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THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF SCHOOL AUTONOMY AS A MEANS OF  
CONTROLLING SIGNIFICANT AREAS OF GOVERNANCE IN A.C.T.  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS, AS SEEN BY THE THREE MAJOR  
ADMINISTRATIVE COMPONENTS AT THE COMPLETION OF THE  
INAUGURAL YEAR OF THE NEW EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

by

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A FIELD STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the study was to ascertain the perceived attitude of system administrators, school board lay members and teachers in promotion positions to the degree of school autonomy to be developed as a means for controlling significant areas of governance in A.C.T. secondary schools. Sub-problems related to the main problem were:

1. What are the perceptions of the system administrators, school board lay members, and teachers in promotion positions regarding -

- (a) the preferred distribution of control to be exercised by each group?
- (b) the perceived attitude of each group of the two other groups perceptions of the preferred distribution of control?

2. What are the areas of governance in A.C.T. secondary schools, where opinions of the three groups indicate conditions of latent, perceived, and felt-manifest conflict existing between any two of the groups involved?

3. What areas of governance have the highest level of perceived concern as indicated for all respondents and each group separately?

4. Is there any relationship between the degree of perceived professional orientation of promotional teachers and,

- (a) the amount of school teaching staff control desired,
- (b) the level of concern,
- (d) the number of conflicts perceived?

Data were collected with a two-part questionnaire. The first part was designed to study policy formulation and was administered to 237 potential respondents. The second part was modified from Corwin's (1970:370) professional orientation instrument and was administered to 175 potential respondents.

Control graphs were used to present the distribution of control that was preferred by each group, for each of the twenty-four areas of governance. Balance of control graphs were used to present the relative location on the total control spectrum of firstly the three groups of desired distribution of control and secondly how each group perceived variations in the distribution of control between the three groups.

Criteria was established to enable an analysis of conflict conditions in terms of latent, perceived and false-manifest conflict. The degree of concern, over disagreement in each area of governance, was ascertained by using a five point "Likert" scale.

An analysis of the data indicated that all groups desired a shift in the balance of control from the previous administrative dominance-primacy position. However, there was a significant difference between the three groups perception of where the new balance should be established. In particular, teachers in promotion positions were loath to concede very much control to the newly established school boards.

The apparent extent and nature of the conflict varied among the groups. In terms of latent conflict, five cases were identified relating to teachers, four cases were identified relating to system administrators, and three

cases were identified relating to school boards. In terms of perceived conflict, three cases were identified relating to teachers, two cases were identified relating to school boards, and no perceived conflicts were identified in the case of system administrators. In terms of felt conflict, thirteen cases were identified relating to school boards, nine cases were identified relating to system administrators, and seven cases were identified relating to teachers. In the terms of possible felt-manifest conflict, eight cases were identified relating to school boards, six cases were identified relating to system administrators and four cases were identified relating to teachers. The areas of governance concerned with staffing were prominent in many of the conflict situations identified.

The areas of governance indicating the highest level of concern were directly related to the areas identified as having possible felt-manifest conflict. The principle area of concern was the appointment of promotion teachers to individual schools.

The study did show a high correlation between a high level of professional orientation and a desire for increased school teaching staff dominance-primacy. This indicated some consultations were acceptable by professional orientated teachers although ultimate policy formulation should stay with the school teaching staff. The significance of this finding, while lending some support to the open professional model developed as an ideal in the study, seemed to be counteracted by the limited role perceived for school boards by teachers involved in the study. This result tended to imply that the shift in the balance of

control as far as teachers were concerned, should be towards a closed professional model rather than towards an open professional model argued for as the ideal model for teacher professional development.

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