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Translations of New Public Management: A decentred approach to school governance in four OECD countries

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## **Abstract**

The influence of New Public Management (NPM) on public sector organisation is nowhere more evident or pervasive than in the field of school governance where political actors, school leaders and governors are called upon to make the internal operation of the school more transparent and accountable to others through the explicitness of performance indicators and output measurements. Yet despite the prevalence of corporate and performative models of school governance within and across different education systems, there are various cases of uneven, hybrid expressions of NPM that reveal the contingency of global patterns of rule in the context of changing political-administrative structures. Adopting a 'decentred approach' to governance (Bevir 2010), this paper compares the development of NPM in four OECD countries: Australia, England, Spain, and Switzerland. A focus of the paper is how certain policy instruments are created and sustained within highly differentiated geo-political settings and through different multi-scalar actors and authorities yet modified to reflect established traditions and practices. The result is a nuanced account of the complex terrain on which NPM is grafted onto and translated to reflect inherited institutional landscapes and political settlements and dilemmas.

## Introduction

Evidence from the field of comparative and international education point to the widespread use of data infrastructures, comparative-competitive frameworks, test-based accountabilities, consumer logics, and philanthropic networks as tools of global education governance (Ball and Junemann 2012; Lingard, Martino, and Rezai-Rashti 2013; Ozga 2012; Robertson 2016; Verger and Parcerisa 2018). A key strength and insight of this work has been its attention to the multiple interacting forces that flow vertically (through transnational agenda setting and national government policy making) and horizontally (through policy communities, inspection bodies and school boards) to compel certain kinds of organisation of the school, particularly in ways that help to anchor the school to global policy processes. Yet despite strong evidence to suggest a global convergence of trends in the way that many schools govern themselves, these same researchers are critical of the idea that global policy processes move uniformly and predictably across nations, spaces, places, institutions, and peoples. Instead, they claim, policy enactments are not only refracted through subnational and national interests and strategic priorities but are mediated by complex forms of 'networked governance' in which policy decisions and instrumentation reflect ever-deepening relationships between education and the

interests and influence of businesses, social enterprises and charities (Ball and Junemann 2012; Olmedo, Bailey and Ball 2013).

Similarly, these researchers are circumspect of concepts like policy borrowing, diffusion and transfer since they give the impression of global policy processes fitting seamlessly with practices of self-governance within subnational and national policy contexts and their unique networks, connections and flows (see Gulson et al. 2017; Silova 2012). Instead, such researchers are more attentive to the complicated distribution of global patterns of rule in the context of fluid, diverse geo-political settlements, therefore allowing greater scope for disjunctions to emerge between global policy processes and policy instantiations mediated by local politics and projects (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012; Beech and Artopoulos 2015; Verger, Fontdevila and Parcerisa 2019). Adding to this growing body of literature, this paper adopts a 'decentred approach' to governance (Bevir 2010) in order to trace the uneven development of New Public Management (NPM) in the field of school governance within four OECD countries: Australia, England, Spain, and Switzerland.

### **A decentred approach**

According to Bevir (2010, 437), a 'decentred view implies that different people draw on different traditions to reach different beliefs about any pattern of governance'. In some cases, similar global patterns of governance can be discerned within and across highly diverse geo-political settings, each with their own distinctive political-administrative structures and historical traditions. Yet, according to Bevir (2010, 437), these patterns of governance must be read as 'a contingent product of a contest of meanings in action'. On this account, the existence of similar patterns of governance in a plurality of sites does not imply that organisational structures and practices flow uniformly from global policy processes but, instead, can be more precisely understood as the resultant formation of a confrontation with global policy processes and its modification in the context of an 'inherited institutional landscape' (Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010, 3). As Li (2007, 13) argues, 'what appears to be rational landscape design or 'management' is the serendipitous outcome of everyday practices that have quite disparate motives'. These disparate motives are shaped by the novel arrangement of different geo-political settlements and their unique laws, values systems, accountability infrastructures, and institutional orders.

From a policy assemblage perspective (Rabinow 2014), these various components are the autonomous parts that make up the loose and contested field we call 'school governance'. The implication here is that school governance is not simply the

residual effect of NPM, even if NPM and its related discourses appear as a dominant framing for school governance and its constituent parts, operations and instruments. As we demonstrate in this paper, NPM is grafted onto existing structures and practices, and therefore NPM is a loose assembly of globally circulating discourse and situated practices and normative commitments.

### **Configurations of school governance**

Here we use the term 'school governance' in the widest sense to describe a polycentric system of governing in which the powers to intervene in the running of schools are decoupled from the centre and tightly or loosely coupled to other government and non-government authorities, including subnational political authorities (such as regions, municipalities and local authorities), private management groups and school boards. These powers to intervene may include the power to regulate and amend laws; the power to monitor educational outcomes; the power to allocate resources and distribute funding; the power to employ staff and determine staff pay and conditions; the power to design the curriculum and admissions policy; and the power to broker or commission new education providers. Yet despite clear disparities in the formation and expansion of school governance,

there are various policy instruments that transcend and overlap subnational and national borders as dominant configurations for the development of education systems and their constituent parts. A dominant configuration to which we now turn is NPM with its emphasis on 'output controls...private-sector styles of management practice [and] greater discipline and parsimony in resource use' (Hood 1991, 4-5).

A key function of NPM has been to limit the discretion of public servants through a tighter focus on contract, corporate and performative measures of accountability (Ranson 2010). In education, NPM is evident in the way public servants, namely political actors, school leaders and governors, strive to attest to the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of their organisations, usually in ways that make a necessity of certain private sector logics and globally circulating discourses of 'educational excellence' and 'good governance' (Wilkins 2016). Operationally and strategically, this requires school leaders and governors to discipline themselves within a framework of rational self-management that inscribes and performs what Power (1997) calls 'rituals of verification', namely compliance checking and performance monitoring. Yet NPM is typically accommodated within pre-existing relations and structures and therefore does not appear everywhere the same reproduction or outcome of predetermined sequencing (see Gunter et al. 2016).



On this account, NPM should not be viewed as a seamless transformation of discourse into practice since it tends to be overlaid and aligned with existing political-administrative structures, such as traditional forms of government which are still prevalent in many countries and which extend to the discretionary powers of some civil servants, elected councillors and school leaders and governors to shape strategic planning, curriculum, learning priorities, and resource allocation. Therefore, a more nuanced account of NPM is needed, one that not only captures its variegated, hybrid, locally adapted expressions across diverse geo-political settings, but which also provides some account of how NPM is taken up and revised to complement existing normative commitments and situated practices.

### **Uneven developments**

To provide such an account, this paper documents the uneven development of NPM in the field of school governance across four OECD countries: Australia, England, Spain, and Switzerland. We have chosen to analyse and compare these four countries since they share some strong commonalities as well as some key differences. A key difference being that schools in Switzerland and Spain have less autonomy compared to schools in England and Australia. This is not to say that

schools in Switzerland and Spain do not exercise autonomy in relation to shaping pedagogy and teaching practices in unique ways, yet, unlike many schools in England and Australia, they do not have responsibility for resource allocation, staff pay and conditions, putting contracts out to tender, and other ‘back-office functions’ linked to school management (see ‘Table 1: Variegated School Governance’ below).

Table 1: Variegated School Governance

|                                 | Switzerland  | England   | Spain  | Australia   |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Regulation</b>               | Regulation of schools devolved away from federal government and downward to ‘cantons’ (municipal authorities) who oversee funding, curricula, teacher salaries, law making and development of accountability and assessment frameworks.                        | Tight regulation of schools by central government in terms of law making and development of accountability and assessment frameworks. Responsibility for funding allocation and statutory requirements is devolved to some county and regional bodies called local education authorities.   | Tight regulation of schools across seventeen regions by central government in terms of law making, funding, teacher management and development of accountability and assessment frameworks.  | Schools are funded by federal and state governments, with state-federal contractual agreements enabling the implementation of national strategic goals and national curriculum, testing and professional standards authorities. State governments have constitutional responsibility for schools, with state-based authorities responsible for school operations, school improvement, strategic priorities, and legal frameworks.   |
| <b>Management</b>               | Low school autonomy. Municipalities called cantons hire headteachers and teachers, manage budgets, have organisational and pedagogical freedom, and increasing responsibility of accountability, albeit limited powers to intervene in the running of schools. | Medium to high school autonomy. Many schools run as ‘state-funded independent schools’ or academies (over 30% of all schools are academies), while majority of schools are local government maintained. Foundations and boards of trustees set up to manage schools independent of local education authorities. These boards of trustees answer to central government by way of contractual obligations, governance objectives and educational performance. | Low school autonomy. Region-wide government authorities or municipalities in some cases are owners of schools and responsible for hiring teachers, funding allocation, site management, teacher pay and conditions, and assessment frameworks. Some schools retain autonomy only in relation to issues of pedagogy.  | Medium autonomy. The degree of autonomy differs according to state/territory. Many public schools have a range of administrative responsibilities, but none are fully self-governing. As the constitutional responsibility of state authorities, schools answer to state authorities.   |
| <b>Participatory governance</b> | Many schools retain a democratically organised school board that is responsible for the administration of the school.  | Most schools retain a school governing body consisting of volunteers (senior leaders, teachers, parents, business leaders) who are required to monitor the educational and financial performance of the school. School governing bodies have been removed from some schools run by large multi-academy trusts.  | Many schools retain a less than democratically organised school board made up of senior leaders, teachers, parents, and administration staff. Currently only teachers possess right to vote on key school matters, unlike parents who possess no rights. Responsibilities of school board do not extend to matters of budget allocation, but are mostly focussed on pedagogical and organizational issues. | School boards and school councils exist in most Australian states. The role and influence of the boards/councils differ across states. There are also Parents and Citizens Associations who conduct volunteer activities like fundraising and running school canteens, but who rarely influence matters of school governance.   |
| <b>Inspection</b>               | Inspections carried out by cantonal inspectorates (integrated in cantonal administration) or delegated to inspection agencies. External inspection may supplement cantonal supervision by inspectorates or even replace it.                                    | Inspection agency is Ofsted, a national, non-ministerial inspection body commissioned by central government to carry out evaluations of school’s educational performance.   | School inspections conducted by regional inspectors who are publicly-employed civil servants.  | School inspections are carried out by state-based authorities. Each state has its own standards/education services agencies. Federal agencies do not conduct inspections.   |
| <b>Leadership</b>               | Head teachers and new leadership conditions now more powerful than school boards and inspection agencies and who conduct ‘supervision’ of teachers.  | Head teachers are employees of the school governing body or board of trustees, who in turn are accountable to central government.   | Head teachers were formerly employed on the basis of rank or seniority (‘primus inter pares’). Since 2009 teachers must follow the rules of a specific ‘master’ to become eligible for headship. Their eligibility is decided by a committee of inspectors and head teachers.  | Head teachers are employees of state departments of education, yet head teacher appointments differ across Australian states and territories. In Victoria, a selection panel assesses applications and the school council recommends to the Department a head teacher for employment. In New South Wales, the selection panel is composed of a Department Director (the convener), teacher representative, parents and citizen representatives, and another head teacher. |

Despite these differences, all the above countries share some commonalities.

These commonalities include a strong connection and commitment to democracy (or claims to democracy) as a principle lever for shaping decisions about education planning, funding and delivery. Such commitments to democracy can be traced to the existence of locally representative school boards in all four countries. Called 'Schulpflege' or 'Schulkommission' in Switzerland and 'Consejo Escolar' in Spain, school boards typically consist of both lay and professional members drawn from the school and the wider community. A key function of school boards (broadly understood) is to enhance accountability *downwards* to various stakeholders, including community members, parents, teachers, staff members, and students; to enhance accountability *outwards* towards inspection agencies and professional standard bodies; and to enhance accountability *upwards* towards the regulators and funders of education, be they federal, state or municipal authorities. In the case of Australia, commitments to democracy have been largely shaped by strong social democratic-professional education bureaucracies rather than the existence of school boards which have not played a large role in the governance of schools in Australia. Moreover, despite attempts to involve parents and citizens in education, it is the teaching profession and state education departments that have historically shaped decisions about education. More recently, however, school boards have become

more important to school governance in Australia under reforms to strengthen school autonomy.

While the responsibilities and delegated powers of school boards vary depending on the country, a key role of school boards as ‘intermediary associations’ (Ranson et al. 2005, 359) is to bring lay and professional judgements to bear upon the actions of those who run schools, namely head teachers and middle leaders. These interventions are designed to ensure that schools are publicly accountable – properly audited and monitored, high achieving, financially sustainable, law compliant, and non-discriminatory. In this sense, school boards in some contexts replace direct steering from the centre – a federal or central government for example – and offer unique opportunities to trace the translation of NPM among different multi-scalar actors and authorities who inhabit and perform different functions of school governance. Adopting a ‘decentred approach’ (Bevir 2010), the following comparative analysis traces the uneven development of NPM in four countries, with a focus on how certain policy instruments – specifically, private sector logics and accountability processes – are arranged, joined-up and ‘made to cohere’ (Li 2007, 264) in the field of school governance. Specifically, we focus on how NPM is taken up and resisted or revised within different political-administrative settlements to complement existing political structures and value systems.

## **Governance and democracy**

As a federation, each of Australia's eight states and territory governments has constitutional responsibility for their public education systems, which are run by state-based departments of education. Australia's public education systems have been highly centralised in each state since their emergence over a century ago. Grounded in social democratic politics and the community school movement, Australia's national policy agenda in the 1970s shifted dramatically towards a focus on decentralisation but it was not systematically adopted at the time due to resistant education unions and the parochial nature of state-federal relationships. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, school governance and management was successfully repurposed in some states to reflect the operational know-how of NPM, or what Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2002) describe as 'corporate managerialism'. The most far-reaching of these reforms emerged in the south-eastern state of Victoria in the early to mid-1990s with the introduction of the Schools of the Future (SOTF) programme. Led by Kennett's Conservative Government, SOTF sought to create schools that in lots of ways resembled businesses (Blackmore et al. 1996). SOTF devolved administration and resource allocation to schools, introduced business planning, and instituted market competition as a mechanism of incentive and

regulation. Moreover, SOTF introduced a skills-based model of school councils in which an emphasis on recruiting individuals with business and governance know-how aimed to remodel schools on private sector logics and business ontology. While across jurisdictions the uptake of NPM has been piecemeal and provisional compared to Victoria, national and state education policies over the past decade have promoted the conditions for competitive, corporate practices in schools.

Independent Public Schools (IPS) represents the most recent radical changes to Australian education. Initiated in the state of Western Australia (WA) in 2009 before being adopted and modified in Queensland, IPS has been supported by a \$70 million (AUD) federal program to support increased head teacher autonomy. IPS is endorsed as a model of self-directed service design and delivery for the public sector (Fitzgerald and Rainnie 2011). Replacing direct management by the centre, IPS operates on a contractual model in which a Delivery and Performance Agreement for each school stipulates agreed outcomes and responsibilities (Gobby 2016). The performance targets stipulated in these agreements usually include the literacy and numeracy results of the national standardised testing regime implemented yearly by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA). To achieve performance improvement, IPS enables schools to adopt administrative and strategic responsibilities which include responsibility for recruiting staff, determining

staffing profile, managing budgets, procuring and managing contracts, opting out of some department policies, developing a business plan, and establishing a school board as part of its governance structure. Rather than a mechanism of local participation and representation, the school board aims to attract those with 'governance capital' who can enable schools to achieve their strategic and accountability goals (Gobby and Niesche 2019). A similar, albeit rearticulated set of NPM trends can be observed in England, often with comparable outcomes.

The development of NPM as a mode of public sector organisation emerged in England in the 1980s and 1990s against a background of various market-based reforms to education introduced by the then Thatcher and later Major Conservative government. Key to these reforms was a focus on the role of parents as discriminating consumers and choosers of education provision (Wilkins 2012) and increased responsibility for schools as managers of their own provision, whose budget was now linked to their student intake. These reforms not only encouraged greater competition between schools but compelled schools to be attentive to market concepts of supply and demand, in effect securing the technocratic embedding of NPM as a principle of school governance. The popularisation of NPM as a mode of school governance is particularly evident in the case of administratively self-

governing schools, that is, schools operating independent of local government management.

During the 1980s new publicly funded schools called City Technology Colleges (CTCs) were introduced in England under the terms of the Education Reform Act 1988 and the Local Management of Schools (LMS) to enable greater school autonomy. It wasn't until the 2000s under Blair's New Labour government that this model of school governance – maximum delegation of financial and managerial responsibility to the school governing body – was expanded to include more schools, specifically 'underperforming' schools. Designed to tackle 'educational disadvantage' (DfES 2005, 29), the academies programme made it possible for private sponsors to run inner-city, publicly funded schools pursuant with a contract with the Secretary of State. The transference of liability of the school's assets to a private sponsor has given rise to wider public concerns however, namely a concern that under conditions of devolved management some school governors are not effective at discharging their responsibilities as custodians of public interest (Wilkins 2016). Increasingly, therefore, academies face huge pressure from the government and school's inspectorate, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), to operate through a strict focus on upward accountability and 'risk-based regulation' (Hutter 2005) underpinned by financial and performance



monitoring, in effect further entrenching NPM as a dominant framing for school governance.

Like CTCs, academies are run by a board of trustees who, through the acquisition of a foundation of trust, function independent of local government with discretionary powers to determine their curriculum, admissions and staff pay and conditions.

While the scope of the academies programme under Blair's New Labour government was limited to opening 203 academies between 1997 and 2010, the programme was expanded exponentially in 2010 following the formation of the Coalition government (a cooperation between the Conservative and Liberal Democratic party). The introduction of the Academies Act 2010 by the Coalition government was pivotal to these reforms in that it enabled all 'good' and 'outstanding' schools (and, for the first time, primary schools) to apply to the Department of Education (DfE) to convert to academy status. Aligned with these trends, and parallel to trends in Australia (Gobby and Niesche 2019), has been a narrow instrumental focus to 'modernise' or 'professionalise' governance through appointing only suitably qualified, skilled and experienced individuals to the school governing body (Wilkins 2016), namely individuals who are best placed to carry out compliance checks, auditing, performance appraisals, and standard evaluations in the name of 'good governance'.

In contrast to Anglo-Saxon countries like England and Australia where 'evaluation and accountability instruments are explicitly used to promote school competition and choice, and are more clearly attached to school rankings and merit-based pay formulas' (Verger, Fontdevila and Parcerisa 2019, 15), other countries, such as Nordic countries, or Switzerland, have 'embraced an outcomes-based management approach to education and introduced more centralised (and standards-oriented) curricula' (ibid, 7). Public education in Switzerland faced intense NPM reforms in the 1990s (Hangartner and Svaton 2013), during which time school autonomy, output-orientation, competition, and school choice were promoted as policy instruments to increase the quality of education in view of the challenges of economic globalization (Buschor 1997). While several attempts to introduce a quasi-market education system underpinned by school choice has largely failed due to Swiss citizens voting against such initiatives (Diem and Wolter 2013), elements of NPM, including a focus on organisational autonomy and leadership, integrated pedagogical initiatives and data-driven technologies as principles of school governance, are evident in the Swiss education system (Dubs 2011, 7-8). Although the idea of school autonomy successfully aligned with some of the emancipatory concerns of the 1970s in Switzerland (Deutscher Bildungsrat 1973), its managerial translation has been met with resistance by Swiss teachers and scholars who fear an 'economisation of education' and the loss of teacher autonomy (Forneck 1997). Yet the scope and

operation of NPM in Switzerland is subject to centralised mechanisms of control enacted by state authorities called 'cantons' and therefore differs from the devolved management structures occupied by school leaders and governors in the context of England and Australia.

In contrast to England and Australia, where 'double-devolution' has resulted in greater responsibilities for school leaders and governors as managers and overseers of the educational and financial performance of the school, in Switzerland the same set of roles and responsibilities are typically structured under the jurisdiction of twenty-six cantons. At the same time, and similar to England and Australia, there are opportunities for citizen participation in school governance in Switzerland. The participation of local citizens in school governance in Switzerland dates back to the establishment of public schooling in the early nineteenth century (Criblez 1992), at which time citizen participation in school governance was celebrated as a bulwark against the excesses of state control. Yet despite the scope of citizen participation in school governance in Switzerland, it is principally cantons who regulate education laws and policy while municipalities and, increasingly, head teachers that manage schools (Hangartner and Heinzer 2016). This has implications for who inhabits and performs key roles and responsibilities in the field of school governance, and therefore who is likely to encounter NPM in their daily work.

## **Governance and leadership**

In both England and Australia, significant responsibility has been devolved to school leaders and school boards as custodians of public interest and ancillaries to government rule through performance-management of staff and students (Gobby and Niesche 2019; Wilkins 2016). In Switzerland, similar trends can be observed through the nationwide creation of professional school leaders or head teachers since the 1990s (Rhy 1997), whose role as school managers has not only profoundly altered established multi-level governance relations but also undermined the contribution of democratically-elected school boards (sometimes called 'strategic bodies') placed in charge of administering schools. Increasingly, professional school leaders now perform the work once delegated to school boards, leading some cantons and municipalities to abandon the role of school boards altogether (Rothen 2016). Despite the propagation of devolution in Swiss education policy, NPM reforms, with their emphasis on performance indicators and output measurements, have resulted in the disempowerment of local democratic participation in school governance (Quesel, Näpfl, and Buser 2017). Similar trends in the development of NPM as a mode of public sector organisation can be observed in Spain.

In 2012 the Popular Party (PP) was elected to government in Spain after eight years of socialist rule under the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) or Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (translated). One of the first laws passed by the Popular Party was *Ley orgánica para la mejora de la calidad educativa* (LOMCE) or *The Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality* (translated). Inspired by neo-conservative and neo-liberal ideals (Viñao 2016), LOMCE is, according to Bonal and Tarabini (2016), the culmination and synthesis of three interrelated policy trends, namely 'conservative modernization' (represented by an appeal to 'back to basics' in the curriculum); new expanded forms of 'liberal' models of management; and increased systems of evaluation with greater influence over education processes and structures and their outcomes. It was also around this time that the Spanish government promoted a 'wave of inevitable austerity' (FAES Foundation 2011), resulting in the total government expenditure for education between 2009 and 2013 being reduced by 16.6% from €53.895MM to €44.974MM. In relation to national GDP, these figures place Spain at 4.36% of expenditure in education, when the EU average is 4.9% and OECD average 5.3%. As the PP leader and former prime minister Mariano Rajoy explained in a meeting organised by the PP think tank FAES Foundation (2011): 'We are going to promote the reform and modernization of the public education sector under the principles of austerity, transparency and

efficiency'. As Bonal and Verger (2017) argue, the PP appear to favour austerity programmes and cutbacks in education spending primarily as opportunities to advance neo-conservative, neo-liberal, low-cost models of education planning.

In terms of its effects, LOMCE was successful in both inscribing and naturalising economising discourses of efficiency, standardisation and output control as principle drivers of school governance, all of which can be traced to the technocratic embedding of NPM within the day-to-day administration and operation of schools in Spain, from the introduction of competitive pay structures (or performance-related payment) to performance monitoring to complement school ranking systems. These NPM prerogatives reflect a transformation in school governance best described by Ball and Youdell (2007, 14) as 'endogenous privatization', namely 'the importing of ideas, techniques and practices from the private sector in order to make the public sector more like businesses'. Similar to the conditions and effects of NPM documented above in other countries like England and Australia, the introduction of LOMCE has contributed to dismantling some of the most enduring democratic features of the Spanish education system since the 1980s (Collet-Sabé and Tort 2016). These democratic features include, among others, the removal of the statutory right of elected members of the Consejo Escolar (or school board) to vote on important issues related to the supervision and management of schools (see

Cobano-Delgado 2015). Since 1985 Spanish education laws have positioned families as one of the key actors contributing to school boards through democratic participation and mechanisms of voice and vote. The ever-deepening relationship between Spanish education and NPM, as evidenced by the introduction of the LOMCE, has signalled a shift away from such democratic priorities, specifically removing the voting rights of parents on matters concerning school governance and instead stressing the importance of greater efficiency, cost reduction and performance management as drivers of school governance (Bonal and Tarabini 2016).

Alongside the repurposing of the direction and responsibility of the school board, there has been a 'professionalisation' of the role of head teachers in Spain since the introduction of the LOMCE. Since 1985, Spanish law dictated that head teachers were *primus inter pares* among school staff, meaning that the role of the head teacher was formally equal to teachers yet conferred seniority owing to their experience. Like teachers, head teachers have since the creation of Spanish law in 1985 been imagined in the role of civil servants in which their contribution to the school was aligned with a sense of 'public duty'. Since the introduction of LOMCE, however, the role and responsibility of the head teacher has been reimagined through a narrow instrumental focus on the managerial and technical requirements

of maintaining schools as businesses (Collet-Sabé 2017). A similar, albeit differently articulated set of changes to the role of head teachers can be observed in the context of Australia and Switzerland too.

The WA Education Department and Education Minister in Australia sought to avoid the pitfalls of previously fraught attempts at decentralisation (namely, the conflict with the teachers' union that resulted in teacher strikes in the 1990s) and the pragmatic challenges of giving autonomy to schools ill-equipped to handle back-door functions, responsibilities and liabilities. To smooth the process of reform, directors at the Education Minister and the Department of Education WA chose to eschew the excesses of autonomy reforms witnessed elsewhere, such as full administrative decentralisation and the deregulation of student enrolments. What resulted was a focus on establishing specific 'flexibilities' that appealed to head teachers, namely recruitment and budgets. Devolved management was therefore subject to school community consultation (schools opt into the IPS program) and assessment of suitability for autonomy based on track record. Teachers' fears of such reforms were largely assuaged by the decision of the government and Department to retain an industrial platform for securing employment conditions and protections, which was negotiated with the union and worked to prevent head teachers from dismissing staff.



The suggestion here is that the local enactment of IPS in Australia deviates from idealised models of NPM. There is evidence, for example, that some school leaders subscribe to managerial and entrepreneurial forms of professionalism in their construal of schools as businesses for which they are responsible (Gobby 2017). Head teachers overseeing devolved management structures tend to prioritise financial management, input-output models of decision-making and market strategies to increase enrolments, improve reputation and obtain competitive advantage (Fitzgerald et al 2017; Holloway and Keddie 2018). There is, however, evidence of resistance to the use of NPM as a tool of self-governance among some IPS schools. Traditional public service-oriented conceptions of the teaching profession remain active in the collective repertoire of the knowledge and practices of some head teachers and teachers (Gobby 2017). Some head teachers of IPS schools, for example, have spoken of their commitment to strengthening the public education system, their resistance to pursuing competitive advantage over neighbouring schools and their use of educative and culturally-sensitive forms of leadership that promote student and community engagement, equity and social justice (Gobby 2017; Keddie, Gobby and Wilkins 2017). Nevertheless, while NPM does not limit how public schools are understood and operate, IPS represents the continued ascendancy and consolidation in Australia of the rationalities and techniques of markets, technocratic managerialism and systems of performativity.

In Switzerland, NPM reforms have altered accountability relations which resulted in the diminishing autonomy teachers once enjoyed in their classrooms. Moreover, the supervision and evaluation of teachers is no longer conducted principally by cantonal inspectors or school inspectors commissioned by cantons and by local school boards. Instead, it is head teachers who have been entrusted to perform such a role, while the cantonal and municipal authorities supervise the work of head teachers. These changes thus hierarchise governance and internal relations within the teaching staff and undermining the de facto autonomy of teachers (Vogt 2002). Head teachers are now expected to advance school development and to push pedagogical reforms mainly defined by the ministry, yet in practice they are overburdened with the kind of techno-bureaucratic work we come to associate with NPM (Windlinger and Hostettler 2014).

On this account, NPM has influenced school governance in Switzerland through professionalising school management and leadership, hierarchising school organisation as well as by introducing new processes of evaluation and data-based accountability. Attempts to devolve responsibilities and power to schools and municipalities (which previously enjoyed a great deal of freedom) have been undermined by increasing cantonal regulation and intercantonal harmonization of

conditions, e.g. the current introduction of an intercantonal standards-based curricula (EDK 2011a) or a national monitoring of students' performances (EDK 2011b). On this account, the idea that NPM reforms have increased the autonomy of schools and municipalities is highly questionable (Maag Merki and Büeler 2002). Instead of empowering local actors, the promotion of the 'self-managed' school in Switzerland appears to strengthen hierarchical models of leadership and weaken democratic measures of accountability (Hangartner and Svaton 2014). The contradictory movement of the 'self-managed' school is that it positions local actors, specifically head teachers, as bearers of new strategic roles and supervisory responsibilities so as to adapt teaching and learning to national and international trends. NPM instruments have been implemented within an unchanged low-stake accountability context, however, in which teachers do not face serious sanctions if they fail to meet standards or neglect certain policies (Brauckmann et al. 2015). Understood from this perspective, NPM reforms have not replaced traditional government structures but instead produced something akin to a hybrid assemblage in which old and new instruments of governing are overlaid and come into conflict with each other (Hangartner and Svaton 2015). As Wilkins (2018a) demonstrates in the context of England, co-operative academies, namely academies with co-operative principles grafted onto them, have developed out of a similar set of problematic alignments since they work to achieve partial congruence of different interests and stakes by

combining seemingly conflicting practices of technocratic managerialism and 'deliberative democracy' through a focus on stakeholder participation.

### **Concluding remarks**

The international and comparative literature on school governance points to variegation in the formation and expansion of different national education systems (Conolly and James 2011). Evidence shows that national education systems are primarily geo-political constructs situated within complex socio-economic histories with significant variations in their local and regional development according to the powers of intervention devolved by central government to different multi-scalar actors and agencies, from municipal and county authorities to privately-run school management groups and school boards. This does not mean subscribing to a view of 'methodological nationalism' and of subnational and national education systems as impermeable to global policy forces, forces that include privatisation management of education services (Ball and Junemann 2012), international comparative assessment (Schleicher and Zoido 2016) and transnational advocacy networks and global business communities (Macpherson 2016). Yet, as our analysis shows, it does mean acknowledging that subnational and national education systems are

resilient structures that develop through 'path-dependent and contingent processes of policy instrumentation' (Verger, Fontdevila and Parcerisa 2019, 1), each with their own 'specific semiotic, social, institutional and spatiotemporal fixes' (Jessop and Sum 2016, 108). As stated by Van Zanten (2002, 302), 'states cannot avoid global pressures to change in specific directions, but they can twist and transform to fit national purposes and opportunities'.

In Spain, for example, the state government shares responsibility with seventeen regional authorities to inform and guide the development of school governance, albeit a large number of important education decisions, whether they relate to law making, funding allocation or assessment frameworks, are centralised and organised by the state. In contrast, school governance in Switzerland is organised through state authorities called 'cantons' who create their own education laws as well as share powers with municipalities to intervene in the running of schools (Hangartner and Svaton 2013). Similarly, schools in Denmark are governed by municipal-run 'standing committees' and superintendents who oversee financial responsibility for schools within their jurisdiction (Moos, Kofod and Brinkkjær 2015, 30) while in Scotland funding allocation and teacher recruitment is controlled by local education authorities (LEAs) (Shields and Gunson 2017). In contrast to these highly politicised arrangements, education provision is no longer the exclusive remit of government

authorities in countries like England (Wilkins 2016), Australia (Gobby 2016), South Africa (Karlsson 2002), and New Zealand (Jacobs 2000) where, increasingly, non-political actors like school leaders and governors have responsibility for resource allocation, curriculum, admissions, and staff pay and conditions. From this perspective, school governance takes on a multiplicity of forms to reflect 'multi-level systems, encompassing state agencies, municipalities and schools' (Paulsen and Høyer 2016, 87) and their concomitant laws, regulatory regimes and patterns of centralisation and decentralisation.

In this paper we have documented the influence of NPM on education through a situated analysis of the development (and non-development) of certain policy instruments in the context of four OECD countries: Australia, England, Spain, and Switzerland. A key focus of our analysis has been to document the 'different modes of insertion' (Clarke 2008, 137) through which NPM has been appropriated and revised in the field of school governance and against the background established cultural traditions, situated practices and normative commitments. From the perspective of a decentred approach (Bevir 2010, 437), we have evidenced the emergence of NPM as 'a contingent product of a contest of meanings in action', given that it is tactically deployed and rationalised differently within differing geo-

political settings to complement pre-existing political-administrative arrangements and practices.

NPM can be loosely characterised as a form of 'endogenous privatization' (Ball and Youdell 2007, 14) in that it reflects 'an approach in public administration that employs knowledge and experiences acquired in business management and other disciplines to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and general performance of public services in modern bureaucracies' (Vigoda 2003, 813). The development of NPM within education, as evidenced in each of the four countries examined in this paper, appears to make a necessity of apolitical, corporate, business-driven models of educational leadership and management (Gunter 2009) and the technocratic embedding of universally-prescriptive conditions and practices by which organisations can be evaluated, measured and compared to determine their effectiveness, efficiency and continuous improvement. Moreover, such policy instruments, where they are enacted properly, provide governments, parastatal agencies and transnational organisations with improved methods to intervene to determine agendas, shape priorities and manage incentives and expectations (Wilkins 2018b).

Whether under conditions of limited decentralisation (in the case of Spain and Switzerland) or under conditions of medium to high decentralisation (in the case of England and Australia) NPM functions to situate schools within a field of 'interoperability' (Sellar and Gulson 2018, 69) and wider systems of 'commensurability, equivalence and comparative performance' (Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2013, 542), thus interlinking and overlapping subnational, national and global policy processes and trends. However, as our analysis also evidences, it is important to remain attentive to the 'messy actualities' of policy enactments rather than assume an unfettered unfolding of a priori global policy processes (Larner 2000, 14). While NPM carves out spaces and practices through which schools might be constructed as measurable organisational entities poised for competition and comparative analysis and performance tracking (Gobby 2013), our analysis demonstrates the complex patterning and layering of NPM within different geo-political settings owing to the historical development of their unique political-administrative structures.

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