EDITOR'S FORUM

A VIEW TOWARD SCHOOL/COMMUNITY-BASED MANAGEMENT: PERSPECTIVES OF PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN AMERICAN SAMOA

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The past few years have witnessed increasing efforts to upgrade the quality of education in American Samoa's schools. In particular, efforts to increase both teachers' and administrators' competence have resulted in more rigorous standards for certification (Freese 1983). As an example, to attain (as well as retain) a principalship, a master's degree is now required. Consequently, growing numbers of Samoan educators are traveling to U.S. colleges and universities to extend their education and training and meet new certification requirements. Along with the degrees earned, they bring back with them the influence of Western ideas, education, and values--albeit in varying ways and degrees. With broadened perspectives and increased knowledge of educational issues and trends, many educators have become increasingly critical of American Samoa's highly centralized educational system. Not surprisingly, the concept of school/community-based management (SCBM), an innovative approach to school organization and management, has sparked the interest of many of these educators. Representing a welcome change from the current top-down and highly restrictive administrative structure of American Samoa's schools, SCBM has generated enthusiasm among both teachers and principals. Nonetheless, there is concern that conditions in Samoa may not be conducive to implementation of SCBM at the present time. The objective of this study is to describe and interpret education- and culture-related factors that might

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have a bearing on the possibility for successful implementation of this alternative approach to school organization and management.

While this investigation represents a first step in a much needed feasibility study, the data obtained also provide a picture of an important, previously undocumented segment of Samoan culture: school life. Although Samoan culture has captured the interest of numerous social scientists, relatively little has been written about Samoa's educational system. For example, there is little in the literature about the relationship between Samoan culture and education, the organization and management of Samoa's schools, the level of education and training of its teachers, or the views and attitudes held by its educators.

The selection of school principals as the focal group for this exploratory study was based on several considerations. First, there is a considerable body of evidence that identifies the school principal as the key figure in making and maintaining effective schools and a significant figure in implementing change. Second, the more rigorous standards for certification of principals has resulted in growing numbers of American Samoan educators returning to school for advanced degrees, the vast majority of them attending colleges and universities in the United States. Shaped by Samoan culture and tradition, yet influenced by Western ideas and education, these administrators possess the unique ability to analyze existing educational conditions in American Samoa and contemplate the potential for change in light of their own culture.

The following research questions were used to guide this investigation:

- To what extent do principals in American Samoa believe that teacher involvement in school management is important to student achievement?
- What perceptions do Samoan principals have about teachers' knowledge and skills? How accurate are their perceptions?
- To what extent do Samoan principals have authority to make decisions affecting their schools?
- To what extent do Samoan teachers participate in key decision-making areas?
- Is there a correlation between the extent to which teachers participate in school management and principals' perceptions of (a) the importance of teacher involvement, (b) teachers' abilities, and (c) their own decision-making authority?
- Can linkages be identified between background characteristics of principals, such as gender, educational background, prior teach-

ing, and administrative experience, and their perceptions of the importance of teacher participation in school management?

- Are there aspects of Samoan culture that may have a bearing on the potential for successful implementation of SCBM?

School/Community-Based Management: Concepts and Assumptions

School/community-based management may be defined as a democratic system that enables a school's community, comprising the principal, teachers, staff, parents, students, and other interested members of the community, to actively and directly shape the quality of education offered its students. SCBM is both an organizational structure that shifts authority from a centralized agency or department to local schools and an ongoing process that changes traditional roles and relationships within a school and between a school and its community. Underlying this shift in the educational management process is the belief that the education of students is best served when decisions affecting any given school are made by the people that are most directly affected by those decisions. As conceptualized in SCBM theory, each school is expected to determine its own organizational structure for decision making, seeking the involvement of all members of the school's community or, at least, representatives of the various groups in the school's community. Inherent in SCBM is the concept of shared decision making, a process in which members of the school community collaborate in identifying problems, defining goals, formulating policy, shaping direction, and ensuring implementation. Although numerous factors--both complex and diverse--must be present to accomplish this cooperative approach to school decision making, one factor in particular has proven to be essential: an environment in which members of the school community freely interact with one another openly, candidly, and with mutual respect. (For additional information regarding SCBM, the interested reader can refer to Cistone 1989, Cooper 1989, and Lindquist and Mauriel 1989.)

Under SCBM, the principalship takes on broader and more complex responsibilities, requiring new skills as well as new attitudes. As stated in a recent report, principals

> must understand change as well as [be able to] manage change. They must [be able to] build a group vision, develop quality educational programs, provide a positive instructional environ-

> ment, apply evaluation processes, analyze and interpret outcomes, and maximize human resources . . . all of this requires more than knowledge. It requires leadership; not ordinary leadership but astute leadership. (National Commission for the Principalship 1990:11)

The successful implementation of SCBM hinges on a number of key factors, not the least of which is the receptivity of the state and district leadership (i.e., the central office) to the concept of shared decision making and the degree to which they are willing to permit schools to move away from traditional top-down organizational structures. Equally important to the successful implementation of SCBM is the commitment of the school principal. The role of the principal as both school leader and change agent has been a persistent theme in research on school effectiveness (Berman and McLaughlin 1980; Bossert et al. 1982; Hallinger et al. 1983; Loucks et al. 1982; Wilson and Firestone 1987). Although the precise extent to which principals are the causal factor in school change is not known, considerable evidence suggests they play a significant part. Indeed, the very decision to adopt a particular practice or innovation often lies in the hands of these administrators (Clark et al. 1984).

Teacher participation in school decision making is often largely determined by the extent to which principals are willing to include teachers in the decision-making process. Chapman's (1988) research on teachers and decision making provides confirmatory evidence that the principal is of fundamental importance in determining the extent, nature, and pattern of teacher participation in schools. Yet little is known about principals' attitudes toward sharing their decision-making authority with teachers. Whereas teachers may view SCBM as a potential vehicle for gaining greater professional control (Futrell 1988), principals may fear that increased teacher participation will erode traditional realms of administrative authority (Geisert 1988). Although few public school principals would adhere to the view that teachers should not participate in school decision making, it remains unclear in which decision domains principals would be willing to allocate authority to them. Equally unclear are the factors that might predispose principals to include teachers in or exclude them from the decision-making process.

One such category of factors involves principals' perceptions. We have come to realize that the way we think about things often influences their ultimate reality (Denemark 1985). The way in which we

think about teachers often influences our dispositions and actions toward them and, consequently, their status. It follows that principals' perceptions of teachers' knowledge and skills in key decision-making areas may influence the extent to which they involve them in the decision-making process. It is not unreasonable to assume that principals who have confidence in teachers' knowledge and skills will be more inclined to engage them in school management than principals with negative perceptions of teachers' abilities.

Another potentially influential factor is principals' perceptions of the *importance* of teacher involvement in school management. Human nature and general experience have shown that we work harder to achieve the goals we believe are truly important. It follows that principals who view teacher involvement as a positive link to student achievement will be more inclined to engage teachers in school decision making than principals with negative views of teacher involvement.

In a related vein, one might also expect principals' perceptions of their own decision-making authority to influence the extent to which they engage teachers in school decisions. For example, principals who perceive themselves as having restricted decision-making authority may be reluctant to share with teachers what limited authority they do have. If it is perceived that particular kinds of decisions are generally made at higher administrative levels, then the issue itself of teacher involvement in that area becomes muted.

Procedure

Sample

A questionnaire, referred to as the Administrator Survey, was distributed to all twenty-six public elementary and secondary school principals in Tutuila, American Samoa. Tutuila is the largest of the seven islands constituting American Samoa, which lies about 2,300 miles southwest of Hawaii and 1,600 miles northeast of New Zealand. Being the largest island, Tutuila supports nearly all the territory's population and is the center of most commercial and government activities. Schools in American Samoa are operated as a single school district, with the Department of Education serving as both the state and the local education agency.

Of Tutuila's twenty-six public school principals, twenty-three returned completed questionnaires, providing an overall response rate of 88 percent. Select demographic data are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. **Demographic Data (*N* = 23)**

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Sex		
Female	12	52
Male	11	48
Educational background		
Bachelor's degree	7	30
Master's degree	13	57
Doctorate	1	4
Not indicated	2	9
School level		
Elementary	18	78
Secondary	4	17
Not indicated	1	4
Teaching experience		
4 or fewer years	5	22
5 to 10 years	14	61
11 or more years	4	17
Mean = 10.3 years		
Administrative experience		
4 or fewer years	5	22
5 to 10 years	13	57
11 or more years	4	17
Not indicated	1	4
Mean = 7.1 years		
School size		
Schools ranged in faculty size from 8 to 138 teachers, with the average being approximately 41 teachers.		

Data Collection

Data were collected through both formal and informal methods. Informally, information was obtained through interviews and discussions with a number of American Samoan educators enrolled in the College of Education at the University of Hawaii, including teachers, principals, and "central office" coordinators. Interviews were also conducted with University of Hawaii faculty who teach courses in American

Samoa as well as with several directors and evaluators of special programs conducted there.

Data were collected formally via a 154-item questionnaire developed by the author, which was administered in May 1989. The questionnaire had five sections. The first focused on demographic information. Sections two through five focused on principals' perceptions of the following: importance of teacher involvement in key decision-making areas, extent of teacher involvement in key decision-making areas, teachers' knowledge and skills with respect to key decision-making areas, and principals' own decision-making authority.

The questions reference eleven categories generally thought to reflect the key decision-making areas affecting school life: curriculum development, textbook selection, student testing and evaluation, student promotion and retention, standards for student behavior, student placement, allocation of funds and discretion over expenditures, staff development, evaluation of teacher performance, selection of new faculty, and selection of new administrators. Each section is structured on Likert-type scales with responses coded so that higher numerical values represent more positive ratings. Respondents were also requested to provide written comments to each section as well as to provide recommendations for making their schools more effective. A panel of elementary and secondary public and private school principals reviewed the questionnaire to ensure its comprehensiveness and relevance, that is, the extent to which the decision-making categories included in the instrument encompassed those necessary to running a school.

Results and Discussion

Principals' Perceptions of the Importance of Teacher Involvement in the Decision-Making Process

An overall score of 5.4 (SD = 1.4) was obtained, indicative of a general perception among Samoan principals that teacher involvement in school management and shared decision making is "important." Still, there were no decision-making areas in which principals, as a whole, perceived teacher involvement to be "essential" or even "highly important" to student achievement. The areas rated highest in terms of importance of teacher involvement included curriculum development, student discipline, and staff development, while the areas viewed as least important for teacher involvement included school allocation of

TABLE 2. **Principals' Perceptions of the Importance to Student Achievement of Teacher Participation in Eleven Decision-Making Areas (*N* = 23)**

Area of Decision Making	Mean	SD
Curriculum development	6.8	.89
Standards for student behavior	6.3	.16
Staff development	6.1	.96
Student placement	5.9	.42
Textbook selection	5.8	.95
Student testing and evaluation	5.7	.64
Student promotion and retention	5.6	.99
Evaluation of teacher performance	5.3	1.02
Allocation of funds and discretion over expenditures	4.5	1.20
Selection of new faculty	3.4	.45
Selection of new administrators	3.3	.31
Overall mean	5.4	1.40

Scale values: 1 = no importance; 2 = slightly important; 3 = somewhat important; 4 = moderately important; 5 = important; 6 = quite important; 7 = highly important; 8 = essential to student achievement.

funds and discretion over expenditures, selection of new faculty, and selection of new administrators. In general, principals were more supportive of teacher participation in areas they perceived as most directly affecting students. Table 2 presents a breakdown of principals' perceptions with respect to each of the eleven key decision-making areas.

To put these findings in some perspective, it is helpful to know how principals elsewhere view similar issues. To date, however, there is only one known study that provides such comparative data (Ganopole 1991). One year prior to the implementation of SCBM in Hawaii, Ganopole conducted a similar study involving 139 public and 61 private school principals from all islands in the state of Hawaii (representing 59 percent of the total number of public school principals and 47 percent of the total number of private school principals, excluding private preschools, in the state). The results showed Hawaii's public school principals to be significantly more supportive of teacher involvement in school management and shared decision making than their Samoan counterparts (t = 3.37, p < .002). Overall, Hawaii's public school principals view teacher participation in decision making as "quite important," giving the highest ratings to the areas of curriculum development, textbook

selection, and student discipline. Staff development was rated fourth, while allocation of funds and discretion over expenditures was rated sixth. Of the eleven key decision-making categories assessed, the areas viewed as least important for teacher involvement were evaluation of teacher performance, selection of new faculty, and selection of new administrators. Although Samoan principals are, in general, less supportive of teacher involvement in school decision making than their Hawaii counterparts, there is considerable similarity between the two populations with respect to the decision-making categories they view as important in terms of teacher involvement.

It should be noted that although SCBM had not as yet been incorporated in Hawaii's schools at the time the survey was conducted, considerable groundwork had already been laid in preparation for its scheduled implementation in several schools the following year. Indeed, the concept of SCBM had been discussed in Hawaii's educational circles as early as 1987. In preparation for this major move, numerous plenary sessions involving district superintendents and principals took place throughout the state. Consultants were brought in to discuss concepts and issues related to SCBM and to share their experience with implementation as it occurred in their states and school districts. In short, public school principals were immersed in school-based-management dialogue and materials. As a result, these public school principals may have developed a greater awareness of the issues surrounding SCBM as well as a greater appreciation for the importance of teacher involvement in school management. Had the survey been conducted earlier, say in 1987, their responses might have been similar to those currently found among Samoan principals; there is evidence to suggest that this may be the case. Survey results from the Hawaii sample of private school principals (private schools were not subjected to the state push toward SCBM) were surprisingly similar to those obtained from Samoan principals with respect to their perceptions of the importance of teacher involvement. These findings suggest the necessity for ensuring that principals as well as other relevant groups understand the concepts underlying school-based management and appreciate the importance of teacher involvement in school decisions.

Principals' Perceptions of Teachers' Knowledge and Skills

Survey results indicate a general lack of confidence among Samoa's principals with respect to teachers' knowledge and skills (M = 3.8, SD = .56) (Table 3). In addition to the low means scores that were

obtained, principals' written comments on the questionnaire made it abundantly clear that they were reluctant to extend decision-making authority to teachers who, in the words of one principal, "are inadequately prepared to carry out the responsibilities they already have." These findings were not altogether surprising because the majority of teachers in American Samoa do not meet generally accepted (American or the recently mandated American Samoan) standards for teacher certification. For example, large numbers of elementary teachers do not have bachelor's degrees; many do not have even a two-year degree from a community college. For secondary teachers, the problem is somewhat different. Although as many as 90 percent have bachelor's degrees, the majority have no background in educational philosophy, issues, or methods. Yet efforts to upgrade teachers' skills have been ongoing for a number of years. For example, since 1980 the federally funded Territorial Teacher Training Assistance Program, coordinated through the College of Education at the University of Hawaii, has provided in-service training to resident teachers in American Samoa. A primary function of this program has been to provide coursework applicable to Samoa's teacher certification program. Other federally funded programs, such as the Multicultural Inservice Center and the National Dissemination Network, also provide in-service training. There are also a variety of "in

TABLE 3. **Principals' Perceptions of Teachers' Knowledge and Skills in Key Decision-Making Areas (*N* = 23)**

Area of Decision Making	Mean	SD
Student placement	4.6	.83
Standards for student behavior	4.6	.24
Student promotion and retention	4.2	.42
Curriculum development	4.0	.73
Student testing and evaluation	3.9	.79
Staff development	3.7	.92
Evaluation of teacher performance	3.7	.39
Textbook selection	3.3	.61
Allocation of funds and discretion over expenditures	3.2	1.04
Selection of new faculty	3.1	1.37
Selection of new administrators	2.9	1.47
Overall mean	3.8	.56

Scale values: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = somewhat agree; 5 = agree; 6 = strongly agree.

house" staff development programs provided by the American Samoa Department of Education. However, in spite of these efforts, there remains a critical need for better-trained teachers.

Ironically, what innovative instructional practices teachers do learn as a result of these programs are often not implemented in their classrooms. Some principals attribute this to the general inflexibility of the central office to support teacher-initiated changes, which means, at the school level, that teachers are unable to obtain the books or other instructional materials needed to implement desired changes. On the other hand, conversations with several teachers suggest that principals are often equally unsupportive of or, at best, indifferent to teachers' efforts to bring about change. Although some teachers say they try to implement new ideas wherever possible, their efforts are usually short lived in the absence of support or encouragement. It appears that in spite of ongoing efforts to upgrade teachers' knowledge and skills, little effort is made by the central office or the school principal to support teachers' efforts to apply new knowledge and skills in the classroom.

Principals' Perceptions of the Extent of Their Decision-Making Authority

On average, the responses to the scaled items in this section of the survey instrument suggest that principals perceive themselves as having "moderate" (M = 4.2, SD = .88) decision-making authority for their schools. More specifically, principals report having "very extensive" decision-making authority in the area of student discipline and "extensive" decision-making authority in student placement, student promotion and retention, and staff development. However, in the remaining seven categories, principals' perceptions of their decision-making authority ranged from "moderate" to "none" (Table 4).

An analysis of the comments principals made on the questionnaire coupled with data obtained through interviews and discussions with Samoan principals, teachers, and program directors provides a more comprehensive portrayal of the decision-making process in American Samoa's schools and the extent of principals' decision-making authority. For example, all major decisions pertaining to curriculum development are made at the central office. Essentially, decisions are made by curriculum committees composed of subject-matter specialists for each of the major subject areas taught. Some effort is made to obtain input from the schools. To this end, each school is visited by a curriculum-committee coordinator, who meets with teachers to discuss curricular issues.

TABLE 4. **Principals' Perceptions of Their Decision-Making Authority (*N* = 23)**

Area of Decision Making	Mean	SD
Standards for student behavior	6.1	.81
Student placement	5.9	1.01
Student promotion and retention	5.8	1.04
Staff development	5.8	1.43
Evaluation of teacher performance	4.7	1.47
Curriculum development	4.6	1.52
Allocation of funds and discretion over expenditures	3.7	2.20
Student testing and evaluation	3.6	1.91
Textbook selection	2.8	.49
Selection of new faculty	2.4	.99
Selection of new administrators	1.8	1.56
Overall mean	4.2	.88

Scale values: 1 = no authority; 2 = very little; 3 = little; 4 = moderate; 5 = extensive; 6 = very extensive; 7 = complete authority.

Principals say these meetings give teachers a good opportunity for providing input into curricular decisions. However, principals see themselves as being only peripherally involved in such decisions and go so far as to say their views in these matters are "ignored." In spite of limited input, they are given to understand that once the decisions are made, they are not free to deviate from the prescribed curriculum. According to principals, then, teachers have more say in decisions about curriculum than they themselves do.

The fact that teachers in American Samoa have such ready access to "central office decision makers" stands in marked contrast to what sometimes occurs in schools in the United States. In a study by Blase (1990), teachers in one southeastern state described the various strategies that principals use in trying to control teachers, claiming that principals were often successful in controlling teacher influence over policy and programs by restricting teachers' access to superiors. Although the present study does not extend to an examination of control-oriented behaviors of Samoan principals, it appears that in American Samoa teacher access to superiors is largely determined by the central office rather than by the principal.

With respect to expenditures and allocation of funds, again decisions are made at the central office. Principals have virtually no budgetary

responsibilities. Although they can make requests for supplies, equipment, repairs, improvements of school facilities, or other purchases, there is no assurance that--or timetable for when--their requests will be approved. As one principal stated, "I submit my requests in 'priority order,' and after that all I can do is hope for the best."

A complaint about the inadequacy of custodial services surfaced, but principals acknowledged that the problem was only partly attributable to funding decisions. As explained during an informal discussion with several Samoan educators, some of the custodians are elderly and incapable of even minor repairs, and others are simply uncooperative. A particularly vexing aspect of the problem arises when these employees are of high rank in the village, requiring principals to be especially "delicate" in their dealings with them. Toward the end of a lively discussion focusing on school problems and politics, one member of the group wryly observed: "School management and politics go hand in hand, no matter where in the world you are. In Samoa, however, politics also means having to deal with people according to their social ranking."

With respect to teacher evaluation, principals were quick to point out that although this task falls within their "domain of responsibilities," they have no real control, because there is little recourse with inadequate teachers. Several principals expressed hope that current efforts to develop a teacher evaluation instrument would facilitate the evaluation process by providing appropriate documentation useful in making decisions about marginal or unsatisfactory teachers.

All staffing decisions are made at the central office. Central office personnel conduct interviews, make selections, and assign staff to school vacancies. Principals have neither hiring nor firing authority. The principals themselves are selected and placed in schools at the discretion of the director of education. They cannot "apply" for vacancies and have no "rights" to remain in their positions. Although they can communicate their desires to the director, many are painfully aware that they do not have the same mobility or control over their professional careers as principals in other locales.

The picture that emerges is clearly one of a highly structured, top-down educational system. The majority of decisions are made at the central office, and principals have limited influence over decisions affecting their schools. With increasing knowledge and understanding of research on school effectiveness, many principals are eager to implement new ideas. Their comments suggest a growing frustration as they find that their professional judgments are not being heard.

Perceptions of the Extent of Teacher Involvement

The results suggest that, in general, teachers participate only "occasionally" (M = 3.2, SD = .94) in school decisions (Table 5). A notable exception is curriculum development, an area in which principals say teachers are involved "more than half the time." However, principals report considerably less teacher involvement in all other decision-making areas. In the remaining decision-making areas, the extent of teacher involvement ranges from "less than half the time" (e.g., in student placement and setting standards for student behavior) to "never" (e.g., in selection of new faculty and administrators).

To provide some perspective, these findings were compared with those obtained from the Hawaii sample of public school principals referred to earlier. Again, the results showed a significant difference (t = 9.95, p < .0001) between the two groups, with Samoan principals reporting lower levels of teacher involvement in school management than their Hawaii counterparts. For example, Hawaii principals reported that teachers are involved in school decisions, on average, "more than half the time." According to these principals, teachers are "usually" involved in decisions regarding textbook selection and "often"

TABLE 5. **Principals' Perceptions of the Extent to Which Teachers Participate in Eleven Decision-Making Areas (N = 23)**

Area of Decision Making	Mean	S D
Curriculum development	5.0	1.50
Student placement	4.7	.67
Standards for student behavior	4.5	.54
Staff development	3.8	.95
Student promotion and retention	3.3	1.90
Evaluation of teacher performance	3.1	1.20
Textbook selection	3.0	1.40
Student testing and evaluation	2.7	1.40
Allocation of funds and discretion over expenditures	2.1	.68
Selection of new administrators	1.4	.10
Selection of new faculty	1.2	.20
Overall mean	3.2	.94

Scale values: 1 = never; 2 = seldom; 3 = occasionally; 4 = less than half the time; 5 = more than half the time; 6 = often; 7 = usually; 8 = always.

involved in decisions concerning curriculum development and setting standards for student discipline. In the areas of student placement, budget, and staff development, teachers are perceived to be participating "more than half the time." However, according to principals, there is less teacher involvement in decisions about student promotion and retention, student testing and evaluation, and the evaluation of teacher performance, areas in which teachers are said to participate "less than half the time." In the area of selection of new faculty, teachers participate "occasionally," but they almost "never" participate in the selection of new administrators.

Correlational Analyses

Correlational analyses were conducted to determine the relationships between principals' perceptions of (a) the importance of teacher involvement in the decision-making process, (b) teachers' knowledge and skills in key decision-making areas, and (c) their own decision-making authority, on the one hand, and the extent to which teachers in their schools are involved in key decision-making areas, on the other. The results revealed several significant relationships. First, a high correlation ($r = .53$, $p < .01$) was found between principals' perceptions of teachers' knowledge and skills and the extent of teacher involvement in key decision-making areas. These results may be interpreted as lending confirmation to the assertion that the more confident principals are about teachers' knowledge and skills, the more apt they are to include teachers in decision making. Second, a strong correlation ($r = .51$, $p < .01$) was found between principals' perceptions of their decision-making authority and the extent of teacher involvement in school decisions. In general, the more decision-making authority principals perceive themselves as having, the greater is the extent of teacher involvement in school decisions. And third, a significant relationship ($r = .44$, $p < .05$) was found between principals' perceptions of the importance of teacher involvement in school decisions and the extent of teacher participation. Although this finding tends to support the contention that teacher participation in decision making is linked to the importance principals place on teacher involvement in the decision-making process, interpretations must be drawn cautiously. Aside from the fact that correlations do not permit conclusions of a causal nature, it is important to remember that the findings are based on perceptual data. It is possible that principals' perceptions of the importance of involvement influence their

perceptions of actual participation. Put another way, principals may see what they want to see.

Clearly, for a more balanced perspective of the role of teachers in the decision-making process, data from teachers themselves are needed, Moreover, to develop a fuller understanding of the dynamics of decision making in Samoa's schools, future studies should also include the views of students, parents, and central office administrators. Although perceptual data is valuable, future studies should also include data from school-site observations. Through the use of multiple sources and methods of data collection, a more comprehensive picture will be provided.

Relationships between Background Characteristics and Perceptions of the Importance of Teacher Involvement in School Management

A nonparametric one way analysis of variance was used to examine the relationship between select background characteristics of principals and their perceptions of the importance of teacher involvement in school management and shared decision making. These background characteristics were: gender, educational background (degrees earned), number of years as a teacher prior to becoming a principal, and number of years as a school administrator.

Of the factors examined, only length of administrative experience was found to be significant: principals with fewer years of administrative experience rated the importance of teacher involvement in decision making significantly higher ($p < .05$) than did the more experienced principals. For example, principals with five to ten years of experience rated the importance of teacher involvement significantly higher than those with eleven or more years of experience, and principals with four or fewer years of experience rated the importance of teacher involvement in decision making significantly higher ($p < .05$) than either of the other two groups.

There are at least two explanations. First, because many of the less-experienced principals were also among those who had more recently completed their professional education and training, their views may reflect recent research on school effectiveness, much of which emphasizes the importance of teacher participation in school decisions. A second explanation is that the newer principals, having recently been teachers themselves, still identify closely with teachers and thus may be more sensitive to their needs than the "older" principals. It is reasonable to assume that the views of these principals reflect the combined effects of both explanations.

Cultural Characteristics: Implications for SCBM

The ethnological literature depicts Samoan culture as conservative and stable. In contrast to other Polynesian societies such as Hawaii, New Zealand Maori, the Marquesas, and the Cooks, which have retained little of their indigenous culture, the social organization in Samoa has changed little since the mid-nineteenth century, when it was first described by missionaries (Holmes 1980). Seeking to explain the relatively unchanging nature of Samoan culture, Peter Buck suggested,

> The pleasure derived from the exercise of native institutions is perhaps the most important factor that has led to the persistence of Samoan customs and helped them resist the disintegration that has taken place in other parts of Polynesia. The Samoans are thus more conservative than other branches of their race and this satisfaction with themselves and their own institutions makes them less inclined to accept the change that foreign governments consider would be of benefit to them. (1930:5)

A similar observation can be found in the Geographical Handbook Series, in which the Samoans are described as "people with such a conservative nature that . . . new elements (foreign goods, money, Christianity) have never been allowed to sweep the land with the devastating effects to be observed in some other Pacific island communities" (1943: 608). Almost three decades later, observing relatively little cultural change, Douglas Oliver commented on the unique ability of Samoans to "survive the strong impact of western civilization without changing their everyday lives" (1961:220).

Indeed, Samoans have managed to retain almost intact their local political system, which is based on elected family titleholders *(matais)* and village and district councils *(fonos).* To understand the *matai* system means to comprehend the complex system of titles, involving (a) rights over family lands, (b) local household groups, (c) titleholders, (d) other divisions of the same title, (e) common holders of the same title, (f) associated subordinate, coordinate, and superordinate titles, (g) dispersed, internally unranked descent groups, and (h) local, territorially based organizations. In his excellent description of the *matai* system, Holmes calls attention to the importance of the family and the village council (1980). As Holmes explains, the most important social unit in Samoa is the *'aiga,* a large extended family headed by a *matai,* who

holds the traditional title of that family. Each village has from ten to fifty *matai* titles that have been created at various times in history by important persons or by the village council. These titles are usually conferred on the basis of meritorious service.

Within each extended family, there are subgroupings known as *faletama* (houses of the children), established by the offspring of the original titleholder. If the original titleholder had two sons and a daughter, three branches would have been created in that family--two male lines and one female line (neither of which has a special advantage). The *matai* occupies the traditional dwellings and land associated with his title. As head of the family, *matais* not only oversee the everyday affairs of the household, but also represent the family in the village council, acting in accordance with relative rank in the village hierarchy of titles and their role as *ali'i* (chiefs) or *tulafale* (orator chiefs), which are the two categories of *matai.*

Chiefly rank is not achieved through inheritance, but rather through election by the kindred. Traditionally only males were elected as *matais,* but in recent years increasing numbers of women have been elected to a title. An individual retains his or her title until death unless he or she elects to give up the title. When either of these events occurs, the family holds a special meeting to elect a successor. Anyone who can trace descent to the former holder of the title is eligible to vote on the successor to the title or to hold the title himself or herself. Because descent is tracked through both parents, Samoans can typically trace a kinship relationship to numerous *matai* titles in their own or other villages. Consequently, a large number of people may be eligible for any given title. The successor, however, is typically selected by the family on the basis of his or her influence over the affairs of the family as well as personal stature in their eyes. In any family, one's stature is enhanced by skillful oratory, efficient handling of family crises, artful arrangement of celebrations, and, especially, generosity to family members.

Because titles are directly linked to land ownership, the benefits of achieving a title are increasingly viewed with an economic eye. Nonetheless, the social prestige and stature that accompanies a title is highly valued in Samoan culture. Although Samoans are quick to insist publicly that all holders of a title are equal, it is evident from observing political life in a village that certain members are accorded greater deference than others. Sometimes this seniority of rank is explicit, but more often it must be inferred (Keesing and Keesing 1956). Among the many criteria involved in such rankings, seniority appears to be determined by a combination of ascribed and achieved statuses. Age, wisdom,

length of village residence, prowess in war, genealogical knowledge, *tamatane* descent (male line of chiefly descent), and general political cunning all enter into the determination of particular rankings. However, one of the greatest difficulties in the determination of rank is that title autonomy is more relative than absolute. Thus, a title that is seen as subordinate to another in certain contexts may be recognized as defining an autonomous descent group in others. Shore (1977) suggests it is this complexity of social ranking and structure that is responsible for Samoans' close attention to social context as well as their cautiousness in interpersonal relations.

Given this complex sociocultural milieu, many educators in American Samoa are skeptical about the possibility for successful implementation of SCBM in their village schools. They are concerned that the prevailing attitudes and patterns of social interaction will ultimately undermine the "democratic" decision-making process inherent in the concept of school-based management. In the words of one Samoan educator, "Regardless of what you call it--collaborative decision making, school/community shared decision making, or school-site management --you can count on the fact that decisions will ultimately be influenced by the highest-ranking *matai* in the group." Thus, we are left to wonder whether the concept of SCBM would eventually serve to restructure Samoa's educational system or whether it would itself be restructured to fit into Samoan custom.

Nonetheless, some important changes are occurring in American Samoa that are presenting a serious challenge to the old *matai* system. For example, for generations the movement from untitled to titled rank required little more than aging, patience, and dedication to family welfare (Holmes 1980:195). In recent years, however, formal education and sophistication--which tends to be defined as an awareness of Western culture, ideas, and practices--have played an increasingly important role in determining one's social stature and, consequently, in the likelihood of being elected to chiefly rank. The changing nature of the criteria for attaining chiefly rank, which reflects a fundamental change in Samoan values and attitudes, takes on added significance in light of the growing number of Samoans who are pursuing degrees at U.S. colleges and universities. Given the "new" criteria for attaining a titled rank and the growing number of Samoans who meet the criteria, one should expect future *matais* to be significantly different from those of the past. However, one can but speculate as to how this "new breed" of *matai* will combine Western ideas and education with traditional Samoan values. Although definitive answers must await the test of

time, there is a growing sense among many that Samoa is changing. In the words of one Samoan educator:

> There is a quiet war going on between the old guard and the younger generation. The young are being pressured--sometimes subtly, sometimes not--to preserve *fa'a Samoa.* As a result, some things look the same on the surface, but change is bubbling underneath. I think when future generations look back on this period of time, they will say Samoa was "in transition."

Certainly, efforts at change are not new to American Samoa. However, what distinguishes today's efforts from those of the past is the source of those efforts. Whereas before such efforts typically came from "outsiders," the current calls for change--especially change directed toward Samoa's educational system--are coming from Samoans themselves. When Buck (1930) discussed the Samoans' resistance to change some sixty years ago, he attributed it to a general satisfaction with themselves and their institutions. Today, due to a heightened awareness of Western ideas, conditions, and practices, Samoans are less satisfied with the status quo and, presumably, are less resistant to change.

Indeed, some significant changes can already be seen in American Samoa's educational system. In addition to the establishment of more rigorous certification standards for teachers and principals, the educational agenda set by Samoa's director of education calls for an increasingly Americanized style of education in its schools. Already in evidence are "stateside" curricula, and English has been declared the official language of instruction.

Still, significant reform cannot be expected without appropriate preparation, and as it pertains to the restructuring of schools in American Samoa, adequate preparation may indeed be the single most important ingredient. Lessons learned from implementation efforts in schools across the United States have made it clear that this shift in school management cannot take place all at once. To begin with, in any community contemplating SCBM, regardless of locale, it is essential that all constituents understand how shared decision making is expected to work, how traditional roles will have to be redefined, and what parameters exist that define or limit the decision-making structure. Second, the need for a well-designed transition plan that includes sufficient time to educate and prepare teachers, principals, and community members to assume their new responsibilities cannot be overemphasized. To date,

efforts toward such understandings have not even begun to take place in Samoan communities, and little assistance or encouragement is forthcoming from top-level administrators. Moreover, the teachers and principals interviewed in the course of this study hold out little hope for any such assistance from the central office anytime in the near future. As one educator pointed out, "Little can be done to change things in individual schools until there is a change in attitudes in top-level governance."

As discussed earlier, the findings of this study also pose concerns about the adequacy of preparation and training of large numbers of teachers in American Samoa. Although many are anxious to play a bigger role in school decision making, for school-based management to succeed teachers must be highly knowledgeable and skilled professionals. Toward this end, there must be a continued emphasis on providing educational programs that strengthen both the intellectual and methodological foundations of teachers and prepare them to take an active role in school improvement and management.

Unfortunately, Samoan principals, too, appear ill prepared to assume the responsibilities of school-based management. This is not to say they are not good managers. On the contrary, they manage their schools quite well. However, as schools move away from traditional top-down administrative hierarchies, the role of the principal takes on greater breadth and sophistication, requiring new attitudes as well as new skills. Perhaps one of the most important of these requisite skills is the ability to nurture in their constituents (teachers, parents, and community members) the capacity to engage in the leadership task (National Commission for the Principalship 1990). Bringing people in each school's community together and using available talent effectively to accomplish collectively formulated goals lies at the heart of school-based management. The majority of principals in American Samoa have had little or no preparation for these new tasks and processes. They, like teachers, are in need of appropriate preparation that will enable them to meet the new demands of their jobs. The principals themselves are among the first to admit this need.

In sum, in spite of professed enthusiasm among growing numbers of Samoan educators for SCBM, many of the conditions deemed essential for successful implementation of school-based management are not present in American Samoa. On the bright side, Samoan educators are no longer complacent about the state of education in American Samoa and, increasingly, are seeking ways to bring about school reform.

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