Towards an Understanding of Administrator Dominance

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In the highly centralised, state system of public schooling in Australia there has traditionally been little opportunity for members of the community to participate in educational decision making at the state, regional or school level. Educational governance has been the responsibility of professional educators having no direct accountability to the public.

In the state of Victoria, it has only been in the last decade that opportunities for community participation have been provided, beginning at the school level in 1975, with the passing of the Education (School Councils) Act and culminating in 1982 with the creation of the first State Board of Education.

The Education (Schools Councils) Act, reflecting the government policy of decentralisation and devolution, constituted the first official attempt to achieve, through structural change, a redistribution of power between the professional educators and members of the public. Whilst the principal remained ultimately responsible for the determination of the school's educational policy, members of the school community as represented on councils were, for the first time, given statutory authority to advise the principal on the development of that policy. Whereas prior to 1975 the principal could largely determine the extent to which the school interacted with its community, after the passing of the Act, it became the council's responsibility to ensure effective interaction, initially through the wider use of the school's facilities in the community's recreational, cultural and continuing education activities. In matters of finance, the new legislation, together with concomitant changes in the State Education Department's accountancy procedures, made principals accountable to the members of council for the spending of a wide range of funds.

The passing of the Act, however, found many principals opposed to the reforms, and many school councillors unprepared for their wider responsibilities. The threat of more open structures and increased accountability, the suspicion that council members might use control over finance to become involved in the day to day running of the school, the fear of ideological influences and the loss of their not inconsiderable autonomy, caused disquiet among many principals (Fitzgerald and Pettit, 1978). Initially, despite the changes in structure and function introduced by the 1975 Act, some principals at least, through their control of the council agenda, their linguistic skill in persuading and influencing councillors, and their monopoly of information about the day to day operation and internal administration of the school, were able to ensure their dominance in relationships with council members (Gronn, 1979).

In 1981, a White Paper on Restructuring the Victorian Education Department formally recognised some of the problems which had been encountered in the

implementation of the original legislation and made recommendations designed to allay the fears of parent organisations, which had argued that vested interests were acting to restrict members of the community from exercising the powers conferred on them by the 1975 Act (*School Bell,* June 1981, p.1). A change in government in April 1982, temporarily halted the implementation of most White Paper recommendations, although in an amendment to the Teaching Service Act, prior to the elections, the discretionary power of principals to act upon school councils' *advice* on educational policy was withdrawn, and instead, principals were directed to *consult and reach agreement* with school councils on policy development and implementation (Amendment to the Teaching Service Act 1981).

On coming to power, the new Labour government conducted a Ministerial Review of the Restructuring of Victorian Education. This review laid the foundation for a massive shift in power unparalleled in Australian public education. School councils will, in future, determine the nature and direction of the curriculum, they will be responsible for policies and planning and they will participate in the process of selecting principals. The division of labour and function between principals and members of school councils and the balance of power underlying this division, will be inexorably altered.

Research

In Australia, no large scale research has been conducted into relationships between educational administrators and members of school councils. In North America, however, where members of the community have traditionally participated in school decision making, the relationship between educational administrators and members of school boards have been the subject of considerable investigation. The difficulties of reconciling the seemingly inherent tension between representation and administration/democracy and efficiency (Lowi, 1962; Cooper, 1973) has been acknowledged as a major factor contributing to the relationship's problematic nature.

Yet, despite the established tradition of community participation in North America, much of the research into administrator-board relationships has highlighted the dominance of the administrator, the importance of his/her technical authority and the tendency of the lay community to defer to his/her expertise (Kerr, 1964; Zeigler and Jennings, 1974). Educational administrators had emerged as powerful educational experts (Vidich and Bensman, 1958) exercising influence through their ability to control the dissemination of information about school and wider educational matters (Masotti, 1968). Board members tended to engage in role avoidance (Lipham, Gregg and Rossmiller, 1969; Peak, 1971). Many boards had ceased to govern, instead they had become "rubber stamps" merely legitimating the recommendations of the administrator (Zeigler and Jennings, 1974). Thus as laymen turned to the professional educators for information and expertise, knowledge became transformed into a political resource. The major norm for decision making had become the professional values and expertise of the administrative staff (Zeigler and Tucker, 1980).

Recently, the hierarchical and technical model of school governance has come under challenge as exaggerating the power and dominance of the administrator (Boyd, 1976). Heeding Zald's argument (Zald, 1969) that it is the balance of

resources for specific situations and decisions that determine the attribution of power in the encounter between boards and administrators, Boyd calls for a more comprehensive approach to the study of administrator-board relationships taking into account the particular mix of contingencies and relevant resources in the administrator board interaction (Boyd, 1976).

Purpose of the study

This study was designed to investigate in the Australian setting:
(1) the attitude of principals and members of school councils to principal dominance on council; and
(2) the personal and contextual variables which may be associated with variation in such attitudes.

Method

An attitude scale measuring principals' and council members' attitudes to principal dominance was developed. The attitudes of principals and council members were measured and an analysis made of the relationship between personal and contextual variables and differences in attitude scale scores.

(1) Development of the Attitude Scale

Construction

The Likert method of scale construction was used. Items were generated from conversations of councils in session and interviews conducted with principals and council members from four schools in inner city, suburban and country Victoria. Thirty-nine items considered relevant to the attitude being investigated were selected for trial. These items were administered to a random sample of 274 principals and council members. Two hundred and twenty-one responses were received, representing a response rate of 80.7 per cent. The responses were analysed to determine which of the items discriminated most clearly between the high scorers and low scorers on the total scale. The statements with the largest t values were selected for inclusion in the final questionnaire. The items included in the questionnaire each had a t value $\geqslant$ 3.17.

The refined scale of 24 items was sent to a sample of 372 principals and council members at 21 randomly selected schools. Two hundred and ninety-seven responses were received, representing a response rate of 79.8 per cent. The responses were analysed to provide: the inter-item correlation, the internal consistency of scores, and the split half reliability of scores.

Follow up interviews were conducted with principals and council members in three schools. Interviewees were asked to comment upon the extent to which the content of each item pertained to the attitude under investigation, and the degree to which the set of items represented all aspects of the attitude. Respondents were also asked to rate themselves on their attitude to principal domination. Self report data and scale scores were compared and discussed.

After an interval of six weeks the scale was re-tested with a random sample of 52 respondents.

Reliability

The corrected split-half reliability of the scale was found to be .728. The test/re-test reliability after a period of six weeks was found to be .693.

Validity

Item analysis demonstrated that all items discriminated between high and low scores on the total scale (Edwards $t \geqslant 3.17$). Internal consistency, estimated using Kuder Richardson and Cronbach's alpha, yielded a coefficient of .807. The homogeneity of the scale was not threatened by any item on the scale.

The pattern of scores among known groups was in accord with expectations.

Follow-up interviews revealed a close relationship between attitudes revealed in personal interviews and scores obtained using the scale. Those interviewed gauged the content of each item relevant to the attitude and the set of items generally representative of all aspects of the attitude.

Scoring

Five response categories were provided for each of the 24 items on the scale: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree. The responses were scaled in such a way that the attitude most favouring principal dominance was given the highest score. The theoretical range for an individual's total score was from 24-120.

(2)　Data Collection

A questionnaire, containing the scale and relevant demographic items, was mailed to 430 principals and council members in 26 randomly selected schools throughout the state of Victoria. Three hundred and sixty-five responses were received representing a response rate of 84.9 per cent.

Description of the Sample

Table 1 presents a comparison between schools in the total population and schools in the sample according to location. Considering that in the state of Victoria 54 per cent of secondary schools are located in inner city and suburban areas and 46 per cent of secondary schools are located in country areas, schools involved in the study could be considered proportionally representative of the total population of schools.

Table 1　Comparison of schools in sample to total population of schools according to location

	Percentage of schools in population	Percentage of schools in sample
Inner city/suburban	54	59
Country	46	41
Total	100	100

Table 2 provides a description of the members of the community (comprising

Table 2 Characteristics of the members of the community on council

Sex

Male	62.6%
Female	31.9%
No resp.	5.5%
Total	100.0%

Age

Over 55	7.6%
45-55	38.7%
34-45	46.6%
25-35	5.0%
Under 25	—
No resp.	2.1%
Total	100.0%

Years on council

Less than 1	25.2%
2-5	52.5%
6-9	12.6%
Over 10	6.7%
No resp.	2.9%
Total	99.9%

Occupation

Category	%	Examples
professional	12.6%	eg. doctor, solicitor, architect
	18.1%	eg. teacher, social worker, nurse
proprietor	8.4%	eg. director large industrial enterprise, owner of business worth more than $75,000
manager	12.6%	eg. company manager, sales/office manager, owner of business worth less than $75,000
office & sales worker	5.9%	eg. accountant, dept. head in govt. service, real estate agent
	9.7%	eg. insurance agent, bank clerk, salesman, office clerk
farmer	6.3%	eg. grazier, farmer, farm manager
	—	eg. tenant farmer, sharemilker, farm labourer
skilled worker	6.3%	eg. electrician, policeman, butcher
semi-skilled worker	—	eg. barber, fireman, machinist
	1.7%	eg. building construction worker, storeman, packer, driver, miner
unskilled worker	0.4%	eg. waitress, cleaner, roadsweeper, factory operative
home duties	15.1%	
No Response	2.9%	
Total	100.0%	

Highest Educational Qualification

Doctoral degrees	12.6%
Masters degrees	18.1%
Bachelors degrees	8.4%
Tertiary diplomas	12.6%
Trade quals	5.9%
Year 12	9.7%
Year 11	16.4%
Year 10	19.3%
Year 8	6.3%
Other	—
No response	6.3%
Total	100.1%

Doctoral degrees 1.3%
Masters degrees 1.3%
Bachelors degrees 12.6%
Tertiary diplomas 20.6%
Trade quals 8.4%
Year 12 8.0%
Year 11 16.4%
Year 10 19.3%
Year 8 5.9%
Other 3.8%
No response 2.5%
Total 100.1%

parents, shire/council nominees and representatives of affiliated groups) serving on councils. The table reveals that community representatives tend to be well-educated males occupying professional or managerial positions. Most had served on council for less than five years.

Members of staff serving on councils also tended to be males, who, with over 10 years experience as teachers, held positions with some administrative responsibilities. The characteristics of staff members participating in the study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3   The characteristics of the staff representatives

Sex		Seniority		Years teaching:	In present school	Total experience
Male	72.9%	Deputy Principal	8.2%	Less than 1	—	—
Female	27.1%	Senior Teacher	18.8%	2-5	37.6%	7.1%
		Teacher with		6-9	38.8%	30.6%
		responsibility	38.8%	Over 10	23.5%	61.2%
		Teacher	32.9%	No response	—	1.1%
		No response	1.3%			
Total	100.0%	Total	100.0%	Total	99.9%	100.0%

Table 4 provides a description of the characteristics of the school principals participating in the study. The results show that the principals were predominantly male with considerable administrative experience. The majority had been principals for more than five years, and principals in their present schools for more than two years.

Table 4   The characteristics of the school principals participating in the study

Sex		Years as principal in present school		Total years experience as a principal	
Male	91.7%	Less than 1	16.7%	Less than 1	4.2%
Female	8.3%	2-5	62.5%	2-5	25.0%
		6-9	16.7%	6-9	29.2%
		Over 10	4.2%	Over 10	37.5%
				No response	4.1%
Total	100.0%	Total	100.0%	Total	100.0%

The results

(1)   *Membership status and attitudes to principal dominance*

When the mean scale scores of respondent groups were analysed, it was found that principals had the highest mean scale score of 70.78. This score, it should be noted, is approximately mid-point on the theoretical range. The lowest mean scale score, indicating an attitude least favouring principal dominance, was found among staff members. Their mean scale score was 60.44. The mean scale scores for each membership group are included in Table 5. Statistically significant differences ($\alpha < .01$) existed between the scale scores of principals and staff representatives; principals and community representatives. No statistically significant difference existed between the mean scale score of staff and community.

Table 5   Membership status and attitudes to principal dominance

Membership status	N	$\overline{X}$	s.d.
Community Representatives	236	62.98	9.89
Staff Representatives	85	60.44	9.66
Principals	23	70.78	11.58

Table 6   Differences in attitudes between principals, teachers and community members on councils

	Principals $\overline{X}$	Teachers $\overline{X}$	Community $\overline{X}$	F	P
The principals should be prepared to provide information on all issues about which members of school council wish to be informed.	3.26	3.97	4.2	12.35	<.001
Council members are justified in demanding that the principal conform to their expectations about the keeping of accounts.	2.95	3.52	3.85	10.83	<.001
It is inappropriate for members of school council to censure the principal or in any way exercise control over his/her behaviour.	3.43	2.44	2.70	9.15	<.001
The principal is the school councillors' most reliable source of information about the school.	4.17	3.23	3.63	9.01	<.001
The principal must establish that the professional rights of principal and staff are not to be challenged by members of council.	4.08	3.47	3.15	8.91	<.001
In school administration democratic procedures must sometimes be foregone in the interest of efficiency.	3.69	3.35	2.94	8.60	<.001
School council members are justified in creating informal alliances to be used in limiting the power of the principal on council.	1.73	2.52	2.15	8.29	<.001
Members of school council should always support the recommendations of the principal.	2.17	1.71	2.17	7.26	<.001
The principal is entitled to veto discussion on any issue perceived as a threat to the principal's authority.	2.39	1.68	2.02	6.89	<.001
The chairman of the council should not put to a vote a proposal which the principal is known to oppose.	1.95	1.64	1.93	5.67	<.01
The principal is entitled to exercise influence on any issue which is perceived as a threat to his/her authority.	4.0	3.31	3.25	5.63	<.01
The school council should not make a decision which the principal is known to be unhappy about implementing.	2.86	2.23	2.31	5.01	<.01
School council members do not possess sufficient information about the school to challenge the recommendations of the principal.	2.65	2.17	2.55	4.74	<.01

When responses to individual items were analysed it was found that statistically significant differences ($\alpha < .01$) existed among group responses to 13 of the 24 items.

The widest variation occurred in regard to the principal's provision of information, and his/her accountability in matters of finance and in regard to the councillors' rights to censure the principal, challenge the rights of the professional educators or use informal alliances to limit the principal's power. Table 6 shows the group means for those items which revealed significant differences in attitudes among membership groups.

(2) *Factors associated with differences in attitudes among community representatives*

Statistically significant differences ($\alpha < .01$) existed among the attitudes of community representatives according to the personal variables of: sex, age, ideology, level of education and occupation. In addition, community representatives' experience of the school: their satisfaction with the school's achievement of its educational goals; their satisfaction with the operation of the council; their assessment of their relationship with the principal; and their assessment of the relationship between the school and its community were also found to be associated with differences ($\alpha < .01$) in attitude to principal dominance.

Sex

A statistically significant difference ($\alpha < .01$) existed between the attitudes of male and female community representatives. As Table 7 reveals, males received a significantly lower mean scale score than females, indicating an attitude less accepting of principal dominance.

Table 7   The difference between the attitudes of male and female community representatives

Sex	N	$\overline{X}$	s.d.
Male	148	61.87	9.10
Female	76	65.19	10.80

Age

As Table 8 shows, significant differences ($\alpha < .01$) also existed among community representatives, according to age. The widest variation occurred between the youngest members, aged 25-35 and the oldest, aged over 55, with the youngest members obtaining significantly lower mean scale scores.

Community representatives in the two middle age brackets, who comprised the largest groups in the sample, showed the least variation in scores. It is interesting to note however that although ranging between the oldest and youngest groups, their scores tended to be more closely aligned to the youngest group who had expressed an attitude least accepting of principal dominance.

Table 8   The differences in the attitudes of community representatives according to age

Age	N	$\overline{X}$	s.d.
25-35	12	58.08	11.68
35-45	110	63.21	8.37
45-55	92	62.06	8.61
55 +	18	71.27	12.58

Ideology

Community representatives who stated their personal ideology as "liberal" scored significantly lower than other groups. The least variation between group scores existed between those community representatives who considered themselves as conservative and those who considered themselves as ranging between conservative and liberal, depending on the issue. The mean scale scores for community representatives according to ideology are found in Table 9.

Table 9   The differences in the attitudes of community representatives according to ideology

Ideology	N	$\overline{X}$	s.d.
Liberal	38	59.05	11.37
Conservative/Liberal depending on issue	158	64.06	8.74
Conservative	30	63.80	7.64

Education level

Table 10 shows that the more highly educated the community representative, the lower the mean scale score and hence the less accepting of principal dominance. In particular, community representatives who had successfully completed Bachelor, Master or Doctoral degrees from tertiary institutions scored significantly lower than those who had not completed secondary school and those who had not continued with formal education beyond the secondary level.

Table 10   Differences in attitudes of community representatives according to level of education

Level	N	$\overline{X}$	s.d.
Doctorate	3	43.66	19.65
Master	3	55.0	7.81
Bachelor	29	59.41	9.12
Tertiary Diploma	49	61.61	8.31
Trade Qual.	20	59.70	9.84
Year 12 (HSC)	19	67.05	10.17
Year 11 (Leaving)	39	65.38	9.13
Year 10 (Intermed.)	46	64.78	7.79
Year 8 (Merit)	14	64.14	13.43
Other	9	65.33	9.68

Occupation

Consistent with the relationship found to exist between educational level and attitude to principal dominance, significant differences in attitudes were also found among community representives according to occupation. As Table 11 reveals, community representatives who occupied professional or managerial positions had the lowest mean scale score, indicating an attitude least accepting of principal dominance. The scale scores of community members occupying such positions contrasted sharply with the attitude scores of unskilled workers, bank-clerks, office clerks, salesmen and farmers.

Table 11   Differences in attitude scores of community representatives according to occupation

Occupational category	N	$\overline{X}$	s.d.
Accountant, dept. head in government service	14	57.57	7.51
Doctor, solicitor, architect, etc.	29	60.75	7.22
Teacher, social worker, nurse, etc.	43	61.44	10.02
Skilled worker	15	61.80	6.10
Director/owner large business, industrial enterprise	20	62.15	7.58
Home duties	36	63.0	12.52
Semi-skilled worker	4	64.0	8.60
Manager/owner small company, business enterprise	30	64.46	10.36
Farmer, farm manager	15	65.73	9.14
Bank clerk, salesman, office clerk, insurance agent	23	67.26	10.68
Unskilled worker	1	68.0	0

Experience of the School

The results, so far, have shown that the younger, more liberal, better educated, male community representatives who held professional or managerial positions were least prepared to accept principal dominance. Furthermore, as Table 12 shows, community representatives who were least satisfied with: the school's achievement of its educational goals, and the operation of the council, were also least likely to accept administrator dominance.

Table 12   Satisfaction with the school's achievements of its education goals and the operation of council, and attitudes to principal dominance

Level of Satisfaction	The school's achievement of education goals			The operation of council		
	N	$\overline{X}$	s.d.	N	$\overline{X}$	s.d.
Not at all satisfied	9	55.77	7.42	6	54.83	10.94
Fairly satisfied	76	60.10	8.38	56	59.89	8.81
Satisfied	101	64.76	9.71	114	63.16	8.32
Very satisfied	42	65.73	8.51	55	67.01	9.97

Similarly, the less positive a community representative's assessment of his/her relationship with the principal, and the relationship between the school and the

community, the lower the mean scale score. Community representatives' assessment of their relationship with the principal, their assessment of the relationship between the school and the community and their mean scale score is included in Table 13.

Table 13 Community representatives' assessment of their relationship with the principal and the school's relationship with the community, and their attitude to principal dominance

Assessment	Relationship between community representative and principal			Relationship between the school and the community		
	N	X̄	s.d.	N	X̄	s.d.
Poor	3	51.66	11.01	9	57.88	10.58
Fair	18	59.72	7.07	39	59.94	8.75
Good	83	61.95	7.79	104	62.84	9.46
Very Good	127	64.55	10.10	80	65.40	10.11

(3) *Factors associated with staff members' attitudes to principal dominance*

Whilst there was a trend among staff representatives characterised by a liberal orientation, limited administrative responsibility, and a low level of satisfaction with the operation of council and with the school's attainment of its educational goals to have lower mean scale scores, only on the basis of sex was a significant difference ($\alpha < .01$) among the attitudes of staff representatives found. As Table 14 reveals, male staff representatives, consistent with the male community representatives, scored significantly lower than their female counterparts.

Table 14 The differences in attitudes of male and female staff representatives

Sex	N	X̄	s.d.
Male	62	58.88	8.72
Female	23	64.65	10.94

(4) *Factors associated with differences in attitudes among principals*

The small sample size made it unlikely that statistically significant differences would be found among the scale scores of principals. However several trends, worthy of reporting and investigating further, did emerge. For example, more experienced principals, principals who had served in their present school for over five years, principals who were male and principals who considered themselves to be "liberal" tended to have lower mean scale scores. In addition, there was a trend for lower mean scale scores to be found among principals who were most satisfied with the operation of council.

Discussion

This study had its genesis in the history of Victorian public schooling, which in less than a decade has seen successive governments attempt, through legislation, to dismantle a hierarchical system of education, replacing it with an increasingly democratised structure in which members of the community can take their place alongside professional educators in the decision making arena. These historical

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developments were considered in the light of a considerable body of literature, only recently under challenge, which suggested that even in situations where democratised structures and traditions of community participation have been long established, a hierarchical model of decision making, based on administrator dominance, prevails.

The findings of the study have implications for both theory development and practice. Clearly they support Zald's proposition that "In formulating hypotheses about control in organisations one must first specify the range of variables and conditions under which elites or managers may or may not influence important decisions". (Zald, 1969, p97). In the Victorian setting, the data suggest that the desire to exercise control shifts with the nature of the issue under consideration. Thus for principals, a perceived challenge to their authority or a perceived infringement into "professional" areas is likely to bring forward a mobilisation of their power resources. Similarly in matters of finance and information transmission, community members are likely to exercise more power than they may otherwise do during the course of council operations.

Furthermore, personal factors: sex, age, ideology, educational level, occupational status, attributes of people brought into the administrator-council member relationship from the larger society will affect the degree of control which respective participants exhibit.

In addition, conditions associated with the school itself: the extent to which it is considered successful in the achievement of its educational goals and the extent to which it is seen as maintaining effective interaction with its community; together with conditions internal to the operation of council: people's satisfaction with council operation and their satisfaction with the relationship between principal and council member, will also affect attitudes to participation and control.

In conclusion, the wide range of variables found in this study to be associated with differences in attitudes to principal dominance, both within and among groups, supports Boyd's (1976) call for a more comprehensive approach to the analysis of administrative relationships. This study, in its identification of a range of variables and conditions under which administrators may or may not influence decision, lays the basis for further research focusing on the manner in which the particular mix of such variables operate in a given situation.

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