

DECENTRALIZING EDUCATION MANAGEMENT TO SCHOOL LEVEL: HOW MUCH, AND HOW?

From the perspective of an Assisted school that made the journey to being a fee-levying private school.

Government Assisted, Non fee-levying Private school

- Begun by religious bodies, of which the majority were by missionaries of Christian denominations and the Catholic church. Managed and run by them.
- Large number of them taken over in 1960 by the Schools Take-over Act.
- In 1982, the State came to the assistance of the schools retained by the religious bodies, by paying the salaries of an approved cadre of teachers.

The schools are still managed and run by the same religious bodies.

How do Assisted Schools function?

- These schools have a percentage of staff salaries (perhaps 50 to 60%) paid by the state, according to an approved cadre.
- The balance staff salary bill, all operational costs, infrastructure development etc have to be raised through admission donations and fund-raisers by stakeholders. (**Similar to Government schools who too receive inadequate funding**)
- The school is managed by a Board comprising representatives from the religious body it comes under, as well as stakeholders like the PTA, the OBA/OGA and Welfare Society.

Functions of the Centre

4.1 from 'Towards a New Education act'- Final report by Dr G. B. Gunawardene and team, 2011.

The Ministry of Education performs several key functions:

- Setting national level guidelines for policy
- Macro level educational planning and performance monitoring
- Assessment of educational quality, human resource planning and development with regard to educational services
- Teacher education and development
- National level examinations and assessment and evaluation
- Production and distribution of school textbooks, supply of school uniforms
- Administration of national schools and other special schools.

Current role of a School Head

Many school heads who wish to act as first line managers experience a great deal of frustration by the limitations that some circulars create. If the school head is the educational leader of the school, then the regulations and approval procedures should support and facilitate to maintain the school head's actions to make the school more effective rather than constrain him/her.

Though a principal is expected to perform the role of a professional leader, his/her enacted role is confined to that of an administrator.

Examples from our journey

- Eradication of examinations in the Primary school.
- Introduction of new courses for post O'level students
 - Diploma course in HR, (from the Institute of Human Resource Management)
 - Aviation course (offered free by Sri Lankan Airlines)
 - AAT (technical level qualification in accounting)

How much (& what?): Curriculum

- Give a prescribed, core curriculum for 35 periods of the 40-period week.
- Include STEM education and other skills that current students will require in the future.
- Core curriculum must focus on psychosocial development and emotional growth of the student. E.g. Introduction of units that promote 'Growth Mindset', & 'Sati pasala' etc.

School level input for balance curriculum

- The curriculum can differ by grade in the school; human resource, infrastructure and other resource availability; location; local and school community interest etc.; driven by the School Head and staff.
- Eg: Swimming, needle work, metal work, electrical work, motor mechanics, chess, coding, robotics, media, web designing, fabric painting, basic law, foreign languages, appreciation of the arts (or one particular art form), motivational speaking etc

Concerns of the Centre

- The Centre must ***trust*** that any school will do its best to move forward and provide opportunities for students, particularly because schools are driven by competition & comparison.
- Despite inequalities in resources, a policy of uniformity and monitoring, which the Centre seems to prefer, **is not the best.**
- Best 'policing' is by student and parent body of the school!
- School level leadership is one of the key factors of school level learning and personality building in children.

How?

School Based Management structure.

- From 2006 there has been a School Development Society and a School Management team that has worked together towards the Program of School Improvement. (PSI)
- Ethos of the school – who gives direction?
All stakeholders must buy into those values.

Safeguards:

- Clear grievance handling procedure, not involving main actors.
- Ways to avoid politicization, and conflict of interest in stakeholders.

My Utopian state: Classify schools according to 3 criteria

- 1st category – According to the curriculum they offer (present scheme)
 - National schools, 1AB etc, but give special classification for schools that offer the Bi-lingual program and English Medium A'level Science & Commerce streams.
- 2nd category – According to academic achievements at public examinations:
 - Primary schools - their ranking in the scholarship exam.
 - Secondary schools –their ranking in the O'level and A'level examinations, according to streams.
- 3rd category- According to their capacity to raise funds

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- Those who can generate their own funding will get a higher ranking, but less funding from the State!
- Those who get a low ranking should get their full budget approved.
- The Centre can supervise closely the schools with low ranking in categories 2 & 3 for better support.
- To promote value education that should be 'caught, not taught', schools that *can* raise funds over a certain amount, should donate a percentage to less empowered schools.

Areas of concern that the Centre can address

- The temptation is always to take children from better income groups
- Safeguard: The Centre can suggest a quota at admission for children of low- income households.
- The community must feel it is 'their school'. Thus the Centre can tweak admission quotas according to the demographic of each area, and not uniformly, on the national percentages.
- Avoid inequalities in expenditure *within a school*: eg: budgets for sports and salaries of sports coaches etc.

Conclusions:

There will always be inequalities in resources amongst schools in a country like ours. But these inequalities can encourage improvements.

The Centre must have *some* control but at the same time, allow schools to have some initiative and drive, for better leadership and to provide more opportunities to students.

Empower all schools with options, and the less resourced schools ***will*** aspire to the opportunities that 'leading schools' give their students; through individual initiatives and resourcefulness they too will drive their school forward.

Eg: Bi-lingual program.