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This paper will briefly introduce issues underlying school-based management (SBM), examine some literature relating to it and then discuss how, in the Fiji context, it is operating and can be improved to enhance teaching and learning.

What is School-based Management?

School-based management has been defined and interpreted along a very broad spectrum and implemented with the same degree of difference with neither clarity in nor agreement on its definition. Among the variety of interpretations and implementations, two central themes can be identified: moves towards school-based autonomy, and participatory decision-making on a wide range of school related issues.

Oswald (1995) describes SBM as the decentralisation of decision-making to the school site with the argument that, when properly implemented, improvements are experienced in student programmes because resources are provided to match their needs; in the quality of decision-making through group participation; and in the quality of communication among all the stakeholders. This is supported by Sackney and Dibski (1992: 105) who conceptualised the move as decentralising and debureaucratising school control:

For some of its advocates, it is also a proposal for shared decision-making within schools. And for some, it is a method for increasing the influence of parents in school decision-making.

Mojkowski and Fleming (1988) argue that those who are closest to the students (teachers and parents) should make decisions about their educational programmes – curriculum; instruction; and the organisation of time, people, facilities and resources. The hypothesis is that such a practice will result in improved student

performance through a more effectively and efficiently run school.

Garage (1992) in his examination of school-centred reforms in New South Wales (Australia) found a strong emphasis on replacing the 'top-down' hierarchical structure by a 'downside-up' structure with the school at the centre of the decentralised system providing the important educational elements of teaching and learning. It also took into account the fact that every school was different with different needs; that the best judge of these needs would be the individual school's teachers and community; schools would best meet their needs if they were allowed to manage themselves within a given budget and guided by a set of general policy guidelines; and that the state system should provide the necessary supportive structures at all levels. Some of these structures were seen in the clustering of schools (14-16 in each cluster) under a Cluster Director, establishment of regional Education Resource Centres as hubs for localised professional and curriculum development, and the formation of individual school councils made up of parents, community members and teacher representatives.

In his survey of case studies on collaborating for educational change in South-East Asia and Africa, Shaeffer (1992) identified various forms of collaboration in existence such as in the supply and maintenance of resources; devolution of certain aspects of authority to schools, allowing wider participation in governance and management; and improving content and methodology through collective surveys of community resources and knowledge and/or assessment of local educational needs to enrich the local content of the curriculum. Enhanced collaboration

impacted positively on a number of broad areas:

- on the education system generally where successes allowed steady growth elsewhere;
- on educational administration which encouraged further experimentation;
- at the school level where improved resources, programme activities and training activated greater involvement;
- on pupil achievement which had some indicators in improved enrolment, more students sitting external examinations and greater pupil creativity and pride;
- on communities, as seen in their greater involvement, more community learning programmes and greater participation of women.

Some common elements identified in the literature regarding SBM implementation are:

- the key role of the head teacher and the importance of ensuring that the person with the

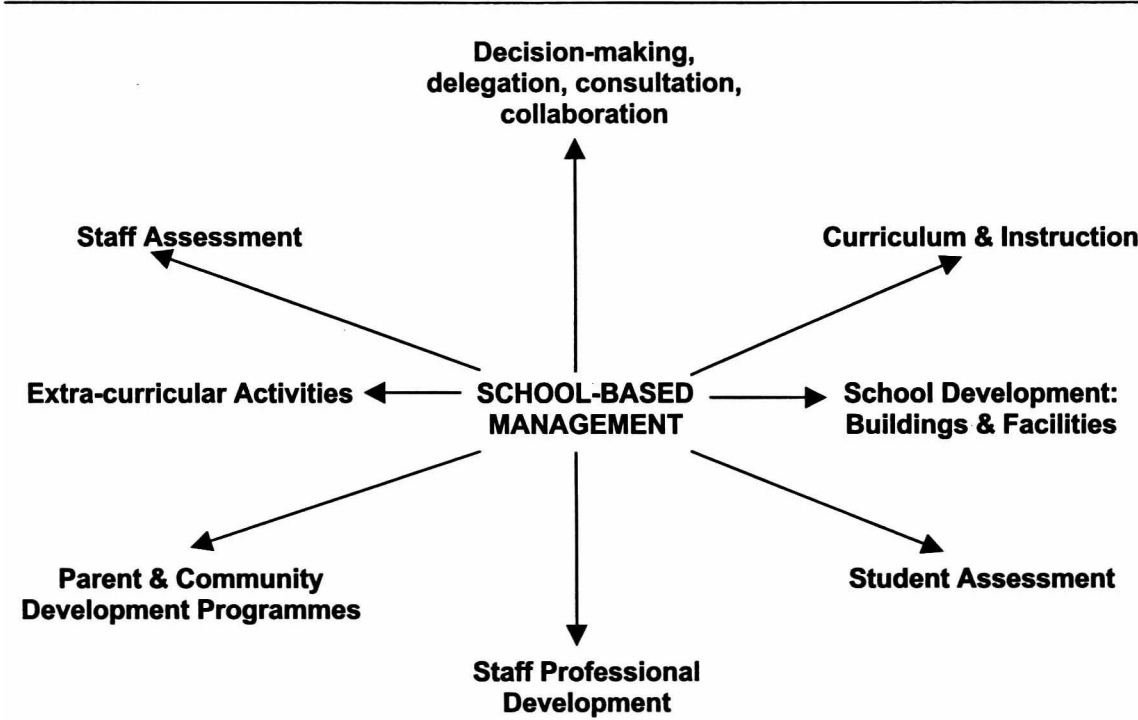
appropriate knowledge and experience is selected for the position;

➤ the demands placed on the headteacher and teachers often require knowledge, skills and attitudes they do not have and thus they require regular professional training and upgrading programmes;

➤ dispersion of authority throughout the school organisation to ensure maximum participation of all stakeholders in both decision-making and implementation of programmes; and

➤ dissemination of information widely among all stakeholders so that they can make informed decisions.

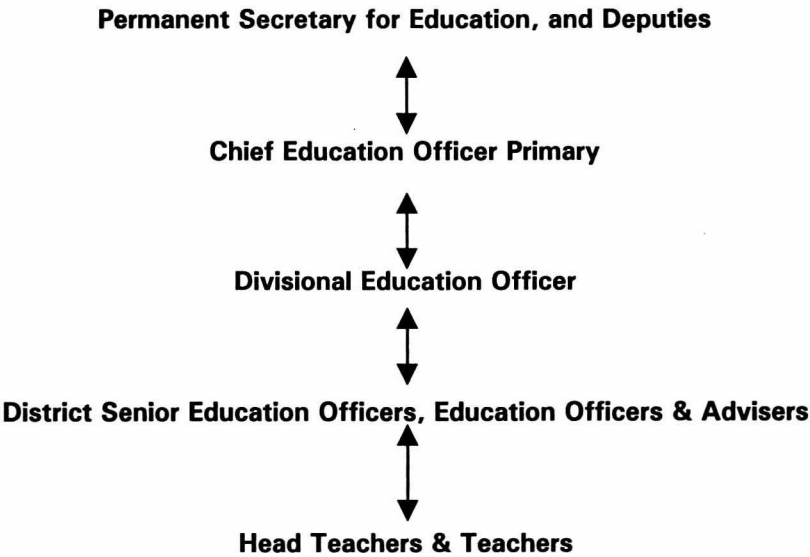
The various areas that can be an interactive component of SBM are shown below:



The Fiji Context

Decentralisation of primary education in the Fiji context is seen in the establishment of divisional (4) and district (9) education offices with delegated powers for the administration of policy matters on education in the

various schools and communities within their boundaries. Delegation of responsibilities is extended into the schools via their respective head teachers. A diagrammatic representation is set out below on the next page.



It is argued, quite correctly, that such a lengthy line of referrals is cumbersome and restricts initiative and development at the school level. This is further exacerbated by national examinations, which have a stranglehold on the system generally. Parental and community pressures on schools to achieve high passes, and the head teachers' and teachers' own ignorance of the availability of better school programme options all restrict the learning opportunities of the children. Adapting and modifying aspects of SBM or merely improving existing structures can help introduce more innovative and interesting activities at the school level. An important starting point would be to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of options that are available within national guidelines.

SBM, as understood by the international community, especially in the USA, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, is not as yet conceptionally or operationally functioning in Fiji. There have been

moves recently that suggest a greater need for schools and their communities to become more collectively involved in decision-making at the school level. The 2000 *Report of the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel* makes repeated reference to this.¹ In suggesting changes to the organisational structure the Report (2000:379) recommends that:

responsibility for many of the day-to-day decisions concerned with the running of schools be delegated to school management committees, boards of governors and the heads and staff of these institutions ... [who should] be more responsive to the needs of the communities and the individuals they serve.

It further recommends, when proposing the establishment of a review board and its audit functions, that:

¹ Much of what follows in this section comes from Chapter 4 of the report pp 369-388.

Lasting improvements can only take place if all stakeholders work together to review the performance of schools and their students, identifying sources of weakness and planning joint strategies to improve students' academic and overall personal development (2000: 381).

With regard to goal setting at school level, the Commission proposes that:

The heads and staff, along with the management committees, should be encouraged to set clear and achievable goals towards which they can all work co-operatively (2000: 382).

The key role of the head teacher in improving the overall work of schools is strongly emphasised:

The evidence indicates that those who are most successful as heads of educational institutions are those who have a clear and coherent vision of the purposes of the institution, are able to articulate this vision to the staff and can obtain the commitment to this vision of all involved. Other important skills are team management skills which are required to build up collaborative relationships with staff and other stakeholders, in order to deploy resources efficiently to produce the best results (2000: 384).

SBM importance is highlighted in Recommendation 14 which states that:

Head teachers and school management committees should be given as much freedom as possible to operate their schools without too much interference from the MOE, except in areas relating to their professional standards of performance and

disbursement of school funds (2000: 388).

Throughout the report, both explicitly and implicitly, the importance of implementing some aspects of SBM for the sake of improving both participation and efficiency at school level is repeatedly raised.

The above recommendations are timely and, if the necessary funds for implementation are made available, much-needed improvements can be expected. For the time being it would be more realistic to examine some of the existing structures and see how they can be better organised to be SBM compatible:

District Education Offices

The district education offices could be strengthened to become more effective and efficient in providing professional support for the schools and communities they serve. At one level there is need for upgrading existing staff through regular professional training and at another level, providing additional qualified staff so that responsibilities are more evenly distributed and the quality of support for schools improved.

Zoning/Clustering of Schools

A more serious assessment of zoning/clustering of schools should be undertaken. In parts of Fiji, especially in the Western and Northern Divisions, some form of zoning is in existence and utilised in an adhoc fashion for a variety of activities, covering such things as agricultural shows, sporting activities and localised in-service training. Also operating are activities organised by the various branches of the two teachers' unions. Having some realistic clustering of schools within districts will improve consultation and collaboration on a wide range of educational issues, including the regular training of teachers and community members. The resource base

in terms of personnel and facilities is widened, and working relationships among the different communities are enhanced.

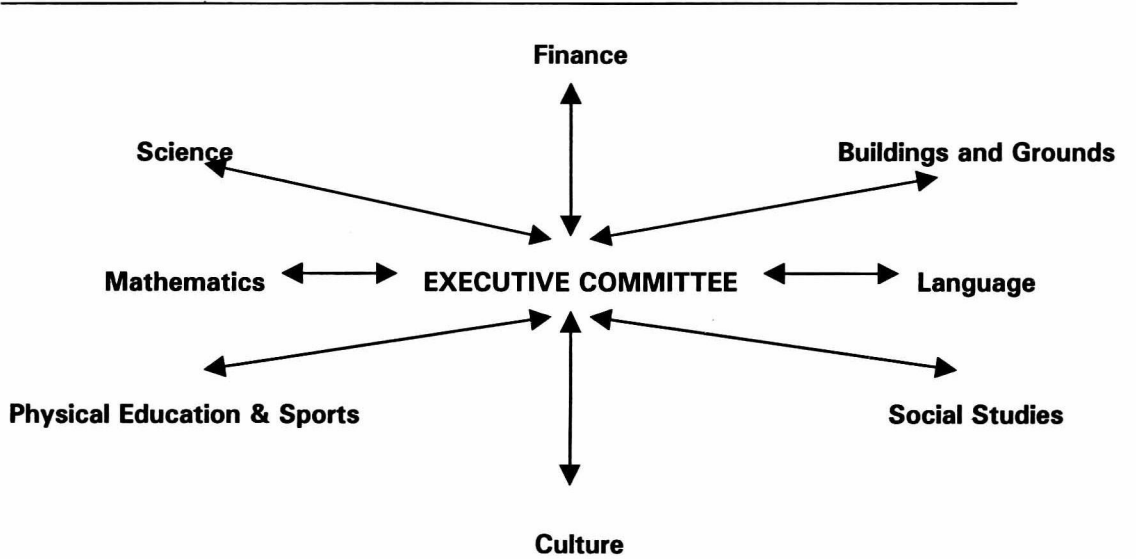
School Committees and PTAs

The organisation and roles of school committees and PTAs within each school should be reviewed and improved through proper consultation with all stakeholders. Clashes of interest can be avoided, common goals can be set and those involved can become more effectively supportive of one another in their attempts to help the teachers raise the quality of the children’s education.

Developing out of the above is the formation of various sub-committees responsible to the executive or central committee to provide guidance on important aspects of school development. The membership criteria could be expertise/experience and interest. As much as possible, teachers and other stakeholders should be

represented. The number of working committees could be fixed and ongoing or instituted when needed. The finance committee will be able to provide a realistic budget after considering school needs and all possible sources of funding (government grants and community contribution), the culture committee will be able to examine the related official curricula and include local content to make the activities more relevant and interesting and the other sub-committees will be able to provide guidelines to make the school programme more relevant, interesting, and inclusive with the necessary local support. While prioritising the welfare of the students, these sub-committees should also include awareness and related programmes for the parents and community members. A well-informed school community will be in a better position to make balanced decisions about their children’s education.

A diagrammatic representation is as follows:



Community Participation

Participation of a wide cross-section of the community that is deliberately planned allows for a broadening of activities for

the benefit of the students and those involved. Here are some possibilities:

➤ A group of teachers and local experts form a committee to examine the official art and craft and dance syllabi with the purpose of including traditional content at the various levels. Through consultation they agree on activities suitable for the different classes, ensuring that what is learnt at one level forms a 'building block' for activities at the next. A 'new' set of syllabi is created with some degree of local ownership. The involvement of community members is scheduled within the school timetable so that at allocated times they become actively involved as teacher support personnel. This can be considered an 'all win' situation, with the students, teachers and the 'local teacher' all benefiting from the involvement.

➤ The school calendar of events has reserved Week 5 in Term 3 as the annual inter-school athletics championship for the 8 schools in the zone. As many teachers will be involved with their respective school teams, officials for the day could be in short supply. A sensible solution is to run a number of training sessions for members of the community on how to officiate in the various areas. Coaching clinics for teachers could also include members of the community so that, over time, each school will have available a pool of coaches and officials to help with physical education and sports. Their experience and expertise will definitely benefit the community at large.

➤ In a similar way, topics in science, social science and mathematics can involve members of the community in informing and training the students on local traditional and cultural practices

that are relevant to the various themes/topics being studied.

(Some of these activities may carry over as extra-curricular enrichment activities of the official programme.)

Professional Development

The deliberate and planned involvement of teachers in curriculum and other professional development activities at the school level, initiated and facilitated by the head teacher, is a key factor in SBM and needs to be encouraged more vigorously. Head teachers need to be convinced that such a move is not removing their authority but is a move to utilise available skills for the common good while allowing them more time for other school development projects. Some obvious advantages are:

- The abilities, skills and experience of teachers are allowed to develop through interchange at regularly organised professional meetings.
- Leadership skills are learnt and developed when staff members are given responsibility to organise and run training sessions.
- Teachers' involvement and experience develop their confidence and help them to become better qualified as agents of change.
- The professionalism of teachers is developed and improved.
- Teachers become empowered to respond more empathetically to local needs.

SBM encourages participation of all stakeholders at the school level, sharing decision-making and responsibilities and utilising available expertise to enhance and maximise the learning opportunities of students specifically and the school

community generally. Given government support and appropriate consultation at all levels of operation, it is possible to undertake manageable adjustments, utilising available resources and staggered over a realistic time frame.

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