ABSTRACT

Recent decades have witnessed an increasing number of attempts in various parts of the world to restructure and deregulate government schooling. Central to these initiatives are moves to dismantle centralised educational bureaucracies and to create in their place, devolved systems of education entailing significant degrees of institutional autonomy and a variety of forms of school-based management and administration.

The subject of the research project reported in this thesis is restructuring in the Western Australian government school system since the publication in 1987, of a document entitled, *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement* by the former Ministry of Education of Western Australia. The aim of the study was to develop an understanding of how school administration teams in selected government rural schools in the State of Western Australia, were managing their work within the context of the 'policy ensemble' promulgating restructuring since 1987.

In seeking to analyse how school administration teams have managed their work in the context of restructuring, the study called for the adoption of qualitative research methods using the interpretivist approach anchored in the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Grounded theory methods of data gathering and analysis were utilised in this multiple case study approach through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with members of the school administration teams in the four case study schools. Each of the case study schools presents a different set of circumstances that impact on the way they are managed. For the purpose of this study, school administration teams were viewed as being comprised of principals and deputy principals. The research

findings are presented, first, as a set of four separate case studies that include a set of emergent theoretical propositions. The total of nineteen propositions arising from the four separate case studies are then examined and compared in a cross-case analysis.

Ten propositions are categorised by theme. They form three clusters, or groups, of propositions common to some of the schools. The focus of the first cluster is communication and meeting arrangements in two of the case study schools. The second cluster centres on team cohesiveness and decision-making processes. The third cluster comprises the largest group of common propositions and is related to the influence of School Councils. The remaining nine propositions form a fourth cluster focusing on different aspects unique to each school, a finding that reflects the differing contexts in which school administration teams operate.

By investigating the impact of the restructuring policy on school management in these settings, the study should assist in an understanding of how school administration teams operate in a restructured system and serve as a framework by which to examine other contexts. It is recognised that the research findings, based as they are on four separate case studies, do not have generalisability to other settings, but sufficient detail of the research context, data collection and analysis is laid out so that the reader may make his/her own judgements about transferability to other settings.

The research findings have implications for theory development in the area of school management. In particular they have implications relating to the formation of school administration teams in response to the need for shared

decision-making as part of educational restructuring. These in turn, have implications for professional development. Implications of the findings for further research are also discussed. Finally, the implications for future practice are presented.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person without due reference being made in the text.

William John Mortimer

March 2003

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Studying as I did in a location so distant from the university campus, meant that I was reliant on the reference services of The University of Western Australia Library. I very much appreciated the excellent support of the Education, Fine Arts and Architecture Library. The Education, Fine Arts and Architecture Librarian, Ms Kerry Bedford, was most particularly helpful over the years and I

thank her for her assistance and professional expertise. Mr Tim Malkin of the Central Library of the Department of Education, tracked down obscure historical details and provided further assistance. The Graduate School of Education 'office ladies', Mrs Robyn Wilson and Mrs Carol Thomason, have cheerfully provided assistance with administrivia during the past six years.

I also express my appreciation for the interest shown by friends and colleagues in the progress of my research because they also gave me the will to complete the task.

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