions and of the most appropriate resolution of matters originating from regional forums, either within the region or to State wide forums. There are state wide forums corresponding both to the regional management forums and to the central directorates as well as a Senior Executive forum. The structure of the relationships between these local, regional and state wide forums can be depicted diagrammatically (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Relationship between Local, Regional and State Wide Forums
Senior Executive Forum
State Studies State Human State Resources State Regional State Review
As these forums were seen to be critical to the effective working of the newly restructured Department, perceptions as to their efficacy and the level of understanding as to their functions is an important part of this research.

Section IV - The Research

Background

In 1989-90 a study was conducted of the rhetoric through which the Queensland Education Department's policy of devolution of responsibility to State schools had been developed and promoted (Burke, 1992). At the conclusion of the series of workshops which gave rise to the data for that study, it was recommended that a further study be conducted in 1992 - two years after the implementation of the policy. The purpose was to evaluate the effectiveness of devolution policy in practice in its early stages of implementation, as perceived by key stakeholders in the Queensland state school system. Preliminary discussions between the present QUT research team and senior Departmental officials (the Executive Director, Directorate of Evaluation and Review and the Senior Research Officer) commenced in August 1991. Agreement was reached after a series of meetings that the project be set up as follows:

Project: A review and evaluation of the perceived effectiveness of the devolution of responsibility to Queensland State Schools.

Aim: To evaluate the effectiveness of devolution policy as perceived by key stakeholders in the State School system.

Objectives: To investigate:

(i) the extent to which the various stakeholders perceive themselves to be involved in decision making in their particular roles;
(ii) in which areas of decision making these stakeholders participate;
(iii) stakeholders' perceptions of the outcomes of being involved...
in decision making;
(iv) whether stakeholders perceive a gap between the rhetoric of devolution policy and the actuality of implementation.

In consultation with the Senior Research Officer of the Department the research team decided that the perceptions of the sample would be obtained by means of a written questionnaire. The data from this questionnaire would be collated and analysed both quantitatively (using the SPSS package) and qualitatively as open-ended comments were also requested. The resulting questionnaire was divided into three sections:

- Part A: Personal profile of respondents (including the nature of their involvement with the formal structures in the State school system).
- Part B: Perceptions of devolution policy and procedure.
- Part C: Actual examples of participatory experience in decision making in the particular role of the respondent.

Sample (see Figures 2 and 3)

As Queensland is so vast it was decided to focus on three specific regions with very different characteristics. These were:

- Metropolitan West which is mainly urban, with large metropolitan schools,
- Wide Bay which is typically provincial, and
- South West, the smallest of the regions where the schools are fairly isolated and there are very few large schools.

The regions and schools within each region were selected because they offered a diverse range of community characteristics. Factors such as the following were taken into account when selecting schools: their socio-economic background, whether they were urban/rural, large/small, the cultural diversity, the distance from Brisbane, the identification of the school with the community, the varying proportions of ethnic origins etc.

Eight schools were selected in Metropolitan West and in Wide Bay and 4 schools were selected in South West.

A total of 300 questionnaires was sent to the 20 schools and distributed to the administration team, the teaching and non-teaching staff, and parents and community members (refer to Figure 2).

75 questionnaires were sent to Regional Office Management, School Support Centres and Regional Management Forums. Completing the total sample of 400 there were 25 drawn from the State-wide Forum including the Director General, Executive Directors, Regional Management, Studies Management,
Human Resource Management, and Resource and Administration Management (Figure 3). In earlier drafts of the questionnaire students were included but in the final questionnaire after the pilot study they were dropped from the sample, and this presents something of a limitation to this particular study. However, conscious of the significance of student participation in a devolved system of education, the research team plans to target higher secondary students with a slightly modified questionnaire more suited to their experience, in the near future.

Figure 2
Sample for Devolution Study
SCHOOL SAMPLES: Regions
   Metropolitan West - 8 schools
   Wide Bay        - 8 schools
   South West      - 4 schools
Selection from Principal and 1 Administration within each school:
   Team member 2
   Teaching staff 4 and non-teaching staff 2 - (selection 2 from staff list supplied by school)
   Parent 7 (some nominated by principal as active members of school organisations and some selected as parents from random student data set as typical parents)
   Total in each school 15
Maximum Sample:
   Metropolitan West 8 x 15 = 120
   Wide Bay         8 x 15 = 120
   South West      4 x 15 = 60
   Total in Regions 300

Figure 3
Regional Office and School Support Centre Sample
(N = 25 per Region depending on size) - (Maximum sample = 75)
School Support Centres:
   2 SSC per Region - (10 persons 2x5 per Region) - (Maximum sample = 30 persons)
   Total Number
   Selection from each SSC: Co-ordinator 1
   Advisory Council Members 2 (including
parent/community members)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Providers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancillary Staff</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total in each SSC</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional Office Management (5 per region) - (Maximum sample = 15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AED's Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Members of Regional Management Forums (10 per depending on size of Region) - (Maximum sample = 30)

People not captured already - especially parents/community members, union representatives.

Total N Regional = 75

STATE-WIDE FORUM SAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director General</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Directors</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies Management</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Management</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource and Administration</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Construction of the Questionnaire

Constructing a questionnaire to meet the needs of documenting the perceptions of individuals from different levels and places of the education system proved a complex task. An early decision was to have different questionnaires for the different target groups but this was felt to be inappropriate if comparisons were to be made. It was felt to be crucial that comparisons needed to be made as to what people's perceptions were on the same issues right across the system. Only in this way could any recommendations be made as to where the education Department should be placing more resources. It was also essential that the questionnaire should be both "user friendly" and short as we aimed for as close to 100% response rate as possible from people as disparate as the Director - General and Cleaners at country schools. We have yet to see whether our language has
been user friendly enough or whether we have become enmeshed in education jargon.
The questionnaire was trialled on Master of Education students at QUT and after further work piloted on targeted peak bodies such as the QTU, QCPCA, Qld State Primary School Principals Assoc., the Queensland Institute of Senior Education Officers, administrators, School Support Centre Staff and both teachers and community members from primary and secondary schools.
The questionnaires were then distributed to the sample of individuals in Forums, Regions, Central office, School Centres and schools as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. Where possible they have been addressed to individuals for ease of follow up, but where schools are involved the researcher assigned to that region has worked with the Principal of each school to pick as random a sample as possible of teachers, community member and non-teaching staff. Two schools from our first protocol sampling in the Metropolitan West Region refused to participate due to other commitments and had to be replaced, but all other schools chosen agreed to participate.

Section V - Some Issues beginning to emerge
At this stage we can only comment on general trends as the questionnaire data is in the process of being analysed. We have chosen therefore three very general questions to highlight some of the emerging responses. These are what do people at the grassroots think about the restructuring, what do they feel is important and what do they fear.

What do people at the grassroots think?
As we had expected many of the responses especially at the school level fit into the "Don't Know" category. It would be ambitious to expect that much could be achieved in the first year in which a new structure was being introduced.

One does not want to fall into the trap of arguing that outsiders who could be "deviant and threatening strangers" need to be inducted in some way into school processes (Wood, 1974; Fitzgerald, 1980) before they can be of any use to the school; if one is serious about the devolution of decision-making, however, certainly some training does need to be carried out. By chance one of our target schools in Wide Bay is involved in a detailed program of skilling both parents and teachers in processes necessary for school-based management and it will be interesting to see if the effects of this skilling shows up in the data.
However, many of the respondents seem to be feeling that some positive change is taking place about which they are not yet clear. Comments such as: "Schools more aware of capacity and ability to self-manage" and "Greater involvement of variety of people especially parents. Greater degree of responsibility" reflect this position.

However, there are also the negative responses such as: "Principals have more power and are hindering teacher professional development and initiatives in matters that regional officers used to support". So not surprisingly a range of opinions are being expressed. There is also little understanding of the forums, their composition, purpose and workings. This is going to be an important point as the restructuring is based on the effective working of the forums.

What do the participants feel is important?

Some concern is expressed as to whether devolution is merely a cost-cutting move and if these funds are inadequate for the job obviously the system will fail. For example one respondent stated "Devolution of funds to the schools.... these funds are inadequate - there is no money for relief staff for people to attend meetings". On the other hand another comment "More funding is available for school discretion". So the level of funding is obviously of great concern to many people and it is felt that there needs to be appropriate levels of funding.

The fact that schools should be able to respond to local needs is seen to be important. However, the feeling is that the "capacity to respond to needs exists but response is, as yet, ineffective" and there is the added concern that there is "less control monitoring of new ideas - everyone is trying to re-invent the wheel". And of course "the allocation of resources is a contested process".

What do they fear?

An interesting issue that arises in the light of our earlier discussion is that "the tension between devolution to schools and maintaining central office policies for accountability purposes in public education" is of concern. Others expressed this more directly in terms of concerns about social justice issues.

There are also a range of comments around School Support Centres which are yet to establish themselves effectively. The more negative comments state that they are "set up to accommodate certain personnel and are of no apparent value". Other views are more positive in seeing them as a useful repository of specialist resources which may be called upon by the school as the need arises.

Meetings and whether they are useful or a waste of time and energy also
come under
fire and some concern was expressed as to whether individuals had either
the skills or the information to deal
adequately with the demands being made upon them. Again in the light of
our earlier comments on the
relationship historically between schools and communities in Queensland
this is not surprising. For
example:
"Since becoming involved in just the P & C and the School Forum Group, I
feel that I have a better understanding of what is at least happening
within the school but as far
as decision-making goes I still feel a little out of my depth".
Conclusion
At this point our data has yet to be analysed. It will provide us with the

base data for further work as it is
information collected at the start of a new system.
Two points made in the additional comments section of our questionnaire
place an interesting perspective on our
work. There:
"appears to be a high degree of confusion at all levels re degree of
autonomy at different levels leading to assumptions that State policies
don't exist...(they do)...massive culture
change sought rejecting previous
Department leadership and combined organisational memory - processes
not done with care for people. In many cases culture not changed - sexist
and other
inappropriate attitudes (merely) buried....."
and a further comment from another respondent:
"devolution is a positive step... difficulties moving to local management
model within
what has historically been a top-down hierarchy. Still clouding operations
are issues of
hurt and anger at restructuring and the need to learn a different
managerial model".
These two quotes summarize many of the issues still to the fore in the
Queensland Department of
Education at the end of 1992 and are major areas that need to be addressed.
Coming to an end on a
positive note, for us anyway, another respondent commented:
"Found questionnaire very thorough and well graded. Would be extremely
interested in the results."
So will we, once we have all the data processed with the help of the Review
and Evaluation Unit in the
Department of Education!

Section 1 - The Queensland Backdrop
Section II - Recent Documentation
Section III - The Forums
Section IV - The Research
Section V - Some Issues beginning to emerge
Project: A review and evaluation of the perceived effectiveness of the devolution of responsibility to Queensland State Schools.
Aim: To evaluate the effectiveness of devolution policy as perceived by key stakeholders in the State School system.
Objectives:
To investigate:
(i) the extent to which the various stakeholders perceive themselves to be involved in decision making in their particular roles;
(ii) in which areas of decision making do these stakeholders participate;
(iii) stakeholders' perceptions of the outcomes of being involved in decision making;
(iv) whether stakeholders perceive a gap between the rhetoric of devolution policy and the actuality of implementation.

Figure 2
Sample for Devolution Study
SCHOOL SAMPLES: Regions
   Metropolitan West       -       8 schools
   Wide Bay        -       8 schools
   South West      -       4 schools
Selection from Principal and 1 Administration within each Team member 2 school:
Teaching staff 4 and non-teaching staff 2 - (selection 2 from staff list supplied by school)
Parent 7 (some nominated by principal as active members of school organisations and some 7 selected as parents from random student data set as typical parents)
Total in each school 15
Maximum Sample:
Metropolitan West       8 x 15 = 120
Wide Bay        8 x 15 = 120
South West      4 x 15 = 60
Total in Regions 300
Figure 3
Regional Office and School Support Centre Sample
School Support Centres: 2 SSC per Region - (10 persons 2x5 per Region)

(Maximum sample = 30 persons)

Total

Number Selection from with Co-ordinator 1
each SSC: Advisory Council Members
2 (including parent/community members)

Service Providers 1
Ancillary Staff 1
Total in each SSC 5

Regional Office Management (5 per region) - (Maximum sample = 15)

Executive Director 1
AED's Studies 1
Human Resources 1
Resource Management 1
Review Officer 1

N = 15

Members of Regional Management Forums (10 per depending on size of Region) - (Maximum sample = 30)

People not captured already - especially parents/community members, union representatives.

Total N Regional = 75

STATE-WIDE FORUM SAMPLE:

(25 in total) Director General 1
Executive Directors 3
Regional Management 3
Studies Management 6
Human Resources Management 6
Resource and Administration 6 N

= 25

Construction of the Questionnaire

Constructing a questionnaire to meet the needs of documenting the perceptions of individuals from different levels and places of the
education system proved a complex task. An early decision was to have different questionnaires for the different target groups but this was felt to be inappropriate if comparisons were to be made. It was felt to be crucial that comparisons needed to be made as to what people's perceptions were on the same issues right across the system. Only in this way could any recommendations be made as to where the education Department should be placing more resources. It was also essential that the questionnaire should be both "user friendly" and short as we aimed for as close to 100% response rate as possible from people as disparate as the Director - General and Cleaners at country schools. We have yet to see whether our language has been user friendly enough or whether we have become enmeshed in education jargon.

The questionnaire was trialled on Master of Education students at QUT and after further work piloted on targeted peak bodies such as the QTU, QCPCA, Qld State Primary School Principals Assoc., the Queensland Institute of Senior Education Officers, administrators, School Support Centre Staff and both teachers and community members from primary and secondary schools.

The questionnaires were then distributed to the sample of individuals in Forums, Regions, Central office, School Centres and schools as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3. Where possible they have been addressed to individuals for ease of follow up, but where schools are involved the researcher assigned to that region has worked with the Principal of each school to pick as random a sample as possible of teachers, community member and non-teaching staff. Two schools from our first protocol sampling in the Metropolitan West Region refused to participate due to other commitments and had to be replaced, but all other schools chosen agreed to participate.

Section V - Some Issues beginning to emerge

At this stage we can only comment on general trends as the questionnaire data is in the process of being analysed. We have chosen therefore three very general questions to highlight some of the emerging responses. These are what do people at the grassroots think about the restructuring, what do they feel is important and what do they fear.

What do people at the grassroots think?

As we had expected many of the responses especially at the school level fit into the "Don't Know" category. It would be ambitious to expect that much could be achieved in the first year in which a new structure was being introduced.

One does not want to fall into the trap of arguing that outsiders who could be "deviant and threatening strangers" need to be inducted in some way into school processes (Wood, 1974; Fitzgerald, 1980) before they can be of any use to the school; if one is serious about the devolution of decision-making, however,
Certainly some training does need to be carried out. By chance one of our target schools in Wide Bay is involved in a detailed program of skilling both parents and teachers in processes necessary for school-based management and it will be interesting to see if the effects of this skilling shows up in the data.

However, many of the respondents seem to be feeling that some positive change is taking place about which they are not yet clear. Comments such as: "Schools more aware of capacity and ability to self-manage" and "Greater involvement of variety of people especially parents. Greater degree of responsibility" reflect this position.

However, there are also the negative responses such as: "Principals have more power and are hindering teacher professional development and initiatives in matters that regional officers used to support".

So not surprisingly a range of opinions are being expressed. There is also little understanding of the forums, their composition, purpose and workings. This is going to be an important point as the restructuring is based on the effective working of the forums.

What do the participants feel is important?

Some concern is expressed as to whether devolution is merely a cost-cutting move and if these funds are inadequate for the job obviously the system will fail. For example one respondent stated "Devolution of funds to the schools.... these funds are inadequate - there is no money for relief staff for people to attend meetings". On the other hand another comment "More funding is available for school discretion". So the level of funding is obviously of great concern to many people and it is felt that there needs to be appropriate levels of funding. The fact that schools should be able to respond to local needs is seen to be important. However, the feeling is that the "capacity to respond to needs exists but response is, as yet, ineffective" and there is the added concern that there is "less control monitoring of new ideas - everyone is trying to re-invent the wheel". And of course "the allocation of resources is a contested process".

What do they fear?

An interesting issue that arises in the light of our earlier discussion is that "the tension between devolution to schools and maintaining central office policies for accountability purposes in public education" is of concern. Others expressed this more directly in terms of concerns about social justice issues.

There are also a range of comments around School Support Centres
which are yet to establish themselves effectively. The more negative comments state that they are "set up to accommodate certain personnel and are of no apparent value". Other views are more positive in seeing them as a useful repository of specialist resources which may be called upon by the school as the need arises.

Meetings and whether they are useful or a waste of time and energy also come under fire and some concern was expressed as to whether individuals had either the skills or the information to deal adequately with the demands being made upon them. Again in the light of our earlier comments on the relationship historically between schools and communities in Queensland this is not surprising. For example: "Since becoming involved in just the P & C and the School Forum Group, I feel that I have a better understanding of what is at least happening within the school but as far as decision-making goes I still feel a little out of my depth".

Conclusion

At this point our data has yet to be analysed. It will provide us with the base data for further work as it is information collected at the start of a new system.

Two points made in the additional comments section of our questionnaire place an interesting perspective on our work. There: "appears to be a high degree of confusion at all levels re degree of autonomy at different levels leading to assumptions that State policies don't exist...(they do)...massive culture change sought rejecting previous Department leadership and combined organisational memory - processes not done with care for people. In many cases culture not changed - sexist and other inappropriate attitudes (merely) buried....." and a further comment from another respondent: "devolution is a positive step... difficulties moving to local management model within what has historically been a top-down hierarchy. Still clouding operations are issues of hurt and anger at restructuring and the need to learn a different managerial model".

These two quotes summarize many of the issues still to the fore in the Queensland Department of Education at the end of 1992 and are major areas that need to be addressed. Coming to an end on a positive note, for us anyway, another respondent commented: "Found questionnaire very thorough and well graded. Would be extremely interested in the results."

So will we, once we have all the data processed with the help of
the Review and Evaluation Unit in the Department of Education!

Bibliography


Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, Task Force on


Department of Education, Queensland (1988)'Devolution of Decision Making to Schools', Departmental Notices (88.19.18), Brisbane.
Department of Education, Queensland (1989d) School Community Participation in Decision Making, Brisbane.

Department of Education, Queensland (1990a) Parents and Teachers; Partners in Education, Brisbane.
Department of Education, Queensland (1990b) Take Part, Brisbane.
Discourse, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 98-114.
Watkins, P. (1988a) Representative Democracy in a Regional Board

Section I - The Queensland Backdrop
Section II - Recent Documentation
Section III - The Forums
Section IV - The Research
Section V - Some Issues beginning to emerge

Project: A review and evaluation of the perceived effectiveness of the devolution of responsibility to Queensland State Schools.

Aim: To evaluate the effectiveness of devolution policy as perceived by key stakeholders in the State School system.

Objectives:

(i) the extent to which the various stakeholders perceive themselves to be involved in decision making in their particular roles;
(ii) in which areas of decision making do these stakeholders participate;
(iii) stakeholders' perceptions of the outcomes of being involved in decision making;
(iv) whether stakeholders perceive a gap between the rhetoric of devolution policy and the actuality of implementation.