ACCOUNTABILITY IN FLORIDA SCHOOLS

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This article is based upon a three-day visit to Florida, which was made possible by a travel grant from the Ford Foundation. During that visit I interviewed two Florida senators, nine members of staff of the State Department of Education, representatives of the teachers' union, staff of a school district superintendent's office, and the principal of a school which I visited. I want to thank all these people for the co-operation and hospitality shown to me. I have supplemented the information they gave me in person by study of the documentation which was also freely supplied by the State of Florida.

Background

The State of Florida had a population of 6,791,416 at the 1970 census. The population is age-skewed by virtue of the popularity of the state as a place of retirement.

Florida is in character a southern state - Suwannee and Dixie are both within its borders - and thus it has persisting legacies from a segregated school system in which the educational provision for blacks was inferior to that for whites.

In education Florida is still a low spending state. There is no state income tax or property tax, state funds being provided by a 4% sales tax, which brings tourists into the tax constituency. About 10% of the funds for school education come from Federal sources, and this is about average for the states. Low tax effort at state level does not attract high Federal contributions. School Boards levy local property tax. The proportion among the sources
of school finance in the state overall is State 54%; School Boards 36%; Federal 10%; but the wealth of individual school districts varies by a factor of 10, and the state contribution is used towards equalisation, 85% to 90% equalisation being claimed. Nevertheless the wealthier districts have better schools.

There are 67 school districts in the state. They vary enormously in size, some being very small. The overall picture, however, is of a state having, by American standards, a preponderance of educational provision through unusually large school districts.

In Florida the school district areas correspond with the counties.

Checks and Balances

American political structures are characterized by the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers. For our purpose here the separation of legislature and executive is important. The legislature comprises the state legislature and the elected district school board. Since the legislature is seen as representing the will of the people - i.e. lay opinion - the parent-teacher associations and the school advisory committees, of which more later, may be seen as extensions of the legislative power, even though they do not in the strict sense legislate.

The state legislature in Florida has its own public servants in support of its legislative function. There are six to eight professional educational staff in the legislative branch of government. This development is relatively new. This legislature secretariat has become very influential particularly because it, rather than as formerly, the State Department of Education (executive), controls the flow of information about education to the legislators. Some feel that here the legislature has invaded the territory of the executive, tipping the delicate balance towards the legislature, where perhaps it was previously tipped towards the executive.

The legislature meets for some six weeks each year (not long ago sixty days every two years), and committees meet throughout the year. By States' standards this constitutes an active legislature.
The executive function at state level is vested in the State Department of Education, whose chief officer is the Commissioner. He is required by law to recommend and implement the budget. The legislature passes law: the Commissioner, on behalf of the executive branch, promulgates rules and regulations within the bounds of that law, and these acts of "administrative jurisdiction" have the same force and effect as law. The legislature has assigned to the State Board of Education (comprising the Governor, the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, the Comptroller, the Treasurer, the Commissioner of Agriculture and the Commissioner of Education) responsibility as "the chief policy-making and co-ordinating body of public education". (Florida Statutes 1976: 229.053)

In Florida all education is within the Department of Education including universities, community colleges and so forth. We shall be concerned here with the Division of Public Schools. The divisions are co-ordinated through the Commissioner's Office and have obvious conflicts of interest with regard to budget, which the Commissioner must resolve.

The executives in the Division of Public Schools see themselves as educational administrators who combine management skills and the capacity for educational leadership. They represent the institutionalised professional opinion which informs, confronts and negotiates with the lay legislature. At School Board level their equivalent is the Superintendent's Office. It is important to note that a school principal is regarded as an educational administrator, part of the professional group to which colleagues in the State Department and the Superintendent's Office belong, and not as one of the teacher group. School principals are not members of teacher unions, nor are they covered in teachers' salary negotiations.
In essence there are two separate structures bearing on teachers, the legislative and the executive:

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It could be said that the legislature tends to see itself as representing the school's responsibility to parents and citizens, while the executive represents a professional responsibility by virtue of its special expertise and experience, and also a claim to represent the educational interests of the children where these are not understood by parents and lay citizens.

The teachers are represented by two unions: the Florida Teaching Profession is affiliated to the National Education Association (which is the stronger in rural areas). The Florida Education Association/United is affiliated to the American Federation of Teachers (the stronger in cities). The NEA is the long-established professional association. The American Federation of Teachers is more militant and has stronger links with the trades unions. Both unions maintain offices and lobby staff in the state capital of Tallahassee.

**The Legislature and Accountability.**

Both in terms of constitutional powers and in terms of financial provision, the school system of Florida is accountable to the State Legislature. Until recently this accountability was expressed through the scrutiny of schools by professional staff of the executive branch, and in the financial area, by conventional audit to prevent misappropriation and permit descriptive statements of expenditure. As the state financial contribution increased, there was a disposition on the part of the legislature to attempt to exercise increasing control over curriculum. Then, more recently,
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under the influence of Planning Programming Budgetting Systems came the development of a system of accountability.

The present system of accountability had its roots in a Florida statute of 1968 which *inter alia* instructed the Commissioner to use "all appropriate management tools, techniques and practices which will cause the state's educational programs to be more effective and which will provide the greatest economies in the management and operation of the state's system of education." (Florida Statutes 1968 229.551) Nine principles were adopted by the Florida State Board of Education in August, 1969. These included: the establishment of state educational objectives in priority order; provision of sound financial support; creation of minimum standards for achievement and quality controls; assistance to districts for evaluating results; creation of an information system; and efficient use of funds.

Legislation from 1971 onwards, culminating in a consolidating act in 1976 established the present statewide system of accountability. In the 1976 act the statement of intent is as follows:

The intent of the Legislature is to:

(a) Provide a system of accountability for education in Florida which guarantees that each student is afforded similar opportunities for educational advancement without regard to geographic differences and varying local economic factors.

(b) Provide information for educational decision-makers at the state, district, and school levels so that resources may be appropriately allocated and the needs of the system of public education met in a timely manner.

(c) Provide education about costs of educational programs and the differential effectiveness of differing instructional programs so that the educational process may be improved continually.

(d) Guarantee to each student in the Florida system of public education that the system provides instructional programs which meet minimum performance standards compatible with the state's plan for education.
(e) Provide a more thorough analysis of program costs and the degree to which the various districts are meeting the minimum performance standards established by the State Board of Education.

(f) Provide information to the public about the performance of the Florida system of public education in meeting established goals and providing effective, meaningful, and relevant educational experiences designed to give students at least the minimum skills necessary to function and survive in today's society.

On the input side the development of a system of accountability in the face of this intention has led to the development of a computerized accounting system allowing refined expenditure breakdowns. For example, the costing of individual classrooms or individual lessons is possible though not practised. On the output side the move was towards the specification of behavioural objectives.

A noteworthy feature of the accountability legislation is that, although bills concerning education are usually drafted by the legal department of the office of education, most of those on accountability were drafted by the educational staff of the legislature, and only later worked through with interested parties - including the state's own Department of Education - in committee stage. A professor of educational administration commented: "In the traditional mode the professionals within the system have defined the modes of operation and delivery. There is no longer a disposition to accept the advice of professionals as dispassionate. Accordingly, there is a movement from representative towards participatory forms." Seen from this standpoint, the accountability system is a means of giving the citizenry information which allows them to participate.
The statewide assessment program was created in response to the legislation of 1971 to 1976. Goals for education in Florida were adopted by the State Board of Education in 1971 and revised in 1975. These goals are described in a publication of the Florida Statewide Assessment Program (1976) in the following terms:

One goal is the mastery of basic skills required to gain and express ideas through words, numbers, and other symbols. Mental and physical health is a goal to help students to acquire and maintain good health habits and emotional well-being. Two goals involve relationships with other people: the appreciation of the family as a social institution; and moral, ethical, and spiritual values. The citizenship education goal is directed at improving habits and attitudes for responsible citizenship. The occupational interests goal strives to alert students to job opportunities, and to develop skills and attitudes necessary for productive work. The aesthetic and cultural appreciation goal proposes that students "develop understanding and appreciation of human achievement in the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts."

In setting these goals, the state defined its responsibilities in the education of its students: namely, to ensure that every child acquires essential skills.

It is worth noticing that these goals do not mention knowledge or understanding at any point: skills and attitudes are the desiderata. This emphasis is a by-product of the approach through behavioural objectives.

Following on the definition of goals, the legislature set up in 1971 the Florida Statewide Assessment Program with a commission to develop instruments for assessing student achievement and a cost-effectiveness plan. The first assessment, of reading only,
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took place in 1971-72 and was based upon a selection of reading objectives and items - 116 for Grade 2 (age 7) and 291 for Grade 4 (age 9) - drawn from the objectives and items bank of the Center for the Study of Education, University of California, Los Angeles. 32% of the items were not reported in the results "because of serious technical difficulties or because they did not appear to be a valid measure of an objective." (Development of Florida Statewide Assessment Program, published by the Program, 1976).

In the same document the second testing in 1972-3 is described thus:

More in-state educators were involved in the development of test items for Florida's second assessment in 1972-73. Initial test items were supplied by two local school districts and Florida State University, under contract to the Florida Department of Education. All of the reading, writing, and mathematics test items then were reviewed by a commercial testing firm, Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich for content validity and appropriateness for the grade level being assessed. More than 80 percent of the items were revised, and another 10 percent were replaced by the testing firm. Objectives that could not be measured, because they required the use of unobtainable equipment or because scoring criteria had not been developed for questions requiring written responses, were identified by Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich...

Following test administration, test items were reviewed by subject area specialists in the Florida Department of Education and by a panel of Florida school and university teachers. Items the panel and subject area specialists considered to be invalid were deleted. No results were reported for the third-grade mathematics objectives.

There is clear evidence here both of technical problems and of difficulties in meeting the criticisms of teachers and other educational professionals in the state. The appeal to
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independent and notionally objective criteria was not being made good, since local practitioners were being brought in to assess the assessment, and a good proportion of the results were being discarded on their advice. And clearly the relationship between the consultant technocrats - CSSE at UCLA and Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich - and the local claimants to testing expertise must have been a little strained.

At this point of development a new director of the Florida Statewide Assessment Program entered the picture. Dr Tom Fisher had high levels of competence in the techniques of assessment coupled with political experience gained in the controversial Michigan accountability system. His technical competence is enabling him to tighten up and sophisticate assessment design and administration. For example, instead of a simple league table conception in which scores are compared across schools, he has given each school a target in the form of a prediction score assigned by the use of a regression model, which takes into account a number of factors known to influence attainment.

Fisher's political grasp is also apparent. Administratively his unit is part of the State Department of Education, though it is geographically separated. He is clearly aware, however, that the function it performs is one demanded by the legislature in pursuit of a policy evoking various degrees of enthusiasm among departmental staff. Accordingly, he sees himself as a legislature man within the department, and it is from the legislature that he has, in his own words, "acceptance and praise". The fact that in Michigan the accountability system was developed by the professional with the legislature on the sidelines probably serves to highlight for him the contrasting situation in Florida. Both Fisher's technical skill and his political sense have probably been of great importance in the development of the Florida assessment program. At this stage he claims modest success.

However, the assessment program has narrowed. In 1971
the program of accountability called for:

The establishment of major or ultimate, basic, specific, uniform, statewide educational objectives for each grade level and subject area, including, but not limited to, reading, writing, and mathematics in the public schools.

(Florida Statewide Assessment Program 1976)

This broad-front approach to accountability was not, however, maintained.

The 1974 Act stipulated that all students in grades 3 and 6 be assessed in the subject areas of reading, writing and mathematics in 1974-75, and all students in grades 3 through 6 be tested by 1976.

No other subject area is to be tested until the assessment of reading, writing and mathematics has been implemented in grades 3 through 6.

(Ibid.)

In short, assessment of output in the context of accountability has become assessment of basic skills at minimum levels. In an accountability system which seeks to relate inputs to outputs this output measure would appear to be defective in that it is a necessarily low-level measure applied to a narrow range of the output and not one which can be justified as an index of performance across the desirable range. At the same time there is an obligation upon each school to state its objectives across the range. This exercise may be important if schools are to put the state assessment results into perspective; and it could possibly support a care for quality above minimal levels. Yet one must expect that it is in those situations where it is most needed that the withdrawal of the statewide testing is likely to lead to a satisfaction with the modest standards of basic literacy which are required, even in the case of pupils who should have much higher levels of attainment.

There appears to be some disappointment among legislators
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about the slow implementation of accountability procedures in the school system in response to the statewide assessment program. One senator felt that the major problem was in the State Department of Education: "They will disseminate the part they agree with, but not what they disagree with. Differentiated funding and increased dollars they agree with. Parent advisory councils and annual reports of progress by schools they do not agree with." The legislature seems to be pushing in this area. The 1974 act calls for comparison of performance with national indicators and reports annually to all parents. It was clear to this senator that these pressures were not really effective. There are difficulties in devising incentives and penalties. Financial rewards cannot be given to the schools successful in meeting the performance criteria. This is to reinforce disadvantage. The recourse is really to the reaction of press and parents to publicly declared results.

In the face of this frustration arising from the doubt whether the accountability system is leading to a rise in standards in schools, another senator saw the problem as the rooting of the accountability system in industrial concepts not really applicable to the educational system. But he was not disposed to protect the schools from the pressure being exerted upon them, because they previously stressed student accountability of the style now being applied to them instead of accepting in spirit their institutional accountability to the students. For his part he thought that schools had done little to help their friends defend them. He didn't expect accountability to be successfully and systematically implemented, but he reckoned that a touch of the whip would do no harm to a horse that was not being energetic enough.

In short: the legislature has tried to call the executive and the schools to account through a statewide assessment system.
This assessment scheme has run into technical problems and has contained these by limiting itself to minimal basic skills. The legislature is becoming disappointed with the results of its drive, but finds difficulty in devising incentives which will put pressure on schools. Comparison with national norms — of a kind that will become possible here in the wake of the APU's light-sample testing — and compulsory reporting to parents are its sanctions.

There is some tendency for legislators to attribute difficulties in getting accountability to work as they had hoped to passive resistance in the executive and the schools.

Accountancy and Accountability

Accountability is necessarily linked to the idea of cost effectiveness. In Florida the accountancy system had to be changed to make possible accounting by school and by programme. This part of the accountability design was not legislated but was developed in and by the State Department of Education through a technical branch responsible for budgeting and planning. The head of this branch is trained in cost accountancy and his staff are highly qualified in systems analysis and programming.

The system devised leads to centralised computerized accounting which allows the branch to extract detailed information such as the cost of one curriculum element or one classroom. The computerized accounts are fed back to all school districts and to all individual schools. They can also be related to test results to produce indices of cost effectiveness. Here, of course, since salaries are a high proportion of educational costs, lowly paid teachers towards the bottom of the scale provide the most cost effective classrooms.

I got the distinct impression that the accountants are sceptical of the worth of the test results they are given as output measures; but they do not regard this as their business.
They are sophisticated handlers of data rather than handlers of sophisticated data.

They too are puzzled by the problems of relating results to policy in a system in which failure in schools carries no penalties and success brings no rewards. If financial allocations were influenced by performance, their presumption is that low performers would attract more money to help them to improve. That is what happened in the early days in Michigan, but when the schools failed to show improvement in response to increased investment, the state could not claw the money back because of public opinion, especially where racial or cultural minorities were a factor in the situation.

The Policy of the State Department of Education

At about the time when the first moves towards accountability and statewide assessment were being made, the professional educationists in the State Department of Education were beginning to develop the idea of increasing the power of individual schools. The policy was expressed as "a principle of placing decisions that affect learning as close to the learner as possible."

The historical genesis of this idea and of the idea of accountability is not sufficiently clear for me to be certain which of them came first, but the two became linked. The accountability system made it possible to provide the school with control over its own expenditure and freedom of transfer across accounting heads, while at the same time monitoring the operation. The assessment system provided results by school. This meant that the press of accountability fell upon the school and especially upon the principal. If the school is made accountable, then it must have the full right to make decisions about its own pattern of investment. Thus, school-based management and the increased power of the principal - the policy of the educational
professionals in the State Department of Education - became the characteristic educational response to the accountability initiative from the legislature. This was the innovation which would provide space for policy-making in the school which might improve the quality of schooling.

It is important to note, however, that decentralisation of power to schools in association with centralized accounting is potentially at the expense of the power of the local School Board and the local Superintendent's Office. And, indeed, just as some people in the legislature see the State Department as a brake on change, so some people in the State Department see the School Boards as creating hold-ups. In effect, it would seem that the accountability system strengthens the power of the schools at the expense of the Superintendent's Office. The issue with regard to the School Boards is less clear.

With centralized computerized accounting and budgetary allocations made directly and publicly to schools, the Superintendent's staff of assistant superintendents (equivalent to our LEA officers and advisers) have lost their control over finance and hence most of their power of patronage. The school principal has become the key management figure between the state capital and the classroom. A financial controller at school district level can say: "Life has become a lot easier for me. A lot of decisions that used to rest with me have been transferred to the schools. They have been forced down to the principals. I'm happy because I'm left to deal with the financial side unencumbered with policy decisions." This trend may please the accountant, but not his colleagues who are educational administrators with roles centred on policy.

Quite clearly the school principals are central to the developing situation. Is their power growing at the expense of the School Boards? The principals are of the executive,
the School Boards are of the legislature; and state legislators may be expected to want to back the power of the School Boards. How is this potential conflict shaping up?

Principals are not unionized. In 1975 the Legislature specifically denominated principals as management personnel without collective bargaining rights. There is no statewide system of salaries, and no clear link of reward with qualifications or experience. Principals are responsible for their schools and hence bear the brunt of accountability. Up to 1974 principals were entitled by state law to tenure after three years' probation. In 1974 the option of tenure was given to the School Board, and there was no requirement that the Board should act according to a consistent principle. From July 1977 the legislature has abolished tenure for principals (though existing tenure is preserved). In lieu of tenure School Boards may offer multi-year contracts of up to 3 years.

School principals seem to be like football managers: they are the fall guys in the accountability league. It is the legislature which is putting them in this position, and I interpret this as a move to keep the power of the School Board from being eroded by the executive in the schools.

Moreover, there is some tendency for School Boards further to contain the power of the principals by introducing local legislation limiting the range of options open to the school, while on the other side the teachers' unions negotiate conditions in local contracts which set additional limits to the principal's power.
The teachers' unions pay what I take to be lip service to accountability, but are anxious that legislators, and administrators (which includes principals) should be held accountable for the performance of schools and not just the teachers, who, they argue, have very few options in the classroom. Because accountability tends to focus on responsibility for decisions the unions are able to argue that classroom teachers are not the most important decision makers for determining the performance of schools. They feel that the public mood is towards centralised accountability and control, yet this is combined with a good deal of pressure on teachers from press and public. And of course they feel that there is just not enough money being put into education to get the kinds of results that people want. The unions would like to see evaluation of performance at all levels and not just evaluation of teachers by output assessments.

An important concern is representation of teachers on committees at all levels. At the moment teacher representatives, where they exist, are management nominees: the unions want union nominees. This representation issue and that of salaries loom larger than accountability, though it counts as a serious irritant.

I formed the distinct impression that the teachers' unions are unsure of exactly where their interests lie in the tension between the legislature and the executive: neither is in a straightforward sense an ally for the teachers, and the situations are not always easy to read in terms of consequences for the unions and their members. School-based management seems to offer more power for the teacher, but a consequently greater pressure of accountability. By no means all teachers are likely to welcome this.
Grass Roots

I visited one school district and within that district only one school.

The first point of interest was the choice of district. The State Department of Education at first suggested that I should visit Monroe County. However, since this comprises the islands of the Florida Keys off the southern tip of the peninsula, it did not seem feasible to get down there during a three-day visit. However, it was arranged that I should meet a university professor who had worked with the Monroe County School Board on school-based management and accountability. This made it clear that Monroe County was considered a success area for the decentralising policy, but that a contributory factor was the separation of the islands, which created a natural centrifugal tendency, and that the personal qualities of the superintendent were very important too.

The second suggestion was that I might visit Fort Lauderdale. This was changed at short notice to Alachua County, centred on Gainsville. As it turns out, this was greatly to my advantage, since I am able to use, as well as what I gathered on my short visit, a study, "School-based management and budgeting: the case of Alachua County, Florida" prepared in 1976 by Nadi C. Fester, Nicholas A. Fischer, Karen K. Fischer and Michael S. Kneale of Harvard University for The National Institute of Education and the School Finance Reform Project.

From that source I gather that the decentralised management and accounting processes to be described have been implemented in at least three school districts, the ones already mentioned as those suggested for my visit. The
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overall situation is described as follows:

Three counties in Florida chose to enact a mandate of the Florida Educational Finance Act, to decentralise their management and budgetting processes. Since decentralization was not made part of the law, most of the 67 county-districts in the State chose to proceed more slowly. However, the superintendents and school boards in Monroe, Broward and Alachua Counties began almost immediately to plan and phase in decentralization of management and budgetting decision-making...

School based management shifts the majority of policy and program decisions to the principal at the local school site. The principal and school staff, for example, now make virtually all decisions on staffing, program, support services and maintenance, particularly the amounts that will be spent on each.

Each school generates school funds in terms of fulltime student equivalents, as do universities in this country. Only 26% of the funds generated can be allocated to centralised services in the educational system. 80% of the total school educational budget goes to principals in the form of a lump sum.

The important point to grasp is that this is the basis for accountability. You are only accountable for the money you are free to dispose. It is also the basis for generating a feeling of accountability rather than one of being unjustly called to account. And finally it makes possible the management response which is the means by which accountability can be translated into improvement of schools.

At the same time the accountability boundary with the consumer has to be negotiated.

Each district is required to form citizen advisory councils at the district level. In addition, in Alachua, Broward and Monroe counties these councils have been formed for
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each school in the county. The councils have a mandate to advise on decisions about every aspect of school operations including budget, curriculum, staffing and maintenance.

Presumably the shrewd principal will see that certain intrusions by such lay advisory councils make them rather than her responsible - that is, accountable - for the results.

I interviewed the recently retired superintendent for the county, now a professor of educational administration at the University of Florida. This in itself indicates that he is an unusually able and well-trained superintendent, chiming with the evidence I had about Monroe County in the south. My personal judgement of him is that he would attract great liking and respect: a good choice to put into action a difficult policy reorientation given that he was sympathetic to it. And he was sympathetic both to the citizenry's demand for evidence of results and to the delegation of power to individual schools.

The financial controller in the office of the School Board was a young man in his thirties, as I would judge. He was trained in cost accountancy, used to computerized methods, enthusiastic about the new system, and pleased to play a technical rather than a policy role. He recognised that many of his colleagues holding parallel positions in other school districts lacked modern accountancy training and were unfamiliar and unhappy with computerized accounts based on the principles of Programming Planning Budgeting Systems.

The school principal of the school I visited had recently taken her doctorate in educational administration at the University of Florida. She was the first principal of a modern open-plan elementary school, one of three identical showpiece schools in the county. As principal at the opening of the school, she had inherited no staff: all were her people. The school was well-equipped, had an excellent library and was successfully
involved in curriculum innovation. I had the feeling that, had my interest been in school building or open schooling or team teaching or curriculum innovation, I would probably have been directed to visit the same school.

The principal herself had been pressing for more freedom to make management and budgetary decisions at school level before school-based management had become adopted policy in the district. At first she had got only one salary in her control, but she had continued pressing. She was delighted with the new management system and saw it as the basis for improving teaching through corporate accountability and responsibility. She understood clearly the principles behind the computerized accounting system and explained them lucidly to me. She could quote me the budgetary saving from shutting off the air conditioning for an hour and what might be bought with it.

She had also considered the internal management implications of school-based management, and had developed a participatory style of organization which gave staff a share in decision-making. Two examples may illustrate the implications for practice. She described how the staff had decided to do without a music teacher this session, but now wanted to re-engage one next year. It might be possible to have a music teacher for alternate school years, so that each child would get several years of music during a school career, yet there would still be a considerable saving on salaries. A second example: The school was divided into five sections, each comprising an open centre area with five open class spaces letting on to it. Each area was manned by a team of five teachers. Applicants for posts in the school were first interviewed by the principal, who made a short list. The team then made their own choice of colleague in their own way from this list. Only in this way could the principal hold the team accountable for its performance.
My experience at grass roots level gave me the impression that the implementation of school-based accountability and management depend upon the existence of intelligent, sensitive, well-trained and confident personnel working in reasonably favourable conditions. This was like curriculum innovation revisited.

Reflections

Performance contracting in which private profit educational firms undertake teaching on a payment-by-results basis proved unworkable in recent trials in the United States. Accountability in the public school system cannot be linked to financial incentives and penalties. Public opinion would not tolerate more liberal payment to more successful schools, since this would simply accentuate discrimination against racial minorities and poor areas. In Michigan more liberal payments were made to schools with low standards in an effort at positive discrimination, the principle being that the funds would be withdrawn if they did not lead to improved performance. But the state has found this withdrawal very difficult to carry out in practice. Thus accountability, for all its sound, lacks financial teeth and relies upon press and public reaction to reporting of results by school. This itself is, of course, a potentially powerful sanction, especially in a society like the United States where public opinion can act powerfully on the schools through elected ad hoc school boards.

However, accountability implies that schools with unsatisfactory performance attempt to improve their working. And to improve is to innovate. There is a long history of difficulty in implementing innovations in education, as elsewhere. In Florida the educational innovation which is seen as the response to accountability is a form of school-based management of resources and development of programmes which demands a high level of sensitivity and competence on the part of the school principal.
and co-operativeness and skill on the part of the staff. Where these favourable conditions are lacking, it is probably easier to respond to the pressures of accountability working through press and public opinion either by careful public relations or by "cosmetic" drives for results aimed at improving test scores without improving overall performance in basic skills, much less in terms of broader educational desiderata. No doubt this is made easier by the accessibility of the statewide assessment tests to the teachers at the close of each testing, but it would be difficult in any circumstances to prevent teachers aiming at the test rather than at the performance it is meant to sample.

The accountability system itself is seriously inadequate, both in its measures of output and in its measures of input. Its measures of output are so narrow that they threaten to damage the education, not merely of the able, but of the average if they are accepted as targets by the school. Concentration on low level basic skills could lead to serious problems of boredom. Thus, one would think it dangerous that a school spend too high a proportion of its time on the test content. How much would be appropriate it is difficult to say without making critical empirical observations. But I have no doubt that a school which systematically maximized its maximum scores would do so to the detriment of the education of the children.

It is only necessary to believe that a school which spent as much as 70% of its time on these minimal objectives would be a bad school to expose a serious weakness in the accountability model. The major input is teacher and class time - as Dahlöf has convincingly shown in a Swedish study - and no attempt is made to monitor how much of the time input is related to the measured output.

A lot of thought and care has been put into the Florida accountability system. To produce a better one - accepting the
basic assumptions - would not be easy. But the input–output equation is seriously defective; it is probably easier than is desirable to improve test scores without substantially affecting practical attainment outside school settings; and the educational improvement which accountability is presumably designed to motivate is apparently no easier to disseminate and implement than that motivated by enthusiasm in the heyday of the 1960's. Neither the problems of the nineteenth century accountability system which we experienced in payment by results nor those of the curriculum movement of the sixties and early seventies seem to have been solved.

It seems to me that at different times the improvement of schooling encounters different barriers; and I believe that at the moment the great need is for the development of a new level of professional skills and competences among teachers. It is not lack of motivation which lies in the way of the educational four minute mile!

Accountability in Florida has probably improved education in a small proportion of schools with able and well-trained staff working in favourable circumstances. I am inclined to think that this is a small percentage: barely double figures at the most. Because of its narrow criteria, I should expect it to lead in more situations to the deterioration in attainment noted by HM Inspectorate under payment by results. This takes the form of sacrificing academic standards for performance in rudimentary skills; and teaching for the test rather than for real-life use.

Nonetheless, school-based management linked to some form of accountability by individual school does seem to have real potential if it can be realized. However, teachers will need to have access to a special training and development programme if they are to be equipped to take the opportunities it offers.