Enacting the Independent Public Schools program in Western Australia

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The Independent Public Schools (IPS) program began to be implemented in some Western Australian schools in 2010. The IPS program devolves a number of responsibilities to principals and is part of the political objective of removing the constraints of the education bureaucracy by fostering school level decision-making, problem-solving and innovation. This paper argues that IPS can be understood as an instance of 'advanced liberal government'. It then explores the enactment of IPS in a Western Australian high school. This paper suggests that while IPS was designed to empower principals from the constraints of the Department of Education, and principals are taking up the flexibilities offered by the program, some principals may be experiencing a lack of support and resources that imposes constraints in their capacity to innovate and problem-solve.

Introduction

This paper explores the Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative developed in Western Australia in 2009. IPS is promoted as a program that cuts the "unnecessary red tape" (Liberal Party of WA) of bureaucratic decision-making by devolving decision-making closer to the people who know most about the local context and those affected by it – principals, parents of students and the local community. IPS involves a mix of local responsibility and central regulation. Schools selected for the program assume the authority to make decisions related to curriculum, student support, human resources, recruitment and selection, payroll, financial management and building and facilities, while centralisation largely remains in such areas as policy and strategic direction, performance monitoring and measurement, and curriculum. Since the launch of the IPS program in WA in 2009, similar policies are now being developed and implemented in Queensland, New South Wales and at the national level by the Federal Government.

Like other Western liberal democracies, school autonomy and devolution have been a fixture of education reform in Australia over the past few decades, however until recently it has been *ad hoc* and highly provisional, not constituting for the most part a coherent reform program, save for the Kennett government's *Schools of the Future* (Directorate of School Education, 1993) program in Victoria. Nevertheless, the educational case for school autonomy is mixed. Decentralisation and school autonomy has been variously characterised as an attempt to drive efficiencies and reform teachers' industrial platform (Gavrielatos, 2011), a positive innovation that will improve student learning, and as a political-economic reform that disadvantages the already disadvantaged (Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). In Western Australia (WA) the IPS program has been implemented largely free of research or the sober judgments of evaluation and the WA government has expressed its intention to expand the program to as many public schools as possible. It is

the purpose of this paper to provide some insights into the IPS program and its enactment in WA schools.

This paper argues that the IPS program can be understood as an attempt to reconfigure the organisation and management of the WA Education System according to the rationalities of advanced liberal government, as described in the neo-Foucauldian research of Rose (1999) and Dean (1999). In particular, the program conforms to other self-managing trends insofar as it encourages principals to become problem-solving professionals who can innovate in response to local conditions (Popkewitz, 1996). This paper explores the enactment of the IPS initiative through two interviews conducted with a principal of an IPS school, with the goal being to understand how the IPS policy is "translated from text to action" (Ball, MacGuire & Braun, 2012, p. 3). The interviews reveal that IPS fosters problem-solving at the local level, however this capacity in some instances is limited by the added responsibilities of IPS and the effects of a district restructure. These, I argue, interact with the enactment of IPS in ways that may frustrate the program's goals of added flexibility and autonomy.

The expert case for school autonomy

What is the 'expert' case for decentralisation and school autonomy? That is to say, what is the case made by those with authority to speak on matters of school governance? School autonomy is the corollary of the idea proposed for a number of decades that devolving responsibilities from large bureaucratic organisations to smaller entities variously produces efficient, effective and democratic organisations and outcomes. The source of these arguments is varied. With the growth of identity politics and its associated discursive shift from representational to participatory democracy from the 1960s, feminist and progressive critiques laboured on the failure of public bureaucracies in Western liberal democracies to deliver on participatory ideals in a world increasingly populated by an active, empowered citizenry (Dean, 1999; Gough, 1979). At the same time that these critiques were made, studies in bureaucracy and management construed public bureaucracies as comprising structures and processes that agitated against achieving their objectives effectively and efficiently (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Such criticisms resonated with the economic analyses of public choice theorists who pointed to the public bureaucracy's economic and political shortcomings (Buchanan & Wagner, 1977). Official reports from the 1970s into the management of the public sector ushered in an era of reform shaped by these criticisms under the banner of New Public Management (Hood, 1991).

Unsurprisingly, the anti-bureaucracy discourse was brought into the remit of education systems. The case against centralised education systems was made by a wide variety of researchers in the areas of critical and cultural analysis (Rizvi, 1994; Smyth, 1993), education organisation research (Sergiovanni & Carver, 1973), education management research (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; 1992), and the school effectiveness research, which has had a long tradition of arguing for the benefits of school autonomy (Reynolds et al., 1976; Sammons, 1999). There should be no doubt that decentralisation was construed through

the discursive limits of each expertise where the case for decentralising reform was mounted. The case for decentralisation was sometimes based on psychology, and was at other times overtly ideological (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Those like Rizvi viewed devolution as a means to realising a social democratic ideal of empowered, self-governing communities, while Rutter, Maughhan, Mortimore & Ouston (1979) emphasised the power of 'school effect' against what they viewed as the tide of social determinism in the work of cultural education theorists. While the cases for decentralisation were wide and varied, there was nevertheless a common target. Fostered by the putative self-evidence of the problem of bureaucracy, the common goal was to facilitate change in the government of education by reducing the influence of the education bureaucracy and 'empowering' those who work in schools.

More recently, the case for greater school autonomy has been advocated strongly by political actors operating at the international level, notably the OECD (Lingard & Rizvi, 2006). Quantitative research conducted by the OECD supports the growing trend of decentralisation and the fostering of education markets. Comparing education systems around the world, the OECD concludes that decentralised school systems perform better than centralised ones (OECD, 2004). The OECD also conducted an analysis of the 2006 PISA science knowledge and skills results. Researchers conducted interviews with principals from over 57 countries who reported on their level of autonomy across a range of matters. Comparing students' test results and the reports of principals, the OECD concluded that school systems with high autonomy, that give schools power over course content and budgets, perform better regardless of whether the schools which the children attend have high degrees of autonomy or not (OECD, 2007). In short, system level decentralisation appears to be correlated with high student performance. The benefits of system decentralisation were confirmed by subsequent analysis of the PISA results, which also found that local control over the hiring of staff was associated with high performance (Schütz, West & Wöbmann, 2007). It is also claimed "there is not a single case where a policy designed to introduce accountability, autonomy, or choice into schools benefits high-SES [socio-economic status] students to the detriment of low-SES students" (Schütz, West & Wöbmann, 2007, pp. 34-35). Finland, with its decentralised system of schooling that fosters innovation and collaboration, is viewed as a model of a high performing system (Schleicher, 2011).

However, the case for school self-governance is not beyond doubt. Research including the meta-analysis of data into decentralisation conducted in the 1990s failed to demonstrate any significant direct link between school self-management and improved learning outcomes (Malen, Ogawa & Kranz, 1990; Summers & Johnson, 1996). A study conducted in Victoria, Australia, following self-managing reforms in that state found no direct cause and effect between the decentralisation of decision-making in planning and resource allocation, and improved learning outcomes for students (Caldwell & Spinks, 1998). Caldwell (2012) suggests, however, that a new wave of research, more attentive to the link between decentralisation and learning outcomes than previous research, has emerged that supports the case for decentralisation. In that research, improved learning outcomes can be achieved in particular circumstances involving local decision-making. Improved learning outcomes are registered in decentralised systems where local control of budgets is

accompanied by certain accountability mechanisms, such as external exams (Wöbmann et al., 2007), and where purposeful links are made between self-management capacities and improving the teaching and learning in classrooms (Bullock & Thomas, 1997; Caldwell & Spinks, 1998; Levacic, 1995). The case increasingly being recommended to political authorities, at least at an international level, is that decentralisation in itself does not improve system or school improvement. However, decentralisation can improve school performance if attention is also paid to addressing certain features of a school's 'ecosystem', which include instruments of accountability, the social and cultural capital of schools (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008), the quality of teaching, and the effectiveness of school leadership (Hargreaves, 2010).

Even if decentralisation is pursued with policies that address schools' eco-systems, questions still surround the unintended consequences of devolution and the deregulatory policies associated with it. There is evidence that as administrative tasks are devolved to schools, schools experience an excessive administrative burden (Blackmore, Bigum, Hodgens & Laskey, 1996; Starr, 1998; Whitty et al., 1998), and the work of principals becomes less about driving educational improvement and more about managing risks (Thomson, 2009), managing the business of schools (Gewirtz, 2002; Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995) and being entrepreneurial (Grace, 1995). Further to this, the deregulation of school choice that often accompanies decentralisation has been documented to produce unfair student selection practices in some schools (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), to advantage privileged students more than students from low SES background when measured against student test results (Schütz et al., 2007), and in some cases to "intensify the gaps between schools serving the rich and those serving the poor, gaps marked by growing differences in school size, student intake, resources and achievement" (Lamb, 2007, p. 29). Whitty et al. observed that "for those schools ill-placed to capitalize on their market position, the devolution of responsibility can lead to the devolution of blame" onto parents, teachers and students (Whitty et al., 1998, p. 113). This produces unintended consequences that cost the system as a whole, particularly for students and families who lack the cultural and financial capital of their peers. There is even concern about this expressed in the research supporting decentralisation. Schütz, West and Wöbmann (2007) concluded that while students perform better where private schools operate, the evidence is less clear as to whether choice among public schools has a significant positive effect on student achievement.

It is not the purpose of this paper to validate or debunk the findings of these experts in management, organisations and education in order to support or invalidate decentralisation as a policy objective. What the above description attempts to do, however, is to map out some of the key ideas and findings of experts that provide the context and intellectual resources for the pursuit of policies of decentralisation. Of particular interest is that there appears to be a political commitment to decentralisation and school autonomy despite the mixed findings about its efficacy and effects. It is this political commitment that arguably continues to maintain decentralisation as an object of investigation by the various 'expertises' of education and agents of education policy. This may explain the more recent research that construes school autonomy as a means to facilitate transformations in certain features of the ecosystem of schools that other

researchers have established are so crucial to improving educational outcomes, such as quality teaching. Whether these transformations could be pursued within centralised education systems is a moot point. Clearly the political tide is in favour of school autonomy.

Advanced liberal government

How, then, can we understand decentralisation as a political objective? And what role has political thinking and action played in the emergence of school autonomy? A fruitful way to understand and examine school autonomy and IPS in particular is by using the insights of Foucauldian research on government. There are three points I wish to make in relation to this. First, IPS can be understood as an instance of a broader shift in how political and government authorities are rationalising and enacting government. Second, government and programs of government, like IPS, can be studied at the level of the individual and his or her practices. Third, the activity of government is a complex, provisional and congenitally failing enterprise. Let me describe these in turn.

Advanced liberal rule

There has been a transformation over the past half-century in how government is rationalised and enacted in many Western liberal democracies. This shift has been termed advanced liberalism. The term 'advanced liberalism' developed out of the Foucauldian studies in government (Foucault, 2007; 2008), notably the work of Rose (1999) and Dean (1999). It refers to the emergence of particular kinds of rationalities and modalities of governing in the late 20th century in many Western liberal democracies. Encompassing what is commonly known as neo-liberalism, advanced liberalism signals a wider field of governmental rationalities and technologies that emerged in the post World War Two period. Forming out of a critique of social liberal rationalities and modalities of governing, those commonly linked to the 'welfare state', advanced liberalism conceptualises the wellbeing of individuals and nations in terms of the capacity of individuals to seek personal self-fulfillment and empowerment through industriousness and enterprise, and to exercise their freedom to better themselves particularly through the facility of choice making (Rose, 1999). For political authorities it has increasingly became a matter of moral obligation and patriotic duty for individuals to take responsibility for themselves and their future, rather than expect the state to secure them from need and risk. Here the individual is assumed to be, and is constituted as, an entrepreneur, an enterprise, a problem-solver, a consumer, an autonomous chooser, and an empowered and an active citizen. This reconceptualisation of the subject of government has also brought about a re-thinking of how the public sector and political authorities and their instruments should operate. In the late 20th Century political authorities and governmental agents have increasingly been tasked with setting and optimising the conditions that enable responsible self-regulation in the form of enterprise, personal independence, productivity, and the exercise of choice. This has led to political authorities seeking to create market mechanisms for competition and choice in areas of public provision such as health and education. Dean (1999) describes advanced liberalism as 'reflexive government' because the ends of government are being folded back upon the instruments of government.

Dean's description aptly fits with the contours of recent school reform. As a governmental technology, schooling and its bureaucratic organisation has been problematised according to the advanced liberal governmentalities of flexibility, autonomy, choice and empowerment. Accordingly, the problem with school systems is conceptualised in terms of the regulatory constraint imposed on it by education bureaucracies, the delimitation of choice and organisational flexibility, the failure to empower principals and school communities, and the failure of school systems to be responsive to the needs and interests of citizens, which include local communities. The Federal Government describes this in terms of the need for education systems to be subject to "improved market design – so that we work to create the conditions in which markets serve the public interest through vigorous competition, transparent information, greater choice and becoming more responsive to the needs of service users" (Gillard, 2010, p. 5). These goals are to be folded back upon the school system, as an instrument of government. This involves rendering school systems more effective, responsive, flexible, enterprising and innovative through devolving decision-making authority to schools, whilst encompassing these school in a range of decentralised and centralised regulatory techniques, knowledges and practices, which include the discourses of management, market mechanisms, performance management techniques and policy frameworks that steer schools at a distance. These enable schools to become relatively autonomous entities.

Government as the practices of the self

Importantly, advanced liberal government, like any activity of government, works not by the ideological infiltration of people's minds but by linking political and governmental rationalities to individual practices and conduct. It was Foucault's contention that government in liberal societies functions not by dominating people's minds and bodies but by shaping how individuals exercise their freedom. Knowledges, techniques, practices and strategies in which individuals are implicated, such as those derived from the expertises of the social and human, shape the thoughts, conduct, beliefs and desires of individuals. These constitute 'technologies of the self' insofar as they are employed in the practices of self-formation and individuals' own self-government. Liberal government relies upon developing individuals' capacities to govern themselves responsibly, within certain defined parameters.

In relation to our present discussion, then, advanced liberal rule can be understood in terms of the employment of knowledges, techniques and practices that shape the exercise of principals' freedom in the direction of enterprise, choice, innovation and problem-solving. Popkewitz conceptualises this as changing patterns of governance by cultivating 'problem-solving' capacities of teachers in decentralisation reforms. In effect, political rationalities shape the "modes of action that act upon the dispositions, sensitivities and awareness that enable individuals to be productive and self-autonomous actors" (Popkewitz, 1996, p. 29). Hence, the cultivation of the innovating, decision-making and problem-solving principal reflects the modes for the exercise of political power across the educational field. By shaping principals' personhood, principals and the field of education are rendered governable to ends specified by political and governmental authorities.

The messy actualities of governing

Although we can identify this wider transformation of government, this perspective needs to be accompanied by an analytical approach that is sensitive to what Larner (2000) describes as the "messy actualities" (p. 247) of governing. The concern here is not to assume that government policy and programs unproblematically realise certain ideologies and policy frameworks. Rather, studies in governmentality often examine the complex, pragmatic and contingent nature of governing. For instance, Rose & Miller (1992, p. 190) describe the pragmatic nature of government in terms of how a "sublime image of a perfect regulatory machine is internal to the mind of programmers", yet, "the world is not itself programmed". Their point is that programs of government and the political rationalities and ambitions they embody are limited in their capacity to territorialise a governable field because: they are made operable through mundane and often technically limited techniques and technologies; they depend upon the activities of people across disparate departments and sectors of society not necessarily subject to centralised coordination; they are deployed in domains that comprise individuals and groups that exert their resistances and pressures; they embody and co-exist with heterogeneous and often rivalrous discourses and rationalities and technologies of government; and because programs of government cannot absolutely anticipate people's responses they often produce unexpected problems. In short, the 'will to govern' is not matched by the capacity to govern absolutely. Consequently, "the aspiration to govern is accompanied by a constant registration of failure, where ambitions do not meet outcome and the need to do better next time" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 191).

Given the above points, while we may locate school autonomy within a broad trend in the rationalisation and enactment of government, the enactment of policies and programs of government on the bodies and in the minds of individuals is provisional, contextually shaped, and rife with conflicts and contradictions (Ball et al., 2012). They are, in a sense, experimentations with the organisation of reality, activity and being. It is the purpose of the following section to examine the IPS program as experimentations with governing, by paying attention to how the programs of government enacting advanced liberal rationalities are themselves being received, adopted and enacted.

The Independent Public Schools program in Western Australia

In WA, successive government policies related to the public sector and education have produced a partially decentralised education system. Until 2011, schools were aligned with fourteen regional education offices that steered schools in their local district through local area planning. Principals had responsibility for creating and reporting to the local office on school improvement and development plans. Until more recently, the central Department of Education managed large parts of school budgets, procurement, school enrolment, recruitment and employment. Over the past decade there has been a loosening of Departmental regulations. Some principals have been given authority to opt out of the central placement process and to recruit and employ staff on merit. The *School Education Act 1999* more recently provided greater school-based decision-making, a greater role for school councils in procuring local sponsorship, allowing some schools to offer specialist

programs, and some deregulation of school enrolments to enable some students to attend schools outside of their catchment.

It was not until 2009 that a coherent program of reform to the governance of education emerged. In the lead-up to the 2008 state election, the Liberal Party announced its *Empowering School Communities* policy (Liberal Party of WA, 2008). This document outlined a vision of public education that involved creating a framework for a system of public schools where policy and budgets are determined for implementation locally, for schools equipped to do so. The document takes the position that the strength of the public education system is frustrated by the incapacity of principals to participate in decision-making and innovation in response to their local conditions. Following the election, a Liberal-National coalition was formed and the newly appointed Education Minister, Dr Elizabeth Constable, was made responsible for implementing the *Empowering School Communities* policy. It was determined in mid 2009 that under the IPS program, schools would have a range of 'flexibilities' that include:

- the flexibility to recruit and appoint student support staff and have the discretion to determine how special needs funding is spent;
- the flexibility to determine a school's staffing profile by being exempt from central placement process and having authority to directly recruit and appoint staff, make early offer of employment to pre-service teachers, and create job designs and positions;
- the flexibility to manage staff and contingencies through a one-line budget, to establish a range of reserve accounts, and to use the accounting and financial procedures and practices they see fit;
- the flexibility to manage facilities (electricity, water, gas, waste) and retain savings;
- creating policy, a business plan and entering into a Delivery and Performance Agreement with the director general (Department of Education, 2010a).

Principals and the community, with the exception of the opposition Labor Party and the State School Teachers Union (WA) warmly welcomed the IPS initiative, with one in eight schools expressing interest in the first round of applications. The following year, the Department announced the implementation of a further element of the *Empowering School Communities* policy. A review of the district office structure determined that from 2011 the 14 education districts were to be reduced to 8 education regions, and the creation of 75 school networks (each with approximately 20 schools). A principal would manage each network, with that principal released from their school to assist other schools in their network. The goal of the networks according to the Minister was to move school support services from district education offices into schools, with the objective of giving principals and staff power over how these services are delivered and used, thereby enhancing support to schools (Department of Education, 2010b).

Enacting the IPS program

This paper relates to a study involving interviews conducted with Education Department staff and principals of two IPS schools. This paper reports on a case study of one Independent Public School in the south metropolitan area of Perth and two interviews conducted with the Principal of this school. Principals are an important group for study because, as Blackmore (2004) observes, they are often the point of convergence for policies and their conflicts, ambiguities and tensions. Interviews were conducted with the Principal in her school's first year of the program, and then again in the school's second year. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand how the Principal received and enacted the policy, and to identify any challenges that the program presented.

Sunshine High School

Sunshine High School has approximately 900 students from years 8 to 12. It services a community with a socio-economic index below the national mean, with student achievement below the national average. The school has many discipline issues but it also has a strong pastoral care program and a good attendance record. Bridgette has been a principal for more than a decade, with half of that time at Sunshine High School.

Bridgette fully endorsed the IPS initiative. She was keen to assume the role of manager of her school's business affairs including taking on responsibilities for staffing, managing budgets and maintenance, creating a business plan, and promoting the school to the wider community. She felt that she was better placed than the Department to make decisions for her school based upon its local needs and context. She also described how her experiences with the Department had constrained her attempts to act in the best interests of the school. She recalled how she had struggled unsuccessfully for years to convince the Department to replace a damaged water pump, who instead chose to spend money fixing it numerous times. But being an IPS school enabled her to finally find a solution to the problem. She was able to consult directly with the executive directors responsible for the IPS program and they supported her decision to buy a new water pump. Bridgette valued this everyday decision-making, observing, "… getting rid of some of the red tape was seen as something that may make the school's executive life a little easier".

But principals like Bridgette have not just embraced this capacity to run the everyday affairs of their school. Like many of the principals who have publicly supported IPS, one of the key features welcomed by Bridgette was the capacity to employ staff. Under a centralised system, teachers were allocated to schools without regard to whether there was a fit between the school and the teacher. For Bridgette, this limited her capacity to improve the quality of teaching at her school and therefore to lead her school to improved student engagement and outcomes. But through the authority to employ her own staff Bridgette reasoned that she could make a big difference to the school and the learning experiences of her students:

> I guess it comes back to a lot of the research base that indicates that quality teachers make the biggest difference to the educational outcomes of students. In an area where every school is trying to improve the outcomes of their students, maintaining quality teachers in the school is our priority. We've experienced substandard teachers in the past and we know the impact that has on the students and the culture of the school, so the biggest factor which was up there as a beacon was ensuring we maintain the quality of teachers within the school.

IPS gave Bridgette the authority not only to advertise positions and select candidates, but to also subject candidates to a 'creative' assessment, where candidates conduct a short demonstration class for the selection panel. By doing so, Bridgette was able to assess each candidate's teaching abilities, and in particular determine if they could develop a rapport with the school's students, which she believes is important.

There have been criticisms that school autonomy encourages principals to be entrepreneurial and competitive, and by implication pursue interests that are not necessarily education-related (Gewirtz, 2002). Bridgette observed that this has happened in some IPS schools, but she believed this was occurring in schools in higher socio-economic communities where those schools could compete with private schools based on academic ability. In contrast, Bridgette appeared to resist becoming entrepreneurial. She expressed "a vision of being an effective, efficient school that uses its resources carefully and gets the best educational outcomes from the kids", but she did not "have a vision of being enterprising and entrepreneurial". While she was an innovator and problem-solver, she described her managerial style as cooperative. She described how she had refused to use her school's first year of IPS to remove teachers who did not fit her vision for the school, and she did not attempt to take students from state schools in the area. Instead, she described the collaborative network of public schools that she was a part of and that she wished to strengthen:

> We do things as a group to enable education for students, so I can still be an Independent Public School within a collaboration, and the two things don't create tension because as an Independent Public School I'm not trying to break those (other) schools and marginalise them. I value them and we need to work together to provide the best quality education for the kids within this community. Very different rationale to the other principals in IPS, and many of them are very competitive because they are working at the high end of the socio-economic scale… we're below it, the second half. So, they're very competitive because to maintain their market they have to compete against the private schools.

Bridgette believes that IPS provides sufficient flexibility for principals to run their schools as they decide. In the case of Sunshine High, this meant building relationships with other schools and working on a shared vision for the area. This did not mean Bridgette did not prioritise building the strength of her school. She sought to optimise how Sunshine High School functioned by professionally 'growing' her staff, pursuing a strategic direction for

the school, and improving the learning experience of her students. These goals were supported by her engagement with surrounding schools.

Challenges

A number of factors were impinging upon Bridgette's capacity to be a problem-solving innovator. After 18 months of being in the IPS program, Bridgette identified limits to her school's capacity to fully benefit from the IPS program. Of considerable concern was the extra administrative burden and responsibility related to recruitment, finances and staff inductions, an experience not uncommon for self-governing schools (Starr, 1998; Whitty et al., 1998):

> The biggest change that has happened is the amount of responsibility now placed on principals' shoulders. So, yes you're autonomous, but now you're responsible for this, this and this. A classic example of that is to do with recruitment. The Department used to do all of the screening for candidates in terms of WACOT [now the Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia], Working with Children check, all those sorts of things, national police check, we're now responsible for checking all of these things.

This administrative burden had intensified since the one-off financial grant for IPS transition had been spent, leaving her without the necessary financial resources to employ administrative staff that she still required. Bridgette also felt that support from the Department had been withdrawn, particularly from the Schools Innovation and Reform Unit, which was established in the Department to support the autonomy of principals of IP schools:

> … So we had a hierarchical system with schools underneath. The system was to support principals. They're now slashing all of this and now saying 'You're responsible for that'… The support structures have been reduced, which is quite interesting. So we used to have the Innovations Unit which supported two rounds of IPS schools with four directors in there. We now have four rounds of IPS schools and three directors, so it's very much that the support has been withdrawn. But when you think of the model of autonomy you've got to say is that, it wasn't made clear at the beginning that that was going to happen, it was like 'Now you're autonomous you make all the decisions da da da da… you won't need all of that support'

For Bridgette, the capacity to innovate and enterprise was being circumscribed by external factors that left her "tied to her office". This was exacerbated by the district re-structure that began in 2011. This had blurred the lines of responsibility and access to information, and removed a valuable resource for Bridgette. In her first interview, Bridgette spoke positively about her relationship with her district director and its invaluable support for her as a principal, but she was unaware that this support was going to be removed. With the district restructure, however, that director was no longer available to her and the new

director became responsible for approximately 240 schools. Bridgette expressed disappointment about the reduced support and the loss of a valued mentor:

> As you go through the system you always had a performance manager who you could actually have a conversation with in a regular way to say 'Look, I've been thinking about doing this what do you think?' Or 'Blah, blah, blah, what do you think?' As a principal now I have no one because the director general is my performance manager. So it's very crucial that you have a network of principals to work with and to discuss professional issues and generate and consolidate, 'Yeah, yeah, I'm on the right track here'. That mentoring role has completely been lost from the system. So, yes, you're autonomous, but on your own professional journey. I could be an IPS principal for 15 years; 'Yes, I'm responsible for my own professional learning', but that mentoring and that discussion component has been lost and that used to be there from a directorship or from a superintendent as I've moved through the system. And that's a key role as for every member of our staff, but as a principal I feel we have been very much left in the cold under this banner of autonomy. So how will the system continue to grow the IPS principals to make them better principals?

For Bridgette, the district restructure inhibited her capacity to innovate and problem-solve, the very things that IPS was established in order to achieve. It appears, therefore, that associated reforms were interacting with the flexibilities offered by the IPS program, and this was impacting on Bridgette's capacity to be the kind of principal expected of her. This problem was exacerbated by her inability to procure the funds needed to build the facilities needed to employ more staff. Bridgette said:

> … the biggest issue is … to take on more responsibility I need more support staff. To have more support staff I need more facilities. That, I have no control over. That is always political. So I am stuck. So although I have autonomy to do some things, I haven't got the infrastructure to do it.

This problem was also experienced by another IPS principal, Mitchell MacKay, who received a public rebuke from the Premier for sending a letter to parents advising them that he was disappointed at the decision not to fund new buildings and renovations to his school's aging facilities (West Australian, 2012).

Although still positive about the IPS program, Bridgette's early experiences had left her a little disillusioned as she believed that 'principal autonomy' had been used as a way to devolve ever increasing responsibilities to schools without due regard to the capacity of schools to cope, and without the support schools require to undertake some of these responsibilities. The problem articulated by Bridgette is not that principals don't have enough autonomy, but that innovating and leading is constrained without having access to the resources and support she needs.

Conclusion

This paper has suggested that the policy trajectory of increasing school and principal decision-making power is an instance of transformations in the government of liberal democracies, termed advanced liberalism. For advanced liberal rationalities of governing, the welfare of the state and its citizens is to be secured by limiting the reach of formal political authorities and their instruments, and optimising the capacity of individuals to exercise choice in response to their needs and local contexts. This also involves giving individuals greater responsibility over personal and work lives. The Independent Public Schools program represents an experimentation in advanced liberal governing in the domain of education. IPS problematises school education in terms of the constraints imposed by the education bureaucracy on schools, and it consequently seeks to optimise the decision-making and innovating capacity of principals. As a governmental program, however, the implementation of IPS must contend with the messy realities of the education domain. Where it is enacted, IPS produces a range of responses from principals and it produces unexpected effects.

If the program's goal is to facilitate greater decision-making at the school level, then the program is succeeding. The principal reported on here utilised the flexibilities offered by the IPS program. She relished the freedom to innovatively, efficiently and effectively manage her school organisations. The exercise of this freedom was shaped by professional discourses insofar as the principal attempted to utilise the powers granted by the program to improve teaching and learning. She was attempting this by recruiting teachers she thought fitted with her school. As can be expected, the IPS program has also produced a number of tensions and unplanned effects. IPS and the district restructure had presented some challenges for the principal. While Bridgette welcomed the IPS program, she had negative experiences related to increased administrative burden, the inability to invest in the infrastructure that would make employing more staff possible, and a district office restructure that saw the removal of support. For this principal, there was "another side" to IPS. The solution to this problem was not more freedom, but more support and resources from the Department.

This study outlines that IPS is a program that seeks to regulate the modes of conduct of principals according to the 'govern-mentalities' of autonomy, empowerment, innovation and flexibility. IPS has conceptualised this problem in terms of removing the constraints imposed by the bureaucracy and devolving to principals the authority to make a range of decisions related to creating a strategic direction for their school, allocating resources, and staffing. However, facilitating autonomy and principals' innovating capacity has produced its own constraints. In particular, the capacity to innovate and problem-solve has been constrained by increased administrative responsibilities, the diminution of central and district office support, and the inability to secure the financial capital required to employ more staff. It appears that these constraints work against the program's goals of increasing principal freedom, innovation, leadership and improving student learning. The question remains as to whether these effects are being experienced by others outside of the case study school and whether these challenges threaten the goals of the program, especially if it leads to principal disillusionment.

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