

The attempt to reform School Councils in the 1980s: a rehearsal for the furore that greeted the proposals for School Boards?

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ABSTRACT

In the light of the Scottish Government's commitment to the principles enshrined in the Christie Commission and developing approaches worldwide to public administration, this article considers the forces at work and the major arguments for suggesting the need for increased and enhanced participation by parents in educational decision-making and school governance by focusing on the early 1980s. This was another period when participative democracy and partnership between lay-persons and public officials was widely supported at a theoretical level but often met resistance on the ground. An analysis of the responses to the abortive School Council consultative exercise of 1984 conducted by the Scottish Education Department (SED) is offered. The period before the emergence of Michael Forsyth as Education Minister in the Scottish Office in Mrs Thatcher's era as UK Prime Minister is reviewed. Forsyth's controversial proposals for the establishment of School Boards that caused such consternation among the educational establishment and parents have subsequently been replaced by Parent Councils.

INTRODUCTION

Various approaches to school governance have been adopted in Scotland since 1970. The latest being Parent Councils which were established by the *Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act*, 2006 in recognition of the role that parents can play, both in their own children's learning, and in the life of a school, and which replaced School Boards (Macbeth, 1990). However, there has been a long-standing debate about the nature of parental involvement in Scottish schools particularly in relation to the wider role in school governance. While today, aspects of parental involvement are written into teacher professional standards, for example, that is relatively new and signifies growing professional recognition at policy level of the need for such participation. It is in governance that tensions between service providers and users have been evident over the