THE FORUM
For Advancing Basic Education and Literacy
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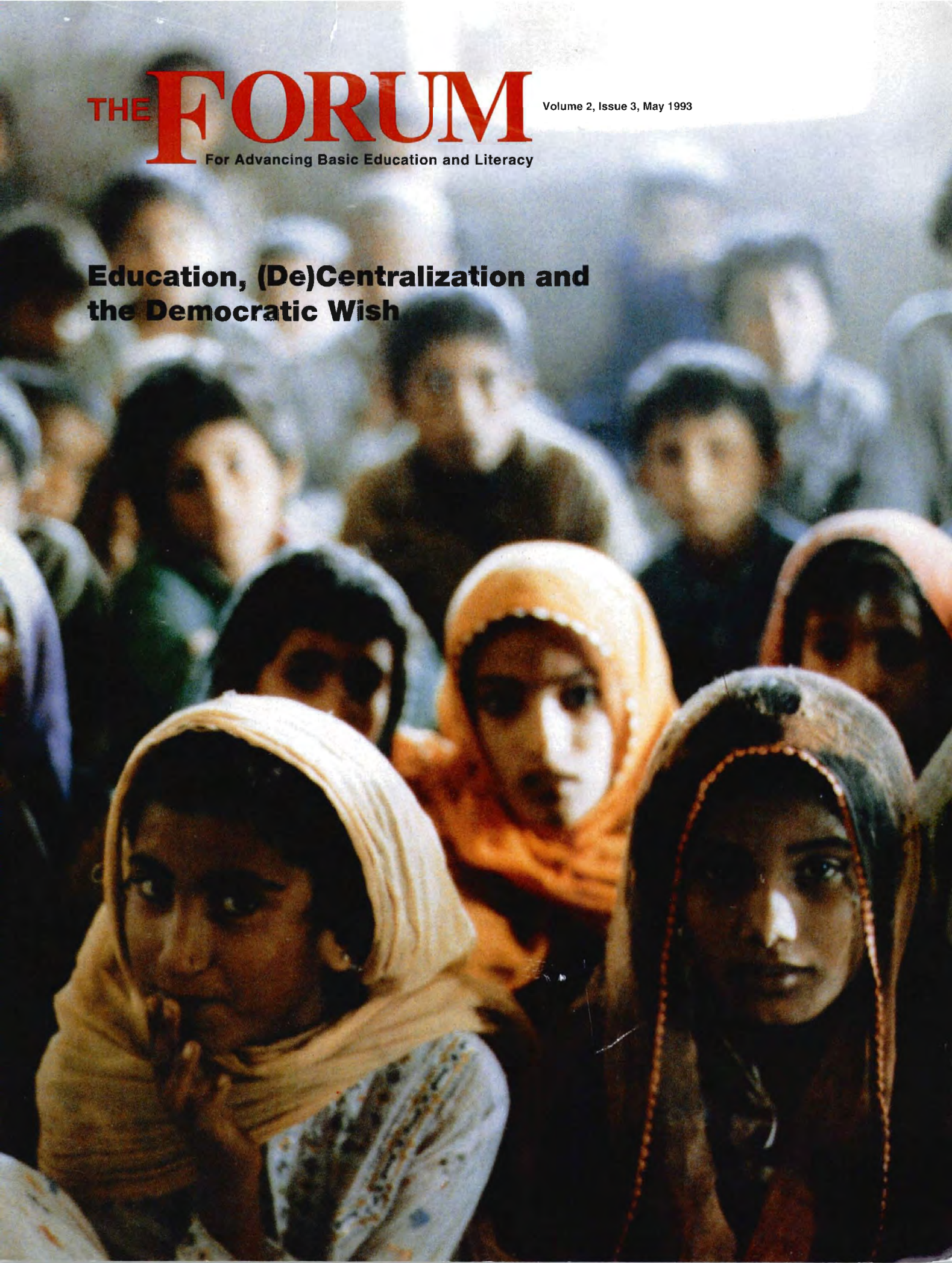
Education, (De)Centralization and the Democratic Wish



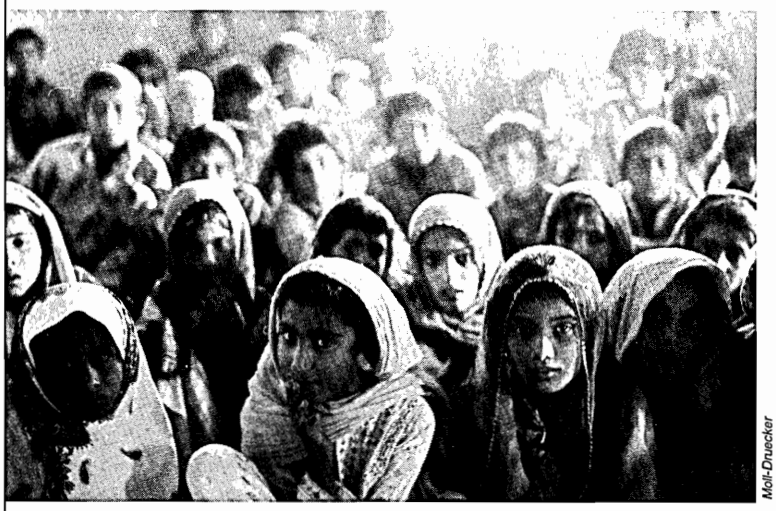
To Our Readers

"Decentralization in the educational sector has been shown to be a possible fora to improve institutional management ... however, in spite of the worldwide fad, decentralization is not an end in itself and does not automatically accomplish productivity, equity and quality improvements."

— Juan Prawda

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a scornful tone, "It means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

— Lewis Carroll



Moll-Druecker

Calls for decentralization can be seen as a wish for more accessible, participatory and accountable schools, a wish for voice. Of course the real question for any reform is whether it helps children, such as these school girls and boys in Pakistan. Our thanks to James Morone, author of **The Democratic Wish** ***(New York: Basic Books, 1990), for inspiration for the title.***

It seems more and more that radical structural reforms—generically called "decentralization"—are seen as necessary to improving education. The word decentralization, however, refers to no specific thing and has little meaning apart from concrete circumstances. As such, decentralization makes a better slogan than practical guide to administrative reform.

Yet the popular appeal of the word is instructive. It refers I believe to a widespread "democratic wish" for structures of school governance that are closer, more transparent and participatory, more accessible, accountable and effective than those in current view. Unfortunately a preoccupation with "decentralization" may prevent inquiry into the more useful question—what changes in educational decisionmaking are likely to improve education in particular historical and organizational circumstances?

This issue of The FORUM provides a range of perspectives on decentralization, centralization and school governance. The intention is not to provide answers, for governance is ultimately a matter of political process. Instead the hope is to increase the options available to policymakers by opening up the conversation and suggesting broader ways of thinking about how school systems are run.

In our first article Donald Winkler provides a concise overview of decentralization. He develops the theme that governance is improved by appropriately assigning administrative tasks to different levels of government. Ricardo Lagos, former Minister of Education of Chile, discusses the importance of the central government in ensuring equity in a decentralized system. He outlines programs undertaken by the Government of Chile to help low-achieving schools improve and to transform education from a bureaucratic to a professional undertaking. In the third article I identify ways in which the "discourse" surrounding decentralization has reduced rather than increased options visible to educational policymakers. A tentative framework is outlined for considering policy options using structural change, including decentralization or centralization, as means for educational reform.

Juan Prawda summarizes his research on decentralization of education in Chile, Argentina, Colombia and Mexico with a series of lessons for policymakers. Interestingly, he is one of the very few to ask whether decentralization has been associated with improved outcomes. Donald Warwick follows with a summary of the implementation questions that need to be asked before beginning a program of decentralization. He focuses mainly on Paraguay.

South Africa's National Education Policy Investigation contributes this issue's most self-reflective piece. It highlights practical and theoretical issues in establishing participatory governance in education. The fact that a single working group has prepared two different proposals for school governance shows the continuing debate within South Africa's democratic movement over appropriate forms of participation. The article resonates with concern that all citizens get a meaningful voice in national choices.

Associates in Rural Development summarize their research on decentralization and structural adjustment in West Africa, providing an illustration of the pitfalls of failure to implement carefully.

The next two articles raise issues of bottom-up versus top-down change. Susan Street questions the meaning of Mexico's top-down decentralization and looks with hope at the emergence of a truly democratic teachers' movement. Florida State University's Center for Policy Studies in Education explores the necessary and complementary roles of grassroots initiatives and government policy in meeting the educational needs of street and working children.

Finally, Jane Hannaway, in her research on successful decentralization in two US school districts, challenges the conventional rationale for decentralization. Decentralization can improve classroom instruction, not because of efficiency effects, but because it better engages teachers in the core tasks of schools—teaching and learning.

The articles are intended to provoke discussion and thought. I hope they do. I also hope you'll share the magazine with your colleagues and your reactions with us.

— James Williams, Editor

Contents

The Forum
for Advancing Basic Education and Literacy
Harvard Institute for International Development
One Eliot Street
Cambridge, MA 02138, USA
Tel: 617-495-9478
Fax: 617-495-0527
Telex: 275276
Cable Address: HIID
TWX No: 7103200315

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2 **An Introduction to Educational Decentralization** *by Donald Winkler*
An overview of issues in decentralization

4 **Quality and Equity in Educational Decentralization: The Case of Chile** *by Ricardo Lagos*
Avoiding the dangers of excessive decentralization and developing a professional model of school organization

5 **Reform in Educational Decisionmaking** *by James Williams*
Increasing policy options for structural reform

8 **Lessons in Educational Decentralization: A Note for Policymakers** *by Juan Prawda*
Decentralization does not automatically or necessarily increase productivity, equity or quality

9 **Recommendations for Decentralizing Education in Paraguay** *by Donald Warwick*
An implementation perspective on decentralization

10 **Toward Democratic Governance of Education in a New South Africa** *by Governance and Administration Research Group, National Education Policy Investigation*
Policy options for a democratic post-apartheid system of education

12 **Predicaments of Decentralization** *based on reports of the Decentralization, Finance and Management Project*
Has decentralization improved services for rural citizens?

13 **Educational Decentralization in Mexico: A State or Societal Project?** *by Susan Street*
Decentralization of education in Mexico has a long and rich history, yet only last year did it really begin

14 **Lessons from Street and Working Children Programs: Implications for Decentralization** *by Anthony DeWees, Hartley Hobson, Peter Easton and George Papagiannis*
Decentralization emerges from both top-down and bottom-up efforts

16 **Decentralization, Teachers and the Improvement of Classroom Instruction** *by Jane Hannaway*
Decentralization can improve education but only when it engages teachers in the core tasks of instruction

17 **What's Happening & Closing Thoughts**

A B E L
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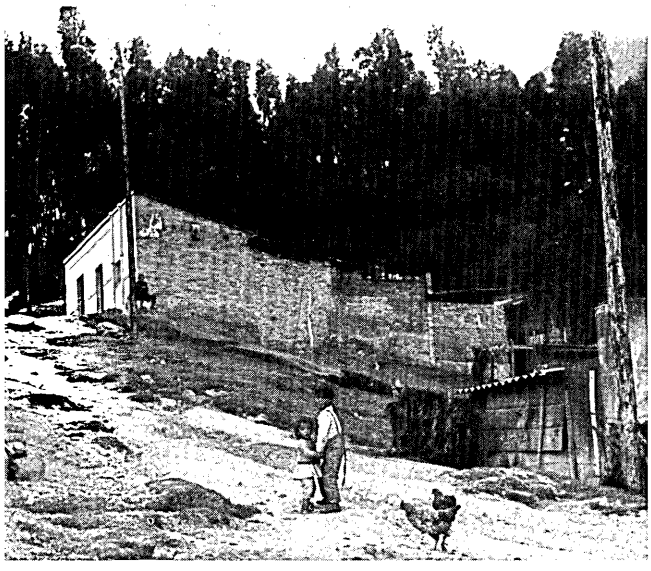
An Introduction to Educational Decentralization

by Donald Winkler

There is a worldwide trend to move decisions in education away from the central government and closer to schools. In the US local governments already have much decisionmaking power. Thus decentralization in the US means giving school teachers and administrators more decisionmaking authority. In developing countries educational decisionmaking is usually concentrated in central governments. Thus decentralization in developing countries takes one of two forms. In **deconcentration,** subnational administrative units of the education ministry are given more authority to make decisions. In **decentralization,** the responsibility for the finance and delivery of education is transferred to regional or local governments.



Ernesto Sendoya

What Kind of Decisionmaking Authority?

There are two major kinds of decisionmaking authority: authority to raise revenues and decide expenditures, and authority to allocate school budgets and organize learning processes.

Revenue assignments state which taxes each level of government can use. Sometimes the share of national taxes among different levels of government is specified. More rarely, percentages of government money are earmarked for education. One important question for decentralization is whether subnational government units are allowed to raise revenues by raising tax rates or charging user fees. If a subnational government unit is not permitted to raise funds, it has little fiscal authority.

Expenditure assignments state which services each level of government must provide. Within decentralized systems, responsibilities vary a great deal between and within levels of education. Central governments are usually responsible for providing and financing university education. Local governments often provide and partially finance primary education.

Administrative Arrangements

There are many ways to finance and provide education. And even the most decentralized systems leave major responsibilities to the center.

School Organization. School organization means minimum school requirements, the structure of primary-secondary schooling and the rights of children to education. Except in a very few federalist systems such as the US, school organization decisions are made at the center. However in almost all school systems in developing countries, schools vary a great deal in complying with such standards. This is especially true in such aspects as the number of grades offered. One major difference between decentralized and centralized school systems is which level of government makes the decisions about resource allocations that can lead to unequal opportunities. In centralized systems the ministry of education itself makes such decisions. In decentralized systems inequalities usually result from differences in the wealth/tax bases of local or regional bodies that finance education.

Curriculum and Teaching Methods. The central government usually regulates curriculum standards. Such standards usually apply to both private and public schools. Centralized decisionmaking does not necessarily imply a uniform curriculum. Several centralized countries have developed different curricula to meet the needs of different social groups. In most cases teacher education is also the responsibility of central government (or regional government in large decentralized systems).

Examinations and Supervision. Examination procedures vary more widely perhaps than other aspects of education. In some ex-British colonies (eg the West Indies), exams are set and graded in England. At the other extreme are most countries in Latin America which have no national examinations. There, criteria for passing from one level to the next are set at each school and vary a great deal. In between are countries that set and grade exams regionally.

There are two crucial questions related to supervision. First, who selects the chief administrative officer of a school or group of schools? And second, what power does that individual have over educational functions? In very centralized systems the ministry appoints school administrators. In such systems school administrators have few powers other than evaluating personnel and monitoring school operations to comply with ministry guidelines. In a decentralized system the school administrator may be elected directly by local communities or appointed by an elected mayor or council. In between, the ministry appoints administrators but gives them a lot of authority over resource use within schools. In many developing communities, transportation and human resources are so scarce that schools receive little real supervision, regardless of how administrators are chosen.

Teacher Recruitment and Compensation. Teacher accreditation standards are almost always set centrally. In many cases however such standards are ideal and cannot be met in practice. In such cases local/regional teacher labor markets set the real accreditation standards. Teacher recruitment and promotion practices vary a great deal among countries. In quite centralized systems the central government (education or civil service ministry) recruits, appoints, promotes and moves teachers. Such teachers are usually members of the civil service. In decentralized systems communities may recruit teachers. Teacher payment practices are similar to recruitment procedures. When recruitment and promotion are centralized, there is usually a national pay scale that does not vary with working conditions. When recruitment is decentralized, teach-

ers' pay varies according to local labor market conditions.

Finance of Recurrent Expenditures. In highly centralized systems the central government finances and directly provides all educational inputs with no local contributions. In decentralized systems local communities finance and directly provide inputs through local taxes or fees. In mixed systems the central government provides some inputs such as books and supervision. It also provides grants to regional/local governments and gives local communities some control over the use of funds.

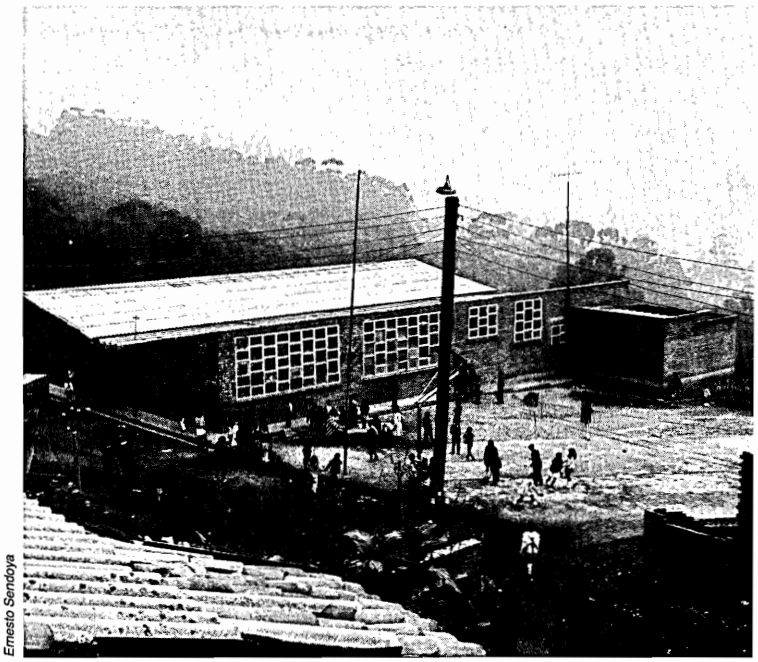
School Construction and Finance. In the centralized model the central government sets uniform school construction standards and builds all schools. In the decentralized model local communities finance and build schools. In low-income countries this means schools are built with voluntary labor, using local materials and standards. In mixed systems the central government may build schools using different regional standards. Communities that build their own schools must follow government standards to be accredited and staffed. School construction and finance are more decentralized than other parts of primary-secondary education. In many developing countries central governments offer a kind of matching grant by promising to staff schools that local communities build.

Evaluation and Audit. Usually the level of government that provides funding carries out financial control, auditing and performance evaluation. Central governments almost always provide internal control over their own use of funds. The also carry out or require external audit of the use of their funds by other levels of government. Local governments generally control only local funds.

Policy Options

Decentralization is likely to affect both efficiency and equity in education. Most educational policymakers are interested in: satisfying taxpayer/consumer preferences; maintaining basic standards of educational quantity and quality; minimizing costs; accounting to decisionmakers; and ensuring equitable educational opportunity.

Satisfying Taxpayer / Consumer Preferences is related to both voice and choice. The more voice taxpayers and parents have in deciding taxes and educational spending, the more satisfied they must be. Generally, the smaller the area making taxing/spending decisions, the larger taxpayer and parents' voice is. Sometimes however local elites dominate decisionmaking and weaken the voice and choice of less powerful groups. The more diverse citizens' taxing and spending are, the more important both voice and choice become.


Ernesto Sendoya

Regions that do not provide ***minimum quantity and quality of educational services*** are likely to experience lower productivity and economic growth than other areas. In other words there is a national economic interest in making sure that all citizens gain at least basic levels of knowledge. These standards are usually defined as minimum years of education or minimum expenditures per pupil. Decentralization may not lead to minimum educational services if central governments do not require and/or finance them.

Consumers and taxpayers prefer ***low-cost educational services.*** One common argument for decentralization is that using local inputs and technology will reduce costs. However, economies of scale in some areas such as curriculum development, development and administration of standardized tests and teacher training, argue for a central government role.

Accountability is holding public officials responsible for their actions and is necessary to decide between different financial arrangements. Accountability requires that responsibilities for financing and providing education be clearly specified; that implementation reflect public policy; that financial reporting and auditing ensure proper use of funds; that program evaluation assess school performance; and that education consumers have free and easy access to financial and performance information. Decentralization is likely to have mixed effects on accountability. Decentralization may encourage parents and voters to monitor schools more closely. But it may not give them the necessary information to do so.

Most countries seek ***equality of educational opportunity,*** but definitions vary widely. Equality is low when there are large differences in expenditures and educational attainment across regions, ethnic or socioeconomic groups. Equality is low when educational spending reflects the income of family and/or area. When schools do not have equal access to resources, decentralization is likely to increase inequality of educational opportunity unless the central government takes steps to equalize spending.

What Role for the Central Government?

Often education decentralization policies look only at transferring decisionmaking to subnational authorities. By doing so they ignore the important role of central government. Economies of scale argue that central governments should provide some services (eg curriculum design, preparation of teaching materials, teacher training, evaluation and testing). Externalities argue that central government is needed to ensure that all children should have access to minimum educational resources and services. Equity argues that central government should provide financial assistance to equalize or redress spending differences across communities. ❖

Donald Winkler is an economist in the Latin America and the Caribbean Technical Department at the World Bank. The complete version of this paper, "Decentralization in Education: An Economic Perspective," can be obtained from the Education and Social Policy Department, Human Resources Vice-Presidency, The World Bank, 1818 H Street NW, Washington DC 20433, USA.

Quality and Equity in Educational Decentralization: The Case of Chile

by Ricardo Lagos

Chile now enrolls nearly 100% of its children in primary school. Hence the education policy focus has shifted from increasing access to improving quality. The previous government put in place a broad program of decentralization. Many of the responsibilities previously carried by the central government were transferred to municipal levels and private concerns. Unfortunately, decentralization did little to help poorer school districts overcome their basic handicaps. And rural schools continue to struggle with low achievement on national tests of mathematics and Spanish.

The current government views decentralization as a double-edged sword. On the one hand a decentralized education system has the potential to improve quality. This happens through efficiencies in the use of resources and accountability and professional autonomy for schools and teachers. However if each community ends up with an education that reflects its income and power, decentralization can lead to increased inequalities.

As a result, the Government has adopted a two-pronged approach. The basic framework of decentralization which was adopted during the 1980s remains untouched. This includes an extensive role for the private sector. Decentralization has been extended by increasing the focus of schools on academics and teacher professionalism. At the same time the Government recognizes that central authorities have two critical roles to play, even in a decentralized system. The center must: 1) ensure minimum levels of quality for all schools and 2) provide disadvantaged schools with special support. Current policies give individual schools more responsibility for creating and implementing special programs. Still the federal level maintains accountability for approving new curricula and evaluating the results. Three main programs put these policies into practice.

The 900 School Program

This program focuses on the 10% of primary schools with the lowest scores on national achievement tests. The program's goal is to improve language and mathematics achievement, communications skills, creativity and self-esteem of students in grades 1 to 4. Curricula and methods of teaching and supervision have been completely revised. To supplement normal classes, specially trained youths hold remedial classes twice a week during the second semester. Each school hires and trains its own "monitors," provides them with necessary support and evaluates their progress. At first school principals resisted bringing in non-traditional teaching staff. Over time, however, the remedial classes have become one of the most successful parts of the program. In addition, the Government provides schools with special texts and other teaching materials.

Central authorities have two critical roles to play, even in a decentralized system—assuring minimun levels of quality for all schools and providing disadvantaged schools with special support.

The program began in 1990 with 969 schools. By 1991, 1278 schools were participating. After two years in the program, 270 schools improved student achievement in grade 4 of the national exams and "graduated" from the program.

Rural School Improvement Program

As in many countries, social and cultural differences between rural and urban areas make urban curricula and teaching methods inappropriate for rural children. (Twenty percent of Chile's children are considered rural.) The Rural School Improvement Program works to develop curricula and teaching methods that fit the cultural and linguistic needs of rural children. The curriculum begins with the knowledge and concerns that rural children bring to the classroom. It then links such local knowledge to the broader nation while retaining value in local environments and culture. The program includes development of textbooks, teacher guides and teaching methods that meet the needs of rural children and workshops for geography teachers.

Decentralization and Teaching: School Improvement Projects

One of the most ambitious programs has schools compete for Government funding to support academic improvement projects. This program seeks to change teaching from a bureaucratic to a professional model. Schools and teachers are encouraged to submit project proposals to the Ministry of Education for federal support. The projects must focus on increasing student achievement in reading, writing, math, science and social studies. They may use school resources such as student newspapers, theatre, radio, science labs or farms. Teachers must develop their own teaching and curriculum guides.

Between 1992 and 1996 the Ministry of Education plans to support 5,000 learning projects at a cost of about US $30 million. 4,600 grants will be reserved for primary schools at medium and high risk. 400 grants will be open for bidding at large. With these programs Chile's Ministry of Education hopes to draw on the strengths of decentralization to create more flexible curricula, teaching methods and learning environments for different groups of learners.

The Ministry wants to develop a "professional model" of school organization that responds to local needs. This contrasts with the more rigid bureaucratic model of the past. At the same time, the Ministry wants to avoid the dangers of over-decentralization. Thus, the central Ministry will intervene if necessary to reach national goals of access, efficiency and equity. ❖

Ricardo Lagos is former Minister of Education of the Republic of Chile (1990-1992).

Reform in Educational Decisionmaking

by James Williams

Decentralization, essentially, is a reform of decisionmaking and governance, an attempt to improve education by changing the structure of the education system. Table 1 summarizes more and less useful ways of thinking about such changes, which are detailed as follows:

1) **Beyond Either/Or.** Governance in education is often framed as a choice between centralization or decentralization. This abstract dichotomy is less useful than questions which direct attention to specifics, eg, Is moving authority for a particular administrative function from one level of the system to another likely to achieve a particular objective? Where can responsibility for a particular administrative function best be located to achieve certain objectives, given the goals, capacities and needs of an education system at a particular time?

Either/or is misleading in several ways. First, it suggests that centralization and decentralization have intrinsic value. In fact their relative value depends on such factors as the current structure of the education system, the logic of a particular administrative function, the capacity of the system, the objectives being pursued. **The more useful question is whether a particular administrative function is excessively (de)centralized in light of particular goals and given other possible arrangements.**

The either-or dichotomy suggests that systems can usefully be characterized as "centralized" or "decentralized." In fact most systems contain forces pushing for greater centralization balanced by others pressing for decentralization. Most education systems consist of three or more levels of authority rather than two as suggested by either-or statements. **It is more meaningful to specify the locations from and to which authority is being moved than simply to indicate a direction.** Effective reform may balance policies with a centralizing effect on some aspects of the system with policies that decentralize other parts of the system.

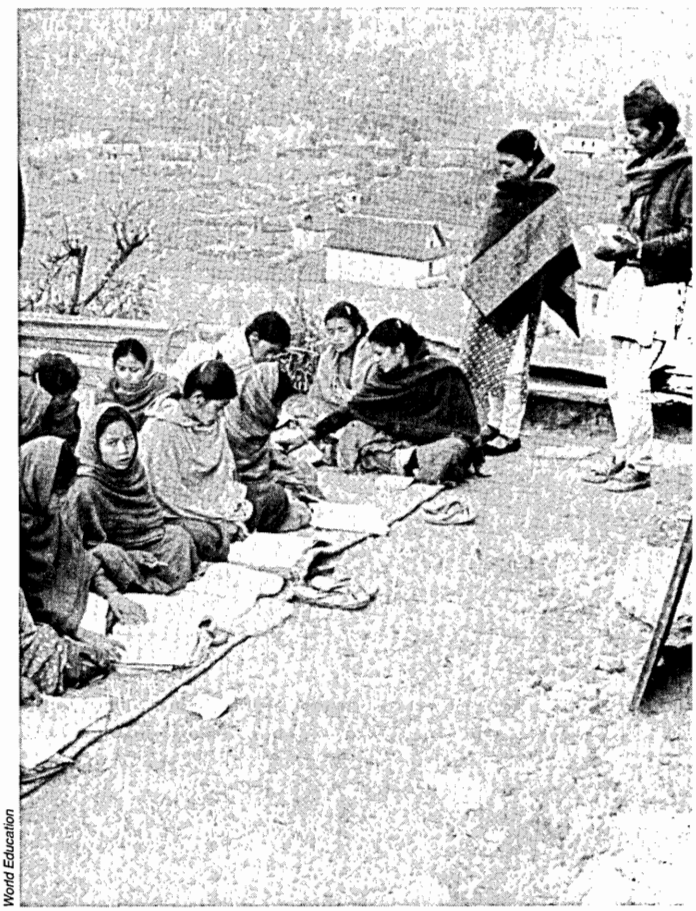
2) **Beyond Formulas.** Given the diversity of conditions, resources, capacities and values of different education systems, principles behind effective reform are more useful than context-free formulas and "one best" solutions. A given problem is likely to have a number of technically satisfactory but contradictory solutions. The desirability of a given course of action is likely to depend as much on one's values and what one stands to gain or lose as on technical virtue. Unfortunately both the search for simple, context-free solutions and the assumption that each situation requires a totally unique solution divert attention from more useful, generalizable principles.

The reform of educational governance might be compared to architectural design. Architects do not have to rediscover physics each time they design a building. They can rely on established principles of engineering. At the same time, the purpose is not to

continued on next page

Table 1. Less and More Useful Ways of Viewing Governance in Education

LESS USEFUL	MORE USEFUL
1 Beyond Either/Or	
Either decentralization or centralization	Where is responsibility for a particular administrative function best located, to achieve particular objectives and given the goals, capacities and needs of a system at a particular time?
2 Beyond Formulas	
One-best, context-free solutions; Nothing can be generalized	Principles; options; information about options
3 Beyond the Abstracted Technical	
Removing issues of politics, organization, implementation from technical analysis	Incorporating all insights; Explicit values; Establishing legitimate processes for considering the interests of all groups and for making contestable choices
4 Beyond the Purely Theoretical	
(De)centralization works in theory, so it should work in practice; (De)centralization works in other sectors, so it should work in education	Too little is known about education to assume that insights from theory and/or other sectors will apply to education; Look for actual effects
5 Beyond Good Government-Bad Government	
"Bad" government (hierarchy, regulations, bureaucracy, centralization); "Good" government	Ways that the organization of government structures relations among actors (isolating teachers, promoting bureaucratic rigidity); Ways organizations can be changed



World Education

Table 2. Toward Multiple Options for Structural Reform

POTENTIAL REASONS FOR STRUCTURAL REFORM

For Decentralization

- Ease financial burden on center
- Generate additional resources
- Reduce administrative overload at center
- Foster greater responsiveness to local needs
- Provide regional autonomy
- Permit local variation
- Foster professionalism at school level
- Move decisionmaking closer to information
- Permit communities to supplement government support
- Increase participation of "clients"
- Promote local initiative
- Reduce size and/or power of central bureaucracy
- Reduce reporting
- Reduce excessive centralization

For Centralization

- Ensure funding equity
- Ensure minimum standards across system
- Ensure coherency across system
- Ensure standardization
- Foster professionalism at national level
- Build a common national identity
- Achieve economies of scale
- Distance education from local politics
- Reduce duplication
- Compensate for weak local capacity
- Reduce excessive decentralization

For Either Centralization or Decentralization

- Redistribute power
- Improve access
- Increase accountability
- Increase efficiency
- Improve equity
- Improve quality
- Reduce corruption
- Do or change something

POTENTIAL ACTORS/DECISIONMAKERS

Government

- Constitution
- Legislative or judicial bodies
- Top government officials
- Other ministries (eg Finance)

Education Bureaucracy

- Central ministry
- Regional officials
- District officials
- Principals
- Teachers

Clients

- Parents
- Students
- Teachers
- Teachers unions

Others

- Community members
- Mass organizations
- Technical experts in education
- Technical experts outside education
- Universities
- Special government bodies
- Other citizens groups
- International organizations
- Donors
- Regulated market
- Unregulated market

POTENTIAL POLICY OPTIONS

(De)Centralization - Move Responsibilities

- Move responsibility for **implementation** (according to prescribed procedures) down/up/outside the education hierarchy
- Move responsibility for **deciding how to implement** (to achieve prescribed objectives) down/up/outside the education hierarchy
- Move responsibility for **deciding objectives** down/up/outside the education hierarchy

Modify Accountability

- Increase/Reduce accountability
- Change actors who are accountable
- Change actors to whom accountable
- Change what accountable for (inputs, procedures or outcomes)

Build Capacity

- Provide training
- Provide guidance
- Instructional support rather than inspection
- School clusters

Change Incentives

- Individual incentives (pay, promotion)
- Institutional incentives (eg school-level grants)

Regulate / Deregulate

develop a uniform design for all contexts but one that fits the unique needs of particular clients with a particular site.

One useful approach is to generate a series of possible solutions, specifying the pros and cons of each. Such a list might include the problems a particular solution does and does not address, what is involved in different choices (from technical, political, implementation and financial viewpoints), the conditions under which a particular solution is likely to work and the parties/groups it will appeal to or alienate.

3) **Beyond the Abstracted Technical.** In planning structural reforms it is more useful to consider all aspects of organizational change—politics, organizational dynamics, implementation issues—than to rely on only a technical analysis.

Politics must be considered for several reasons. In most cases, the spark behind organizational change begins with political not technical considerations. Even a technical reform is likely to acquire a political tone rather quickly, as groups rally to support and challenge new policies. Political agendas are likely to seek technical justification, particularly with as vague but widely-accepted a word as decentralization. (De)centralization efforts are likely to become identified with other political issues, to be "adopted" by groups with varying agendas and to attract strong ideologies. Successful implementation requires politics in the form of consistent high-level support from political leaders and the bureaucracy over an extended period of time. In the final analysis decisions about decentralization may boil down to choices based on values and priorities. Thus, effective structural reform may involve establishing legitimate processes for making choices that are in the end contestable and disagreeable.

Organizational and implementation perspectives are also useful. Despite the best of plans and intentions, organizational incentives—social, ideological, employment and financial—may work against reform. Education systems are quite loosely structured. Change may be more difficult to bring about than in less spread out, more easily managed organizations. Decentralization plans need to be workable—with sufficient clarity, resources, management capacity and motivation. There needs to be a willingness to shift course as necessary during the process of implementation. It is often unclear what problems will arise during implementation. That some problems will emerge however is almost certain.

4) **Beyond the Purely Theoretical.** It is more useful to question the ways in which abstract theory and strategies from other sectors may or may not fit real conditions in education than to accept such theories as is. Little is known, really, about the extent to which theories developed in other sectors work in education. Thus, for example, relatively free markets are effective at producing high-quality soft drinks of uniform quality. However, we do not really know how effectively and under what conditions markets might consistently produce education of high quality. As Hannaway discusses, the positive effects of decentralization on classroom instruction may not relate to efficiency effects as is commonly assumed (p 16). It is also important to continue to see what situations are rather than what they should theoretically be or what we would want them to be. Thus, **a failure of centralized governance does not necessarily mean that more decentralized structures will work better.**

5) **Beyond Good Government-Bad Government.** It is more useful to understand government (also hierarchy, regulations, bureaucracy) in organizational rather than normative terms. Decentralization is often promoted out of a frustration with government and its problems—rigidity, seeming endless growth, red tape. However, by viewing government as a complex but ultimately understandable organization, one is better able to make it serve intended purposes. Thus seeing government inefficiency as inherent to government is less useful than understanding and changing the incentives that lead to waste.

A useful perspective sees government as more effective at some things and less so at others. Thus for example central government is better at funding local innovations than starting them. Similarly, different levels of government are better able to carry out some tasks than others. Central governments are better able to afford curriculum design specialists than individual schools. District offices are generally better able to identify locations for new schools than regional offices.

Toward Multiple Options for Structural Reform

There are many more policy options for structural reform in education, as illustrated in Table 2, than are typically discussed.

Though one could begin with any of the three columns, for convenience the table begins with a list of possible objectives (or reasons) for undertaking structural reform. Some objectives are clearly associated with either decentralization or centralization, while others can support either. Thus for example both centralization and decentralization can be used to improve quality or increase efficiency. This variety of possible objectives is one reason for confusion about the actual purposes of (de)centralization in particular cases. The number of objectives also makes it possible to work toward one objective while espousing another.

The next column lists a number of possible actors or decisionmakers. If (de)centralization takes place entirely within the government hierarchy, actors could be referred to as "levels of the system." However when governance is considered more broadly, a number of groups become potential or practicing decisionmakers. The issue of centralization versus decentralization is thus replaced by the broader question of who should participate in running the education system. To what extent should citizens, educational experts, politically-accountable government officials or foreign donors be making educational decisions?

The third column lists policy options, only the first three of which relate directly to (de)centralization. Though not all strategies will achieve all objectives, there are clearly a number of options for structural change.

Considerations in Reforming Governance in Education

In designing appropriate governance structures, several principles, summarized in Table 3, may help clarify choices. First, it is useful to consider administrative functions separately in light of what is involved with each. **With some functions such as curriculum design, a high degree of uniformity and/or expertise is involved. Such decisions are best placed in central locations. Other highly personal or context-dependent matters such as improving school-community relations are best delegated to local actors who know the particulars of specific situations.**

As a general rule, it makes sense to locate decisions close to the source of information about variation. Thus, for example, district inspectors are more likely to know the special needs of the schools they supervise than regional officials. In that sense inspectors ought to be given the discretion to decide which schools to devote their energies to. Yet if inspectors lack the capacity to make "good" decisions, the responsibility should be moved "up" to a higher level. It is also important to consider the incentives in administrative structures. If inspectors are rewarded equally for spending time at more and less accessible schools, they are not likely to visit difficult schools very often. Of course, financial incentives may not be the only or most important factors driving educators, where compliance is less important than enthusiasm and innovation.

Education improves when administrative structures enhance the capacity of educators to do their jobs. Thus, reforms that increase collegiality and a focus on instructional tasks such as school clusters and supervision of teachers by principals are likely to improve education. At the same time, governance structures that fail to hold decisionmakers accountable for their decisions are likely to fail. Accountability is often tightened in ways that have little to do with the desired outcomes. For example, a system seeking to improve quality may require teachers to spend a prescribed period of time on each subject. The intent is to ensure coverage of the entire curriculum, but the effect may be detrimental to teachers' best professional efforts. A better approach might be to tighten control over the desired outcomes, eg pupil test scores, but loosen control over the means of achieving the outcome. Leaving the means unspecified gives to teachers the challenge of finding ways to achieve the objective. This too is a form of decentralization. ❖

Table 3. Structural Considerations in Structural Reform

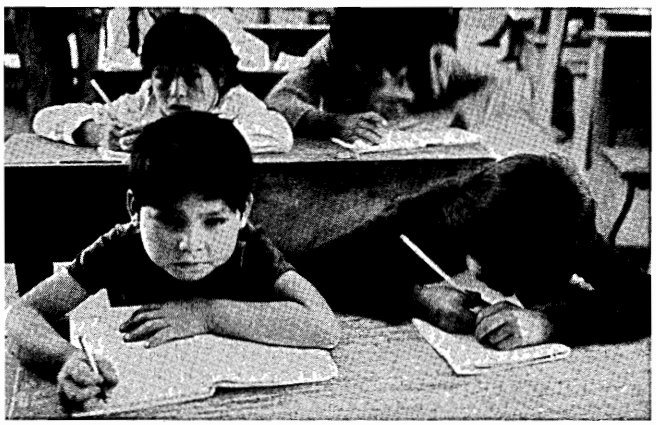
- Consider the requirements and context-dependence of each administrative function
- Locate the decision at the nearest capable level to the information
- Consider the incentives at work; Remember morale
- Design structures to enhance capacity
- Design structures to ensure accountability
- Tighten control over outcomes; loosen control over means

James Williams is Editor of The Forum *at the Harvard Institute for International Development.*

Lessons in Educational Decentralization: A Note for Policymakers

by Juan Prawda

For the past twenty years many countries have tried to decentralize education. There are various reasons: to improve the finance, efficiency and quality of education systems; to redistribute political power; and to promote political stability. This note summarizes research which asked whether such conditions actually improved during decentralization of education in four countries. Based on analysis of the experience of Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico between 1980 and 1988, the note concludes with lessons for policymakers[1].



FAO/A. Conti

Were Goals Achieved?

1) During the decentralization process did the financial burden of education shift from central governments to subnational government units and/or the private sector?

Answers vary by country and level of education. Chile and Mexico were unable to shift the financial burden of primary and secondary education from their central governments. However, Argentina did shift much of the finance of public primary schools to the provinces. In Chile the private sector took on much of the burden of financing higher education, though with public subsidies.

2) During decentralization were additional resources generated for education?

Except for Argentina, the evidence suggests the opposite. Education expenditures shrank even more rapidly than general government spending. These reductions are most likely a result of general economic decline and structural adjustment policies rather than decentralization. But it is clear that decentralization itself did not increase resources.

3) During decentralization did enrollment, repetition and dropout rates improve?

Access to education was increased during this period both in countries that decentralized education and those that did not. Net enrollment in preschool and primary education increased. Primary dropout and repetition rates declined. Primary completion rates improved. At the same time all countries spent fewer resources. These results suggest that decentralization was not an important factor in enrollment and internal efficiency, though it may have helped improve productivity.

4) Did the quality of education improve during decentralization?

Unfortunately, Chile is the only country of the four with reliable cognitive achievement data. Results for Spanish and mathematics from the 1982 and 1988 national standardized tests showed declines of 14 and 6 percent, respectively. The gap on the Spanish test between the highest scores (found in paid-private schools) and the lowest (in high-risk municipal schools) widened during this period. These results suggest that quality did not improve during decentralization.

5) Did equity improve?

Outcomes are mixed. During decentralization in Chile, differences between schools in achievement test scores increased. During decentralization in Mexico and Argentina however, regional differences in preschool and primary coverage, repetition and dropout rates and primary completion rates grew narrower.

Lessons for Policymakers

Additional information gathered during the research suggests:

- Decentralization is not an end in itself
- Decentralization does not automatically or necessarily increase productivity, equity or quality
- Successful decentralization requires:
  - Full political commitment from all levels of decisionmaking
  - Clear specification of which educational functions could be better delivered at central levels, smaller decentralized government units and/or the private sector
  - Clear definition of accountability for each participant
  - Implementation strategies and timetables
  - Clear operational manuals and procedures
  - Continuous training in skills to be performed at central and decentralized units
  - Continuous monitoring by policymakers and officials
  - Enough financial, human and physical resources to sustain the process
- Results of educational decentralization take a long time to appear. In Mexico and Chile results began to surface five years after the process began.
- Continuous changes in central and local personnel undermine decentralization (Colombia and Argentina). However, retaining experienced staff increases the likelihood of success (Mexico). Time permits officials to learn, design, test, fine tune and buy into decentralization.
- Introducing market mechanisms into education hurts low income groups who do not have the information or income to take advantage of consumer choice.

Incentives and disincentives are needed to encourage desired behavior and discourage inefficiency and mismanagement. A good incentive is "matching grants," which permit local government to raise money which is matched by central government. An effective disincentive is making local authorities legally accountable for unreasonable budget deficits. ❖

Juan Prawda is Senior Education Specialist in the Latin American and Caribbean Region of the World Bank. He can be contacted at 1818 H Street NW, Washington DC 20433, USA.

1 This note synthesizes findings published in: Prawda, Juan, 1992, "Educational Decentralization in Latin America: Lessons Learned," *A View from LATHR*, No 27. Washington DC: World Bank; and a forthcoming article in the *International Journal of Educational Development* (1993).

Recommendations for Decentralizing Education in Paraguay

by Donald Warwick

In 1992 Paraguay asked a team of consultants to suggest ways of decentralizing its public education system. Government officials strongly endorsed such a move. They claimed that the current system gave too much power to the federal government and took too little account of regional differences in history and culture. But when asked how decentralization should take place, they had little to say.

Such confusion about the practical meaning of decentralization occurs in many countries. Centralization and decentralization may not be the opposites they would appear to be. Decentralizing authority to local areas for example may strengthen central control. In Paraguay rural teachers complain that they must pick up their salary checks in the capital city and that they have no place to cash those checks. The central ministry could require its staff to distribute checks to rural teachers and ask government banks to cash the checks. Those steps might be called decentralization, but they would strengthen central power in local areas.

For decentralization to be effective, Paraguay must learn from the experience of other countries[1]. These experiences show that successful decentralization requires not only a clear sense of what must be done and who will do it but also the political support, budget, management, staff motivation and training necessary to make it happen.

To succeed, a major decentralization program must have strong, visible and continued backing from the President, the Minister of Education, those who set the national and regional budgets and other political leaders. A study of four large development programs in Indonesia found that the visible commitment of President Suharto was critical to their success[2]. Unless the President of Paraguay and other key political leaders make educational decentralization a top priority, it will not be carried out. To provide a clear sense of direction, the government must carefully define what will and will not be decentralized. It must decide which functions will be kept in the central ministry, which will be assigned to local areas and which will be shared. Experience elsewhere is clear that shifting activities to local areas creates demand not only for work there but for joint responsibilities with central authorities.

What is a reasonable division of tasks between central government and local areas? The central ministry might be responsible for national curriculum, setting teacher training and certification standards, fixing the length of the school year and publishing textbooks. With adequate staff, local areas could develop materials on regional history and culture. They could decide about opening new schools, supervise teachers and schools, distribute textbooks, and adjust the school year to local conditions such as harvests. The central ministry and local areas could share responsibility for integrating national and regional curricula, publishing textbooks incorporating those curricula, and training teachers to meet national and local standards of quality.

Before the government tries such a plan, it must ask if its initiatives can really be carried out. Joint curricula will make little sense if, as in Paraguay, it is unclear which regions need local curricula, there are no curriculum specialists working in local areas, no budget exists for regions to develop their own curricula, and no specialists are available to integrate national and regional materials.

To move from plan to field activities, the government must decide who will carry out the decentralized tasks, whether they will be motivated to do so and how they will be trained. Will those assigned new tasks work for the federal ministry or local authorities? Because Paraguay now has no local officials and will not have regional governors until elections, planning for decentralization before those elections is difficult.

It is also unclear whether officials assigned to carry out decentralized activities will have the skills and motivation to do so. In Mexico the central government prepared for decentralization by offering careful training, seconding personnel to meet local staff shortages, supervising local projects and providing other help where needed. Mexico thus showed a level of political commitment that so far is missing in Paraguay.

Any large-scale program of decentralization will spark opposition from politicians, administrators, teachers, unions, parents and others affected by the changes. Central officials may feel that they are losing power or authority. Teachers may prefer to be paid and supervised by the federal government rather than local authorities. Teachers' unions often see decentralization as an attempt to undercut their collective bargaining power. Parents may complain about lower quality education. To deal with such opposition, managers need strong political commitment from federal and local officials and a willingness to make changes in response to valid criticism.

Finally, decentralization will take time. Those affected by the shifts in responsibility will change their attitudes and behaviors very slowly if at all. This is likely to be particularly so in Paraguay, where all appointments in government schools are now made by the federal Ministry of Education and local areas have little responsibility. Many will oppose decentralization, and others will wonder if it is necessary. Even if all these conditions are met, major changes will take 10-15 years to become permanent. Hence before the government begins decentralization, it should decide whether it has the ability, will, resources and public acceptance to carry it out. If not, it might begin with smaller initiatives, such as delivering paychecks to teachers in rural communities and requiring local branches of government banks to cash them. ❖

Donald Warwick is Institute Fellow at the Harvard Institute for International Development. *This work was carried out as part of a larger project commissioned by the Advisory Commission on Educational Reform of the Government of Paraguay, with funding from USAID under Project ABEL. The complete report, "Análisis del Sistema Educativo en el Paraguay," is being published in Spanish by the Centro Paraguayo de Estudios Sociológicos, Asunción, Paraguay.*

1 See Prawda, Juan, 1992, Educational Decentralization in Latin America: Lessons Learned. Washington DC: Latin America and Caribbean Region, World Bank; Conyers, D, 1984, "Decentralization and Development: A Review of the Literature," Public Administration and Development 4: 187-97.

2 These studies were carried out from 1979 to 1984 by Development Program Implementation Studies of the Harvard Institute for International Development.

Toward Democratic Governance of Education in a New South Africa

by the Governance and Administration Research Group, National Education Policy Investigation[1]

Dispute over governance in education has characterized South African political life throughout the century. Attempts to change education in South Africa will have to give careful thought to how the system will be administered. Demands for a unitary democratic system of education have grown with the struggle against apartheid. The government has controlled most technical expertise. Thus policy statements prepared by citizens outside government have not been sufficiently developed to be considered as alternatives to government proposals. With this background the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) established the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI). An important part of NEPI's work is preparing policy options for governance of education after apartheid. The new system is to be democratic in both formulation and implementation of policy.

In doing this, it will be necessary but not enough to guarantee democratic participation. It is also important to consider the role of the state vis a vis civil society and the structure and distribution of power. School governance cannot change broader inequalities. But power imbalances can be made visible if their structures are open to public participation in their tasks, composition and procedures. Thus in South Africa a centralization-decentralization dichotomy is less meaningful than asking who will participate in making what decisions about and for whom, with what resources and under what conditions.

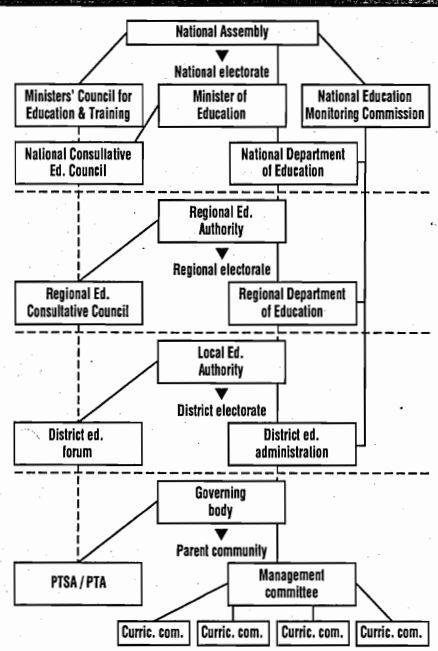
The investigation included participants' values and assumptions. There was no attempt to force consensus. Instead, two different perspectives emerged on organizing a more democratic system of school governance. The report is less a blueprint than a framework for thinking about possible new governance structures. Such a new system cannot simply be created from technical processes. However, information and expertise can play a critical role in informing what are ultimately political decisions for which decisionmakers must be politically accountable.

Governance in the Old System

South Africa has developed a very complex education system. Based on apartheid ideology, separate administrative systems were set up for each racial group. This has led to 19 separate education departments, 17 employing agencies, 14 cabinets and 12 education acts. The racial and ethnic fragmentation of the system led to both duplication and poor coordination. Though each department may seem autonomous, in fact, the South African cabinet makes all important funding decisions. Thus, unequal resource allocations have maintained inequalities of race and class. The Government, for example, spends four times the resources educating a white child as a black child.

The combination of complex administration and very centralized control has created long lines of accountability. The complexity of administration weakens challenges from below. Challenges are aimed at local officials who have little authority to respond. This further weakens the authority of local education officials and does not solve the real problems. Administration is well developed at regional and higher levels. There are few effective governance structures at the district level, however. Policy is formulated by bureaucrats with little public input. The closed, top-down, secretive style of bureaucratic policy-making has made the policy process difficult to see. Limited decentralization has not opened the policy process to teachers, parents, students and interest groups. Thus there is little political accountability to the mass of people.

Figure 1. System Perspective



Reprinted from National Education Policy Investigation, 1992, *Governance and Administration.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press / NECC.

The Two Perspectives

In searching for concrete proposals, the research group crystallized their views into two separate proposals. For convenience, they are called the "system" and "school governance" perspectives. Both perspectives grow out of the five NEPI principles of non-racism, non-sexism, unity, democracy and historical redress. Both are based on the governance values of efficiency, equity and quality.

System Perspective

Beginning with a macro, systemic view of change, the system perspective focuses on structures and processes to make the education system more democratic and accountable. A basic assumption is that any change in governance will be heavily influenced by existing structures. Systematic historical analyses of the existing system can identify opportunities and constraints on change. The system perspective assumes that change should not be imposed from the centre but negotiated among interests at each level. The following principles will guide negotiation of a new governance system:

- commitment to the core values
- widest possible participation, balanced against efficiency, coherence and national unity
- political and administrative accountability: decisions to be taken as close to the people directly affected as is possible for effective, efficient administration
- a coherent unitary national education system

- different ways of participating in policy: a wide cross-section of groups will formulate policy, while other more directly accountable groups will adopt and implement policy
- different policy rights: the rights to make decisions, to be consulted and to be informed about decisions

Education will be provided by a unitary system of four levels (national, regional, local and school). The policy process will involve four domains (policy formulation and consultation, adoption, implementation and monitoring). See Figure 1.

Policy will be formulated by consultative groups, composed of major stakeholders described in law. These groups will give political authorities access to public opinion, and allow organizations in civil society to lobby authorities. Policy will be adopted by politically-accountable authorities at each level (Minister of Education, regional authority, local authority, school governing bodies). Policy will implemented by the administration (national department of education, regional department of education, district education authority and school management committee). In addition, there will be a unique monitoring body, which will report directly to the National Assembly. This body will be responsible for monitoring equity and quality targets, gathering data for planning, giving coherence to the system and performing an advocacy function.

This structure provides clear accountability for policy and implementation. It also permits negotiated autonomy at the district level for a phased transfer of authority over certain issues. The approach requires that discretion be clearly defined at each level. Actual allocation of functions will be negotiated among interest groups.

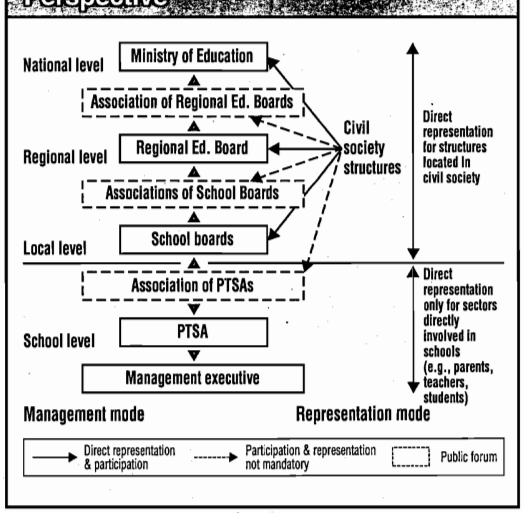
School Governance Perspective

The second position is the school governance perspective. This position begins with the need for democratic, accountable participation of parents, teachers and students in governing education at the school level. A framework of supporting institutions is then proposed for each of four levels. Unlike the system perspective, the school governance perspective does not separate policy functions. Instead, it proposes a single hierarchy with different types of participation in governance.

As shown in Figure 2, the national ministry of education will be responsible for key decisions such as national curriculum and finance. Even so a place is reserved for representing the views of interest groups from the broader communities. Regional education boards will manage education in specific areas. They will be geographically defined to cut across current artificial ethnic lines. An important regional function will be to distribute funds to school boards and to equalize resources, particularly in previously under-resourced areas.

The school board will govern education at the local level. Catchment will be defined in areas small enough for effective administration but large enough to break down current inequalities. School boards will set policy (within national guidelines), appoint teachers and redistribute physical and human resources to ensure fairer use than in the past. School boards will be made up of representatives from PTSAs (parent teacher student associations), government offices and interest groups. PTSAs will govern at the school level. Actual administration will be the responsibility of the school principal and administrative personnel, who will report to the PTSA.

Figure 2. School Governance Perspective



Finally, the school governance perspective proposes policy forums be set up between each two levels of the system. These bodies will monitor and advise but not execute policy. They will also link the different levels of governance for greater system coherence.

School governance will be separated into two modes—management and representative. The management mode, a responsibility of government, will manage schools on a day-to-day basis. The representative mode, a responsibility of parents, teachers and students, will be a formal way of challenging school management. Representatives will be accountable to the people or organizations they represent. Each governing body at each level of the system will have some members in management and others in a representative capacity. The two modes will permit school governance to be challenged from both within and outside the system.

The two perspectives differ mainly in how NEPI goals are to be realized. The system perspective puts the participation of interest groups in consultative councils. The school governance perspective allows participation at each level of the system. The system perspective sets up separate groups to formulate, manage, monitor and evaluate policy. School governance provides for different ways of participating in single policy bodies at each level of the system. The different levels of the system are linked by broader advisory groups.

Toward the New System

Whatever specific structures are adopted, realizing a more participatory and accountable system will require a great deal of capacity-building at school, local and regional levels. In addition, district education authorities and school boards must have meaningful access to resources. The new system will draw on the existing bureaucracy, and there is a need to identify key officials to be retrenched or replaced. Equally clear is the need for intensive bureaucratic training in a new culture of public management. This new culture will include affirmative action to correct current gender and racial imbalances. ❖

Additional information can be obtained from either Peter Buckland at The Urban Foundation, PO Box 1198, Johannesburg 2000, or Linda Chisholm, EPU, University of Witwatersrand, Private Bag 3, Witwatersrand 2050 Johannesburg, South Africa.

1 This article has been abstracted from Governance and Administration and The Framework Report and Final Report Summaries, both prepared by the National Education Policy Investigation/NECC and available from Oxford University Press (1992).

Predicaments of Decentralization

based on reports of the Decentralization, Finance & Management Project [1]

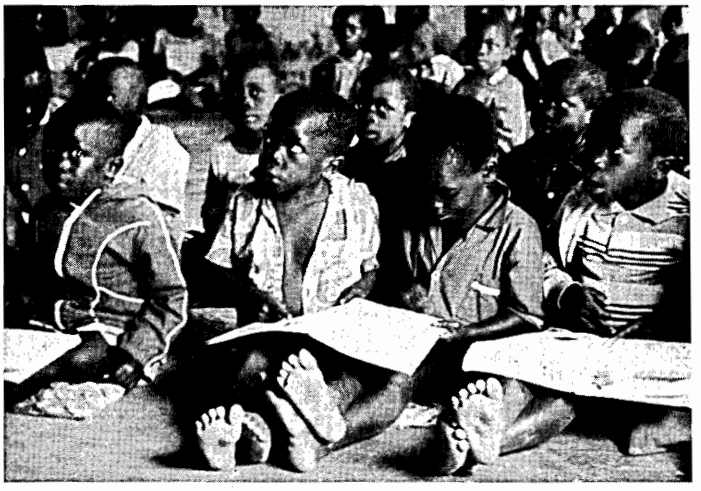
Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have taken steps to decentralize public services. The purposes are to increase the efficiency of public services, the participation of clients and the responsiveness of providers to local needs. Decentralization policies have often been introduced together with structural adjustment policies. The two are linked by concern for efficiency.

After more than a decade, it is reasonable to ask whether decentralization has achieved its stated goals. Have participation and efficiency increased? Are services now more in line with the needs and preferences of citizens, especially in rural areas? To answer these questions, the Decentralization, Finance and Management Project conducted field research in Ghana, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. All three countries have implemented policies of both decentralization and structural adjustment. The research focused on education and health as typical government services.

In all three cases, country teams concluded that decentralization failed to achieve its stated objectives. Decentralization took place largely on paper. Local governing units (LGUs) were given new responsibilities but little real authority either to raise revenue or design services to meet local needs.

The Dilemmas of a Decentralizing Center

Several factors explain these failures. The push and design of decentralization came from central government officials and international donors not local communities. Decentralization was started mostly because the central government, under structural adjustment, could no longer afford to pay for services. The three countries lack a tradition of strong local government independent of national government. The LGUs were primarily responsible for decentralization. However, their structures (staff size, facilities etc), responsibilities and funding were set by the central government not by local demand, participation or interest. LGUs were set up independently of any existing traditional community governance bodies. Because of limited tax bases in rural areas and limited authority to impose new taxes, most LGUs depended on the central government for funding. Not surprisingly their primary orientation was toward the center rather than to clients.



Victoria Baker

The LGUs were required both to support centrally-mandated local administrative structures and to provide services to local people. With limited funds, it was impossible to carry out both tasks. Burdened with regulations, responsibilities and deconcentrated ministerial units, LGUs had little ability or incentive to control expenses—personnel, administrative or overhead. The LGUs did attempt to mobilize local resources. However the funds went to support the bureaucracy, not services of local interest. In the process, the LGUs lost credibility with local residents. Tax increases did not lead to improved services.

In attempting to increase local support, LGUs lobbied central governments for grants to augment their own resources. This increased LGU dependence on central government and slowed down development of autonomous, effective local governance. Dependent on central government funding, LGUs failed to use existing local resources. They also ignored the institutional capacity built up in many communities through community development associations (CDAs). Thus, in many ways organizational incentives worked against the responsiveness of local government to the needs of local people.

Because of the difficulty of firing staff, budget cuts required by structural adjustment were taken mostly from operating budgets rather than from the bureaucracy. Without necessary materials and support, service delivery was further weakened along with the credibility of decentralized government.

In many cases LGU officials were elected by constituents. However, LGUs were too constrained by finance and regulations to deliver the promised services. The right to vote for a local official lost its meaning as that official had little power to improve local conditions. At the same time there was no feedback from recipients of services to central officials, who still held most of the real power. Thus the limited participation of rural citizens had little impact on the education services they received. Not surprisingly, people paid little attention to LGUs. Instead they devoted their energies to courting the central government.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In none of the countries did the efficiency of educational delivery improve. And the control and influence of the central government did not change. Instead, LGUs became more dependent on central funding. Administrative deconcentration occurred, but without the devolution of decisionmaking and fiscal authority. Decentralization meant greater taxation but not greater services, which actually decreased under budget constraints. At the same time, many local self-governing institutions continue to provide efficient services that governments have not provided.

Based on these observations, two general recommendations can be made. First, policies should work to increase the service provision of local governments. Second, government should support and build on the strengths and capacities of local self-governing institutions.

More specifically, national governments should further loosen control over local taxation. Local governments should be permitted to trim overhead costs by reducing staff to locally adequate levels. Alternative approaches to local governance that rely more on local institutions such as the com-

munity development associations should be encouraged. Local governments can reinforce service orientations by identifying and supporting local self-governing institutions. Central governments should allow localities greater freedom in shaping their LGU institutions. Parent Teacher Associations and other local feedback mechanisms should be established. Communities should be encouraged to improve their problem-solving capabilities and to form special service provision districts. ❖

1 The Decentralization, Finance & Management Project is funded by USAID and managed by Associates in Rural Development of Burlington, Vermont, in collaboration with Syracuse University and Indiana University.

This article is based on reports by the Decentralization, Finance & Management Project, funded by USAID. More information on the project and copies of the reports on which this article is based can be obtained from Louis Siegel, Associates in Rural Development, 110 Main Street, Burlington, VT 05402, USA.

Educational Decentralization in Mexico: A State or Societal Project?

by Susan Street

The decentralization of education in Mexico has a long and rich history, yet only last year did it really begin. For 20 years, other things have been going on under its cover[1]. Mexico's decentralization has been relatively successful in one sense. Technocrats have used it to substitute traditionally patrimonialistic administrative processes with "rational planning and budgeting" (thus guaranteeing their place in the Ministry). However, decentralization has been totally ineffective in "modernizing" daily operations of the education system.

Not unlike other countries, decentralization in Mexico has brought a recentralization of decisionmaking and a reconcentration of power in new groups. Mexico's policy can be described as a deconcentration of expenditures within government offices and a delegation of administrative functions from upper to lower levels. In no way can Mexico's decentralization be understood as devolution, at least not until the 1992 Agreement.

A unique characteristic of decentralization in Mexico is that until recently it did not pretend to offer a "democratic" ideology. Mexico's policy lacked a "social participation" component in which delegation to state and local levels would be linked with an increase in groups actively participating in educational decisions. Rather Mexican decentralization has been exclusionary. For example, at no point have teachers been included in the policy's design or implementation. Instead the teachers' union (SNTE) has been identified as the policy's number one enemy, as "resistant to change" and "an obstacle" to innovation.

Despite a weakening of the teachers' union, however, the union is still closely tied to the status quo and to politics as usual. The teachers' union and education ministry continue to exchange favors—political positions in state and national congresses, in government and in their respective bureaucracies. The competition for power between the education ministry and the teachers' union has dominated the decentralization process and effectively removed it from the daily concerns of teachers.

Some teachers feel the teachers' union has totally failed to represent their interests. Thus since 1979, a movement has arisen to democratize the union. In central and southern states teachers have organized for salary hikes, improved working conditions and union democracy in a mass movement led by the Coordinadora Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE). The dissident teachers have directly decentralized union power, redesigning union practices to reflect teachers' decisions about professional interests, union rules and regulations and school organization.

Union leaders have held to the traditional notion of "teachers' work" as movement along a rank system (el escalafón). And Ministry technocrats have dreamed of a merit pay system. Yet teachers in Chiapas and Oaxaca states have developed their own union criteria for promotion and distribution of workers' benefits. By transforming relations between union representatives and those they represent, they have created a new ideology of "teachers' rights." As a result teachers have expanded their roles beyond classroom instruction to decisionmaking in areas previously controlled by government and union.

Among other impacts, this bottom-up force for change has modified the field upon which major battles of educational decentralization are fought. The usual infighting over control of the budget between the Ministry and the teachers' union has shifted. Now there is a more public critique of the relationship between the state as patron and teachers as workers. The teachers' movement has been based on principles of direct social democracy within a new "political ethics" proposed by the dissident teachers.

Though not the dominant tendency, this change from below has opened education to the possibility of a different type of decentralization. This new kind of decentralization directly affects school practices (although not necessarily educational processes). Decentralization need not be limited to the self-reform of a state bureaucracy. It can become a legitimate demand of civil society accustomed to authoritarian political rule. Decentralization can be understood as local autonomous social movements rooted in schools and communities. The democratic teachers have contributed this idea of decentralization by creating new democratic union practices and defining participation as a right for defending collective interests.

However these possibilities are only recently being explored and are far from being established. The trend seems to be for top-down processes to predominate. One thing is certain; it is easier to modernize politics than to democratize education. ❖

Susan Street is researcher at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) in Mexico City.

1 In May 1992 the government, national teachers' union and state governors signed an agreement transferring administration of schools to state governments. Previous decentralization decrees had remained ineffective, involving simply the expansion of federal offices and faculties into state jurisdictions. Now state governments are creating institutions to handle their new tasks.

Lessons from Street and Working Children Programs: Implications for Decentralization

by Anthony DeWees, Hartley Hobson, Peter Easton and George Papagiannis

We define street and working children broadly to include all children living or working in situations bad for their growth and well-being. There are over 100 million such children throughout the world. Communities in many countries have set up innovative programs to respond to the abuse, exploitation and neglect facing street and working children. Programs usually provide a mix of services—counseling, health care, self-awareness, education, job training and group organization. Programs are usually run by nascent voluntary groups and are able to serve only a small segment of the growing population. In many cases governments have given little support or have actively opposed such organizations. Yet as street and working children have become more visible, governments have been challenged to give local organizations more authority and resources.

UNICEF / Claudio Edunger

Brazilian street children often band together in gangs for mutual support and as a substitute for the family and to survive.

Decentralization as an Iterative Process: Programs for Street and Working Children

Such a dynamic represents what might be called an "iterative process of decentralization" between local communities and government. Governments need grassroots programs to provide context-sensitive services that meet local needs. Such programs must rely on government policies and resources for expansion, legitimization and legal protection of children's rights. The evolution of programs for street and working children suggests factors crucial in this process.

How do programs emerge?

Most programs start with a focus on a particular community problem, usually something very apparent. A Belgian priest began Kenya's Undugu Society to respond to the growing numbers of "parking boys" who lived dangerously on Nairobi's streets. The Passage House in Recife Brazil began as a response to the emotional and physical health needs of street girls exploited through prostitution. Program organizers spend a lot of time in the beginning "hanging out," talking to children in their natural environs, learning about their problems and involving them in imagining solutions. Developing a sensitive and complex understanding of children's situations is essential to responding effectively to their problems.

Program leaders further their understanding by networking with others—churches, social workers, doctors or attorneys. These groups help each other learn where the needs are and what gaps can be filled. Often a charismatic leader plays an important role in mobilizing groups around the central problem. Such a leader may be critical in raising funds. Volunteers make up the majority of staff in most organizations for the first several months or years.

The Politics of Implementation

Many street and working children programs advocate politically for full human rights for marginalized children. Organizers often promote a different view of the child in society—encouraging children to take on the responsibilities of citizenship as part of protecting their rights. For example, at Colombia's Bosconia-LaFlorida children and youth are treated as citizen-participants. Former street children govern the home in which they live, elect a mayor and solve problems by group consensus.

Many programs propose alternative views of education and social assistance. They view the child and "family" (whether a mother, father or peer group) as responsible for the child's learning and development. The Philippines Reach Up program organizes residents of slum communities to determine priorities for local government. Though the extent varies, most programs comment audibly on the lack of meaningful governmental involvement in these children's problems. (In Brazil, street children have organized to take their concerns to the national legislature.) If not directly, then by example, programs advocate alternative ways of helping street and working children.

The Evolution of a Comprehensive Approach

As programs gain more experience and knowledge of their communities, they modify services and strategies. At first programs may provide only curative services—medical checkups or temporary shelter to those most visible on the streets. Such programs may become involved in prevention—protecting children's health and safety in the workplace, providing education and training, reaching out to less visible domestic workers and rural children. Families, peer groups and communities may also get involved in programs through income-generation, community development or sanitation projects. Programs promote the child as a member of a family and community. They may encourage children to become active and critical citizens who speak out and participate in local government.

The Limits of Bottom Up Efforts

Despite their best efforts, voluntary grassroots organizations ultimately run into limitations. For instance, children may continue to be exploited in the workplace, due to the lack of regulatory muscle in child labor legislation. Schools operating on elitist philosophies may continue to push out poor children— charging high fees, meeting on schedules that do not permit poor children to work and teaching irrelevant curricula.

Programs may lack the resources to meet some needs such as intensive psychological counseling for children of extreme abuse. Volunteers may no longer suffice when children require trained and experienced staff to provide legal advice, medical treatment or long term, focused advocacy. Without a coordinating body, programs tend to duplicate or leave gaps in services.

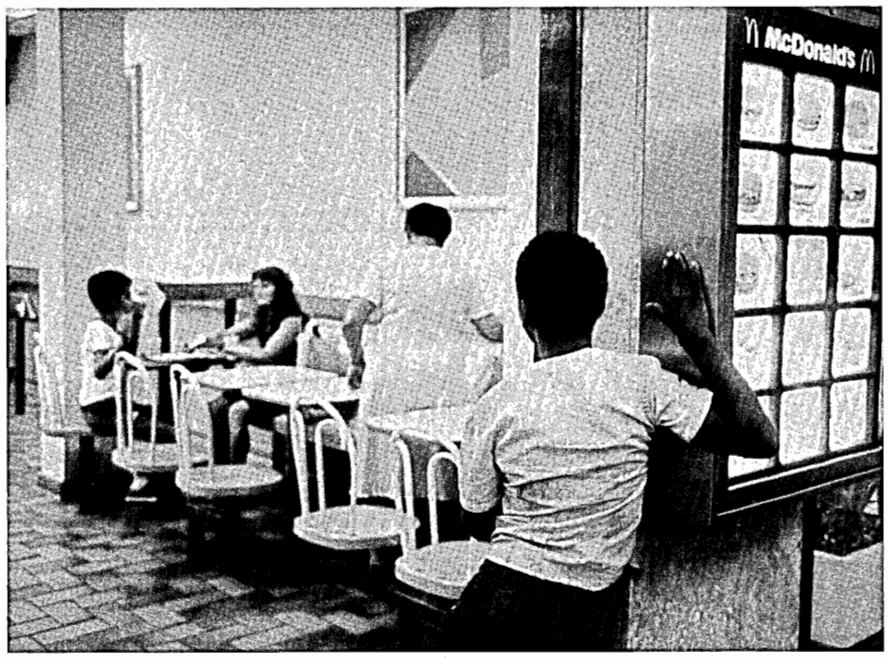
A National Environment that Supports Local Initiative: Brazil

Brazil is an example of iterative decentralization. Largely because of grassroots movements, the government was pushed to develop an appropriate policy environment to weave local community efforts into a comprehensive system.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s a large number of innovative programs for street and working children grew up in Brazil. Programs attended to diverse groups of disadvantaged children, including street children, narcotics runners and child prostitutes. These programs developed a wide array of context-specific strategies for advocacy, education, training and health. Despite these efforts, Brazil's children were badly underserved. Many government programs contributed to denying children their basic rights and dignity.

Gradually, however, popular sentiment and the restoration of democratic government helped the government reconsider its role vis a vis street and working children. The 1988 constitution, particularly the "absolute priority" its language gives to the rights of children, established a new framework for considering children's needs. Both the content of programs and the policy formulation-implementation process were restructured. The Child and Adolescent Statute of 1990 codifies the constitutional guarantees for children in what has been called the world's most progressive children's legislation.

Most of the authority for children's programs is devolved from federal to state and municipal levels. The municipality is accountable for serving the needs of children. Specific procedures permit individuals and community groups to legally redress the failure of municipalities to meet their obligations. The Municipal Child Rights Council is the central coordinating authority for children's policies. It is composed of representatives from municipal government and children's advocacy and service groups. The Council coordinates the election of Tutelage Councils that represent given geographical areas of the municipality. Together the Municipal Child Rights Council and Tutelage Councils integrate community-specific services into a comprehensive system. They expand system capacity by providing resources to community groups or directly incorporating new practices into the municipality's programs.



UNICEF / Claudio Edunger

A child waits for scraps of food at McDonald's restaurant in Sao Paulo.

Grassroots programs are needed to provide context-specific services that respond to local needs, while local programs must rely on government policies and resources for expansion, legitimization and legal protection of children's rights.

This change in the decisionmaking process has meant that NGOs and other groups working with street and working children have seen their role shift. Rather than providing direct services as an alternative to the state system, they now monitor municipal efforts and mobilize citizens to ensure that municipal resources and policies are implemented according to law.

Conclusions

Brazil's street and working children program shows what can be achieved when provision of services is seen as a two-way system of government and local service providers. Local programs are generally best for reaching marginalized children. To function properly in the face of complex social problems, however, demands a policy climate that supports development of local institutions. ❖

The Center for Policy Studies in Education at Florida State University is conducting a UNICEF study of lessons learned from educational programs for street and working children in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Comments and communications are welcome. Please contact the authors, Center for Policy Studies in Education, 306 STB, Florida State University, Tallahassee FL 32306, USA.

Decentralization, Teachers and the Improvement of Classroom Instruction

by Jane Hannaway

Conventional wisdom says that dramatic changes in the organization of education are necessary to improve American schools. Structural change, especially extensive decentralization, is commonly suggested as a way to achieve such improvements.

I conducted research in two well-regarded decentralized school districts in the Western US. The research supports the idea that decentralization can have marked effects, positive or negative, on how education is carried out. However the effects differ from those predicted by the standard paradigm. The arguments for decentralization in other types of organizations do not apply to schools. Decentralization holds promise for improving education, but only to the extent that it affects classroom teaching and learning, in particular the engagement of teachers in instruction.

Arguments for decentralization are generally based on a logic of information: actors with the best information about a particular process should have discretion to make decisions about that process. Following this logic, large organizations and those with non-routine technologies tend to decentralize decisionmaking authority. In large systems top-level managers simply cannot process the volume of information necessary to make all decisions. By necessity, decisions are delegated to lower levels. Similarly, decisions involving complex or technologically-dynamic operations are better made by those close to the information. A central problem in organizational design is developing ways of ensuring that those lower in the hierarchy will act as those higher in the hierarchy wish. This is known as the principal-agent problem and is especially important in decentralized systems.

The standard arguments for decentralization make intuitive sense in education. Teaching is a complex and dynamic process. Teachers understand the process of classroom instruction and the particular needs of their students better than central authorities. Thus, decisions about classroom practice should be located in the classroom or school. Bureaucratic regulations and excessive centralization may prevent teachers and school staff from using their professional expertise most effectively. Thus, supporters of decentralization expect that school-level actors, freed from state and district regulations, will focus their efforts in ways that will lead to greater student achievement.

However such arguments are built on two faulty assumptions. First, they assume the core tasks of educational organizations (teaching and learning) are tightly managed by central authorities. Second, they assume that teachers have a well-developed understanding of the teaching-learning process. A large body of evidence suggests this is not the case. Our understanding of teaching technology is limited. And school systems are already quite autonomous. Teachers work in separate classrooms. Schools operate fairly independently of school districts. School districts function with considerable independence of state and federal governments, at least in terms of day-to-day teaching and learning. Thus if school-level decentralization has positive effects on classroom teaching and learning, something else must be going on.

To find out what was different about education, I undertook research in two decentralized school districts known for their excellence. I found that decentralization in these districts differed in at least four ways from the assumptions in the literature:

1) **Goal definition.** The decentralization literature assumes that teachers have well-defined goals, even if they differ from those of system managers. However my research found that teachers work with a only vague sense of what they are trying to accomplish. *A key factor in successful decentralization was some mechanism for helping teachers define their objectives more concretely.*

2) **Local Knowledge.** The decentralization literature assumes that teachers know more about the production process than those higher in the hierarchy. Decentralization frees teachers to act on their knowledge. In contrast, I found that *successful decentralization promoted teachers' learning of new and better ways of teaching.*

3) **Agency problems.** The literature argues that decentralization increases agency problems, the difficulty organizations have in coordinating the actions of agents (teachers) with the wishes of managers (principals, district officials, the public). My findings suggest the contrary notion that decentralization in education reduces agency problems. *In decentralized districts where teachers were involved in decisions about their work, their professional lives were more rather than less observable and more open to influence by others.*

4) **Controls and Incentives.** The standard paradigm assumes monetary incentives and bureaucratic rules are primary influences on teacher behavior. I found that *social and cognitive factors played a greater role in teacher behavior.*

Teachers in public schools are not overly regulated; they are ignored. Central regulation turns the attention of critical actors, particularly school and district administrators, away from teaching and learning. So teachers in traditionally-organized schools are likely to work in isolation. Teachers' efforts are loosely directed, their learning is limited. Their good work is not appreciated, their bad work not corrected.

The daily lives of teachers and principals in the decentralized systems I studied were quite different. The most significant common element was the way decentralization generated interactions among school staff around curriculum and staff development. In one district the district-wide curriculum defined the classroom focus of teachers. The district staff development effort (and related professional exchanges) helped teachers learn to implement the curriculum. In the other district an education reform group helped teachers work collaboratively to frame their work more concretely and share knowledge of teaching.

Structural reforms that direct teachers' attention to their central tasks, that help them interact professionally around defined common objectives, and that give them a sense of mission are nearly certain to result in more effective schools than traditional structures of professional isolation. ❖

This article is excerpted from "Decentralization in Two School Districts: Challenging the Standard Paradigm," in Jane Hannaway and Martin Carnoy, eds, 1993, ***Decentralization and School Improvement: Can We Fulfill the Promise?*** *San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Dr. Hannaway is Professor of Education at Stanford University (CERAS, Stanford University, Stanford CA 94305, USA). Her current research interests center on structural reforms in education.*

What's Happening

June 27 - July 2, 1993

World Association for Educational Research, 11th International Congress

"The Role and Place of the Humanities in Education for the World of the 21st Century"
Jerusalem, Israel

Contact: Professor Yaacov Iram
Congress President
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June 30 - July 31, 1993

Educational Policy and Planning Workshop

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Harvard Institute for International Development
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Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA
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July 4 - 8, 1993

4th Conference of the International Association of Cognitive Education

Ramat Gan, Israel

Contact: Professor David Tzuriel
School of Education
Bar Ilan University
Ramat Gan 52900, Israel

July 5 - 9, 1993

International Association of Special Education, Third Biennial Conference

"Global Perspectives and Local Solutions in Special Education—A Vision for the Future"
Vienna, Austria

Contact: Congress Secretariat
1993 IASE Conference
c/o INTERCONVENTION
Austria Center Vienna
A-1450 Vienna, Austria
Tel: 43 1 23 69 26 41
Fax: 43 1 23 69 648

September 20 - 23, 1993

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September 24 - 28, 1993

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"The Changing Role of the State in Educational Development"
Oxford, England

Contact: W I Ozanne
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HIID, One Eliot Street
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Tel: 617-495-9478
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Additional Reading. In addition to the references given, interested readers may wish to consult:

Lauglo, Jon and McLean, Martin, *The Control of Education: International Perspectives on the Centralization-Decentralization Debate.* Studies in Education (New Series) 17 London, England: Heinemann Educational Books.

McGinn, Noel and other authors in "Reforming Educational Governance: Centralization-Decentralization," in Robert F. Arnove, Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly, eds, 1992. *Emergent Issues in Education: Comparative Perspectives.* Albany, NY, USA: State University of New York Press.

Rondinelli, Dennis, 1990. *Planning Education Reforms in Developing Countries: The Contingency Approach.* Durham, North Carolina, US: Duke University Press.

Weiler, Hans, in Hannaway and Carnoy, 1993 (see page 16).

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Closing Thoughts

Nondemocratic governments will not use decentralization to broaden democratic participation (no matter what their rhetoric), and whatever benefits result from increased efficiency will be distributed inequitably in an inequitable society.

— *Noel McGinn & Susan Street*
Comparative Education Review
30 (4) 1986

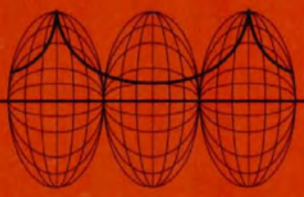
Research on centralization and decentralization in American education is characterized by the virtually complete disconnection between structural reform and anything having to do with classroom instruction or the learning of students.

— *Richard Elmore*
in "Beyond Efficiency and Accountability: Centralization, Decentralization, and School Improvement in Educational Policy"
forthcoming (1993) Jossey-Bass

Increasingly, we find that the nation-state has become too small for the big problems of life and too big for the small problems. It's too small for the big problems because it can't manage the large capital flows, currency flows, demographic flows, that are taking place around the world, and too big for the small problems of life because it's not responsive to the variety and diversity of local needs.

— *Daniel Bell*
Interview, *Harvard Gazette,*
October 28, 1992

Stephen Toumas



THE FORUM

For Advancing Basic Education and Literacy

The Harvard Institute
for International Development
One Eliot Street
Cambridge, MA 01238 USA

Tel: 617-495-9478
Fax: 617-495-0527
Telex: 275276
Cable Address: HIID
TWX No: 7103200315

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