

DEVOLUTION FOR WHAT?

AN EXPLANATION THROUGH SRI LANKAN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Hemamali Palihakkara
Deakin University
Geelong
Victoria
Australia

Paper presented at the AARE/NZARE Conference
Geelong, Victoria, 22-26 November 1992

DEVOLUTION FOR WHAT ?
AN EXPLANATION THROUGH SRI LANKAN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE
Hemamali Palihakkara
Deakin University

The philosophy behind devolution is that it is both more democratic and more efficient to make decisions in their locality than large-scale decisions at the centre. Hence, devolution is a political means which can best be used in realising specific aspirations of a locality within a national framework. Ironically, in some post-colonial countries 'devolution' seems a popular vogue which has become an end in itself. Sri Lankan experience in education reveals that 'devolution' for the sake of 'devolution' will not lead a country to do any better, unless there is more emphasis on the objectives of any devolutionary measure.

OVERVIEW

This paper is intended to make two contributions to educational policy, specifically in relation to devolution of power to school level:

- * a conceptualisation and description of the reasons behind devolution;
- * a de-mystification of the processes of decentralisation and devolution in Sri Lanka.

Firstly, it is intended to highlight the philosophy behind devolution and local control. Then an attempt will be made to conceptualise, why many governments of various parts of the world, show much interest in introducing devolution into their education systems. It will then be followed by an argument based on a mismatch between various notions and visions of devolution. Next, Sri Lankan experience in devolution will be discussed to support the above mentioned arguments. Finally, implications will be discussed, based on the Sri Lankan experience in devolution.

WHAT IS DEVOLUTION? IS IT JUST A POLITICAL MEANS?

According to the present Western notion of devolution in education, ' the concept of devolution rests upon the view that the school belongs to its

community, and that community knows what is best for them and they know how to make it happen. To achieve these aims, power has to be restored to the school and its community instead of centralised bureaucracy (Simpson-1991). This notion seems to be equally shared by both new 'right' and 'left' in the West.

Thus, when looking at changes happening in most aspects of political ideologies, one tends to think that 'old paradigms don't fit any more'

(Swanston, 1992). If one could explain the ideologies of Right and Left, by placing them in a continuum which stretches from centralisation to decentralisation, it was the case in the past that ideologies inclined more towards Right were seen as conservative and supportive of free markets, whereas the Left had more faith in centralisation. But today, both Left and Right move freely in this continuum and tend to use both centralisation and decentralisation as and when the political parties in power think that it is prudent. For example, the Conservative governments of the United Kingdom have introduced a national curriculum and 'self-managing schools', while Labor governments of Australia have devolved more power to the local levels. In the United States, although there appears more support for school-site management, it is very clear that there is a tremendous effort towards centralisation, by setting national standards. It is also envisaged that Australia, too, might opt for such centralised steps while still supporting the rhetoric of devolution. Hence, it seems that even those who want to shift more towards centralisation, are hesitant to do away with decentralising. Both trends - centralisation and decentralisation, tend to share a common political agenda- which is devolution and local level participation in decision making.

However, although the term 'devolution' is freely and widely used in many situations, it is clear that not every one uses the term to mean the same. It appears that different countries and different institutions use 'devolution' for different purposes which gives different connotations to others. Therefore, it can be argued that the very basic idea of 'devolution' is either being lost or subjected to challenge, because of the way it is being used.

However, the philosophy behind devolution is that, since it is said to be both more democratic and more efficient to make decisions in their locality than large-scale decisions at the centre, power should be devolved to the lower levels, within a central framework. Although there is no one best way of devolving authority and power to the local levels, it can be done according to the 'emerging needs' of a contemporary society - being understood not only by the party in power but by the society at local levels as well. According to the general taxonomy of Rondinelli (1981), decentralisation options for public organisations extend from limited delegation in the responsibilities of public officials through de-concentration and devolution to full privatisation of the control, management and finance of these organisations (Cummings, 1988).

Similarly, although there is a distinction between devolution and decentralisation, very often both terms are being used interchangeably. However, a distinction can be made: decentralisation is delegating administrative power and authority to lower levels with the ultimate responsibility remaining at the centre, whereas devolution is transfer of political power from the centre to local levels.

Brown (1990), cites two modes in the literature on decentralisation. One form is strictly 'organisational' - in which the central office may delegate authority to make certain kinds of decisions to specific levels further down the hierarchy. The other - political decentralisation implies some form of semi-autonomous local control, perhaps via boards of elected officials. Regarding accountability, in organisational decentralisation, personnel are accountable to those higher in the organisation, whereas in the political decentralisation, they are more accountable to the persons who elected them (p.60). Similarly, Brown suggests another dimension of decentralisation - 'vertical' and 'horizontal'. According to him, vertical decentralisation refers to the extent decision making authority is shared down the hierarchy of management. It involves line authority between persons from the chief executive to the lower subordinate and can be placed within any role in the line authority. Horizontal decentralisation on the other hand, is defined as the dispersal of authority to non-line or staff members who may be resident at any level in the organisation. (p. 38)

Both devolution and decentralisation are intended to reduce the size of the central state and increase activity, responsibility or power at the periphery (Gordon, 1992. p.189). By looking at the differences and the similarities of both decentralisation and devolution, it could be argued that some countries who claim that they have devolved the education systems, are actually taking some steps toward decentralisation.

However, it appears that what is expected from both these terms is a release of the bureaucratic functional load of the centre, and making the locals involved in decision making, within a central framework. Hence, devolution could be described as a political means which can best be used in realising specific aspirations of a locality within a national framework.

WHY DEVOLVE? IS IT BECAUSE IT HAS BECOME THE VOGUE?

The concept of devolution has become popular among the education systems too. No matter whether a country is a 'developed' or a 'developing', or the political party in power belongs to the 'Right' or to the 'Left', there is a common tendency for 'devolution' in education. However, from the way devolution is being implemented at school level, and the criticisms that it has to face with, it is confusing why governments are so concerned in devolving their education systems, while at the very same time having interests towards more centralisation as well. Is it because of the democratic ethos of creating a society that is free from suffering, domination and subjugation or, is it because of the vision of schooling that broadens and deepens, not merely the democratic principles that inform it, but also to speak to a language of possibility and hope that engages rather repress the meaning of political and pedagogical struggle (Svi Shapiro, 1990, p. xiv). There is no doubt that state education is

ultimately connected to socio political structures of a country. Therefore, it could be argued that 'devolution' in educational practices has come to the scenario and taken shape in various forms in various circumstances, mostly as a political solution.

Now, the question arising is why political leaders informed by competing ideologies opt for devolution as a solution, at least in principle.

Although not specifically focussed on devolution, many theorists have expressed their views on the present trend towards local participation in decision making. Summarising such views, Pennock (1979), highlights four main reasons: responsiveness, legitimacy, personal development and overcoming alienation. A similar view has been presented by Lawton (1992) in describing the reasons for devolutionary measures taken by various governments.

Beattie (1985) uses two categories, namely Reformist model and General Crisis model, to explain why governments want to devolve and what their underpinning agendas could be. According to her, if the aim of devolutionary attempts is towards genuine increase in responsiveness, personal development and overcoming of alienation, it comes under the Reformist model. On the other hand, if such attempts are being taken only on cosmetic sense with legitimation remaining as an overriding consideration, she categorises them under the General Crisis model. Although it looks cumbersome to evaluate the political agendas of governments, Beattie provides a criteria to identify them. According to her, if governments offer more experience and commitment of democratic involvement to the lower levels, they could be identified as belonging to the Reformist model. On the other hand, where the attempts by the governments are to achieve greater levels of legitimation, and where the threat to the government is most urgent, such situations are most likely to come under General Crisis model (Beattie, 1985, pp. 5-22). Any devolutionary attempt by governments could fit any of the above two models. Hence, Beattie's classification seems to be helpful to understand, why most governments have chosen 'devolution' as a panacea.

Beattie's above classification is also helpful to understand what has been happening in most parts of the world since World War Two, with the demand for more equality in education which, at least superficially, challenged the prevailing education systems. In the recent world political history, with the transfer of power to masses from the traditional elites, governments have been more concerned about satisfying public demands. Irrespective of what they do behind the back of the masses, they are compelled at least in principle, to show that they are mindful of public rights. Hence, wherever political parties have to bid for public support to

come into power, notions of devolution, participation and more privileges to the public become the order of the election manifestoes. More often than

not, governments would have done so, not with a mere genuine interest of giving away their power and authority to the public but to meet with their own sectional interest of coming into power. At the very same time, there could be countries who want to have a genuine democratic involvement, responsiveness and personal development of the total community as a nation.

However, it is yet to be found out whether every circumstance of devolution could be easily understood by fitting into Beattie's (1985) dichotomy - in order to be able to deal with devolution. If devolution is more cosmetic than real with little opportunity for any genuine increase in responsiveness, does that mean that a particular circumstance should be viewed as a general crisis situation? Or could there be other reasons which could not be explained from any of the above mentioned theories? For example, if a particular post colonial country is trying to introduce 'devolution' with all good intentions, such as described under Beattie's Reformist Paradigm, and yet it becomes a failure, how does one to conceptualise such a circumstance? In the case of Sri Lanka, it seems that Western theories are being imposed, and thus notions of devolution and decentralisation have been introduced as administrative solutions to complex social problems. Therefore, it could be argued that Western theories such as 'devolution' 'decentralisation' and 'participation' have paid little consideration to what is happening in other parts of the world in their circumstances.

DEVOLUTION FOR WHAT: PROBLEM OF CONCEPTUALISING THE PROBLEM

Although many countries seem to have opted for devolution in education, it appears that it has been used mostly as a popular vogue. In many countries under various reforms, devolution has become an end in itself. For instance, the Ministerial Papers 1-6 (1983) issued by the Ministry of Victoria, argued for:

- (1) genuine devolution of authority and responsibility to the school community,
- (2) collaborative decision making processes,
- (3) a responsive bureaucracy,

- (4) effectiveness of educational outcome and
- (5) active redress of disadvantage and discrimination.

These were set out as important principles which were to be given foremost and continuing consideration. As can be seen, above number 1 to 3 are only just democratic means which could be used towards particular ends. For example, above number (1) is a move to increase communication, whereas (2) is an administrative solution to a broad social and political problem. In that sense, only number 4 and 5 could be counted as ends or clear objectives to be achieved. According to the Deakin Report on Restructuring Victorian Education, devolution has become an end in itself, and there wasn't any visible improvement, in making the system more democratic (DISE, 1984). Not only in Victoria, but also in the other states of Australia and some

other countries - who are presently involved in such devolutionary processes - have not shown a clear vision of what they are going to achieve from such devolutionary processes. The reason could be due to conflicting nature of the underpinning ideologies between the notion of devolution and the perceptions of power groups in each institute. Perhaps, particular political parties in power and/or the bureaucrats who are involved in policy matters, may not want to see genuine devolution. Or else, they may have to face a similar pressure from their own powerful pressure groups not to pass over power to local levels. According to Badcock (1988), although the government of Victoria has made a commitment to bring about devolution to local levels, most trade unions (both teachers and principals) and the bureaucrats did not like that to happen, because of their sectional interests. However, it appears that although Victoria had a clear vision of devolution, it was not shared or understood by all, even in the government. This was because it was superimposed on more participatory system to corporate managerialism ie. school-based activities. Therefore, when it came to implementation level, various groups were interpreting it in various forms. Hence, more than anything else, lack of a common clear vision and inherent contradictions would have been the main problem of Victoria.

Since schools are part of the wider economic and political context, any policy document in education has to occur within the contemporary political order. Therefore, it is quite natural that although policy formulators

seems to be independent of party politics, they are compelled to work within certain limits. But according to Shapiro (1990), 'educators have to move away from the mechanical, one dimensional, interest ridden politics that have dominated their thinking in the past and construct forms of social authority that enable them to take a leading position in relating pedagogical concerns to those spheres of everyday life that have traditionally existed outside the realm of radical educational discourse'.

According to him, it is not an easy task for a party in power to satisfy the conflicting demands of both political and economic aspects of the society (ibid. p. 146). Although political need is for equality and social justice, economy demands quality, efficiency and effectiveness. Therefore, there is always a competition for more demanding jobs, and education acts as a source of mechanism to get them. Hence, it is possible that elites try all their means to get those prestigious positions in job market by manipulating the system.

One of the important questions one has to ask in analysing such devolutionary attempts is, 'devolution for what'? As Swanson and King (1992, p. 174) suggest, all that matters in the end is 'who is getting what, when and under what circumstances'. No matter in which 'name' is used - devolution or decentralisation - the political promise underlying is the

provision of reasonable amount of power to the lower levels, to have choices and meet with aspirations. Until that objective is sorted out, 'devolution for the sake of devolution' may not bring about such democratic ideals.

SRI LANKAN CASE OF DEVOLUTION OF POWER TO SCHOOL LEVEL

The following Sri Lankan case explains the previous arguments and also highlights the fact that there could be some more aspects in other cultures which were not taken into account in some of the theories which explain notions such as 'devolution' and 'participation' which have evolved from the Western democratic theory and practice.

TRENDS TOWARDS DEVOLUTION AND DECENTRALISATION IN EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is an independent democratic republic which has a recorded history of a well established civilisation which goes back two thousand five hundred years. From the earliest times, it had been a society with a highly elaborated system of institutionalised inequality. Pre-colonial Sri Lanka was stratified on the basis of kinship and caste (Fernando, 1979). Although there was no such formal education system, there had been monasteries and temple schools patronised by the king, to foster and cherish religion and education. However, when the Western powers arrived in Ceylon, royal patronage had perforce to cease and the government or private agencies had to take the place of the king (Wijesingha, 1969). As a colony subjected to the Western domination, the prevalent social stratification was augmented by adding a new social elite group cropped up as a result of English education and well paid government jobs. Missionary services which converted natives into alien religions, made the society more multifarious. Besides that, Sri Lanka has two major ethnic groups, with a few other minorities. Similarly, there is a remarkable difference between the rich and the poor groups of the society, and also the life styles of the urban and rural people. This complex nature of the society, can be reflected from the school system and it has caused a tremendous influence in its education too.

With the arrival of the Western powers, Christian missionaries set up schools to convert people to Christianity. Therefore, even before the Western rulers paid any concern to education as a state responsibility, it was the missionaries who were having the monopoly of education in the country, although there were some temple schools on random basis. Since mid 19th century, colonial government too paid much attention to the establishment of schools. However, the government did not intend to discourage the missionary schools and instead started giving grants to them to establish more. Therefore, by the latter years of the 19th century,

there has been a dual system in education such as government schools and denominational schools.

Apart from the Christian Missionary Societies, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims too had been establishing their religious denominational schools by

this time. Although the government in power was having a grant aid system to help these denominational schools, it was apparent that Christian Missionaries were receiving favoured treatment. Therefore, the other religious groups began to seek the same treatment and started demanding more support from the government.

In order to meet these growing demands, government tried to get support from the local bodies. The Town Schools Ordinance of 1906 and Rural Schools Ordinance of 1907 were passed with the intention of getting financial support from the local bodies. However, it was not successful, because most of the local authorities did not have sufficient financial resources. Even by the Education Ordinance, No.1 of 1920 the government made another effort to derive local support by setting up Education District Committees in which there were to be two representatives from the local bodies. However, that attempt also became a failure for they were not in a position of helping the central government, due to financial difficulties. According to Education Ordinance No.31 of 1939, Education District Councils were replaced by Local Advisory Committees. In this way it was hoped that the people of a district would have some share in the education of the children of their area. However, because of the growing demand for popular education at this stage, the state had to accept the full responsibility for the provision of educational facilities.

By the time Sri Lanka became an independent country in 1948, it had a dual system of education of government schools and private schools. The guiding principles of education of independent Sri Lanka, as mentioned by Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara - the first minister of education, were the removal of the privileges of education and the need for equalisation of educational opportunities for all children in all areas (Sessional Paper, 1943). In fact, the first three crucial reforms initiated by Dr. Kannangara, namely free education, adoption of mother tongue as the medium of instruction, and the opening of Central Schools, similar to the model of British Grammar Schools, could be counted as the major landmarks of the educational history of Sri Lanka.

However, despite all the efforts towards equal access to education, there was an ongoing complaint to the effect that just mere provision of equal

access was unable to assure equal success in education. Private fee-levying, English medium schools, were seen as the gateway to more demanding jobs, which ordinary government schools did not have. In order to eliminate such privileges, and to maintain social justice, the then government of

1956, took over all such assisted schools under the centralised state system, with the intension of having a unitary system in education. Therefore, in Sri Lanka, centralisation was seen as a means of assuring social justice and enhancing equal opportunities in education. However, it is not intended here to assess whether centralisation or decentralisation is much better to meet with the needs of a country. Yet it should be mentioned that both are capable of meeting, equity, relevance and quality, perhaps at different prices.

On the circumstances mentioned above, although there was not much question about the rapid numerical expansion of schooling, since the early 1960's the quality of education was subjected to criticism. Starting from 1961 Bandarawela conference, up to this date, most of the commissions, surveys, projects, donor countries, international agencies, studies and reform reports have highlighted the necessity of decentralisation, and devolving power to local levels as a solution to some of the perceived problems in education. Following such recommendations, it appears that several reforms have been carried out towards delegating some administrative responsibilities to implementation levels while retaining policy decisions at centre. However, according to the 1980 report of the Director General of Education, 'despite these reforms, the machinery available at the periphery for the implementation of programs continued to operate in the same old grooves with little or no change' (de Silva, 1990, p. 30). Therefore, a concrete effort was made to make decentralisation a reality .

The reforms carried out during 1980-85 were designed to improve decentralisation and devolution to the regional and sub-regional levels and school level. But the Management Reforms Committee of 1983 - which studied the school system in the country brought to light several weaknesses in the system, some of which are as follows:

'the opinions gathered from the principals indicate that the whole set of management reforms were centrally decided and the style of implementation was 'top-down' approach which did not provide any

scope for variation to relate to local circumstances. A centrally decided programme of sophisticated management activities failed to make any impact on schools, especially those which were ill-equipped and located in remote areas' (Neil Fernando, 1984).

Although there have been some structural changes as a result of such reforms, they did not comply with real devolution of powers to lower levels. According to a diagnostic study carried out by UNESCO, the principal weakness of the Sri Lankan education system was the over centralisation of functions of educational administration which has created a 'system overload' (UNESCO, 1984). However, the only visible devolution taken place so far at school level, was to hand over of the functions carried out by the former Circuit Education Officers to the principals of the 'core' schools of the clusters.

The Cluster system is a group of schools within a particular geographical area functioning as one organisational unit. Thus the smallest unit for planning the development and organisation of the school system was considered as the school cluster. Although The White Paper of 1981 recommended the setting up of School Cluster Boards - initially with advisory functions - in many of the school clusters, such Boards were not in existence. Wherever they exist, they were reported to be not functioning satisfactorily, and were not able to provide the required advice and support to the clusters (ADB, vol.2. p. 240).

It was also found out from the studies carried out on School clusters that the majority of principals and teachers in member schools felt that core school principals had unlimited power as regards the distribution of resources, whereas they did not have any such options (de Silva and Palihakkara, 1988). Hence, it is clear that such devolution was only a transfer of power from the former Circuit Education Officer to the core school principal of the cluster. Although the cluster system seems to be a solution to some of the pressing problems, lack of participation in decision making could be counted as one of the reasons that contributed to its failure.

However, the most crucial devolutionary step ever taken by the Ministry of education was the one followed by the Provincial Council Act and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka of 1987, which was meant to devolve the power concentrated in the centre on the Provincial Councils. Although the Provincial Council Act provides for the establishment of School Boards conforming to the specifications laid down by the Ministry, the subsequent Bill for the establishment of School Development Boards does not show such devolution of power. According to section 8 of the above Bill,

(1)'the functions of a Board established for a school shall be to advise and assist the Principal of such schools in matters connected with the development of the school,....'

(2) Nothing in subsection (1) shall be deemed to authorise a Board established for a school to advise the principal of that school on any matter relating to the management of that school".

(The Gazette of the democratic socialist republic of Sri Lanka, Part 11 of February 01, 1991)

On the basis of the above, it appears that although devolution and decentralisation have been the main focus of the reforms of Sri Lankan education system since 1960's, so far no tangible step has been taken to realise the political spirit of devolution. If at all, the Sri Lankan case could be understood as 'organisational' decentralisation in which the central office delegate authority to make certain kinds of decisions to specific levels further down the hierarchy (Brown 1990). In Sri Lanka, although some decisions are being delegated to the school level, it does

not look like 'political' decentralisation, because schools are still more accountable to the higher officers in the hierarchy. Similarly, the authority delegated to the school level becomes the sole responsibility of the principal, instead of being a collective authority of the School Board. According to Brown's (1990) second dimension on decentralisation (as mentioned above), Sri Lankan case fall into 'vertical' decentralisation - in which the line authority being delegated to the lower subordinate. It cannot be counted as 'horizontal' decentralisation for there is no dispersal of authority to non-line or staff members or the members of the School Boards. The reason that real participation in decision making does not happen at school level in Sri Lanka, could be because of this line

accountability. Therefore, if 'devolution' is intended to make local community members involved in decision making, there is a need for further structural changes.

WHY DEVOLVE? HOW TO CONCEPTUALISE THE SRI LANKAN CASE?

The Sri Lankan case does not fit neatly into either of Beattie's (1985) two categories. Measures taken by the Sri Lankan authorities to implement several reforms towards decentralisation and devolution cannot be conceptualised under Reformist theory, because they do not match the given criteria. According to Reformist theory, devolution is the product of 'experience of and commitment to democratic involvement'. Moreover, it has to have genuine increase in responsiveness, personal development and the overcoming of alienation. Ironically, none of those criteria is relevant to any of the devolutionary steps taken so far at school level in Sri Lanka. Although Sri Lanka represents some of the symptoms of the Crisis model - such as devolution takes place in a cosmetic sense - it is unclear whether all such devolutionary measures could be understood as a product of legitimisation crisis. Unlike in Western countries, so far there was no such demand from the masses to have their own choices in relation to education. However, youth unrest movements of 1970's and 1980's, have convinced the Reform Commissions that education does not meet with the community aspirations, and hence devolution of power to school level would be one way of resolving the problem.

Perhaps, there could be other reasons why Sri Lankan authorities wanted to opt for devolution. It could be mainly because of the pressure come from various reports, commissions, surveys and donor agencies. Most of the recommendations come from International agencies which have their projects in Sri Lanka eg. World Bank, Asian Development Bank and UNDP. Since the trend of the West has been for devolution, these international agencies may have suggested the same to Sri Lanka too, with the intension to provide what is seem to be "good practice" by World Bank etc. On the other hand, some of the suggestions could have their neo-colonial strings such as providing foreign aid as partially a planned policy of advanced nations to maintain their influence and also continue their past practices (Watson, 1982, p. 41). Besides, local experts who have had an exposure to the

international scenario also have recommended devolution. Therefore, it seems that devolution has become a main theme of all the recent educational reforms because of the above mentioned pressure which comes from educational experts and donor agencies.

'DEVOLUTION FOR WHAT?' A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING MEANING AND AGENDAS

It appears that in the Sri Lankan context, 'devolution' has been taken for granted on its face value. Although most of the reform reports recommended devolution, it has been given less emphasis when it trickles down to the school level. It seems that initial agenda has been overtaken by later concerns, in a way in which the norms and visions that supported the reforms at report level perceptibly eroded at policy level. The policy framework (see Appendix) provides a clear example to understand the mutual links and discrepancies between each level, and to conceptualise the underpinning reasons. Thus, it appears that there is a distinction between the recommendations at 'report' level (defining the problem), 'Act' level (legislating it into some form) and 'circular' level (acting upon it). It seems that the weight given to devolutionary measures at 'report' level, becomes very superficial when it comes to the 'circular' level. According to the studies mentioned below, perhaps it could be even more lower when it comes to the implementation level.

Thus, it seems that devolutionary processes have been considered as administrative solutions with little concern for real processes and democratic outcomes. For instance, although measures have been taken to establish School Boards, no power has been devolved except advisory functions. However, there is much difference between real participation and such advisory functions. On the one hand, it does not guarantee any local choice, or rights. Therefore, it is not sure whether devolution is being introduced as a popular banner or because of the pressure come from various reform reports and foreign agencies. Perhaps, it could be the new form of mobilising material resources as it was the case of community involvement since 1906. On the other hand, the reason that devolutionary measures become clumsy at policy level, irrespective of the recommendations of reform reports, could be due to conflicting ideologies. Policy formulators have to work within certain imposed constraints . Because of some feudal

traditions emanating from the past, some still do not recognise that everybody has a right to have choices and options. Similarly, bureaucratic oppression has taken its toll in Sri Lanka. The superordinate mentality of the bureaucrats take it for granted that the government service is their privilege, and the public has to be obliged to them to get things done. Therefore, it is possible to create a camouflage with policy documents, and do things for the sake of doing. Thus it is also possible not to devolve more power to schools when it comes to the policy formulation level. Whether the proposal for School Boards is going to be a success or a

failure is a different story. The problem is why the structural arrangements do not give enough provision for devolutionary processes.

The best way to tackle the above questions is to raise the question 'for what does one need devolution' or 'why devolution'? If the answer is genuine participation of the local groups, then there should be structural access towards that end. It appears from the Sri Lankan experience that one of the reasons for devolving power to school level is to get community support to mobilise resources. As can be seen by the annexed policy framework, since early 20th century even under the colonial rulers, there has been some concern by the governments to make local authorities take some responsibility in mobilising resources to maintain their schools. Steps taken even after independence in the form of Parent Teachers Associations, School Development Societies and School Clusters were mainly focussed on deriving material and monetary resources. However, it is not sure, whether there was that much concern for human resources as well. If human aspect of resources has got the same respect and importance, then there should have been some provision for community involvement in decision making as it is the case in Western societies. Hence, it appears that, although Western theory of devolution means devolving political power vertically as well as horizontally across the board, traditional Sri Lankan practice was to delegate some organisational responsibility to the lower levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy. In that sense, school principals have got some responsibility to take non administrative decisions through limited community involvement. Yet, principals are personally accountable to the hierarchy more than their commitment to the school community. Therefore, Sri Lankan notion of devolution can be understood as a means of harnessing material resources without devolving power to the locality or to

the school community.

However, according to a recent study of Cummings (1988), it is always the rich schools which are being more benefited from this kind of devolutionary strategies of mobilising resources. The same study indicates that instead of reducing the gap between the rich and poor schools, such measures have increased the gap (Cummings, 1988). If such limited decentralisation procedures lead to the betterment of a particular group of the society, then the whole purpose of devolution could be lost. As Swanson had (1982) argued, what is important is 'who is getting what, when and under what circumstances'. Therefore, the best possible way of analysing such devolutionary measures, is to ask and answer the question 'for what?'. It is also important to ask 'what are the provisions for devolution in a particular reform?'

Sri Lankan experience of devolution at school level, is neither political nor horizontal. Although it seems as if social structures dominate the system, it is not the only reason not to give any power of decision making to the ordinary masses at local levels. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons could be the oppression from bureaucrats. Traditional social

disparities based on caste, class, religion, ethnicity, and locality are still pertinent in the Sri Lankan community, making some subordinate to the others. The superiority complex of the power groups is an impediment to treat others as equal. All in all, Sri Lankan authorities may find it hard to accept that local groups too should be involved in decision making. Principals for their part tend to believe that the community should not get involved in matters relating to the internal administration. Perhaps, it could be because of the way that schools have been used to running so far. According to several studies carried out in Sri Lanka, the community feels ignorant about what is going on inside the school. Most parents think that they are unable to help their children in subject matters, because things have changed tremendously in the recent past (Mac Lellan and Palihakkara, 1989).

Perhaps, giving more authority to the School Boards and making the members involved in administrative decisions may aggravate the present problems, if only elite groups are being selected as Board members. Therefore, the

present system of making the principals accountable to the line management of the Ministry while giving them some responsibility to mobile resources through limited community participation, could be counted as maintaining checks and balances by the centre. But, according to the Western notion of democracy, it is not what they mean by political devolution based on local participation.

Thus, it is likely that Western theories and models sit uncomfortably when trying to impose on a culture which is different in values, norms and issues. So, if devolution in education does not work in Sri Lanka, what would it need to do? Perhaps, a method of devolution which is informed by its history and experience might fit better.

However, popular schools in metropolitan areas and the affluent groups both in the cities and suburbs, are the winners of the ongoing competition for the success in education. It is the poor schools and the ordinary masses who cannot compete with the well to do, who have been the losers throughout. Yet, in general terms, Sri Lankans are still a law abiding nation with a great respect towards religion and traditions, willingness to help, having faith in education, concerned for the well-being of others, peace loving and having a community spirit with a sense of solidarity. If a model could be developed taking into consideration the above qualities as cultural resources, perhaps such a model of devolution might fit better rather than something more alien. However, Pateman's (1970) view of using 'participation' for educatory purposes also could be made use of in such devolutionary models, to mitigate the existing psychological barriers - such as 'superior' and 'inferior' syndromes, and to void the gap between various social groups.

CONCLUSION

It was clear that Western notions of devolution in education rest upon the view that the school belongs to its community and as such power has to be restored to the school and its community. It was also argued that even in the Western world, 'devolution' does not mean the same to everybody. The new 'right' uses it to pave way for deregulation and free market approach, whereas the 'left' uses it for democratic participation. But when it comes

to a country like Sri Lanka, it is being used to delegate some line responsibilities to the school level - specifically to the principal of the school to mobilise resources. The school community does not have anything to do with the administrative functions of the schools. If at all, the members of the School Boards can advise and assist the principals in things other than administration and teaching learning process. As such, the Sri Lankan case could be explained as a superficial political solution to broad, complex socio economic problems. It could be so, for reasons inherent in that particular socio political culture, which were not taken into consideration in some of the Western theories. Raising the question - 'devolution for what?' will enable us to understand the underpinning reasons and agendas, not only in Sri Lanka, but wherever the case may be.

REFERENCES

ADB, (1989), Education and Training in Sri Lanka, An Asian Development Bank

Sponsored Project, volume 2, p. 240, EDCIL, New Delhi.

Badcock A.M. (1988), *Devolution at a price*, Acacia Press, Blackburn.

Beattie N. (1985), *Professional Parents*, The Falmer Press.

Brown Daniel J. (1990) *Decentralisation and School-based Management*, The Falmer Press.

Cummings W.K. (1988) *The decentralisation of education*, Project BRIDGES, Harvard University.

de Silva C.R. (1990), *Education in Sri Lanka 1948-1988*, Navarang, New Delhi

de Silva G.N. and Palihakkara H. (1988), *Effectiveness of the cluster system in Sri Lanka*, National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka.

Dennis A Rondinelli et al (1990), *Planning Education Reforms in Developing Countries*, The Contingency Approach,, Duke University Press, USA.

DIS (1984), *Restructuring Victorian Education*, Current issues, A report to the state board of education, November 1984, Deakin Institute for Studies in Education.

Fernando, T. (1979), *Aspects of social stratification in Tissa Fernando and Robert N Kearney (eds), Modern Sri Lanka: A society in Transition*, Syracuse University, New York.

Gordon L. (1992) *The state devolution and educational reform in New Zealand*, in Taylor and Francis (ed), *Educational policy*, 1992 Volume 7, No. 2.

Habermas J. (1976), *Legitimation Crisis*, (translated by T.M. Mc Carthy), London, Heinemann, p. 71

Mac Lellan A. and Palihakkara H. (1989), *Role of the principals of Secondary schools in Sri Lanka*, A document issued by the Staff College for Educational Administration, Sri Lanka.

Neil Fernando, (1984), *Management Reforms Report*, Ministry of Education Sri Lanka.

Pateman C (1970), *Participation and Democratic Theory*, London, Cambridge University Press.

Pennock. J. Roland, (1979), *Democratic political Theory*, Princeton University Press, pp. 438-69

Polantzas N. (1973), *Political power and social class*, London: New books and Sheed and Ward.

Raymond Williams, (1973), *Base and superstructure in Marxist cultural theory*, *New left review* 82, (december 1973, p.3-16)

Sessional Paper xxiv (1943), *Report of the special commission on education, (Ceylon)*, Ceylon Government Press, p. 9.

Stephen B. Lawton, (1992), *Why Restructure* in Taylor and Francis (ed) *Education Policy Analysis*, Vol. 7, No. 2.

Shapiro S. (1990), *Between Capitalism and democracy, educational policy and crisis of the welfare state*, bergin and publishers, New York.

Simpson P. (1991), *A devolutionary Tale*, Paper presented to NSW Teachers Fedaration Conference 8 & 9 March 1991, Sydney.

Swanson A.D. (1992), *Educational Restructuring: Internal perspectives*, in Taylor and Francis (ed) *Education Policy Analysis*, Vol. 7, No. 2.

Swanson A.D. and King R.A. (1992), *The impact of school governance on public financial support systems* in Taylor and Francis (ed) *Education Policy Analysis*, Vol. 7, No. 2.

The Gazette of the democratic socialist republic of Sri Lanka, Part 11 of February 01, 1991, *School Development Boards and Provincial Boards of Education, A Bill*, Government Publication Bureau, Sri Lanka.

UNESCO (1984), *Diagnosis study on Educational Management in Sri Lanka*, UNESCO, 1984

Watson K. (1982), *Education in the Third World*, Croom Helm, U.K.

Wijayasingha S. (1969), *Public interest and community participation in education* in Ministry of Education (ed) *Education in Ceylon; A centenary volume*, Government press, Colombo.

Appendix 1

THE FRAMING OF EDUCATION POLICY AND MANAGEMENT: KEY REPORTS, ACTS BILLS AND CIRCULARS LEADING TO DEMOCRATISATION OF EDUCATION AND PROVISION OF ACCESS TO LOCAL PARTICIPATION 1867-1992

Report/Act/
Circular
context/focus
(why)theories/
concepts/ core themesmajor
recommendations/
reform proposalsoutcome/
implementation/
action taken1867 report of the
Morgan committee enthusiasm from all
religious
denominations to
establish schools and
promote educational
facilities;Liberalism and
freedom for religious
activities; policy
was that government
should intervene
actively and support
private efforts too,
to have more liberal
provision for
educationabolition of the

School Commission and
the appointment of a
Director of Public
Instruction;
expansion of
vernacular
education;The
Industrial school;
mixed(English and
vernacular) schools;
central schools; The
Colombo academy;
training of teachers;
establishment of a
department of
(education) public
instruction; teacher
training; school
inspection;