

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE ISSUE - PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF STATE SCHOOLS

The education systems of the United States of America have traditionally operated on a decentralized basis under the control of school boards whose members are drawn from the community. These boards have had the responsibility for determining the aims and objectives of the schools, and for providing adequate and appropriate staff and teaching resources to ensure that the educational programme can be implemented. Until recently such community involvement has been completely foreign to the management of Australian schools, for this society has traditionally been content to leave the management of its schools to highly bureaucratic and centralized state systems of education.¹ However, it has been a feature of Australian education during recent years for the Commonwealth Government to acquire greater influence and control over education thereby resulting in a higher degree of centralization.² Decision making in

Australian education has, as overseas observers have noted, become the domain of "experts".³

Changes in these trends have become evident in recent years. During the 1960's pressure groups in Australian society began to demand a say in the management of social institutions.⁴ Education systems were not excluded from these demands, and so public meetings, such as those in the Australian Capital Territory during 1966⁵, were called to discuss the issues concerned in involving the community and the profession, along with the government, in decision making at the school level.

During 1973 the first of the organized structures to incorporate representatives of these three groups was introduced into the South Australian education system.⁶ This proposal was quickly followed by another in the Australian Capital Territory which established a different form of school board during 1974.⁷ Proposals have also been put forward for consideration by the community and the profession in both New South Wales⁸ and Victoria.⁹

Although the four existing proposals referred to above are designed basically to decentralize the

administration of schools and to provide avenues for teachers and interested members of the community to participate in the management of their schools each proposal differs in some respect with regard to the composition and functions of the management boards or councils. Each state system has taken into account local conditions that might have some bearing on the structure of the board, e.g. the Australian Capital Territory is a large urban area, whereas South Australia must accommodate urban as well as remote areas.

The reactions to the proposals have also differed in all systems, ranging from an enthusiastic response in the Australian Capital Territory, to a complete rejection by all affiliated organizations in New South Wales.¹⁰ A variety of reasons can be put forward for this range of acceptance but probably the most significant would be that in New South Wales it was "handed down" from the Government as a final product for the schools to adopt, whereas the proposal in the Australian Capital Territory grew out of public discussion and agitation for a more decentralized form of school management. In the first case the participants had little opportunity to have a direct say in the drafting

of the proposals, apart from written submissions, whereas in the A.C.T. the participants had ample opportunity to voice their opinions.

To date the Queensland Department of Education has made no official moves to present a proposal for an alternative form of management for its schools. If such moves were to be taken then again, local conditions should influence the nature of the proposal. Also, if the negative reaction by organizations in some of the other systems is to be avoided then, as far as possible there should be an opportunity to involve those who are vitally concerned in such matters in the drafting of the proposal. It is therefore the purpose of this thesis to present a model that could become operative in a selected Region within the Queensland Department of Education and to outline the steps by which some of the expected opposition to such a proposal might be overcome or at least mitigated.

Justification for the Consideration of New Administrative Structures.

In recent years in Australia a number of influential publications have been directed to the

problem of community involvement and lay participation in school administration. The most important of these have been, Schools in Australia, 1973, the Report of the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission, (The Karmel Report); Teachers for Commonwealth Schools, 1972 (The Neal-Radford Report)¹²; Secondary Education for Canberra, 1973, (The Campbell Report)¹³; and, A Design for the Governance and Organization of Education in the Australian Capital Territory, 1973, (The Hughes Report)¹⁴.

In the climate of change in today's schools the Karmel Report may be considered as the initiator of many significant proposals for changes in the structure and operation of the Australian education systems. This Report argued very strongly for involvement by the community in the school,¹⁵ but declined to be prescriptive in the approaches that might be taken. Community involvement was supported for three different reasons, namely as "a means both of extending its educational influence and of reinforcing pupil motivation"¹⁶ and of bringing teachers and parents closer together. Addressing itself to the value of community involvement in schooling, the Karmel Committee stated:

After almost one hundred years of public schooling a reappraisal of the relationship of the school to the wider society is taking place in Australia, as it is in most industrialized countries. The isolation of schools is being questioned

..... education in formal institutions, separated from both the home and the world of work, has proved to be an inadequate means of changing patterns of social stratification or of initiating all young people into society. Unless our conception of education broadens to enable schools to forge closer links with other socializing agencies the possibility of providing equal life chances for children from all types of social backgrounds is severely limited.

Australian society is much larger, more diversified, and better educated than when government-controlled education systems took shape in the nineteenth century. This suggests the need to broaden the basis of educational policy making beyond those presently involved and to inform public debate about the operation of schools and school systems. The size of the units which try to achieve educational goals may now be inappropriate for efficient and effective operation.

Antipathy towards and apathy about direct community participation in the governance of schooling is widespread throughout Australia. Schools have much to gain from the involvement of the community in educational programs. Complete parental control over the educational welfare of their own children could limit the perspectives of the school and deny the authority of teachers in professional matters. However, the openness of a school to parents is a means both of extending its educational influence and of reinforcing pupil motivation and the obligation on teachers to explain to parents procedures developed through expert knowledge, can only benefit all concerned.¹⁷

The Karmel Committee regarded themselves as

both unable and unwilling to prescribe the forms that community involvement should take, but encouraged the value of experimentation. Realizing the differences in geography and local traditions that exist throughout Australia they felt that the form of involvement should be appropriate to the situational context.

Accordingly the Committee suggested:-

Educationally, and from the point of view of efficient use of resources, it would make good sense to have the school as the nucleus of a community centre. Joint planning, and even conduct, of schools by educational, health, welfare, cultural and sporting agencies could provide additional facilities for the school, allow the community access to its resources and thus generally increase its fruitfulness. In this way a link could be forged between school, family, peer group and the society at large.¹⁸

The lead provided by these proposals gives adequate justification to review the present social conditions as they might influence new structures in the Queensland Education System. The issues concerned would presumably be those of local interest so that community involvement would go hand in hand with the devolution of powers to the school.¹⁹ Because there are many localities with differing problems, there would inevitably be a variety of local structures.

The proposals of the Karmel Report are des-

igned to make "the overall circumstances of children's education as nearly equal as possible."²⁰ In order to achieve this it was recommended that a total of \$396.5 million be spent during 1974-75, on major programmes in government schools.²¹ It could be argued that the providers of this money, the tax payers, should have some say in how their money is to be allocated within individual schools. Musgrave²² has commented that there is ferment amongst the public and professionals that experts will be forced to render account for their policies and actions.

Unless major differences in the schools are visible to all, the conclusions of the public, that is, those who pay and whose children are our students, must be that teachers and administrators are unimaginative and/or inefficient.²³

Similar arguments are made in favour of community involvement in schools in The Community and Its Schools, 1974, (The Buggie Report),²⁴ the Report of the Review Panel in New South Wales set up by the Minister for Education. In this Report it is argued that accountability for education should be brought closer to the community, for the school

must be accountable to those it serves. Public education is a public as well as a professional business. Professionals participate in the development of goals and priorities, but the

right of the public to hold them accountable for their actions remains.²⁵

"School Boards" and "Community Involvement"

Before examining the progress of lay and professional participation in the management of state schools in Australia, it is important to correct an unfortunate misconception held by many members of the community of what constitutes the Australian version of a school board. It is "unfortunate" in that the term "school board" has acquired overtones derived from the American system where the members have control over school policy, have the right to hire and fire staff and generally have the statutory responsibility for conducting local public education. The Australian proposals, however, have been designed more to suit Australian conditions, despite the fact that boards may be contrary to tradition. The membership of these governing bodies, it is proposed, will include professional, lay and Departmental representatives, and in no instance, to this date, has the governing body been given the power to hire or fire professional staff.²⁶ Therefore, the Australian proposals bear little resemblance to those of overseas systems, and

under no circumstances should preconceived ideas be transferred to the Australian systems. It would be better, in fact, if the use of the term "school board" was abandoned in the Australian scene and replaced by a term such as School Management Council, or Committee, to describe the governing bodies now being formed in some of the Australian systems.

It should also be emphasized that community involvement and school boards are not to be regarded as synonymous. Although community involvement is something to be encouraged, the inclusion of lay personnel on a school management board is only one such form, and on reviewing the number and influence of lay people proposed for inclusion on such boards²⁷ it is only a minor form. It is therefore, a false ideology to speak of school boards as a synonym for community involvement.

Overview of the Study

The following information will be presented in the succeeding pages of this thesis. First, the existing proposals for school boards designed for the Australian education systems will be reviewed along with other relevant information, such as the Redcliffe-Maud

Report.²⁸ This will be followed by a brief review of the current structure and organization of the Queensland Department of Education.

A description of the survey designed by the author to obtain opinions on the composition and functions of school boards will then be provided. To obtain opinions from principals, teachers, and parents and citizens association representatives, the survey was distributed to all schools within the Darling Downs Region. The results are tabulated and analysed.

The information obtained from the review of literature is then combined with the results of the opinion survey to provide the basis for the models for a school council system in the Darling Downs Region. These models, and survey, it will be suggested, could be used as a basis for similar research and proposals in other Queensland regions.

The concluding chapter will include recommendations for further research and outline the stages of implementation for a school boards proposal in the Darling Downs Region. It will also suggest areas where resistance to such a proposal might occur and will propose procedures that might overcome such resistance.

NOTES

1. Partridge, P.H. "The Direction and Goals of Australian Society", in F.M. Katz and R.K. Browne, Sociology of Education; Readings Pertinent to the Australian Education System, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1970. In Chapter 6 Partridge examines the pressures to move towards a centralized education programme in Australia; e.g. the Australian Constitution adopted in 1901 left the control of education to the State Governments.
2. A comprehensive coverage of reference material on this topic is provided by G.S. Harman, The Politics of Education; A Bibliographical Guide, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1974. See especially "The Commonwealth Government and Education." p.62-68.
3. Butts, Freeman. The Assumptions Underlying Australian Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1955. He is quoted as saying "it is assumed that only a few non-professional persons can be trusted with a role in educational decisions", p.14. See also Partridge, P.H. op cit., p.70, and Connell, W.F. "Myths and Traditions in Australian Education", Australian Journal of Education, Vol.14, No. 3., October, 1970. p.261-264.
4. There is little recorded research on the participation in decision making in social institutions in Australia. However, a number of Australian sociologists have examined the pressures that exist to provide avenues for employees to have their say in the management of the institution in which we are employed, e.g. Partridge, Encel, McCallum, Browne, Simpkins, Harman and Goodman.
5. Increasing dissatisfaction with state schools in Canberra culminated in the Adult Education Department of the Australian National University convening a public seminar to discuss the possibility of an

autonomous Education Authority being established in the Australian Capital Territory. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Chapter II of this thesis.

6. The South Australian Department of Education introduced School Councils in state schools in March, 1973.
7. School Boards were implemented in the Australian Capital Territory in January, 1974.
8. Proposals for the composition and functions of school boards in New South Wales were first submitted in 1973, and revisions to these proposals were circularised during 1975.
9. In Victoria initial proposals were circulated during 1974 and revised during 1975.
10. In New South Wales every organization associated with the state schools, from the Principals' Association to the Miscellaneous Workers' Union (cleaners), rejected the proposals. In the Australian Capital Territory however, interim school boards began advertising and interviewing prospective staff members before it had been finalized whether they would have the power to do so. (Personal communique with liaison officer, Interim A.C.T. Schools Authority).
11. Schools in Australia, Report of the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 1973.
12. Teachers for Commonwealth Schools, Canberra, Australian Government Printer, 1972.
13. Secondary Education for Canberra, Report of the Working Committee on College Proposals for the Australian Capital Territory, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 1973.
14. A Design for the Governance and Organization of Education in the Australian Capital Territory, Canberra, Australian Government Printer, 1973.

15. Schools in Australia, op cit. p.13.
16. Ibid
17. Ibid
18. Ibid, p.14.
19. Ibid, p.10.
20. Musgrave, P.W. "Education as an Active Agent in Changing Society", in Unicorn, Bulletin of The Australian College of Education, Vol. 1, No. 1, March, 1975, p.22.
21. Schools in Australia, op cit. p.141.
22. Musgrave, P.W. op cit.
23. Ibid, p.25.
24. The Community and Its Schools, Report of the Review Panel Appointed by the Minister for Education, N.S.W. Government Printer, 1974.
25. Ibid, p.16.
26. Although it has been proposed that school boards in the Australian Capital Territory be given the right to hire and fire staff, through the employing body of the Commonwealth Teaching Service, the Teachers' Union reaction has been so strongly against this proposal its implementation has been deferred to a later date.
27. The proposed number of lay members on boards varies from three in the Australian Capital Territory to a minimum of ten in South Australia. These figures represent a small proportion of the community involved in school affairs.
28. Royal Commission on Local Government, 1966-1969 (Chairman, The Rt. Hon. Lord Redcliffe-Maud), Report (London, H.M.S.O. 1969) Vol. 1.