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Community empowerment? School autonomy, school boards and depoliticising governance

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Abstract

The public education systems of many countries have undergone governance reforms involving administrative decentralisation, corporatisation and community 'empowerment'. In this paper, we examine the significance of local participation and partnerships in the context of public school autonomy and their corporatisation. Focusing specifically on the use of school boards in the Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative in Western Australia, we analyse the interview responses of five IPS principals using Foucauldian notions of governmentality, governance and community. The analysis shows that school boards are conceptualised and mobilised through the narrow technical–rationalist discourses of governance associated with corporatised school autonomy. School boards function as a new form of governmentality that constrains recruitment and participation in school decision-making in ways that depoliticise education. In response to the rise of school autonomy and corporatisation in Australia and elsewhere, we argue for wider local participation on school boards and local engagement with, rather than eschewal of, the politics surrounding education and the public good.

Keywords School boards · School autonomy · Community · Neoliberalism · Governance · Foucault

Introduction

Since the 1980s, the bureau-professional organisation of the public sector of many OECD countries has been transformed in the image of private sector business by "the politics of economic activism" (Rose 1999, p. 244). The corporate forms of management adopted by the public sector value and incentivise the entrepreneurial

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local management of resources; the pursuit of organisational competitiveness, flexibility and revenue; and accountability to centralised agendas through data-driven audit and performance comparisons (Bevir 2010; Clarke and Newman 1997; Rose 1999). Public education systems in many countries have not been immune from this "idealisation of the firm as a generic model of social and economic behaviour" (Ball 2007, p. 37; See also Gewirtz 2002; Rizvi and Lingard 2010). Policies such as Academies and Free Schools in England (Keddie 2015, Gunter 2011; Wilkins 2016), Charter Schools in the United States (Musset 2012) and Free Schools in Sweden (Lundahl 2016), have devolved decision-making responsibilities to schools and local communities, positioned citizens as consumers of public services, entrenched corporate forms of management and leadership, and contrived entrepreneurial and market-type behaviour (Gewirtz 2002; Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Smyth 2011).

New Public Management forms part of a generalised 'governance narrative' that has problematised and reconstituted public sector administration and government (Bevir 2010). According to Bevir (2010), theories of new governance normalise the criticism of state administered public services as inefficient, undemocratic and incompatible with economic logic, the ethical regime of responsible autonomy, an increasingly fragmented and complex state and civil society, and the realities of policymaking and governing practices. These normative representations have resulted in theories, policies and programmes concerned with displacing the state-centred and hierarchically organised public sector with decentralised, horizontal and networked forms of governance that operate through technical managerial knowledge and practices. A key feature of this 'governance without government' orthodoxy is formalising the participation of citizens, private organisations and community ('the third sector') in the delivery of public services (as 'stakeholders' and 'partners') (Brown 2015, 2016; Dean 2007; Rose 1999). This discourse of partnerships and local empowerment has accompanied public school autonomy initiatives. Enacting the "new hegemonic governance imagery characterized by high hopes of potential benefits of self-governance for the enhancement of efficient, effective and democratic governance" (Sorensen and Triantafillou 2010, p. 3), communities have become targets of 'empowerment' in education policy (Wright 2012). They are incited to partner with schools through decision-making mechanisms like school boards and governing bodies (Wilkins 2016).

This paper examines the 'empowerment' of communities in school decision-making in relation to this turn to governance. It takes as its case the Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative in Western Australia (WA). A watershed moment in the administration of the WA public school system, IPS purports to free schools from bureaucratic red-tape and top-down rule by decentralising bureaucracy and operationalising local decision-making (Fitzgerald and Rainnie 2012; Fitzgerald et al. 2017; Gobby 2013a, b, 2016). Lauded by proponents as an efficient, effective and empowering model of "self-directed service design and delivery" for the public sector (EAC 2009, p. 53; Gobby 2016), the government promoted IPS as enabling communities to take control of their school's destiny, enabling "a real sense of shared ownership" (GMO 2009, n.p.), with community participation facilitated through establishing school boards. However, despite pronouncements of community empowerment, concerns exist that IPS and school boards diminish rather than

enhance community participation. In 2017, ten members of the school board of Perth Modern School sent the Director-General of Education a letter stating they had lost confidence in their principal and called for her dismissal after the principal planned to build a $10 million auditorium without their consultation (Perth Modern School principal under pressure after board declares no confidence 2017, n.p.). The parliamentary inquiry into the IPS initiative reported that some principals were using the school board as an advisory council, and to rubber stamp externally imposed requirements (EHSC 2016). The Western Australian Council of State Schools Organisation also described how principals were side-lining the voluntary Parents and Citizens Associations (P&C) from school decision-making (EHSC 2016). Indeed, IPS principals are out-sourcing services (i.e. canteens and uniform shops) run by voluntary P&Cs to generate income (Gobby 2013b). By examining the conception and use of school boards, this paper illuminates the systemic conditions for the apparent discrepancy between the programme's aim of 'empowerment' and reported experience.

This study resonates with governing body research in England which explores the refashioning of school management, leadership and community participation through processes of autonomisation, corporatisation, top-down accountability and depoliticisation (Olmedo and Wilkins 2016; Ranson et al. 2005; Wilkins 2016). There is, however, paucity of research on the relationship between public school autonomy and school boards in Australia, including IPS boards (Austen et al. 2011; Blackmore et al. 1996; Gammage 2008; Gilchrist and Knight 2015). We address this gap. Through the use of the Foucauldian and neo-Foucauldian literature on discourse, governmentality and community as a 'third' political space of government (Foucault 2002, 2008; Dean 2007; Rose 1999), we theorise governance, school autonomy, community and school boards as power/knowledge constructs of modern forms of rule that albeit imperfectly operationalise governmental rationalities and objectives. This paper explores the conceptualisation and experiences of school boards in IPS with a view to contribute theoretical and empirical insights into how autonomy reforms tied to governance discourse reconstitute the meaning and practices of community, participation and government itself. The paper proceeds with a discussion of the policy context informed by the critical literature, the research process, and the analysis of excerpts of interviews conducted with five IPS principals. We then conclude by arguing for attention to the political effects of local participation when it is operationalised through the discourses of governance.

School autonomy and school boards

While lacking conclusive evidence of its benefits to learning outcomes, school autonomy (or school-based management) has emerged as a powerful discourse of education in recent decades (MGSE 2013). Endorsed internationally by global governance bodies such as the OECD and World Bank, school autonomy promises to solve the perceived inability of education bureaucracies to deliver efficient, effective and self-improving education systems in ways that embrace the moral and economic imperative to treat workers and citizens as self-responsible, enterprising

and autonomous (Keddie 2016; OECD 2011; Rizvi and Lingard 2010). The decentralisation of school management in countries like England and Australia through the New Public Management (NPM) devolves decision-making simultaneously as imposing corporatising discourses (Connell 2013; Kimber and Elrich 2011). The resulting 'managerial school' emphasises dynamic and enterprising leadership operating in a supposedly 'enabling' and economised institutional context of privatisation, marketisation, competition and choice (Ball 2003; Brown 2015; Connell 2013; Dardot and Laval 2013; Gewirtz 2002; Smyth 2011). Contractual accountability to 'the centre' according to narrow metrical notions of organisational performance promotes a "'new form of sociality' in education based on measurements, targets, comparisons and incentives" (Ball and Juneman 2012, p. 23). This hegemonic form of school autonomy challenges the 'public good' notion of education, leading some to ask about the desirable ends of autonomy (Niesche and Thomson 2017).

Western Australia's IPS initiative emerges from this policy assemblage. Like all of Australia's state-run education systems, WA's public education system has been highly centralised since its inception. Major economic rationalist reforms in the 1980s and 1990s downsized the central Department, created regional and district offices, and introduced school-based management and accountability instruments such as school improvement plans (Angus 1995). Successful resistance from the teachers' union centred on the erosion of teaching conditions constrained further decentralising reforms, such as the devolution of employment and budget responsibilities. This changed circa 2009 with the IPS initiative (Gobby 2013a), which aims to "give parents and the school community more of a say in how their schools are run" (Government Media Office [GMO] 2009, n.p.). IPS introduces school-level authority over the setting of strategic goals (i.e. creating a school business plan); budgets; the recruitment of staff; managing school maintenance and contracts; deciding the staffing profile (positions); and managing school operations to fulfil its contractual obligations to the Department (operationalised through a Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA)) (Fitzgerald and Rainnie 2012; Gobby 2013a, 2016). To facilitate its take up, IPS avoided the extremes of autonomy and commercialisation by maintaining industrial protections for staff, making the programme opt-in, maintaining enrolment restrictions, and positioning IP schools within the public education system (Gobby 2016). Despite this, IP schools are operating according to corporate managerial rationalities in an institutional context of "competitive performativity" (Ball 2003, p. 219; see Fitzgerald et al. 2017; Gobby 2013b). Currently, IP schools educate 83% of WA public school students.

Like school autonomy reforms elsewhere, local control is couched in terms of individual and community autonomy, empowerment and self-determination (EAC 2009; Wright 2012). The *Empowering School Communities* (ESC) policy that anticipated the IPS initiative states as a goal the creation of "trusting and empowering school communities" (Liberal Party of WA 2008, n.p.). Its stakeholder model of local level decision-making involves partnering "school principals, teachers and staff with parents, local businesses, community groups, local government and the wider community to improve learning outcomes" (2008, n.p.). Replacing the school council, the school board is the formal mechanism of community and stakeholder participation, and is a feature of public school management in other Australian states

(Gammage 2008; Lingard et al. 2002). Outlined in the School Education Act 1999 and school council regulations, the board must be composed of between 5–15 members with at least one parent, and its official role is to strengthen schools' accountability and governance systems (DOE 2016a). The board's role and responsibilities are stipulated in the DPA signed with the Department, and although it does not participate in operational matters, it is formally responsible (in conjunction with the principal) for setting priorities, approving the business plan and budgets, and evaluating performance (Gilchrist and Knight 2015, p. iii).

Previous critically informed research into school boards is instructive for approaching this topic. Victoria's *Schools of the Future* (SoTF) construed school management and the partnership between principals and local communities as 'best practice', specifically through school councils. In effect, the school council constituted a neoliberalising technology that positioned schools as competitive enterprises (Blackmore et al. 1996; Blackmore 1999). The councils reduced teacher representation, focused on school management, and positioned elected parents as individuals and employers rather than representatives of the parent community. In England, a shift away from a stakeholder model of community involvement (i.e. representative) towards a skills-based model (i.e. corporate managerialist) accompanied the corporatisation of schools (Connelly et al. 2017; James et al. 2013; Keddie 2015; Ranson 2011; Wilkins 2016; Young 2016). The integration of the skilled know-how of community members supports the entrepreneurial management of schools while depoliticising educational decision-making by submitting decision-making to the technical logics of management (Clarke 2012a, b; Wilkins 2016). This gives us cause to be attentive to the politics (and depoliticisation) of 'local empowerment' through school boards in IPS and similar school autonomy reforms.

Governance

The notions of locally engaged, inclusive and empowered partnerships promoted by school autonomy reforms like IPS are contradicted by the above-mentioned analyses of school boards. This discrepancy is, at least partly, the consequence of situating reforms that emphasise community, self-governance, partnerships and stakeholders in the discourse of governance (Bevir 2010; Clarke 2012a, b; Newman 2012; Sorensen and Triantafillou 2010; Wilkins 2016).

Governance theories have come to prominence over the past few decades with the promise of limiting the role of the state and promoting engaged publics and democratic ideals in the delivery of public services. They are "concerned to mobilize agents, movements, energies, and cultures outside of the state" and "rest on the hope in civil society – a hope that it holds the solutions, innovative forces, or instructive ethics essential for efficient and effective delivery of services that were once the sole providence of the welfare state" (Villadsen and Dean 2012, p. 401). In this 'governing without government', governance discursively displaces state-centric and hierarchical relations of power with complex, horizontal state and non-state relations, or network governance with stakeholders and partners (Ball and Juneman 2012). These operate through local mechanisms like governing bodies, boards and

councils (Glatter 2003). IPS resembles this image of the apparently flatter, decentred and democratic system of governance that 'empowers' citizens (civil society and its proxies like community) from bureaucratic, political and expert authority. But, theories of governance are limited as an analytical and explanatory framework.

Criticisms of theories of governance draw attention to the limits of their descriptive and normative orientations (Bevir 2010; Dean 2007; Rose 1999; Villadsen and Dean 2012). Realist studies of governance tend to map patterns, negotiations and exchanges that constitute the dispersed practices and networks of policymaking and governance. They normatively signify 'good governance' to mean reducing the expansionist power of the state (political apparatus and public service), using NPM to activate a pre-supposed civil society (i.e. 'the third sector'). In these modernist rationalisations, 'new governance' eschews the critical analysis of the conditions of possibility and intelligibility for acting on the conduct of others (Rose 1999; Villadsen and Dean 2012). That is to say, in its idealistic visions of self-governing and self-transforming communities and individuals (Dean 2007), governance discourse downplays the exercise of power, sovereignty and the normative forms of knowledge through which political government is exercised. The domain of government is therefore reduced to the technical lexicon and instruments of markets, networks and management.

As governance itself constitutes a form of knowledge of the world that is generating truth-effects in how we think about, name and govern the world, studies in governmentality link theories of governance to the operation of neoliberalism (Brown 2015, 2016; Dean 2007). In construing the state as essentially expansionist, and privileging civil society as a pre-political domain that protects against state power, governance discourse operationalises a "state-phobia" (Foucault 2008, p. 76) mentality inscribed in neoliberal governmentalities. Governance therefore contributes to forces dismantling state services and protections, and installing economic government of the social (Dean 2007; Foucault 2008; Villadsen and Dean 2012). For Brown (2015), despite claims that governance techniques are more democratic than state-centred forms, "there is simply no place for the demos or its political activity (especially political contestation about broad principles organizing and directing the polity) within these techniques or more generally within a neoliberal table of values" (2015, p. 207). Hence, neoliberal politics and power lurk behind the language and practices of self-governance, community empowerment, partnerships and local participation. Consequently, governance is not an alternative to political government, but a condition of the constitution and tactical deployment of community, stakeholders and partnerships in political strategies of governing.

Research approach

The interview data were gathered from principals of five IP schools in the city of Perth, Western Australia. The five principals were selected based on their recent uptake of IPS and willingness to be interviewed. A large sample was not sought as the goal was to generate rich data for analysis and theorising about IPS as a form of governmentality. The interview data reported below emerged from hour-long

interviews with each principal about their school's experiences of IPS. The interviews covered topics including school leadership, management, curriculum and pedagogy, and the perceived challenges and opportunities afforded by the IPS programme. The responses were collected, key themes identified guided by the literature, and then analysed. We do not make claims that these schools and principals represent the entire system, but we document the particular logics and practices at play at these sites to generate further insights and theorising. Informed consent was obtained on the condition of anonymity, and the confidentiality of interview responses. Below we present a number of short extracts related to community and school boards from the five interviews.

Bridgette has been principal of Sunshine High School for approximately five years out of ten years as a principal. With approximately 900 students, the south metropolitan school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score of 974 is below the national average (1000). Jack is a newly appointed principal of the Westside College, which is 20 km south of Westside High, has an ICSEA score of 1010 and has approximately 1200 students. Rob is an experienced principal of the Sandy Primary School in Perth's north-eastern suburbs. The school's community is culturally diverse (18% have a language background other than English) and has an ICSEA score of 1000. Paul has been a principal of the eastern metropolitan Forrest Primary for three years. The school's ICSEA score is 950 and enrols approximately 450 students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (33% have a language background other than English, with 10% Indigenous student population). Mark is a principal of an IPS secondary college with a highly subscribed programme catering to international students, and a programme for adult re-entry to education. It has approximately 800 students, with 40% having a language background other than English.

The analysis of the data draws upon the critical literature on school reforms described above and particularly Foucauldian notions of discourse and governmentality. For Foucault, discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 2002, p. 54). Furthermore

> Discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe (Foucault 2002, p. 54).

The significance is that discourses are not just language but they join together the functioning of knowledge and power and construct subjects together in ways that are socially specific (Weedon 1987). Viewing discourses as sets of practices that engage or privilege certain statements is a useful tool to analyse how school autonomy and community participation regulate and promote specific approaches to the management of schools.

Foucault's (2008) notion of governmentality provides a key link between discourse and power and the political rationalities of government inherent in school autonomy discourses. Governmentality is a useful notion with which to analyse specific sets of power relations imbued in the bringing together of power/knowledge frameworks or mechanisms that form school autonomy discourse (see Gobby 2013b;

Niesche 2011; Niesche and Keddie 2016). Governmentality is concerned with how one thinks about governing, the different rationalities, or mentalities of government (Rose 1999; Rose and Miller 1992). By government, Foucault intended the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1983), that is, the shaping of individuals and groups' behaviour with particular aims in mind. A key aspect of this is self-conduct or the governing of the self, which becomes useful in the notions of self-managing schools and more recently, school autonomy discourse. These are rationalities of schools being in charge of their own decision-making and managing of budgets and resources. In this context, "neoliberal governance operates though isolating and entrepreneurialising responsible units and individuals, through devolving authority and decision-making, and through locally implementing forms of conduct" (Brown 2016, p. 5). To understand these shifts, it becomes necessary to recognise the mentalities, instruments and practices of government that form and operationalise the regimes of truth around effective and efficient schooling reforms. This approach is diagnostic insofar as it means "showing how we have come to think about governing in a given situation and to deprive those ways of their obviousness, their naturalness and their self-evidence" (Dean 2007, p. 50).

Consequently, we take school boards to be one mechanism of dispersed governing mechanisms and practices rationalised through disciplinary field of governance, and shaped by corporate managerialism, marketisation, technologies of audit and performativity (Ball 2003; Wilkins 2016). The role of government is to steer schools and school leaders' decision-making and practices towards certain norms and ends, effecting responsibilisation. Responsibilisation does not usurp people's freedoms but operates by transforming the meaning and practices of the responsible exercise of freedom, choice and agency (Rose 1999). Within the governance architecture, school boards constitute a deliberate strategic and political effort to enhance self-governance through "the empowerment of individual citizens [and] the formation of responsible, local communities of stakeholders" (Sorensen and Triantafillou 2010, p. 11). Although the discourse of governance downplays the vocabulary of power (Brown 2016), boards are not neutral administrative mechanisms for achieving specified aims, whether administrative or democratic decision-making. Brown argues "governance actually indexes a fusion of political and business practices" (Brown 2016, p. 5) and is increasingly "neoliberalism's key administrative form" (Brown 2016, p. 5). By connecting local action to political objectives, boards are tied to an economy of power that enables the government of conduct (conduct of conduct) in accordance with emerging rationalities of governing.

We also use Nikolas Rose's approach to political power in the use of community as a third space for governing. Community is constituted as a particular kind of object for the exercise of this political power. Eschewing the commonplace nostalgic and romantic characterisation of community, Rose (1999, p. 176) analyses how community is "instituted as a sector of government". He continues by saying "in the institution of community, a sector is brought into existence whose vectors and forces can be mobilized, enrolled, deployed in novel programmes and techniques which encourage and harness active practices of self-management and identity construction, of personal ethics and collective allegiances" (Rose 1999, p. 176). Community takes on government in the form of both responsibilising and autonomising a range

of actions previously undertaken by the facilitating structures of the state (Rose 1999, p. 174). As seen from the data below, school boards are functioning under IPS as a new domain for deploying approaches to monitoring and self-managing schools. Rose explicitly calls this ‘government through community’ (Rose 1999, p. 176).

IPS, school boards and communities

While schools involve communities through surveys, newsletters, P&C associations, special engagement programmes (e.g. curriculum-based), and parent evenings, the school board occupies an important place in IPS. According to the Department of Education, “establishing a board of an Independent Public School is an opportunity to attract a broader cross-section of people with a range of experiences and expertise. Strong community and business representation ensures the board can make an even more significant contribution to the development of the school” (DOE 2016a). However, attracting a “broader cross-section of people” is constrained by the discourses of management and accountability. According to the Director-General of the Department, school boards should secure “real involvement of the community” (O’Neill quoted in DOE 2016b, p. 2), which she explains as “school planning, budgeting, monitoring performance and then reporting back to the community and to government”. Defined thus, ‘real involvement’ betrays the expectation that principals should recruit, not “ordinary people” (Clarke 2012b, p. 21), but people with the skills, knowledge and networks to support corporate governance, including accountability. This is borne out by the schools discussed here, as board members commonly include academics, business people, representatives from local Chambers of Commerce, and state and federal parliamentarians.

Jack, the principal of Westside College, construes himself as an innovative entrepreneurial leader, and for him, the board must contribute to making the school a competitive enterprise:

> …we recognise that IPS is about what we choose to do to build positive links with our community. The school board is one example here… the board has only started operating, and there is a couple of people I have brought on … the way the school board is thinking is, ‘Well, what opportunities can we find for the College?’ We were talking about joining the Chamber of Commerce, we’ve got council members on there, a local politician…

More than being just a vehicle for community representation, the school board assembles specific forms of knowledge, power and agency. Recruitment is focused on accumulating intellectual, social and cultural capital to shore up each school’s governance know-how, which is being broadened by the neoliberal policy discourse of performance, competition and accountability. The Department endorses this: “Professional skills in areas such as management, finance, procurement, marketing and cultural knowledge support the principal and strengthen the school’s capacity to meet the needs of its students” (DOE 2016a). These matters of recruitment to the board of suitable community members are questions of what Foucault refers to as

"the art of government" (Foucault 1991, p. 92). That is, questions of the best way of managing individuals, goods and economy—an introduction of economy into political practice.

For instance, the school board is expected to use their networks to monitor performance and improve management practices, as well as to generate external funding, and competitively position the school by building partnerships with private and not-for-profit organisations. Hence, the board complements Jack's school's commercialisation agenda, which they are expected to support. The school outsourced the uniform shop and canteen to a private provider, with the payment of commission a new source of school income. The school also outsourced its ICT services and created a marketing coordinator position to promote the school. Recruiting board members sympathetic to and knowledgeable of business logics and practices introduces economy into the governance structures of schools, and a multiplication of forms of political subjectivity of community members (see Rose 1999). For Foucault, through such instruments people become both the target for government and the means by which people are governed; individuals become the target and instrument of the government of populations (Foucault 1991). This is done through a new range of processes, tactics and regimes that construct a new relation between power and knowledge for schools and school–community relations. School board members, as a result, must have governance knowledge and skills consistent with the new functioning of schools and their communities.

Mark perceives that "the board lies at the heart of the accountability mechanisms of a school". He comments that principals are central to the board's effectiveness. Principals should recognise the opinions of the board as critical to schools' accountability and should therefore strive for the board to have "genuine involvement in the setting of priorities, in ensuring that the budget supports those priorities, to have genuine involvement in school policymaking". However, 'genuine involvement' and 'accountability' are defined through corporate managerial discourses of 'good governance', which is the yardstick for judging the contribution of board members (Blackmore et al. 1996). One effect of this new set of arrangements therefore is that corporatisation, competition and managerial accountability marginalise the (albeit imperfect) conceptions and norms of community engagement (James et al. 2013; Olmedo and Wilkins 2016; Wilkins 2016). The stakeholder model of community involvement "implies some form of 'representation' which would include aspects of minimal hierarchy, social and cultural diversity, equal valuing of specialist and lay knowledge, and forms of open participation which allows for conflicting viewpoints as well as scope for difference and deliberation" (Olmedo and Wilkins 2016, p. 8). While the interviewed principals valued community representation and sought input from the community, they also endorsed a skill-based approach to recruitment, arguably because of the performative context of school autonomy. As Bridgette commented

> The school board has to be more of an influencer now than a representer to enable the school to achieve its goals. So, previously where the school board would have parents, staff members, a balance, we are now looking for members with specific skills sets to enable us to do what we need to do. For

> instance, the financial oversight – somebody needs to have a specific skill set within the school board other than a staff and principal to give that transparency and over-sight for the financial management of the school.

This "regulated-participation" (Olmedo and Wilkins 2016, p. 7) illustrates the particular logic at work in the functioning of this assemblage of governmental rationality. Flattening the hierarchy of decision-making authority is less about representation for the local community and more about government *through* community *through* specific sets of skills, knowledge and dispositions. The board builds the "governance capital" (James et al. 2011, p. 429) of a school, where favourable recruits who are "fit for purpose" (Wilkins 2016, p. 97) bring expertise and skills that support the effective and smooth management of the school and its board. Here, school improvement is understood managerially, the effect of 'good governance', and school leaders therefore judge candidates according to "the networks of information, knowledge and resource contacts [that will] enrich the practice of a school" (Ranson 2011, p. 408). In this new "game of power" (Rose 1999, p. 188), where schools are governed through the steering practices of its community members, effective governance is "displaced from the state onto citizens" (Newman 2012, p. 99).

Not adopting this skills-based model opens schools and their leadership to scrutiny. For example, Rob, who leads a school in a low-SES area, perceives himself as having a strong relationship with his community, but a lack of professionals on his board put him at odds with the Department's view of an effective board. He commented about a recent Department review of his school:

> Even though they keep pushing [to recruit members]… one of the criticisms here was, you need more high profile people; you need lawyers and accountants on there, and my good people [current board members] got really offended by what the people from DES [Department of Education Services] said, because they were actually insulting them.

Rob refuses to exclude community members who do not possess the expertise and social capital expected by the Department. But, the deeply embedded (and normalised) managerial notion of 'good governance' means Rob's choices are construed as a risk to the school's ability to demonstrate management capability, optimise performance and competitiveness, and enhance accountability to the agenda-setting centre (see Wilkins 2016).

There are a few issues worth noting about this. First, recruiting those with 'governance capital' burdens all schools to educate their board members, especially about educational and school governance issues. The principals described spending time educating members on the affordances and constraints of the IPS programme since some members thought IPS meant schools having unfettered autonomy. As well, principals spent time educating members on national testing (NAPLAN) and how to critically interpret the data and its significance for their school. Indeed, the Department recently developed a pedagogical programme on school governance to equip board members with the technical–administrative knowledge and skills for performing board-member responsibilities (DOE 2016b). This training of board members functions as a form of disciplining of individuals into educational and

corporate governance discourse. This is for the purpose of better managing such a group of individuals in the governing process. Foucault was clear that he did not see elements of disciplinary society disappearing but working alongside sovereignty and government in a form of triangular relationship: "sovereignty-discipline-government" (Foucault 1991, p. 102). It is these 'educative tactics' deployed by principals on school board members that function as a part of this notion of governmentality. The school board thus becomes both the target and vehicle for the exercise of political power in what Rose refers to as "a double movement of autonomisation and responsibilisation" (Rose 1999, p. 174).

A second issue is that recruitment of 'skilled' board members can be challenging. Some schools, especially in low-SES areas, struggle to attract those with the officially endorsed governance capital (Dean et al. 2007; James et al. 2011). Bridgette noted of her community that there is an "almost complete lack of interest" in participating in school decision-making, and there was even acknowledgement that, in a competitive market context, the school board potentially benefits higher SES schools because, according to Jack, they "have got much greater capacity to bring on to their boards very significant people within their community who have got tremendous expertise". We suggest that the unequal distribution of cultural, social and financial capital in the population is reflected in the differential distribution across school boards, and therefore governance approaches can further the comparative advantage and disadvantage of schools.

Third, in promulgating a market emphasis on 'what works', governance discourse "eliminates from discussion politically, ethically or otherwise normatively inflected dimensions of policy, aiming to supersede politics with practical, technical approaches to problems" (Brown 2016, p. 5; Clarke 2012a, b; Newman 2012). The potential of community involvement to disrupt the dominant policy discourses of standardising curriculum and pedagogies is contained by supposedly neutral and universal corporate managerial discourses of school autonomy that render education and school improvement into an apolitical technical process (of skills) (Young 2016). Hence, principals spoke predominantly about boards in functional terms (i.e. improving accountability and management), with student learning discussed in terms of targets (such as test scores) set out in their DPAs and business plans. Here, governance "vanquishes power, and hence power's visibility, from the lives and venues that governance orders and organizes" (Brown 2016, p. 5). With external accountability and competitive performativity imposed on principals, there was limited evidence in the interviews of principals promoting political conceptions of participation, such as questioning the normative prescriptions of school education, or questioning the power and politics shaping the relationships, issues and decision-making of schools. Indeed, the governance discourse of school boards does not value members contributing local perspectives about the diverse knowledge, experiences and expectations of communities and the complex cultural and situated aspects of educational failure and success (Ranson 2011). This is despite the Premier's aim to create 'shared ownership', and the need to bridge the cultural divide between schools and communities so as to positively influence student learning (Bottrell 2015; Moll et al. 2005; Smyth 2009).

Conclusion

A critical relation to the strategies for governing involves being "attentive to their pre-suppositions, their assumptions, their exclusions, their naiveties and their knaveries, their regimes of vision and their spots of blindness" (Rose 1999, p. 19). In this paper, we have related community participation through IPS school boards to the discourses of governance, which deploy strategies and practices to partner civil society, service users and third-sector stakeholders with schools to take shared responsibility for the provision of education. While presented as the empowerment of communities from education bureaucracies and government through local participation and decision-making, this public engagement is political. Foucault's work on power and governmentality combined with Rose's conceptualisation of community as a third space is illuminative for understanding and analysing how the theories and practices of governance, school boards and associated forms of community empowerment do not operate beyond the structures of the state, but function as mechanisms of power and government. In this form of neoliberalised governmentality, "governments no longer exert monopolistic control over state actions" (Olmedo and Wilkins 2016. p. 13). It is this third space, community, that has become a target for political power. Boards and other community groups have become, through these school autonomy reforms, sites for promoting local involvement in their own government as much as implementing corporate interests and managerial functions that reconfigure the state and practices of governing.

Principals, who are increasingly responsible for their school's accountability, management and performance in a field of increasing risks and insecurities, are restricting their recruitment of board members to 'resource rich' stakeholder groups and individuals who possess the knowledge, skills and networks that support schools' entrepreneurial and corporate interests (i.e. meeting performative, self-evaluation and governance demands). We do not suggest that other community members are not being selected, but that a hierarchy of judgment around the value of board members is enacted when members are recruited through these practices of 'community empowerment'. Moreover, rather than engaging citizens in decision-making around substantive issues like the purpose of education and how it can be organised to benefit students' learning and lives, board members are instead drawn into the power-knowledge web of performativity, managerialism, corporatisation, and contractual accountability. This form of governance limits the potential of community participation through boards.

Further to this, the dominant technocratic and managerial discourses of governance is depoliticising educational decision-making (Clarke 2012a, b; Wilkins 2016). Governance "operates as a depoliticizing epistemology, ontology, and practice" (Brown 2016, p. 6) that downplays "to the point of disavowing both fundamental stratifications in economy and society as well as normative conflicts over the good" (Brown 2016, p. 5). In so doing, governance "diminishes all significant venues for active citizenship" (2016, p. 8), so where one might assume boards could be a venue for empowerment and local decision-making around

local and broader public interests and issues, there is in fact limited room for creative dialogue, dissenting voices, or collective explorations of alternative visions of schooling (Wilkins 2016; Young 2016). Department documents and the interview excerpts show this new form of governmentality is more about establishing consensus, expert corporate oversight and finding suitable participants than it is about facilitating a culturally sensitive decision-making body that debates and advocates for the diverse interests of students and their communities. Is this surprising given that historically "community engagement is viewed through a lens that is sharply focused on the agenda of the school or the education system, rather than the local community" (Smyth, et al. 2014, p. 70)?

Community engagement framed through governance discourse and its universalising logics therefore risks isolating schools and their boards from their local contexts. Smyth (2014) argues that "young people become disenchanted with school because of its inability to recognise or respect them – as individuals, their classed backgrounds, their cultural histories and dispositions, and the aspiration they had for their futures" (p. 232). The learning of students is shaped by power and culture, and teachers and school leaders must mediate between the life-worlds of students and communities to maximise student engagement. Therefore, "the engagement of young people in learning will be in proportion to the capacity of schools to listen and respond sympathetically to the voices of the communities in civil society" (Ranson 2011, p. 409; see also Martin et al. 2000; Smyth et al. 2014). School improvement requires re-orienting schools away from "inward gazing guardianship of the standards agenda" (Ranson 2011, p. 406) to overcoming social, cultural and economic divides partly by capitalising on the funds of knowledge of children and their communities (Comber and Kamler 2004; Ranson 2011; Smyth et al. 2014). Selecting board members based on the criteria of managerial and governance expertise alone and constraining the use of boards to corporate managerial ends, denies schools valuable local knowledge that can serve to strengthen wide community engagement and the alignment of children, pedagogy and curriculum (Martin et al. 2000; Ranson 2011).

These developments are connected to a wider neoliberal policy discourse that disavows its own politics and the political nature of education policy. Through instrumentalist governance reforms, which disavow the power they circulate, issues of public good and social and political conflicts are being vacated from the public sphere and broader schools' discourse (Clarke 2012a, b; Fielding and Moss 2011). This is not to claim that politics, power and the public good have been substantive concerns of school decision-making in the past—the administration of schools in liberal democracies has sought to manage civil conflicts arising from different interests and visions of the purpose of schools. But, these debates about the public good and the role of political and governmental institutions are urgently needed given the inequalities perpetuated by Australia's education system, and the displacement of the role of state institutions in re-distributing economic and cultural resources. Against the separation of education and politics, communities should be engaged in political debate about the public good, structural and systemic issues, and who is best served by school education (Clarke 2012a; Ball 2016; Fielding and Moss 2011).

Importantly, we wish to avoid the political romanticism that construes self-governing communities as the site of empowered self-determination, as this risks reinforcing neoliberal governmentalities by reifying the community as a pre-political, empowered body responsible for its own experiences and outcomes. Rather, what is required is a "practical engagement with specific problems using an analysis of political forces and the resources available to achieve certain ends" (Villasden and Dean 2007, p. 415). Such critical analysis asks "on what assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices we accept rest" (Foucault 1988, p. 154). In relation to school boards, this practical engagement should involve examining, debating and contesting the power, politics and effects of current education policies (Young 2016), the political distribution of resources, the normalisation and effects of corporatised discourses of education and governance, and the universalist pretence of governance knowledge and practices. Local participation on this basis potentially opens avenues to new ways of thinking about and undertaking schooling.

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