

CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING CONDITIONS: THE WORK OF PRIMARY TEACHERS

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Introduction

During the last decade State and Commonwealth governments in Australia have initiated educational reforms designed to increase the contribution of schooling to the nation's economic and social development. Such reforms have attempted to combine the benefits of centralisation with the advantages of localisation. Currently decentralisation of authority and responsibility, and strategic and operational planning, are two of the management procedures governments have imported from business in order to make schools more effective, efficient and publicly accountable. The application of these two principles of management to the administration and organisational restructuring of education has generated a variety of new practices and procedures throughout Australian schooling. School development planning (SDP) is one of the new managerial practices introduced into Australian schools as a part of organisational restructuring. We argue that the new conditions imposed by system and school restructuring have created new work environments and work conditions for school administrators and teachers. Specifically it has meant the redefinition of the nature and scope of the work of managing and teaching in schools. The consistent message from both administrators and teachers is that the changing conditions on education systems and schools has led to significant intensification of their work. A major assumption underpinning intensification is that quality improvement is dependent on involvement by staff, parents and members of the wider community in all levels of decision-making and enactment.

SDP is only one element of a suite of changes representing managerialist approaches to educational administration. The aggregated picture is that of the intensification and the extension of the teacher's day. Other elements of these changes are: moves to school-based curriculum and professional development, self-managing schools, social justice initiatives and curriculum inclusivity, the implementation of national profiles, the reduction of centrally provided services, revised promotional procedures and the requirements for quality assurance.

In looking at the single element of SDP, we support our argument by providing evidence derived from the Primary School Planning

Project (PSPP). Data for that study was gained from a national survey of state and catholic primary schools and case studies undertaken in all Australian states and territories with the exception of Tasmania.

School Development Planning

Within the decentralised management structures now characteristic of government schooling in this country, SDP provides the essential connection between central policy, system procedures and school activity. By linking policy, procedure and practice it serves three crucial functions. It connects government priorities directly into the planning and learning activities of

schools; it is a means for increasing staff and community participation in the management of their schools; and, it provides a means for exercising public and system based quality assurance and quality improvement.

In essence, a school development plan is a public statement of intent, a blueprint for action and a profile for auditing performance. As Davis (1994) says, a development plan states what the school wants to improve [objectives]; how these priorities are to be achieved [strategies]; and the benefits to students [outcomes]. Engaging a school as a community in the successful development of such a plan is a complex and multifaceted social and political professional and communal learning activity. First, it requires involving the school community in reviewing its present thinking and practices about curriculum, pedagogy, assessment evaluation, organisation, structures, administration, budget, staff and parent development, and relations with its community and employing authority. Second, taking in to account the evidence from this review, the school members are required to make explicit, how they intend to improve the quality and efficiency of the pupils' learning over a given period. Third the need to document the process of improvement.

SDP is a central feature of the self-managing school in Australia. It links central policy and priorities, school planning and activity with local participation and accountability. Further, the procedures of SDP require schools to make explicit these connections between centrally set priorities and the activity of teachers and pupils. In addition these procedures require each school:

to develop open and participative decision-making practices;

to establish performance indicators to monitor progress of goal attainment, processes and budget; and

to provide a performance review and evaluation profile for the purposes of public accountability.

An analysis of the official documentation by employing authorities on SDP identified a range of expected benefits related to school management, parent and community relations, teachers' work and pupils' performance. They include:

increasing staff and community creativity, commitment and involvement in the school;

more economic and efficient management;

more focussed and supported leadership;

more informed and shared decision making;

lessening the impact on school administrators and teachers of bureaucratic rules and procedures;

strengthening school community interaction;

improving teachers' professional development; and

improving classroom work and learning outcomes for students.

We found strong support for SDP from regional and diocesan officers, principals, associate administrators, teachers and parents who had experienced the process. The advocacy for SDP far outweighed the criticisms and reservations. We found no loud calls for a return to the old bureaucratic structures and procedures. A somewhat confused view of the power of various groups to influence school plans emerges. This draws attention to the lack of common understandings of what constitutes the practices of collaboration, participation and involvement.

For instance, while teachers and parents see themselves as being highly involved in planning decisions, they report that principals act unilaterally on some four out of ten occasions. Collaboration frequently is seen to be a process for gaining ratification of decisions made by school administrators and employing authorities. Also principals consider parents to be less central to the planning processes than the parents do themselves. However, the opposite applies with respect to the principals' perception of their involvement of teachers in the planning processes.

Involvement in SDP

Parents and SDP

Both the survey and case study data support the view that parental participation in planning is uneven, presents great difficulty in some schools, and is non-existent in others. Parent participation was difficult and continued to be a challenge for teachers, principals and parents is reflected across all case studies.

In his case study Grenfell reminds us that:

We cannot assume that the parties involved, the school, parents and community know the technologies and different languages of planning...Parent involvement in school planning still remains minimal. Attitudes towards power sharing on the part of teachers are highly ambivalent (Grenfell 1994, 36)

Parent participation creates tensions and challenges for all those involved in the life of the school. For principals it can mean revising their style of social and professional interaction with parents and their local community. For parents it means rethinking their relationships with the school and learning ways to encounter and deal with how to be involved in their children's schooling.

Teachers and SDP

Teachers generally agreed that they were included in the major planning decisions on vision and mission statements, policy, curriculum and resources. The majority of them saw that school climates were democratic and staff collaborative and supportive. Higher involvement was more likely in smaller schools and there was some evidence to suggest that female administrators might be more inclusive than their male counterparts. However, on the downside, some half of the teachers felt that typically their role in collaborative planning was to ratify decisions taken by the school administration or employing authority.

Both the degree and the nature of teachers' involvement in planning such learning were diverse. Committees and full-staff meetings were the most common formal structures for staff involvement. The case studies illustrate a range of approaches to how committees are used in school management. On the whole these examples show that these committees are a vital part of power sharing and are able to make policy, set priorities, allocate resources and influence practice. Reardon provides one

example:

The Curriculum Committee is a very important structure within the school in terms of planning. All members are volunteers with a real interest in the subject area they represent. The meetings are open and any staff member can attend at any time. The committee meets regularly (approximately once per month). Staff members bring issues and ideas to this forum through the agenda but the committee also initiates ideas for change and takes these to the staff...Decisions made by the committee are taken to the staff meeting for ratification.
(Reardon 1994, 9010)

Hatton, Hardy, Matthews and Smith also provide models for sharing authority and responsibility over aspects of the school's activities to groups of staff, or to staff and parents. However, the impact of management on teachers' professional lives and teaching time is a regular theme in the cases study and survey data. As Matthews reports in the words of one teacher:

The processes [SDP] involved have changed our lives substantially. In the early days we might have had one formal meeting a week and lots of informal chatter. Now there are demands time@wise, but this is rewarding when we see things being achieved.
(Matthews 1994, 20)

We now turn our attention to the principals and consider some of the aspects of school life that influence their involvement in SDP.

Principals and SDP

As school leaders, principals play a crucial role in that process in various ways. For example, American and Australian researchers, such as Chapman (1990), Chrispeels (1992) and Higgitt (1992) report that school administrators are likely to be more concerned with the form of plans and planning rather than their substance, limit teacher involvement to less substantive issues and circumscribe parent participation often with the co™operation of the staff and `insider parents'. In such cases the principal controls the policy, the staff carry out the teaching and the parents supply the support. However, the influences and interactions that lead to these situations are more often particular than general. Moreover, efforts to change well established procedures and relationships are affected with difficulty and principals and associate administrators are constantly faced with the problem of resolving the rhetoric of participative management with the practicalities of running a

school and the demands of a central bureaucracy.

Hatton (1994, 21) notes this situation in New South Wales when she states, 'There is no doubt that despite the rhetoric about

being self-managing, schools are still being closely monitored and controlled by the centre'. Distant, Grenfell and Smith's account suggest that the situation is similar in Queensland, the Northern Territory and South Australia respectively.

The value placed by the principal on SDP is a major influence on his or her involvement in the development of the plan and the way the plan is used within the school. There is evidence to show that in some schools the sole purpose of SDP is to satisfy the requirements of employing authorities. On the other hand, our data suggest that generally principals are committed to SDP and its potential for improving their schools. One principal described her commitment to SDP in the following terms.

The thing about having a written action plan is that it really is a good driving force, because you can keep going back to that, and then as the end of the term approaches I go back to the action plan and say "Well, what did we say we'd do?"...After I've got everybody going, then I make sure that I'll ask them on a regular basis what they're actually doing... So I have a little calendar of my own where this week I'm going to check up on [X] on how {Y} is going.
(Hardy 1994, 6)

A major limitation on the involvement of school administrators in SDP is the amount of time they are required to spend on bureaucratic tasks. In the words of one principal:

I'll show you what I mean. Like the budget business, there's I mean...a lot of principals have said it, they really feel like a bill paying service for the Department.... I mean I'm now paying the electricity bill that used to be paid by regional office and I'm paying the rates... And yet I've got to sit down and come up with plans and you know...most of the administration things that I do @ here we go again @ energy, that's gas and electricity...equipment service...postage...short term relief...phone...waste disposal...they cleaned out regional office and ...there's not the same wage bill involved down there, but we they put the work load onto us and we're not getting the compensation for it in time. See what they've done is save [by] squeezing more, for the same amount of money, out of principals ...and taking away from what we're actually meant to be doing.

(Hatton 1994, 13)

This is particularly the case in small schools. Finally, the principal's relationship with the school board or council influences both the processes of SDP itself and the nature of the principal's participation in SDP. All of the case studies acknowledge the importance of the school board or council in the planning process. For example, Hardy writing of a school in Canberra, describes a mature relationship between the school council and the school developed over long experience and experimentation in which the council plays a collaborative role with the principal. Hatton, on the other hand gives an account of an emerging relationship between a principal and the school in which one of the principal's main tasks is to better enable the council to realise its responsibilities and powers.

Leadership still appears to be the key variable for ensuring success. There is no single one best way for principals and other

leaders to follow. What can be said is that leadership appears to have become more participative and shared. However, the forms of participation are highly site specific and vary from genuine to pseudo.

The study shows that school-wide planning provides a vehicle for the micro-politics of schools working through new structures, responsibilities and accountability within their local context and schooling systems. On the whole our data supports the position that the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages.

SDP and The Work of Teachers, Administrators and Parents

The fuzzy boundaries between teachers' and administrators' school and private lives, complicate discussions about their work. There is general agreement, however, that school teaching and administration continues to become more demanding and that teachers and administrators suffer from work overload and role ambiguity (Ashenden, 1990; Schools Council 1990). This situation is due in part to developments generated outside of schools and in part to developments within the profession itself (Dimmock 1994; Schools Council 1990).

The meaning and significance of the extensions to the teachers' and administrators' work occasioned by such developments, can be regarded as major professional gains or as professional exploitation. Proponents of the professional gains position contend that the extension of the teachers' role, control, authority and responsibility over the last few years indicates the public recognition of the worth of teachers' contribution to

society, and greater trust in teachers' judgements and skills.

Proponents of the exploitation, or intensification position, argue the opposite. They see the constant extension of teachers' work is leading to the deterioration and deskilling of the profession. They cite as evidence the increased imposition of externally set objectives, teaching procedures, management protocols and assessment requirements; teachers having less opportunities for teaching due to increased involvement with administration and assessment (Apple and Jungck 1992); reduced time during the working day for relaxation and communication with colleagues; less opportunities to engage in professional development; and reduced quality of service due to chronic work overload (Hargreaves 1994).

From the results of our study, the effect and implications of teachers' involvement in SDP are similarly open to alternative interpretations. Administrators and classroom teachers both reported that SDP gave them more control over their activities, improved school leadership, enhanced collegiality, encouraged initiative and raised teaching effectiveness.

Principals and teachers in the study by Hargreaves identified features of school life that helped or hindered them with their administration and teaching. Enabling features included the creation of a shared sense of direction; greater communal support; school planning and implementation committees; decentralised budgeting; localisation of support services; and setting school specific priorities. Conversely, a number of features were cited as hindrances such as, the perceived tensions between commonwealth government, state government, employing authority and school priorities; the demands set by

community and government; and the requirement, where it existed, to gain system approval for school plans.

Respondents also stated that SDP increased the intensity of the school day, generated unproductive paperwork, extended their working day into their private lives, and added to the stress levels in schools. Distant, attempting to understand the parameters of the teacher's work, asked them to describe a normal week.

During a 'normal' week I try to get in there by 7:30@7:45. I catch up with staff and/or principal if there is anything to discuss. It's a full@on week of teaching and sometimes I may not stop for morning tea or lunch @ most times I don't. It's not often I get to go to the staffroom. I'm, either working in here (my room), meeting with the principal

or meeting with someone else. At 3:00 there's either a Union meeting, a staff meeting, a School Support centre Advisory Council meeting, or a Supportive School Environment (SSE) meeting. In the early part of the year there were also Budget Committee meetings that I had to attend. And as I'm currently studying there's also two nights a week I attend uni.

(Distant 1994, 33)

Hatton reported the following response about the relationship between SDP and the rhythm of a teacher's workload.

It (the school plan) took three full days of meetings to actually to nut out what was to be done, then of course you've got your clerical hours. ...I suppose on average each person would have probably put four working days into it, so four times probably forty working days, I guess that is. That's just for the curriculum areas. ... Then on the management etc. ... I've done that in my own time.

(Hatton 1994, 11)

Classroom teachers saw that SDP intensified their work more so than did the administrators. Teachers in Catholic schools, however, were less stressed by the exigencies of SDP than their counterparts in government schools.

Task intensification from SDP applies equally to administrators. One principal explained to Distant how the devolutionary process that promoted self-managed schooling, resulted in tasks, that were once performed by middle management at Regional Education Offices, being passed down to schools.

Do more, do more! It's coming through in such an interesting way, the delegation, it's just "oh our time line is such now could Principals please get together and decide on this panel and do this". So really a lot of the day yesterday for example, was spent organising things for four schools.

(Distant 1994, 31)

Hatton (1994) noted the principal of her school's concern about the negative impact of his managerial duties on his classroom preparation and the effects on his pupils. However, her record of the comments by the principal's wife on the intrusion of school into family captures the impact of intensification on the principal, his wife and their three young children, all

under six. The wife describes their life in the following way.

he's [her husband] over [at the school] quite often till midnight. He'll come home and have tea about six, half an hour, three-quarters of an hour, and then he's back over again. So @ which means looking after the kids in the afternoon, getting all that dreadful time of bath and that sort of thing, is left to me, which is difficult because...I've got [school-related work] that I have to do at home...[I wait] until the kids are all in bed [since] it's hopeless trying to start school work, so I'm sort of juggling housework while they're awake and then when they're in bed I can finally settle down about ten and do something. (Hatton 1994, 14@15)

Hatton continues :

The principal is also affected since his participation in his family is limited. This couple is not alone. Other teachers also feel the effects of intensification on their personal lives. It is plausible to assume that hidden personal costs were not taken into account when School Renewal was devised. Efficiency and effectiveness are being achieved at a considerable personal cost in Meiki. (Hatton 1994, 15)

Parents also are now expected to make a significant contribution to the school through direct participation in school management, supplying resources and being part of their children's school™based learning. They are also part of the intensification syndrome, particularly if one interprets intensification as a form of exploitation.

There is general agreement that SDP makes a worthwhile contribution to the development of school life. Wider scope for participation and responsibility, improved leadership and collegiality, increased opportunities for initiative and structured change, and a higher degree of involvement in and commitment to the school are reported outcomes of SDP. On the downside, SDP adds to teachers and administrators levels of stress and diverts energy and time from the classroom.

The pros, cons, costs and benefits of SDP are peculiar to each school. However, our study makes very clear the key role of the principal in determining the effects of SDP on the development of the school as a learning community and its impact on the lives of pupils, teachers and parents alike.

Conclusion

The move towards managerialism, of which SDP is one element, has fostered new relationships between schools and their communities

in general, and amongst teachers, administrators and parents, in particular. What is now called for, is the clarification of these relationships with a view to redefining obligations and responsibilities. Ironically, the very ambiguity about these relationships also provides the opportunity for such clarification and redefinition.

SDP is one factor contributing to the changed working conditions of teachers. We have asserted that it occupies a central place in the intensification of teachers' work since it encapsulates

the ethic of involvement and self-management and imports the claimed benefits for worker participation from industry into education. It is apparent that teachers are extending their day so that professional work encroaches upon domestic life, and the teachers' day at school is characterised by intensity of workTMload and pressures on their time.

For teachers, school administrators and parents, the rhetoric of involvement can be seductive. It holds the promise of making a positive difference to the work conditions and the satisfactions of teaching and life in schools. However, the realisation of any of these possibilities can come at considerable personal cost. Nevertheless, despite such costs, teachers and principals continue to be positive about the opportunities afforded through SDP for involvement in the management of their teaching. However, how long this positive disposition towards SDP lasts is unpredictable.

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