# School Leadership and 'Language Games' in Neoliberal Times:
# A Critical Ethnographic Case Study of the Independent Public School Policy in Western Australia.

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# Declaration

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University 2020. I declare this thesis is my account of my research and contains as its main content, work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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# Table of Contents

# Acknowledgements

# Abstract

This thesis is a critical policy ethnography (CPE) of school leaders in three low socio-economic indicator (SEI) government schools in Western Australia (WA) that have achieved Independent Public School (IPS) status under the state's IPS policy. It draws on the stories of school leaders to understand the logics, processes, and tensions they experience in enacting this policy maneuver, and how it is negotiated and resolved at the school level (Ball, 2003).

The introduction of WA's IPS policy occurs in the context of a distinct and well-documented shift in the ideological forces driving education policy in the Western world. Such a shift has resulted in the ascendancy of neoliberalism as the dominant discourse within government education policy formation. Further, this shift is clearly evident in responses provided by the school leaders throughout this thesis.

Central to this thesis is the argument that independent or autonomous government schools are part of what Lyotard (1984) terms 'language games.' These language games occur within a broader set of neoliberal discourses driven by the idea of 'homo economicus,' which governs the ways in which individuals conceive of themselves and society. Such a reconceptualization of homo economicus represents an elemental disruption of democracy as individuals within the neoliberal language game strategize for themselves (Dilts, 2011).

The use of CPE provides an opportunity to locate the daily experiences of school leaders in the context of these broader ideological shifts as it relates to the enactment of the IPS policy at three school sites. Ethnography also allows an anthropological approach to the study through seeking to describe participants' actions, intentions,

motives, and reasons. In selecting this particular methodological approach, the voices of participants are given center stage. CPE is a methodology that critically examines the ways in which official policy discourses constitute the lived realities of individuals. In this case, the formal school leadership is comprised of heads of learning areas, deputy principals and principals.

The thesis makes a specific contribution to research by examining the broader effects of neoliberal language games through the enactment of the IPS policy in WA via a range of primary and secondary sources. In particular, it examines the effect of the enactment of the IPS policy from the perspective of school leaders in socially disadvantaged WA government high schools.

# Chapter One

# Introduction

Education is no longer concerned with the pursuit of ideals such as that of personal autonomy or emancipation, but with the means, techniques or skills that contribute to the efficient operation of the state in the world market and contribute to maintaining the internal cohesion and legitimation of the state

———Williams, 1998, p. 18

## 1.1 Background

Before delving into this thesis, I want to say something about my personal and professional context and how this ultimately shaped my decision to examine the role of school leaders involved in the enactment of the Independent Public School (IPS) policy in low socio-economic indicator (SEI) government high schools in Western Australia (WA). I came to government (public) education after a lengthy stint in the Royal Australian Navy, which I left only holding a love of literature and history, and the desire to study both at a tertiary level. To be pragmatic, any degree in literature or history would also have to result in gainful employment; hence a qualification in secondary education too. After gaining my original qualification I sought employment in the WA government education sector, and have been working in the field since 1992—some 28 years at the time of writing this thesis. In 2000 I gained the first of many promotional positions as an English head of learning area (HOLA) in a government high school.

My career has been built predominantly in high schools that the Department of Education (DoE) describes as difficult to staff. More recently, I have taken principal

positions—first in a remote school; then in an extremely challenging isolated location. For the uninitiated, a remote government school in WA is located in a challenging geographic environment. In my case this meant mail once a week, internet through a satellite connection, no mobile phone coverage, and the nearest shop being around 475 km away. Such a journey was over roads accessible only by 4WD vehicle and, depending on weather conditions, those same roads could be completely inaccessible. It was necessary for my staff and me to be completely self-reliant; we coped with the privations as we held strong beliefs about the importance of Indigenous education. My current role is in an isolated school located in a small WA town in the north-west of the state. Perth (the nearest capital city) is 1600 kilometers away—a drive of some 16 or more hours. There are fundamental services, but for matters such as specialist medical treatment, there is a need to travel to Perth. In the past 12 months, at least two tropical cyclones have resulted in the local area being placed on Red Alert for around four days on each occasion. My school was also damaged and closed for a further week because of safety fears. Last year the town held the record of being the hottest place on earth on a particular day: 52 degrees Celsius. During the final months of writing of this thesis we were confronted by COVID-19 and the differing social permeations to stem from it. This required me leading a school to ensure continuity of education for students with little or no access to the internet and parents with minimal literacy and numeracy skills. Each school requires particularly dedicated staff to ensure any advancement of students.

In addition to an interest in difficult-to-staff schools, I have transitioned into leadership of schools addressing the needs of Indigenous youth. My fundamental professional belief is that every child, no matter where they may be located or their socio-economic background, is entitled to an optimal free secular education. This is what has driven

me to choose to work in difficult-to-staff and isolated government schools. To put it succinctly, my professional life is underpinned by a fundamental belief in social justice and a commitment to government education.

Government education in WA has evolved significantly. For teachers and school leaders those changes have had a crucial impact on pedagogy in the classroom. For example, the *Beazley Report* (1984) shifted the government secondary curriculum toward vocationalization through the implementation of the Unit Curriculum (Browning, 1997). The *Curriculum Framework* (1998) expresses learning in terms of outcome statements. However, it also signals a shift toward the ideology of neoliberalism to provide government education that is cost effective and efficient, rather than developing a more progressive pedagogy (Browning, 2002).

Needless to say, during my career I have witnessed numerous changes. In fact, it can be argued that change in WA government education is relentless and has intensified in the 21st century. Such change can be understood in terms of the broader Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), which describes a series of accountability mechanisms such as standardized testing to ensure that centrally determined curriculum is delivered efficiently in classrooms (Sahlberg, 2011). These types of reform have been thrust upon schools generally across the Western world. For example, I witnessed the replacement of the Tertiary Admittance Exam with the Tertiary Entrance Exam, which in turn has been replaced by the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). Similarly, I have observed the increasing influence of the competitive ATAR examination at the end of Year 12 and standardized testing through the National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), both of which directly impact on pedagogy.

As a classroom teacher, HOLA, deputy principal, and principal I have been involved in implementing the Unit Curriculum, followed by student outcome statements, and then the Australian Curriculum. Within the DoE I have observed and implemented a plethora of policies and seen the effects of political influence on the shape of many of those policies. In particular, I have perceived the growing influence of neoliberalism on education policy formation in WA. Consequently, I have, during my career, developed an interest in the context of different policies and the effects of their enactment at the grassroots level.

My professional interests have resulted in two theses addressing the influence of neoliberalism on WA government education policy (Browning, 1997; 2002). The first focuses on shifts in curriculum direction in WA government schools between 1976 and 1996—in particular, the shift from academic to vocational education and training in schools. The second examines the historical development of neoliberal ideology and its impact on WA education policy. Extending this early research interest, I now set out to investigate the ways in which school leaders make sense of the IPS policy in the broader context of neoliberal school reforms.

## 1.2 Aims

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the enactment of the IPS policy from the point of view of school leaders themselves. I am interested in how school leaders experience this particular policy through Lyotard's (1984) theoretical ideas of 'language games' and 'differend' and Ball's (2003) notion of 'performativity.' These ideas provide a set of explanatory tools with which to critique IPS policy enactment and the ways in which policy discourses constitute the lives of school leaders and the decisions they make.

Currently, WA education policy appears to be driven by the forces of neoliberalism or free market competition rather than the needs, interests, and desires of young people themselves (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). During the preceding three decades, it has become apparent that neoliberalism has dominated education policy formation in WA. External factors reaching into classrooms and shaping pedagogy present a distinct dilemma for the professionalism of teachers and those leading them.

Thomson and Blackmore (2006) point to mounting evidence that the role of teachers has become increasingly difficult, time consuming, and unattractive to the extent it is difficult to entice suitable candidates into formal positions. Further, they claim teachers see leadership positions as onerous and geared toward managerial rather than educational tasks. Educational leadership is a process that continues to evolve. Eacott (2011) highlights issues facing Australian educational leaders and argues that preparation of these leaders forms part of a neoliberal agenda measuring good leadership in terms of school-based planning, merit selection promotion, leadership frameworks, and more. This, according to Eacott (2011), forms part of the legitimization of the neoliberal discourse in schools.

Neoliberalism refers to market-dominated reform policies such as decentralization, deregulation, and privatization (Harvey, 2007). At its core is a focus on reduced government spending to increase the role of the private sector in society and the economy. Neoliberalism is the discourse that dominates education. Harris (2007) claims that not only does neoliberalism dominate education; it also dominates contemporary society. As a consequence, is it is difficult to think outside of what she terms the black box of neoliberalism. The ascendancy of neoliberalism is evident in education within performative externally determined outcomes. It has also resulted in

the inability of teachers to think outside of the 'black box' as there is no language enabling communication of an alternative world view (Harris, 2007).

The effects of a performative culture under a neoliberalizing agenda have been deleterious for the public sector, but have been particularly felt by schools and teachers (Ball, 2003). A significant effect of performativity is that individual practitioners organize themselves in response to targets, indicators, and evaluation. For teachers, this involves setting aside personal beliefs and commitments, to exist in the world of performance, generating tension. Performativity, according to Ball (2003), gets in the way of 'real' academic work, or 'proper' learning. It is the vehicle through which what occurs in schools has fundamentally changed. Responses to the performative policy agenda in education are problematic as they have included a narrowing of the curriculum, a focus on that which is easily measurable, and standardized approaches to pedagogy (Heffernan, 2018). One aim of this thesis is to explore educational leadership where there are coherent pressures to perform in the context of the IPS policy.

Changes in WA government education over recent decades have left many in the profession jaded. Some express frustration through open cynicism likening reforms to re-shuffling deck chairs on the sinking ship of 'government education.' At least one reason behind the cynicism lies in the competing discourses to which teachers are exposed (Moore, 2004). One of these discourses involves the professional principle that perceives education as a means through which fundamental interests of equity and social justice can be pursued. Contrasted against this are neoliberal concepts of market-driven input–output models of education. Neoliberalism has had a deleterious effect on schools and those who inhabit them. Teachers have found themselves

coerced to achieve performative goals, while school leaders are compelled to demonstrate worth through the input–output model of neoliberalism. In this way, leadership becomes defined through a narrow set of managerial skills (Eacott, 2011). Accompanying unrelenting changes in WA government education has been the evolution of instrumentalist versions of educational leadership. Gunter (2005) argues the predominant challenge facing school leaders is simply getting the work done and doing it correctly. Further, there is a need to have a sense of purpose underscoring the work to shape and sustain education. The predominant difficulty is that individuals outside of the profession increasingly decide the validity of the work, with the consequence that there has been a progressive need to provide evidence that the work is occurring (Heffernan, 2016).

One ramification of this has been the emergence of power structures that contain "bullet points of 'good' and 'effective' practice" (Gunter, 2005, p. 40). These bullet points are then presented to school leaders as the solution. Hence knowledge becomes packaged so it can be transmitted and tested. Gunter (2005) argues power is 'lived' by teachers and defined through their ability to achieve externally imposed outcomes. Power then becomes located in being a teacher with a job description and cultural expectations of the role. For leaders in education the challenge is in addressing the contradictory pressures imposed.

Against this backdrop, I want to examine how school leaders in three public high schools in low socio-economic communities understand, experience, and respond to the IPS policy in WA. A central argument is that the work of school leaders is located within the broader set of neoliberal discourses currently de/re/forming educational policy. The IPS policy was introduced in 2009, with the first 34 government schools

gaining IPS status in 2010 as part of a broader restructuring of the public sector and education in particular. To survive, teachers and their leaders find themselves constrained within the neoliberal black box. My purpose is to bring a critical lens to the IPS policy by examining the experiences of school leaders. In pursuing this task, I adopt the methodology of critical policy ethnography (CPE) to gain access to the lives of school leaders and examine the key logics, assumptions, beliefs, and values underpinning their experience of the IPS policy.

## 1.3 Research Questions

How do school leaders understand, experience and respond to the IPS policy? This is the primary research question that guides this study. In pursuing this question there are four sub-questions:

1. What key neoliberal logics underpin the decision to become an IPS?
2. How do school leaders describe these logics?
3. On what basis do they make decisions?
4. What effect do these decisions have on the cultural, pedagogical, and organizational aspects of schools?

In searching for answers, I am interested in understanding how the key neoliberal logics felt by school leaders involve the use of performative data among other technologies of control (Gunter, 2001). This pressure includes the increasingly accepted view that education is merely one more service to be marketed accordingly. Gunter (2001) claims a major difficulty facing educational leaders is the common sense view that the purpose of schools is to supply a proficient workforce in the context of global capitalism. Heffernan (2018) also argues that there is pressure on school

leaders to improve student achievement through high stakes testing, which is then publicized in an increasingly competitive market. In this context, school leaders feel compelled to demonstrate the worth of their school and, by default, themselves through performance indicators linked to value for money.

Hartley (2010) argues that management theory is replete with metaphors referring to engineering, with terms such as benchmarks and mechanisms colonizing school life. This kind of business-oriented rhetoric omits concepts of trust, respect, and care, which are prerequisites for stable social and economic order as well as student learning. As a consequence, the value of education is determined by students attaining—or not—performance targets prescribed by external authorities (Ball, 2003). Teachers' professional judgement about the best interests of their students has become subordinated to the requirements of performativity and marketing.

## 1.4 Theoretical Orientation

This thesis is located theoretically within the tradition of critical social inquiry, which involves a willingness to question the taken-for-granted assumptions, categories, and policy discourses with which people have become so comfortable (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). This involves interrupting the cultural logics underpinning dominant policy discourses and the ways in which they shape individual thoughts and actions, to expose embedded interests and ideologies, and common sense assumptions (Ball, 1994).

In developing this theoretical orientation to the IPS policy in WA, I draw on several key theoretical ideas. The most significant of these are Lyotard's (1984) concepts of language games and differend, and Ball's (2003) notion of performativity. These ideas

provide a set of theoretical tools with which to critically examine the experiences of school leaders involved in the process of enacting the IPS policy.

In this thesis, the concept of language games is preferred to the notion of discourse. Discourse, derived from the Latin *discursus*, chiefly refers to 'running to and fro.' Hence, discourse is concerned with moves between reflecting and constructing the social world (Rogers et al., 2005). I argue there is no 'toing and froing' in terms of the neoliberal agenda, which necessitates utilizing language games as a means to control and constrain debate surrounding school autonomy. Members of a community develop ways of communicating that serve specific needs, and this is what constitutes a language game (Woodward, 2005). These language games are subject to a contract between players. As such, every utterance, according to Lyotard (1984), is a move within the game. I argue in Chapter Three that the IPS policy occurs in the context of a neoliberal language game; such a game shapes and distorts the ways in which individuals think and act. Additionally, the game excludes alternative perspectives and possibilities.

It is problematic to compare and/or contrast language games as each possesses different set of rules. As such they are incommensurable (Lyotard, 1984). When a dispute between language games transpires, an irresolvable conflict occurs, which Lyotard (1984) refers to as a 'differend.' Lyotard (1984) argues that when a dispute between language games cannot be resolved through fairness to either game, a differend exists. In this thesis, I argue that WA government education is dominated by a neoliberal language game, and a differend exists as it is problematic to refute this particular game without alluding to neoliberal tools such as performativity, or

quantitative methodology. Within such a language game there is no place for other tools such as qualitative methodology.

A significant facet of the neoliberal language game is performativity despite the IPS policy not directly using the phrase. In this thesis Ball's (2003) conceptualization of performativity is used as this refers to a "mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and display" to assert control (p. 216). Within this performative regime schools are viewed as successful to the extent that they meet previously established criteria of performance against which they are held responsible and accountable. Usually this occurs through accountability mechanisms that are used to ensure adherence to central bureaucratic directives.

## 1.5 Methodological Approach

This thesis adopts the methodology of CPE to analyze the disputed and contested policy and practice space around the IPS policy. The intention is "to reconstruct the cultural logic and embedded meaning, of discourses, institutions and actions" related to autonomous government schools (Levinson & Sutton, 2009, p. 4).

It is important to acknowledge that CPE is not simply a methodological formula; rather it is a family of methods that involve sustained contact with individuals and writing up those encounters (Smyth et al., 2006). It is also an attempt to connect critical theory with the everyday experiences of these individual lives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). A key feature of CPE is the concentration on meanings that individuals generate in relation to differing social structures (Madison, 2005). As such it bridges the gap between micro and macro research by dealing with broad issues of social structure and interaction involving human agents (O'Sullivan, 2009). Smyth et al. (2006) specify

key features of CPE that include embedded interviews, multi-sitedness, and prolonged immersion. In addition, there is the need for the researcher to make visible connections between political and moral conditions, and individual lives. The task of the critical ethnographer is to take the reader below superficial appearances and in doing so disrupt the status quo. The ethnographer also unsettles neutrality and the 'taken for granted' through shining a light on underlying and obscure operations of power and control (Madison, 2005, p. 5).

It is also imperative to keep in mind that theory is the precursor, medium, and outcome of CPE. To be useful, the researcher should not be chiefly concerned with grand theory; instead identifying, recording, and analyzing day-to-day human practices. Mills (1951) warns about the risks of abstract empiricism and the epistemological difficulties of method in educational research. He is concerned with the pretentious overelaboration of method and theory, and their lack of a firm connection to substantive problems (Mills, 1951). By this, Mills (1951) means the capacity of research and theory to interpret and explain data' and connect it to 'the structural and historical factors' above the level made available by the interview as well as the 'psychological factors' below the depth open to the interviewer. The methodological approach used in this thesis is developed in detail in Chapter Four.

## 1.6 Significance

This thesis is significant for four main reasons. First, it extends my earlier attempts to understand the impact of neoliberalism on WA education policy by investigating the consequences of the IPS policy when enacted at three school sites. I have alluded, in the background section of this chapter, to my earlier research into policy development in WA. Over a decade has elapsed and it is timely to revisit the topic in terms of more

contemporary developments. This current work extends on my earlier research interest by pursuing new directions; in particular by drawing on the theoretical ideas of language games and differend, and the notion of performativity to better understand the lived experience of school leaders.

Second, this thesis offers a corrective to the largely celebratory discourses around the IPS policy. Much of the literature surrounding the policy lauds its success, citing, among other benefits, support for principals and school communities (Jacobs, 2016). There have been claims that it provides school communities greater control over decision making processes. Claims have also been made that a relationship exists between improved student results and school autonomy. Such a relationship is, at best, nebulous (Gobby, 2013). As such, this thesis challenges those celebratory discourses—which provide a largely unpolitical or neutral version of reality—and instead engages in a spirit of both critique and possibility (Giroux, 2004).

Third, the thesis focuses on the lived experiences of school leaders to comprehend how policy enactment actually occurs in real schools. There exists a plethora of theory surrounding the autonomous government school movement. (Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2012; Keddie, 2016; Lingard & Ozga, 2007; Ravitch, 2011). This thesis seeks to give voice to the participants, who were ultimately responsible for enacting the IPS policy in their schools. Thus, the significance of this thesis lies in not only listening to the experience and sense making of school leaders but interpreting their accounts through a set of critical theoretical ideas capable of interrupting common sense explanations of reality.

Fourth, the thesis deploys a set of theoretical ideas to interrupt taken-for-granted understandings of education policy. Apple (2009) warns of the need for suspicion

when analyzing supposedly meritorious policy. Such policies can contain intent that is contradicted by the reform's lived experience. As mentioned, the theoretical ideas used to disrupt the laudatory explanations of the IPS policy include Lyotard's (1984) conceptualization of language games and differend, and Ball's (2003) notion of performativity. These ideas are explained further in Chapter Three.

Finally, the thesis contributes to a broader set of policy studies in the context of the GERM, which refers to the interconnection between education policies across contexts, according to Sahlberg (2011). Sahlberg (2011) argues that since the 1980s GERM has emerged with at least five common features across the globe: using performance standards; focusing on the 'core'; using 'low risk' means to attain goals; a focus on corporate management models; and standardized testing. I argue the IPS policy is one more iteration of GERM and establish links to the autonomous school movement in England, the United States of America (USA), and Australia.

## 1.7 Ethics

Prior to conducting interviews with participants there were two layers of ethics approval required. First, it was necessary to gain approval from the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee. This process involved presenting an extensive ethics application outlining the background, research questions, methods, research design, recruitment of participants, and anticipated outcomes. It also involved the preparation of an information letter for participants, including signed consent. This letter contained an overview of the potential benefits, risks, and harms of the research, and informed participants that they were free to withdraw at any time.

The second layer of ethics approval involved the DoE, which has its own arrangements for approving research conducted in its schools. This proved to be a rather convoluted process taking the better part of 12 months before final approval was gained. One area of contention was the use of pseudonyms. A major difficulty was the use of the descriptor 'low-SEI government high schools with IPS status.' I advised the DoE that as there was a small number of IPS government high schools at the time, it might be possible for a careful reader to identify schools and participants. This resulted in me providing an undertaking to make participants aware of such a possibility in the information letter provided to them.

The second area of concern arose from the use of the term 'neoliberal.' Correspondence from the DoE suggested this terminology had raised alarm bells and the DoE demanded a full copy of my PhD confirmation of candidature (CoC) proposal, which was a crucial milestone in my candidature. This seemed an unusual request and one not commonly made in the ethics application process. After resubmitting the application on numerous occasions, and completing a plethora of letters, approval was finally granted by the DoE.

As in any qualitative research the confidentiality of participants is essential. Providing contextual information about the three school sites runs the risk of identifying schools and participants, especially as there are so few low-SEI government high schools in the Perth metropolitan area with IPS status. Therefore, I needed to be diligent in providing not only pseudonyms to protect confidentiality but any contextual information that might reveal the identity of the school and participants. For these reasons, it was incumbent upon me to warn participants of these issues and obtain their consent to participate.

Besides these institutional ethics approval processes, CPE also demands sensitivity to a wider set of ethical matters related to the moral, social, and political purposes of research. Such approaches require the researcher to remain consciously reflexive to be engaged with the ethical dimensions of research—including social justice, fairness, reciprocity, collegiality, and voice—with a view to generating "rich fair cultural accounts" (Berry, 2011, p. 167). This helped me to understand the personal, institutional, and structural arrangements within which research occurs. It is also acknowledges that it is not possible to be a neutral observer of school life. All research is political. With this realization came the responsibility to be critically reflexive about the nature of interactions between myself and the participants (O'Sullivan, 2009). My reflexivity has also involved candor about my own personal professional background and scholarly inclinations, and how this shapes my approach to the thesis.

## 1.8 Overview

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide an overview of the thesis. I have briefly described my personal and professional background, the aims of the research, key research questions, theoretical orientation, significance, methodology, and ethical matters. The intention has been to provide a snapshot of the ways in which this research has been conceptualized theoretically, methodologically, and practically. These different levels of analysis are expanded upon in the chapters to follow.

Chapter Two provides some contextual background to the IPS policy in WA. The chapter's relevance lies in locating this particular policy in the wider social, economic, and political context of educational reform. It locates the WA experience of government school autonomy in the context of a set of wider global education discourses dominated by the forces of neoliberalism (Lingard, 2010). This chapter is organized

around three sections, divided into subsections: first, the context of neoliberalism and the shift to New Public Management (NPM) as a means of local school governance; second, the global trend toward the notion of the self-managing school (SMS), with a particular focus on the USA and England; and finally, school governance in Australia with an emphasis on the IPS policy in WA.

Chapter Three elaborates on the theoretical ideas informing this research. As mentioned above, this thesis draws on Lyotard's (1984) conceptualization of language games and differend, within a wider set of neoliberal logics; or, as Foucault (1984) puts it, 'homo economicus.' As part of these language games I turn to Ball's (2003) notion of performativity to help me interpret what is happening in schools from the point of view of school leaders.

Chapter Four examines the methodology of CPE. I explain why I have chosen this particular approach, and describe key elements and design processes. I begin the chapter by defining CPE and its interest in exposing the ways in which power and knowledge operate in society. Importantly, it helps to explain the everyday experience of participants in more critical ways, especially as it relates to policy contestation, interpretation, and enactment at the grassroots level.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven address the responses of participants across the three separate sites. These chapters reveal the voices of the participants and their experiences of the IPS policy. These chapters form the ethnographic dimension of the research. Each deals with a separate school site: Acacia (Chapter Five), Banksia (Chapter Six), and Casuarina (Chapter Seven). In these chapters I present the voices of participants organized around a set of emergent themes, with theoretical analysis to be developed in Chapter Eight. As people do not normally speak in precise

sentences in interviews there is some minor editing of transcripts to remove unnecessary gaps and typographical errors, and thus provide the reader with an intelligible transcript. As per ethical requirements, pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis to maintain confidentiality.

Each of the three chapters is structured similarly. After a brief contextual discussion, they are organized around emergent themes in order for those themes to be addressed in the subsequent discussion chapter. The first general theme examines what participants perceived to be the benefits of gaining IPS status. The second addresses any negative effects. The third theme explores whether or not it is possible to perceive changed pedagogy attributable to the IPS policy. Finally, participants' perceptions of the future of the policy are discussed.

Chapter Eight endeavors to connect the theoretical framework with the experiences of participants described in Chapters Five to Seven. It attempts to explain some of the contradictions and tensions experienced by these school leaders between professional judgements and neoliberal pressures as they enacted the IPS policy. Following Apple (2009), I take the view that policy enactment needs to be treated with suspicion to comprehend how meritorious policies are typically fraught with contradiction between rhetoric and reality. Central to the chapter is the argument that school leaders are caught up in neoliberal language games and the "terrors of performativity" (Ball, 2003) that constitute their professional identities.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis, by revisiting the main arguments of each chapter. It then returns to the original research question/s to explain how school leaders understand, experience, and respond to the IPS policy in WA. The overall impact of

neoliberalism on WA education policy is also examined, with potential future directions for policy explored.

## 1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to orient the reader to the thesis by providing an overview of the role of neoliberalism in influencing education policy development; in particular, the introduction of the IPS policy in WA. The chapter began with a brief excursion into my own personal professional history and interest in the impact of neoliberal discourses on policy formation and the ways in which it shapes individual lives, especially in the most vulnerable school communities. Drawing on my own interest in the broader structural and institutional arrangements of society I set out to investigate the following research question: how do school leaders understand, experience, and respond to the enactment of the IPS policy in three disadvantaged schools? In pursuing this question, I allude to the importance of the tradition of critical social inquiry and Lyotard's ideas of language games and differend, as well as Ball's notion of performativity, to help me make sense of these experiences in more critical ways. Methodologically, I elaborated on the usefulness of CPE to frame the investigation in ways that allowed me to interrupt common sense and celebratory approaches to the introduction of the IPS policy. I then identified four significant contributions this thesis makes to the field of critical policy analysis, especially as it relates to the nature of school leadership in contemporary times. Finally, I provided an overview of the thesis structure to guide the reader on how discussion will be progressed. I now provide a more comprehensive analysis of the context in which the IPS policy emerged in WA, in Chapter Two.

# Chapter Two

# Context

## 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background context to the IPS policy in WA. I argue that this policy can only be properly comprehended in the context of a wider set of social, economic, and political forces. As such it is imperative to understand the policy in terms of global shifts in policy discourses and movements based in the ideology of neoliberalism (Apple et al., 2005; Burbles & Torres, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010); more specifically, what Sahlberg (2011) describes as the GERM. These global policy convergences and networks (Ball, 2012; Lingard, 2010) are especially prevalent in the USA and England and thus provide a particular focus as I endeavor to locate the IPS policy in the wider global context.

This chapter is structured into three sections that are in turn divided into subsections, not including the introduction and conclusion. It begins by examining the nature of neoliberalism and the GERM. The intent is to locate the IPS policy as a component of a larger set of neoliberal discourses around school autonomy including the rise of NPM. The second section examines both the USA and English experiences in shifting toward autonomous government schools, the aim being to argue that autonomous government school policies are not unique to the WA context, but is part of a wider global movement to reform education systems. The final section addresses the shift toward devolution and local school governance, first from a Commonwealth–state relations perspective and second, in the context of WA.

## 2.2 Neoliberalism and the Global Education Reform Movement

### 2.2.1 Neoliberalism and Travelling Policies

The term 'neoliberalism' is used in this thesis to describe the global market liberalism and free trade policies that emerged in the mid-1970s but gained traction only later in the 1980s–90s. It involves more than economics; it is a wider social movement that encompasses a reduction in the welfare state through privatization, individualization, and deregulation of markets. In other words, every action by the individual is part of a market transaction and conducted in competition with others (Harvey, 2007). The focus on competition erodes the capacity of marginalized individuals to equitably access services such as education and health care because of the concentration on competition and unequal distribution of wealth. The use of market forces also results in intensified assessment as individuals and institutions are increasingly subjected to continuous assessment based on a narrow set of metrics to demonstrate their worth to the wider market. In education, this has resulted in a focus on demonstrating worth through standardized testing and other performative measures (Fielding, 1999).

The IPS policy can be understood as part of a sustained global trend toward policies influenced by the neoliberal agenda. Of relevance to this study is the shift toward greater levels of school autonomy within a set of neoliberalizing discourses around the benefits of privatization, competition, and school choice. Such approaches have appeal at two levels: first, school principals believe that greater autonomy will allow them to make decisions and thereby solve problems rapidly; and second, this will be achieved by removing layers of bureaucratic control and interference (Fitzgerald & Savage, 2012; Lingard, 2010; Smyth 2011).

One of the 'founding fathers' of neoliberalism, Hayek (1945) argues that the fundamental difference between contemporary events and history is lack of awareness of the potential consequences of these events. Specifically, he claims that, "while history runs its course, it is not history to us. It leads to an unknown land and but rarely can we get a glimpse of what lies ahead" (Hayek, 1944, p. 1). At the beginning of the 21st century, Hayek's (1944) observation seems prophetic. Who could have fully comprehended the damage wrought by neoliberal ideologies on the social fabric of society? Similarly, it might be argued that those who framed the IPS policy might not be cognizant of the impact on schools and those who inhabit them and their lived experience. That is what this thesis attempts to uncover as it gets up close to the sense making of school leaders charged with enacting the IPS policy.

Globalization has similarly affected the enactment and development of education policy. Government education systems have become large and complex and, as they expand, increasingly turn to market driven solutions. Rizvi and Lingard (2009) explain:

> This has led to an almost universal shift from social democratic to neoliberal orientations in thinking about educational purposes and governance, resulting in policies of corporatization, privatization and commercialization on the one hand, and on a greater demand for accountability on the other. (p. 3)

Ball (2003) describes these developments as policy convergence, by which he means: "an unstoppable flood of closely inter-related reform ideas [that are] permeating and reorienting educational systems in diverse social and political locations that have very different histories" (p. 215).

The IPS policy can therefore be understood as part of a larger set of global discourses around school autonomy, including Charter Schools in the USA and Free Schools and

Academies in England. Lingard and Ozga (2007) describe these global trends as 'travelling policy,' a term they use to, "identify vernacular globalization in which there is a change and reconfiguration in global, national and local interrelationships but mediated by local and national history and politics" (p. 72).

This policy vernacular is also described as policy convergence, policy transfer, and policy borrowing (Lingard, 2010). This kind of policy terminology refers to "a wearing away of nation state policy making … into a single over-riding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness" (Ball, 2001, p. 28). The IPS policy can be viewed as one more manifestation of neoliberal logic to turn schools into annexes of the economy. Rizvi and Lingard (2000) argue that neoliberalism dominates the perspectives of global actors to the extent that economies and market competition are fundamental components of education policy. They cite assessment systems created by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as an example, as this allows comparisons of achievement between nations. Rizvi and Lingard (2000) claim this system fails to take into account local context concerning good education or relevant curricula; instead children are reduced to potential workers.

Thus, IPS is part of a larger global shift in government education from social democratic to neoliberal orientations (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Fitzgerald and Rainnie (2011) explain:

> The decentralization of school management has been an international trend from the 1980s onwards and a consistent rationale is that of improving the educational experience of students for the benefit of themselves, the community and the economy. (p. 7)

While there are distinct differences between the IPS policy and similar shifts internationally, the actual manifestations of these travelling policy trends share a similar vernacular about the perceived benefits of a SMS (Lingard & Ozga, 2007). SMS status has been touted as a means to make education systems more responsive, effective, and innovative (Keddie, 2016). Keddie (2016) describes policies surrounding the SMS as a "globalized policy discourse" involving increasing levels of accountability, standards, choice, competition, and performance indicators embraced by the advocates of NPM (see Section 2.2.3).

### 2.2.2 Similarities between Australia, England, and the USA

Sahlberg (2011) explains how GERM emerged in the 1980s and has at least five globally common features. There are parallels to epidemics as the ideas and practices infect education systems worldwide. According to Sahlberg (2011), symptoms include:

1. The standardization of education through unquestioningly establishing performance standards for schools, teachers and students so as to improve expected outcomes.

2. A focus on the core subjects of literacy and numeracy, and in some cases science.

3. The search for low risk ways to attain goals through minimizing experimentation so as to reduce alternative pedagogical approaches.

4. The use of corporate management models to predominantly drive improvement.

5. Standardized testing regimes as a means to ensure accountability.

Although there are differences between national contexts, similarities in shifts to autonomous government schools across Australia, England, and the USA indicate a

practical example of 'travelling policy' (Ball, 2001; Lingard & Ozga, 2007), or of GERM (Sahlberg, 2011).

While there was differing vernacular across the USA, English, and Australian contexts, the intentions were remarkably consistent. For example, in considering the role of central bureaucracies, there was a consistent thread of ensuring that schools complied with centrally determined policy mandates. According to Keddie (2015, p. 2), the desire for central control was "set against a political backdrop of moral panic about the dire state of public schooling in contexts like the USA, the UK [United Kingdom] and Australia." Such shifts occurred despite contradictory evidence about its effectiveness in achieving improved educational outcomes (Angus, 1994; Blackmore, 1999).

The speed with which government school autonomy was globally adopted is addressed by Smyth (2011), who argues that the origins of the movement can be traced to the 1980s. There was a shared desire to make government schools more responsive, accountable, and effective. Additionally, there was pressure to enable schools and their wider communities to make fundamental choices in their own best interests, as such decisions could be made closer to the point of educational delivery. Perceptions existed of the supposed inefficiencies of educational bureaucracies accompanied by a desire to free government schools from this encumbrance (Smyth, 2011).

Smyth (2011) provides a summary of commonalities between nations (USA, Canada, England, New Zealand, and Australia) of the forces driving government education reform movements championing the SMS. These included obliging government schools to utilize competitive practices normally associated with private enterprise. This was linked to perceptions that schools were not meeting the needs of 'customers'

and needed to empower parents with greater curriculum choices. There was a belief that the autonomous school movement could bypass the inefficiencies of central bureaucracies that resulted in a "reworking of national sovereignty and the role of the nation state" (Lingard, 2010, p. 136). Lingard (2010) specifically situates developments in Australian education within the frame of this policy discourse, referring to it as 'policy borrowing.'

### 2.2.3 New Public Management

There is a level of debate surrounding specific features of NPM, probably attributable to its transformation between contexts. However, there is agreement that NPM is firmly located within neoliberal ideology and is associated with practices commonly located in the private sector (Osborne, 2006). The NPM paradigm advances the deceptively simple—yet appealing to some—assertion that private sector practices are superior to established practices in public management. In other words, the longer-standing public administration paradigm is projected as outdated, inefficient and in need of reform (Osborne, 2006).

NPM requires a new kind of entrepreneurial leader and has been in the public consciousness for at least the past 20 years. It is perhaps one of the more overt features of the reach of neoliberal ideology on day-to-day operations of public institutions (Hall et al., 2012). Significantly, a feature of NPM (rather than being a static paradigm) is its adaptability to suit divergent contexts within a globalized public policy discourse (Lingard, 2010).

Positioning the existing public sector paradigm in this way resulted in public sector organizations, and those working within them, being portrayed as 'problems' needing to be 'solved' by the NPM paradigm (Clarke & Newman, 1997). Key features of NPM

that would assist in solving these 'problems' included the use of markets and competition within the public sector (Hall et al., 2012). Additionally, there was a focus on management and entrepreneurial leadership accompanied by an emphasis on explicit measures of performance (Hall et al., 2012). These identifying features of NPM become evident later in the thesis as it emerges that IP schools are encouraged to compete for market share, and that there is a focus on performativity. For government education, the NPM paradigm resulted in the development of quasi-markets with an accompanying requirement that government schools operate as competing business units (LeGrand & Barron, 1993). This occurred through standardized testing and the emphasis on comparability of student, teacher, and school performance in these tests.

Hall et al. (2012) describe a changed educational landscape. To explore the new undiscovered land a re-engineered group of educational leaders have emerged who place emphasis on particular management practices that accentuate credence on reducing inefficiency and effective provision of services. Additionally, these leaders claim that practices such as these enable schools to be more responsive to the needs of their 'customers' and able to adopt flexible approaches to the changing needs of users (Gewirtz et al, 2009).

The emergence of this new group of educational leaders coincided with a shift in focus for government schools to NPM practices and entrepreneurial leadership (Gleeson & Husbands, 2001). In addition, there appears to have been a narrowing of leadership concepts in government schools to the extent that principals were perceived as solitary leaders in schools, as opposed to leaders of collaborative processes. There was also an accompanying spectrum of interventions assisting principals in reinventing their professional identities as the solitary managerial leader. Interventions included new

leadership qualifications and business-inspired leadership literature and leadership standards (Fitzgerald & Savage, 2013; Gronn, 2003). These moves to encourage principals to remodel themselves are directly linked to the broader NPM discursive shift focusing on entrepreneurial leadership (Hall et al., 2012; Lynch et al., 2012).

## 2.3 International Policy Trajectories

### 2.3.1 The USA Experience

In this section I focus on international policy trajectories around the emergence of the movement toward the SMS. I draw on the experiences of both the USA and English government education systems to locate the WA IPS policy in the context of a larger global shift to the SMS driven by neoliberal discourses. While the context of these countries are different there is nonetheless a number of commonalities as well as differences. Notably, the USA and Australia have parallels in educational governance. Both have federal governments while education remains a state responsibility. However, the educational system in the USA is more complex and diverse than that in the much smaller Australia (Keddie, 2016). The origins of the SMS in the USA can be found as early as 1983. Ravitch (2010) notes that from 1983, *A Nation at Risk* created a set of derogatory discourses around failing schools that required urgent reform including privatization, national curriculum standards, and standardized testing. The failure to achieve consensus resulted in educational leaders retreating to the relative safety of standardized testing and accountability mechanisms (Montano, 2015).

In this context, Charter Schools became the USA incarnation of the SMS and were first introduced in 1992. They are independently run government schools granted

greater flexibility in their day-to-day operations. The 'charter' component is a performance contract with a governing authority, addressing the school's mission, program, student services, performance goals, and methods of assessment (Epple et al., 2015).

Beginning in 1985, through a series of speeches, A. Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, introduced the concept of Charter Schools as a means for government schools to gain greater levels of autonomy (Montano, 2015). His belief was that such schools would become attractive to innovative teachers and consequently would provide positive educational opportunities for students. Additionally, Charter Schools were originally celebrated as a means to end unnecessary bureaucracy and empower parents (Ravitch, 2010). By 1991, when Minnesota signed the first laws for Charter Schools, it was evident that Shanker's vision would not be achieved. The movement was described as the "most complex example of autonomous schooling in the world" (Keddie, 2016, p. 6). The establishment of Charter Schools raised public expectations of government schools and resulted in an increase in levels of accountability in government education. This would be achieved through standardized test scores (Montano, 2015). By 2002 the federal report *No Child Left Behind* compelled schools to adhere to standardized testing as a means to measure school quality or lose funding (Ravitch, 2010).

The consequence of such high stakes accountability systems implemented by the USA Federal Government resulted in each state seemingly moving toward exerting control over government schools. This in turn meant a narrower curriculum aligned to the standards and tests scores (Berliner, 2009). Hursh and Martina (2016) explain the impact:

Consequently, schools have become places where teachers and students no longer engage in what should be a collaborative process of making sense of the world, but instead are places where teachers and students focus on passing the tests. ( p 190)

The negative effect of this level of accountability is well documented and illustrates the state's coercive assault on education and society (Lipman, 2013). Certainly, standardizing the curriculum and assessment undermined any gains achieved through reforms in the preceding several decades (Hursh, 2007). An example of lost gains is the educational ideals outlined by the Coalition of Essential Schools, including the creation of sustainable, equitable, personalized, and intellectually challenging learning environments. The harsh reality, according to Ravitch (2010) is that, "Charter Schools represented more than anything else a concerted effort to deregulate public education with few restrictions on pedagogy, class size, discipline or other details of their operation" (p. 133).

Simply put, Charter Schools did not work; it is not possible to argue using empirical evidence that Charter Schools have resolved educational problems (Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Ravitch, 2010) or that standardized testing has lifted educational standards (McNeil, 2000; Sacks, 1999). In fact, globally there is minimal evidence to link government school autonomy to improved academic outcomes (Keddie, 2016).

### 2.3.2 The English Experience

It appears that policy makers globally tend to create new kinds of schools similar to every other kind (Gorard, 2014). Therefore, it is not surprising that the English shift toward the SMS was not dissimilar to the American experience in terms of the broader SMS movement. The origins of the English version of the SMS, known as 'Academies'

can be traced to early attempts to foster supply side educational quasi-markets with City Colleges in the period 1979–87 (Walford, 2014). The privatization of government services had been a policy imperative of successive English governments since 1979. While there were numerous models to choose from in seeking to reform government education, English policy makers favored one particular model. According to Gunter and McGinity (2014), "Policy debates, policy maneuvers and legislative reforms regarding publicly funded education in England have been about the imagining, promotion and realization of the 'independent' school as the preferred model" (p. 300).

City Colleges, which preceded Academies, are important in this chronology, as they were the precursors to local management, delegated budgets, and decreased roles for local authorities (Walford, 2014). City Academies were announced as a new form of government school in 2000, with the first three opening in 2002 (Gorard, 2014). The launch was located in a rhetoric of "doing something different in order to make significant improvements in the provision of education" (Gunter & McGinity, 2014, p. 301). The earliest Academies replaced existing schools deemed to be in spirals of decline (Gorard, 2014). In considering the politics surrounding Academies, Gunter and McGinity (2014) argue that:

> election campaigns and the operationalization of the mandate to govern through major restructuring and reculturing were based on a perceived need to enable something new to happen in the provision of educational services. (p. 302)

The new Academies were rebadged, and given new names and new governance; national curriculum requirements were relaxed (Gorard, 2014). There was much hype surrounding the shift to Academies. By 2012 there were over 1,165 secondary Academies, which equated to approximately one-third of all government schools in England.

The concept of independence for English government schools was based on removing schools from local democratic accountability by building on the re-imaged school as a business in a competitive market (Gunter & McGinty, 2014). Local accountability meant government schools answered to the local education authority. The difference between this and the later development of Academies was that early Academies were accountable directly to the English government. The conditions for this to occur were provided through the UK *Education Reform Act 1988*. Independence meant that these Academies and the later Free Schools, in addition to functioning outside the national curriculum, could operate outside of national workforce conditions (Gunter & McGinty, 2014). In other words, Free Schools were outside of the local education authorities, governed by non-profit charitable trusts.

From around 2010 a discursive shift occurred from, "something needs to be done about inner city schools" to "something needs to be done about all schools" (Gunter & McGinty, 2014, p. 302). Those schools in local authorities that were doing well were viewed as needing to do even better. Thus, Academies and Free Schools gradually became a central feature of the English government education system (Walford, 2014).

The English Academy School program was presented by government as a means by which increased diversity and private participation in government education could be used to solve educational and wider social problems (Woods et al., 2007). It was also promoted as a means to create a government education system that could more effectively self-improve (Wilkins, 2019). Originally, Academies were established to halt a supposed decline in government schools, and improve student results. Such a decline was perceived through deteriorating results on standardized tests and

behavior. However, the school improvement and social justice agenda were largely ignored, resulting in almost any school becoming eligible for Academy status (Gorard, 2014).

Walford (2014) argues that the prime beneficiaries of the shift to Academies and Free Schools were those families sufficiently knowledgeable and concerned about schooling to apply to be selected for enrolment. This led to greater levels of inequality as parents competed for places in more desirable Academies and locations. Walford (2014) claims that quantitative data demonstrate Academies performed no better than equivalent schools or those they replaced. This meant a pupil in an Academy performed no better or worse than their peers in equivalent schools (Gorard, 2014). Simply put, like the USA experience, the push toward autonomy for government schools in England was purely ideological and, from an educational point of view, was largely a waste of time based on the evidence (Gorard, 2014). For this study, the comparison is important as it will become clear there is minimal evidence that students across the three sites benefited from IPS status in WA.

### 2.3.3 Similarities Between USA, English, and WA Independent Public Schools

Table 1 lays out some key similarities between autonomous government schools in the USA, England, and WA. The three contexts addressed in the table have distinct differences. For example, both the USA and Australian government education systems are predominantly state based, whereas English government schools are nationally based. By placing IPS alongside similar autonomous government school movements, it is possible to discern parallels; for example, governing bodies in each context provide opportunities for parents and the wider community to participate in school governance. The table utilizes broad categories to draw comparisons.

**Table 1 Comparison Between Systems**

| Title | Charter School–USA | Academy–ENGLAND | IPS–WA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Logics for Autonomy | The capacity to discern the educational needs of the community and offer educational services that will attract students | Free from the constraints of the local authority but must still comply with edicts from the Department of Education | Discerns the educational needs of the community and offers appropriate educational services |
| Accountability | Academic results through standardized testing<br><br>Financial management<br><br>Organizational stability<br><br>Upholding claims made in their charter | Through student results such as standardized testing<br><br>To the central Department of Education, bypassing local authorities | To the Director General of the DoE through a signed three-year delivery and performance agreement.<br><br>Part of that agreement addresses academic results through standardized testing and graduation results |
| Role of the Central Bureaucracy | Compliance with regulations<br><br>Teacher registration | Sign a 'Funding Agreement' with the Secretary of State that provides a framework through which the school operates | Principals report to the Director General, who is the head of the central bureaucracy |
| Governing Body | Can be governed by a range of organizations on either a non-profit or for-profit basis<br><br>The governing body can include parents and community members | Not permitted to operate on a for-profit basis; run by an Academy trust<br><br>The board can be comprised of parents and community members | A school board comprised of the principal, and parent, community, and staff representatives |

| Title | Charter School–USA | Academy–ENGLAND | IPS–WA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Staffing | The capacity to directly recruit staff<br><br>Comparatively:<br><br>• Less experienced<br>• Shorter tenure<br>• Less training<br>• Earnings can be linked to student performance<br>• Required to work longer hours<br>• Lower unionization | The capacity to establish work conditions for staff<br><br>Able to directly recruit their own staff | The capacity to determine staffing profile and to directly recruit staff, thereby opting out of a central staff placement system |
| Salaries | Teachers generally paid less than colleagues in traditional government schools | The capacity to award bonuses | Salaries are determined through a salary award agreement that applies equally to all teachers in government schools |
| Admissions | Unable to impose admission requirements<br><br>If oversubscribed, must select through lottery | Can select up to 10% of students based on aptitude | Generally, students come from a geographical catchment; specialist schools can impose admission requirements such as a dance audition to gain entry to specialist dance programs |
| Funding | Tuition free<br><br>According to enrolment—on a per student basis | Directly from the government bypassing local authorities<br><br>Sponsors contribute to buildings and grounds while government contributes to running costs | Have the capacity to charge some fees; the majority is based on a per student, SEI, and location formula |
| Curriculum | There is a requirement that the state curriculum is followed | Only required to follow the national curriculum in the core areas of math, English, and science; may choose their own as long as it is "broad and balanced" | Must follow the curriculum as established by the DoE |

It is evident across the contexts that autonomy for government schools seeks to enable localized decision making around the particular educational needs of students, and then to develop strategies addressing pedagogy; thus providing some degree of autonomy on educational matters. Such autonomy, however, appears to be counterbalanced against accountability mechanisms firmly linking schools to the regulatory requirements of central bureaucracies, which are responsible for reporting against agreed performance indicators. For example, in England, Glatter (2012) argues:

> Autonomy is exercise within a high stakes accountability framework driven by the centre including, most prominently, national inspections by Ofsted (giving schools just a few days' notice) the reports of which are available online, along with published test and examination results. (p. 568)

A similar contradictory level of autonomy occurs in the USA, as Keddie (2016) explains:

> Certainly, at one level, Charter Schools enjoy a measure of autonomy and freedom, but such autonomy and freedom, is set against a backdrop of unprecedented levels of state-imposed and international accountabilities in the form of an ever-increasing myriad of standardized testing regimes. (p. 7)

In a similar way, IPSs in WA face the contradictory function of discerning and responding to the educational needs of their local communities, but concurrently having to sign a 'delivery and performance agreement' with the Director General of Education that is linked to student performance on standardized test scores such as NAPLAN and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Other performative data such as attendance and suspension rates are also utilized. As the

central authority provides funding, this agreement can be used to maintain control over illusionary autonomous government schools.

While my purpose is not to provide a definitive list of similarities and differences between shifts to autonomous government schools in the three countries, I deliberately allude to the manner in which each context has been shaped by a set of neoliberal discourses galvanized around the market logic and perceived benefits of school autonomy. I argue that these broader sets of globalizing discourses or travelling policies underpinned by neoliberalism are infracting educational policies globally in the form of GERM. In the section to follow I move on to examine in greater detail the historical development of educational governance in WA as a precursor to understanding the IPS policy.

## 2.4 Devolution and School Governance in the Australian Context

### 2.4.1 A Brief History of Federal/State Governance

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of Australian school governance with a particular focus on federal–state relations. Against this backdrop, I provide an overview of WA educational governance; specifically the move toward IPS policy. To begin, the 1901 *Australian Constitution* is ambiguous regarding federal government involvement in state government education. While the constitution identifies direct areas of responsibility such as tariffs and defense, there is no specific mention of education; nor is there direct prohibition of involvement. Section 96 of the constitution states that, "Parliament may grant financial assistance to any state on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit" (Australian Constitution 1901, Section 96).

Since the creation of the Federation of Australia in 1903, the federal government has gradually increased its range of power and functions (Smart, 1982), especially since the Second World War (Harman & Smart, 1982). This imbalance of power can largely be attributed to the *Uniform Taxation Act 1942*, which increased the revenue base of the federal government. In particular, Section 96 of the constitution has been used to intervene in education. This can be largely explained by Australia's vertical fiscal imbalance, which is important in understanding the changing politics of federal and state relations in schooling (Lingard, 2000). The fiscal imbalance refers to the federal government possessing a greater revenue base than states. As state budgets came under increasing pressure, the states became increasingly dependent on federal financial assistance and, "open to a range of national approaches in schooling for cost-efficiency reasons" (Lingard, 2000, p. 31). Although the Commonwealth Office of Education was established in 1945, it was not until 1963 that there was real intervention by the federal government with the Commonwealth Secondary Science Laboratory Scheme and Commonwealth Scholarship Schemes (Smart, 1978). By the time the Whitlam Labor Government (1972–75) was elected the precedent for federal intervention was established. The Whitlam Government quadrupled education expenditure and, through the *Karmel Report* (1973), systemized federal schooling funding (Browning, 2002). Conservative governments following Whitlam trimmed back expenditure but the precedent was established of education being conceived as a responsibility shared by state and federal governments. During this period, there was also a distinct shift from Keynesian to post-Keynesian policies as a result of the impact of globalization (Lingard, 2000).

The Hawke/Keating Labor Governments (1983–96) saw education policy shifting to a focus on marketization and managerialism (Dudley & Vidovich, 1995). The emphasis

shifted to targets and outcomes. Policies during the later Howard Liberal Government ranged from symbolic to substantive, but a common thread was insistence on improving national consistency. Education Minister Nelson was notable for comparing schooling to national rail gauge difficulties (Parkin & Anderson, 2008). He also argued for interventions including government schools specifying performance targets and measures. There was advocacy to provide principals with improved autonomy by decreasing the authority of state bureaucrats. Commonwealth incentives were linked to school performance with claims that schools could be improved with good teachers, principals with real authority, and 'proper' accountability (Parkin & Anderson, 2008).

The Rudd/Gillard/Rudd Labor Governments (2007–13) continued the drift to a national curriculum. This process included the introduction of NAPLAN in 2008 and the My School website in 2010 (Gable & Lingard, 2015). Both of these mechanisms were central to educational accountability with My School enabling comparisons between schools. Although the intent of NAPLAN was to improve learning, the high stakes nature of comparing schools ultimately resulted in a focus on improving test scores (Gable & Lingard, 2015). Thus, there was an escalating emphasis on accountability mechanisms during the 1990s and 2000s inspired by the use of NPM (Lingard, 2010). In particular, there was concentration on outputs. Standardized testing was the vehicle allowing an input–output equation for education, and through this schools could be steered at a distance (Hartley, 1993; Kickert, 1995). Lingard (2010) argues this is further evidence of the reach of globalized education discourses. In this thesis, 'steering at a distance' refers to the use of performative mechanisms as a means to assert control over schools (Ball, 2006; Smyth, 2003).

It is evident from federation to the present day that the federal government has become increasingly involved in schooling. This was largely ad hoc until the Whitlam Government, at which time intervention became more systemized through the use of financial measures. This intercession achieved its zenith with the introduction of NAPLAN and the My School website, as well as the national curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2014). In more recent times, federal policy intervention has centered on the preparation, training, and registration of teachers under the guise of teaching quality (Gunter, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2019).

## 2.4.2 Neoliberal Reforms in WA Public Education

In the preceding sections I have provided an overview of the development of autonomous government schools in the USA and England in the context of a set of travelling policy discourses, and an introductory comparison with the IPS policy in WA. I also set the scene by alluding to federal and state government relations in Australia and the gradual growth of federal government power since the Second World War. This general historical context provides a sense of the genealogy of the IPS policy, to which I now turn in greater detail.

As I have argued, it would be counterintuitive to assume WA education policy was somehow immune from globalized education policy discourses (Lingard, 2010). In WA, we can begin to map the origins of neoliberal influences to at least 1987 with the advent of the *Better Schools* (1987) report, which marked the politicization of government education policy with the independent Director General of Education being replaced by a political appointee more readily controlled by the priorities of the Minister of Education.

*Better Schools* was motivated predominantly by economic rather than educational issues (Browning, 2002; Down, 1990). The report advocated for self-determining schools through recommendations to reduce centralized government education and devolve decision making to the school level. It is significant that the threads of devolution existed as far back as 1987; therefore, it is hardly surprising to see its culmination three decades later in the IPS policy. As the report advocated for reducing expenditure and simultaneously improving efficiency, along with reconceptualizing education as an industry as opposed to a social or public service, it fits comfortably with the broader set of neoliberal discourses described earlier. While there was some restructuring of bureaucratic functions, the central bureaucracy retained the capacity to monitor goals and standards across the government schools sector (Wilson & Smart, 1991).

Six years later the *McCarrey Report* (1993), in neoliberal fashion, sought to make the WA public sector more efficient and effective with negligible increases in costs or the taxation base. The *Vickery Report* (1993) in the same year focused on education and sought to maintain outputs but reduce costs through a 'delivery system' that more effectively utilized staff and facilities (Browning, 2002). This report made recommendations around the devolution of decision making. It led to the development of structures in government schools to make locally based decisions. The neoliberal discourse of both reports was evident through the focus on reduced expenditure, incentives for 'good' performance, accountability mechanisms, and effective resource use. It is notable there was no mention of improving pedagogy, when this might be presumed as fundamental in improving educational outcomes. The *McCarrey Report* propounded devolved decision making as a means to enhance teaching, and generating monetary savings. There was a clear agenda of advancing devolution as

a means to gain efficiency through a reduced central bureaucracy. Such a concentration meant greater government school autonomy was predominantly concerned with reducing cost, not necessarily improving pedagogy.

### 2.4.3 Devolution and the Independent Public Schools Policy

A report titled *Devolution of decision-making authority in the government school system of Western Australia* (the *Hoffman Report*, 1994) articulated the future devolved direction for government education in WA. The document adopted the position that school communities needed to believe they possessed authority to make fundamental decisions. The report also recognized devolution was predominantly concerned with efficient and effective use of resources by reducing the size of the central bureaucracy. Like the *Better Schools*, *McCarrey* and *Vickery* reports, the *Hoffman Report* adopted the neoliberal language of NPM described earlier in the chapter whereby students are reduced to 'clients' and schools provide 'select services.' As a consequence, education was reinvented as a market, and players in those markets had to respond to market forces.

The *Hoffman Report* ultimately concluded that devolution was a means through which outcomes could be improved by allowing those closest to students to make decisions. Ironically, with these devolutionary pressures, the federal government intervened in education governance through attempts to develop a national curriculum, which was a precursor for the later ACARA. Following the *Hoffman Report* (1994) the *Temby Review* (1995) made further recommendations about devolutionary decision making in WA government schools. This took the form of shifting the curriculum to an outcomes focus and in so doing, devolving curriculum decisions to the local level. The *Temby Review* also represented a distinct shift in focus for education toward a

vocationalized curriculum ensuring students became employable and job ready (Browning, 2002).

During the 1990s a series of strategic planning documents was released, culminating in annual 'focus' documents outlining the overall direction of the DoE in a given year. The language of these documents is revealing and confirms the extent to which words like 'efficiency,' 'targets,' and 'accountability' permeate the educational landscape. As Lyotard (1984) argues, these kinds of language game indicate an obsession with efficiency and effectiveness to increase input and output ratios (Perryman, 2006). It is argued in this thesis that these strategic planning documents represented an overt example of language games couched in quintessential corporate management and strategic planning mindsets as part of the broader shift toward NPM. Such efficiency strategies included emphasis on value for money, community use of facilities, and a reduction of deferred maintenance. The genome of autonomous schools continued with discussion of shifting resource decision making to the point of delivery and incorporating grants to improve resource management. Ironically, within these language games there was minimal if any mention of students or pedagogy.

The strategic planning documents also made explicit recommendations that the education market be permitted to determine the validity of some education programs through the provision of flexibilities for individual government schools delivering programs suited to the specific needs of their students. For example, in the 2020–24 strategic direction document, there is recognition that the WA government school system is a significant contributor to the state's prosperity and economic growth (DoE, 2020a). The 2020 focus document contains the priority area involving increasing school autonomy (DoE, 2020b). There are additional suggested actions to develop

flexibilities in work organization and staffing profiles; utilize financial resources; and reconfigure student services. The neoliberal language game is evident in the focus on efficiency gains. Following the re-election of the Court Coalition Government in late 1996, devolutionary processes were fast tracked. Fitzgerald and Rainnie (2012) note that the range of measures included liberalizing student catchment areas, encouraging competition, and limited local recruitment of staff. These types of practices were firmly embedded in the *School Education Act 1999*. Although the Labor Government that followed (2001–09) did not actively pursue devolution, they did not act to reverse the measures of their predecessors. This left the path open for later governments to pursue devolution through the IPS policy.

I have provided this overview of key reports as a means of tracing the genealogy of the IPS policy. Each of these reports in their own way helps establish a set of preconditions conducive to implementation of the IPS policy. In other words, the genesis of the policy is discernable within neoliberalizing influences focused on utilizing market forces to promote school change, particularly in the public sector. It is significant that the policy and preceding devolutionary processes deployed the lexicon of community participation and empowerment as justification for devolution. These types of SMS policies are noteworthy as they were shaped by broader frameworks focused on shifting risk onto individuals, families, and communities (Rafferty & Yu, 2010, cited in Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2012). Governments, through devolutionary processes, essentially abdicate responsibility for educational outcomes in the context of continually dwindling resources (Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2012). Although financial inducements for schools to self-manage were initially offered, this rapidly dissipated, leaving those schools to seek resources from other areas. Often this was through

school fees, further exacerbating inequalities between government schools in affluent catchments and those in low-SEI areas.

The policy of devolved government education was a central platform of education policy in WA when Colin Barnett was education minister (1995–2001) in a conservative Coalition government. In pursuing a "fight against mediocracy," Barnett claims there is an expectation that principals become business people, and schools be more accountable (Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2012). There were few surprises when Barnett returned to government as state premier and proceeded to pursue devolution once again in the form of the IPS policy.

In the period leading up to the 2008 State Election, the Liberal Party outlined a policy for government education involving policy and budgets being locally determined and government schools being equipped to deal with new governance arrangements (Gobby, 2013). Liberal Party documents at the time argued that principals were frustrated by the constraints of bureaucratic control over real decision making (Liberal Party of WA, 2008, cited in Gobby, 2013). Additionally, there were assertions that principals felt excluded from leading innovation in response to specific local community needs. These party documents, accompanied by preceding devolutionary processes, ultimately shaped the context of the emerging IPS policy and the new Minister of Education, Dr Elisabeth Constable, was tasked with initiating it.

The IPS policy was released in 2009 and outlined a series of flexibilities that government schools could attain as a consequence of IPS status. One of the more noteworthy flexibilities was the capacity to bypass a centralized staff placement system through local recruitment and appointment processes. This was in addition to gaining the capacity to determine staffing profiles and make early offers to pre-service

teachers (DoE, 2009). It is apparent that authority over staffing was effectively transferred to principals. IP schools also gained the ability to determine expenditure of special needs funding, and one-line budgets enabled schools to manage staff and contingencies (DoE, 2009). Under the policy schools were permitted to use accounting practices and procedures they considered appropriate to their unique financial needs, and there was the capacity to manage facilities such as water, gas, electricity, and waste, and retain savings. Accountability was accomplished through a delivery and performance agreement with the Director General of Education (DoE, 2009).

The broader WA community, with the exception of the opposition Labor Party and the State School Teachers Union of WA (SSTUWA), embraced the new policy. Not surprisingly, given the increased level of influence over schools, principals were enthusiastic about the policy to the extent that one in eight government schools expressed interest in gaining IPS status in the first round of applications (Gobby, 2013). In September 2009, some 25 schools were given IPS status, 10 of which were high schools. A further nine were included in independent clusters. In the following year, there were an additional 55 schools and 60 in the year following that. In 2010, the DoE announced further decentralization/devolutionary processes with the *Empowering School Communities* policy. As a consequence, a new structure replaced the [then] existing district offices, reducing the number of educational regions to eight and forming 75 government school networks with up to 20 schools in each. A principal was tasked with managing each network and released from their school to assist other principals in the network (Gobby, 2013). The Education Minister asserted that the aim of the networks was to shift support networks from district offices to government schools. The overt objective was to provide principals with the authority to determine

how support services were to be better delivered and utilized (DoE, 2010, cited in Gobby, 2013).

## 2.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to explore the origins and context of the IPS policy in WA. To this end it was divided into three broad themes, which were subdivided further. The first theme examined GERM and sought to locate the IPS policy as a component of a larger set of neoliberal discourses involving school autonomy. The second theme examined both the USA and English experiences in shifting to autonomous government schools. This allowed some comparisons to be made between both of these contexts and the WA IPS policy. The final theme addressed devolution, education governance and relations between federal and state systems.

I have argued that the introduction of the IPS policy is located in the context of a broader set of travelling policy discourses. A central argument is that the IPS policy has its genesis in the global reach of the neoliberal agenda. In fact, the policy can be understood as an example of the globalization of education policy, where the focus is predominantly on economic competitiveness (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009) and the rise of NPM as a means of restructuring and re-culturing school management with explicit standards and measurements of performance. In education, NPM resulted in quasi-markets to the extent that schools were expected to operate as competing business units (Hall et al., 2012).

In identifying parallels between the development of the IPS policy and similar shifts to the SMS in the USA and England, there are clear interconnections of education polices across the globe in the form of what Sahlberg (2011) describes as GERM. For

example, Table 1 identifies similarities between logics of autonomy, with the three contexts appearing to be free from centralized control with the capacity to discern the distinct needs of communities. However, it was noted such autonomy was set against high levels of government-imposed accountability mechanisms (Keddie, 2016).

In seeking to provide an overview of governance of education from a Commonwealth and state level, it is possible to discern the emergence of devolutionary rhetoric, or local school governance in the parlance of the GERM SMS movement. WA government education was not immune to the pervasive influence of the neoliberal agenda.

# Chapter Three

# Theoretical Framework

## 3.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter I addressed the context of the IPS policy, juxtapositioning it against similar international policies for self-governing schools. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a layer of theoretical ideas that can assist in understanding the lived experiences of IPS leaders in low-SEI school communities. In this task, Lyotard's (1984) notion of language games is helpful in explaining the shift toward self-governing public or IP schools. When the term 'language game' is used in this thesis, it refers to the particular context of a neoliberal language game that includes performativity to describe a desired state of school governance and leadership.

This chapter is organized into three broad sections. In the first section I consider the importance of theory in illuminating experience. Here, I draw on Ball's (1994) argument that the role of theory is to disrupt common sense orthodoxy by using a toolbox of ideas capable of challenging traditional approaches to policy analysis that tend to reinforce the ways things are. In the tradition of critical social research, theory is used in this thesis to disrupt everyday perceptions of the IPS policy, and instead provide an alternative reading of how language, power, and knowledge impact on the lives of school leaders in IP schools.

The second section explains Lyotard's (1984) concepts of language games and is divided into three subsections, the first of which explains the origins of language games. These origins are found in the influence of Wittgenstein (1954) who perceives meaning to be linked to rules in a game. This is followed by a closer examination of

Lyotard's (1984) conceptualization of language games. Such language games are a means to manipulate action and thought. They also constrain and control individuals. I then elaborate on Lyotard's (1984) notion of the differend to explain the kinds of stories revealed through the ethnographic fieldwork. Lyotard (1984) describes a differend as being present when language games come into conflict. A central argument of this thesis is that the enactment of the IPS policy occurs in the context of a neoliberal language game that not only shapes and distorts the ways in which individuals think and act, but excludes alternative perspectives and possibilities for the way in which schooling might be structured and organized.

The third section connects leadership, performativity, and language games. I argue that there is a connection between neoliberal language games and the technology of performativity as a means of constituting particular forms of conduct by employing judgements and comparisons (Ball, 2003). The neoliberal logic of homo economicus is examined as a major technology of regulation and the threat it poses to the disruption of democracy and the public good as individuals take on an increasingly entrepreneurial and self-interested persona instead of working cooperatively in the public interest (Dilts, 2011). I argue that school leaders in IPSs are coerced to similarly strategize and this restricts the type of leadership available to a narrowly conceived and instrumentalist approach to school governance. In short, I argue that the IPS policy is a part of a broader neoliberalizing logic that invokes a particular language game to normalize a certain type of leadership conducive to market values.

## 3.2 The Role of Theory in Research

In this section I argue that theory matters because it allows me to challenge and interrupt existing explanations of the social world. A central argument of this thesis is

that theory can be used to disrupt preconceived notions of the way things are. It provides a means to challenge the assumptions, beliefs, and values underpinning policy regimes such as the IPS policy. Scott and Marshall (2005) define theory as:

> an account of the world, which goes beyond what, we can see and measure. It embraces a set of interrelated definitions and relationships that organize our concepts of and understanding of the empirical world in a systematic way. (p. 662)

Ball (1994) argues that theory can sometimes be disruptive and violent because it unsettles dominant ways of seeing the world. He claims that critical theories require the researcher to 'take risks,' 'use imagination,' and be 'reflective.' Significantly, theory provides a language of critique to challenge the 'taken for granted.' Theory also allows the individual to understand "modes of thought other than those articulated for us by dominant others" (Ball, 2006, p. 1). In addition, it provides the language of rigor and irony rather than contingency (Ball, 1995, p. 266). Giroux (2004) argues that critical research centers around "rigorous social criticism as it becomes a stubborn force for challenging false prophets, deflating the claims of triumphalism and critically engaging all those social relations that promote material and symbolic violence" (p. 142). As such, the purpose of theory is to make the familiar strange by making current practices and categories appear less self-evident. Shor (1985) uses the idea of "extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary" or examining "familar situations in an unfamilar way" (p. 93) to shed light on this process of social criticism. In doing so, the theorist can open up spaces for invention, creativity, and new forms of expression (Ball, 2006a, p. 62).

Ball (2006b) draws on Foucault (1980) to explain that the purpose is to provide not a global systemic theory that holds everything in place but instead, an analysis of specific mechanisms of power to build strategic knowledge. In using the term

'strategic,' Ball (2006b) perceives it as form of resistance. When this kind of critical work is pursued, Ball (2006a) cites Bourdieu (1993) to warn against the risk of researchers becoming trapped in false choices between binaries. Researchers, he argues, need to work between binaries. It is essential for theory to be used to assist in understanding occurrences the individual discerns. This thesis carries a clear risk of being ensnared in the binaries of the merits of the IPS policy as opposed to its negative effects—similar to the false choice between good and evil.

In this sense, theory provides a lens with which to investigate school autonomy; specifically the IPS policy. However, the road to autonomy is paved with hazards. One such hazard is, "the current predominance of market ideologies governing western education systems," which are not conducive to an intelligent take up of school autonomy (Keddie, 2015, p. 3). One of my central concerns with the shift to market ideologies underpinning school autonomy is that it ultimately erodes democracy and equality. Such an erosion comes through restrictions on what can actually be done at a school level. I agree with Keddie (2015) when she argues that policies aimed at school autonomy were shaped by political agendas with a focus on managerialism and economically rationalist approaches, rather than genuine school-based decision making.

Significantly, the State Government of WA, through the auspices of the DoE, claimed that government schools attaining IPS status were at the forefront of government education reforms in WA. The then State Minister of Education Peter Collier claimed:

> Independent public schools are leading the way in the reform of public education
> in Western Australia. More and more school communities are realizing the
> benefits that flow from having the autonomy to make their schools more

distinctive and shaped by the needs and aspirations of their students. (DoE, 2013, p. 2)

On the surface, such claims appear plausible and indeed commendable. Collier's comments are a form of language game whereby political statements invoke what Don Watson (2004) describes as "weasel words" or "management jargon" (competitive advantage, accountability, consumers, clients, outcomes, performance, and so on) to exercise and maintain power and control (pp. 2–3). These official statements espouse neoliberal market ideology, which views schools like any other business requiring effective and efficient management; thus foreclosing alternative democratic possibilities (Riddle & Apple, 2020).

## 3.3 Language Games

### 3.3.1 The Origins of Language Games

Acknowledging the importance of theory, I now turn my attention to Lyotard's (1984) theoretical contribution to the idea of language games and how it is useful to my analysis of the IPS policy. In this thesis, I adopt the term language games rather than neoliberal discourse because it offers a far more expansive understanding of the ways in which language functions to control and constrain as well as manipulate both thought and action; discourse implies a level of debate or discussion. In the case of school autonomy, for example, school leaders are duped into believing that IPS status offers them greater freedom and autonomy, but only within the constraints of regulatory and hierarchical accountabilities. Consequently, the 'game' in Lyotard's (1984) terms is concerned with maintaining the illusion of autonomy, which becomes evident in later chapters. For now, I want to examine more closely the origins of Lyotard's (1984) notion of language games to identify key elements of this concept

and why they are helpful. In addressing language games through the notion of paganism, Lyotard (1984) builds on the works of Wittgenstein (1953), and this connection is briefly extrapolated further, later in this chapter.

At the heart of Lyotard's (1984) work is the view that knowledge and power are fundamentally two sides of the same coin. He stresses the importance of asking who decides what knowledge is and what needs to be decided (Woodward, 2005). It is Lyotard's (1984) position that the answer to this increasingly complex question comes down to government. In the digital age, decisions about what knowledge is worth storing and who might be permitted access come down to decisions about which knowledge is legitimate.

Lyotard (1984) contends that any use of language involves fundamental contestation. Whether this is acknowledged or not, individuals are involved in a game with distinct rules. Lyotard (1984) explains:

> to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing and speech acts fall within the domain of general agonistics. This does not necessarily mean that one plays in order to win. A move can be made for the sheer pleasure of invention. (p. 10)

As Lyotard's (1984) understanding of language games is influenced by the work of Wittgenstein (1953), it is appropriate to briefly pause and consider his key argument. I do not intend to provide a comprehensive analysis of Wittgenstein's (1953) work but simply to acknowledge his contribution to the view that a word or sentence has meaning only as a result of the 'rule' of the game, and therefore does not necessarily reflect reality. Wittgenstein (1953) uses the example of the word 'water' to illustrate how the rules in language games can alter from one game to another. With this example, Wittgenstein (1953) argues that water can be used as an order, answer to a

question, exclamation, or request. The meaning of water alters depending on the language game being used. Wittgenstein (1953) contends there is no need to clearly define concepts to make them meaningful. He uses the phrase language game to designate forms of language simpler than the entirety of language itself (Woodward, 2006). Wittgenstein (1953) claims the world consists of facts and humans are aware of these through mental representations or thoughts that are then expressed in propositions. In his (1953) words, "Like everything metaphysical the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language" (p. 112).

For Wittgenstein (1953), there is no single underlying essence of language because words function primarily through naming and some representation of the world. Thus, language games are governed by human practices in which meaning is ascribed in the context of the practice. As a consequence, meaning can be as diverse as the communities in which the word or sentence are used. It is, therefore, misleading to assume that particular words or sentences are somehow fixed or immutable by linking them referentially to the world (Woodward, 2006). The meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., independent public school) is no more than a set of rules governing the use of the expression and established in social practice.

Notably the rules of the game for language are neither right nor wrong. They are simply useful for the particular application in which they are used (Woodward, 2006). Members of a community develop ways of speaking that serve the community's specific needs and this is what constitutes a language game. Hence it can be argued that when an educative community discusses government schools being independent, the language game used involves that community's perception of independence. Wittgenstein (1953) contends that nothing is stable in language games even when

meaning appears to be fixed (e.g., the term independent); the symbols used are nothing more than a way in which humans have decided to speak and write to make sense. He (1953) states:

> For a large class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word meaning it can be explained thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language. (p. 43)

If the language game uses the word 'independent' in a particular way, it will appear that the meaning of that word is linked to its use in language in the context of the practice. This matters in this thesis, as competing language games interpret 'independent' differently.

### 3.3.2 Lyotard: A Brief Segue

In this section of the thesis, my aim is to provide a brief overview of how Lyotard (1984) uses Wittgenstein (1953) to develop the notion of the language game. As such, the intent is not to provide an in-depth examination of Lyotard (1984); rather the purpose is to contextually place Lyotard's work. Lyotard studied philosophy in the late 1940s, writing about and analyzing forms of indifference and detachment in differing religions. He is best known for his work in the 1970s when he began teaching in Paris. Lyotard was critical of universals, meta-narratives, and generality. A number of his works seek to undermine readily accepted universals. It is significant that Lyotard's work on *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979 coincided with the period when Thatcher and Reagan were in power and thus neoliberalism was in the ascendancy. Lyotard (1979) contends that the status of knowledge altered as societies entered the postmodern era. He argues that *systemtheorie* was technocratic and the true goal of the 'system' was to

optimize the global relationship between input and output. Simply put, performativity becomes the underlying purpose.

Lyotard (1984), in extrapolating from the work of Wittgenstein (1953), claims that language games do not carry within themselves their own legitimation. Rather they are subject to a contract between players. He also contends that if there are no rules then there can be no game, and apparent minor rule changes alter the game. Every utterance, Lyotard (1984) contends, should be thought of as a move in the game. Hence, any language game surrounding IPS has players; and there is some sort of agreement between them. Woodward (2006) asserts that Lyotard's (1984) notion of language games is ultimately related to close links between knowledge and power, which he conceives of as two sides of the same equation: who decides what knowledge is; and who knows what is to be decided. In this thesis, the question pertaining to who decides what knowledge is has substance as it is significant who might decide and define what it means to be independent.

### 3.3.3 The Differend

For Lyotard (1984), it is problematic to compare and contrast language games because each has separate rules. Lyotard (1984) argues that when there is a dispute between language games an irresolvable conflict ensues that cannot be resolved through fairness to either game. This is a differend. He claims society is comprised of multifarious and fragmented language games. Each game has strict control over moves that become narratives of legitimation. At the risk of oversimplification, narratives of legitimation refer to those language components used by participants in a language game to vindicate a series of actions. For instance, in the IPS/autonomous government school language game this can involve the use of performativity to defend

actions. Later in this thesis, the role of performativity as a component of language games is explored in greater detail.

Lyotard's (1988) conceptualization of the differend is useful in examining contrasting language games at play with the IPS policy. There is the language game of the policy, stressing benefits of government schools gaining autonomy; and there is the language game postulating independence as problematic. Other ways to think about this include contradiction as well as rhetoric versus reality.

For Lyotard (1988), a differend contrasts with litigation as a means of resolution. The latter can be impartially resolved through parties agreeing on a particular judgement. Lyotard (1984) argues that as a differend cannot be resolved in fairness to either game, it is not possible to reconcile different language games. Such language games are one component of postmodernism, according to Lyotard (1984), who drew on the idea of paganism to explain irreducible differences. Individuals should not attempt to reduce differences to universals but instead address them on their own terms. Reading (1982) explains, "Paganism consists of giving up the opposition of truth to illusion, no longer trying to seize the high ground, to wield power in the name of destroying it" (p. 73).

To extrapolate the concept of the differend, Lyotard (1988) draws on concepts necessitating some form of judgement, but where one party is unable to present a defense as the conflict is in the form of an argument unavailable and/or inaccessible to that party. This occurs when one party is asked to present a case in language nullifying that party's position (Woodward, 2005). In other words, the party is asked to perform a self-defeating task where the form of evidence demanded cannot be provided.

A fundamental argument in this thesis is that the WA government education system (similar to comparable government education systems such as those of the USA and England), is dominated by the neoliberal language game. A differend exists as it is problematic to refute the neoliberal language game without some form of allusion to neoliberal tools, particularly performative data. Many neoliberal tools, such as performativity, pre-date the neoliberal mode of governance. For example, performance-based testing was enshrined in the *Elementary Education Act 1871* (WA). However, this thesis emphasizes that there has been a convergence of these apparatuses in contemporary times. If an attempt is made to discuss whether or not WA government education attains particular goals, the language game needed to prove/dispute such claims is nonexistent in a neoliberal paradigm. It is possible to extrapolate this point further and assert that as social goals are not perceived as adding to the efficiency of the social system, those goals have no place in the neoliberal agenda.

### 3.3.4 What Happens in the Event of a Differend?

The notion of differend is a crucial part of my analysis of the lived experience of school leaders in Chapters Five and Six. Central to this analysis is the attempt to comprehend the ways in which the differend (differences/conflicts) functions in the context of the language game of neoliberalism and the social/public discourses of education. Pivotal to the operation of the neoliberal language game is the narrow focus on performativity as a major technology of regulation through measurement and ranking of success. This means questions concerning pedagogical processes that might occur to arrive at the performance are pushed to the periphery. For example, the use of high stakes testing as a key measure of performance leads to a focus on 'teaching to the test' and

ignoring other kinds of learning experiences involving exploration, discussion, reasoned debate, play, experimentation, creativity, imagination, joy, beauty, and truth. Kozol (2007) believes none of this should be surprising when words such as 'delight,' 'curiosity,' 'kindness,' 'empathy,' 'compassion,' 'happiness,' 'curiosity,' and 'joy' are cleansed from official policy documents only to be supplanted by business-driven jargon like 'proficiency,' 'productivity,' 'transparency,' 'targets,' 'outcomes,' and 'accountability'—all with devastating effect (Kozol, 2007, p. 100, cited in Smyth et al., 2014, p. 99).

Dewey (1959) views pedagogy as an interactive process, predominantly social in nature (Zalta, 2020). For Dewey (1959), schools should serve a social function and be responsible for educating citizens in ways that will activate social change. In particular, Dewey (1959) sees schools as places where individuals can learn to live. This means that pedagogy should not revolve around acquiring pre-determined skills. Instead, schools should be places that assist individuals to achieve their full potential with skills for the greater good (Zalta, 2020). Reid (2018) argues there are two discourses surrounding education in Australia. One of these advances "certainty, competition and regulation" (p. 3). This is the neoliberal language game that has policy features including competition, in the education market place, through standardized testing and a narrow curriculum. The other discourse, according to Reid (2018), utilizes flexibility, adaptability, and collaboration. Such a language game favors policy that includes student-centered learning, teacher autonomy, and formative assessment.

The neoliberal language game values particular social reforms, namely those that promote individual competition and efficiency at the expense of the public good. Lyotard (1988) argues that wrongs occur because of the differend, but he also asserts

that the issue with differends lies in recognition, as opposed to resolution. When discussing wrongs, Lyotard believes one side of the differend will succeed while the other fails. This clearly presents a conundrum; for example, the conflict between neoliberal and welfare reform language games that appear to be irresolvable as it is not possible to bring both games together and remain consistent to original claims—hence the wrong occurs.

Lyotard (1988) argues that when such a differend occurs, the role of the philosopher/observer/researcher is not to resolve the conflict, as to do so would result in an injustice occurring to one side. This presents a clear dilemma as advocates for democracy and public good have no voice within the neoliberal language game. For example, it is not possible to resolve the conflict between the neoliberal language game that relies on performative data to justify actions, and the language game that promotes the social democratic function of public education and relies on qualitative data to drive change. Instead, the philosopher/observer/researcher should opt for communicating the irresolvable nature of differends (Lyotard, 1988).

Williams (1988) argues that the task of the philosopher is to bear witness to such differends. Like Williams, I attempt to reveal the differend apparent between the neoliberal language game and the broader social purposes of government education in WA schools. Lyotard (1988) asserts that in opting to bear witness to differends independent of any form of judgement, the philosopher/observer/researcher can convey the irresolvable nature of the differend. I argue that the IPS policy is part of the neoliberal language game and as such stands in opposition to socio-democratic principles attached to education. The latter involves aspects such as social justice, democracy, and the pursuit of knowledge (Reid, 2019). Such a differend exists as the

neoliberal language game utilizes performative language, which is incapable of expressing wider societal goals attached to public education and the common good. This performative language is taken up in the next section of this chapter.

## 3.4 Educational Leadership, Performativity and Language Games

The aim in this section is to examine the ways in which the language game of neoliberalism constitutes the practice of educational leadership in the context of the IPS policy. My purpose is to better understand how school leaders name and make sense of particular words and phrases as they implement the IPS policy in their school. I wish to understand the practices associated with the language game of school autonomy from the point of view of the players/actors. I organize this discussion around four key themes. The first is performativity, which is used as a disciplinary tool through testing, targets, comparisons, and ranking. The second theme explores the idea of 'steering at a distance,' which is a means for governments to use control mechanisms while presenting the illusion of autonomy (Ball, 2006; Smyth, 2003). The third theme adds a further layer of my understanding of the IPS policy by exploring the concept of homo economicus within the neoliberal language game and how this represents a new reality for educational leaders. Finally, the fourth section discusses educational leadership in neoliberal times.

### 3.4.1 Performativity

The idea of performativity is a significant facet of the neoliberal language game, and has been extensively used as a theoretical tool to explain a range of disciplining practices including measurement, testing, targets, comparison, and rankings. Performativity is a useful device to comprehend as a means for government to justify

the IPS policy. In education, the term performativity is a reasonably new and ugly phrase that has significance (Marshall, 1999). Lyotard (1984) claims the notion of performativity is an important characteristic of the postmodern condition and is a 'game' with no pertinence to truth or beauty. Instead, it is concerned only with technical moves linked to social efficiency. Performativity is part of a neoliberal language game that "refers to the maximizing of efficiency of inputs and outputs throughout the social fabric" (Niesche, 2012, p. 5). In the context of the neoliberal language game performativity focuses exclusively on metrics to measure outputs (outcomes) in education and, in the process, leads to "means–end thinking" (Phelan, 2009, p. 106), whereby educational ideals are secondary to the main language game. Instead it is only concerned with how education might contribute to efficiency in the existing social system.

In describing performativity in education, Ball (2003) claims:

> Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change-based on rewards and sanctions both material and symbolic. (p. 216.)

Others, including Harris (2007), argue that the term performativity captures dominant perspectives in contemporary society. In particular, performativity is useful in understanding educational governance. In recent times education governance has taken on a very specific meaning. From a functionalist perspective, it means, a space for planning intended to calculate the management of choices and cost in order to optimise efficiency and effectiveness. It is a means to regulate, and this can occur through compliance checks, high-stakes testing and performance benchmarks to appraise schools (Wilkins 2021).

The dialectal of efficiency and effectiveness is a fundamental component of the neoliberal language game that colonizes and supplants other alternative possibilities in education (Bourdieu, 1998). This includes the philosophical, ethical, and moral purpose of education and what it means to be educated (Dewey, 1944[1916]); Kincheloe et al., 2000). Performativity necessitates everything/one being commensurate with everything/one else. In other words, everything/one is reduced to be measured by the same standards (Harris, 2007). Within such a language game, educational systems become based only on measurable input/output models, which necessitate standardization. Diversity has to be standardized, to be measured and evaluated. As a consequence, pedagogical processes become contained and constrained within a set of neoliberalizing logics.

Performativity is thus normalized within a particular discourse (Perryman, 2006). In schools, according to Perryman (2006), this means that "lessons are taught in a particular way and school policies and documentation reflect the expected discourse" (p. 150). In a performative regime, schools and those within them are perceived as successful to the extent that they attain pre-defined criteria and outcomes determined by 'experts' most removed from classrooms.

When considering the work of teachers, critical research is discouraged by both education systems and government as it presents a threat to the status quo (Smyth et al., 2014). This process of conservatism is maintained by professional specialization, whereby teachers and academics "become tame and accepting of whatever the so-called leaders in the field allow" (Said, 1994, p. 57, cited in Smyth et al., 2014). Additionally, conservatism is maintained by the certification of authorities as they instruct individuals to speak in the accepted language and cite the correct authority,

thereby "holding the right territory" (Said, 1994, p. 58, cited in Smyth et al., 2014). Said (1994) expands on this by arguing:

> You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you need the approval of a boss or an authority figure; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream. (p. 74)

Kemmis and Smith (2008) provide a further perspective on this issue, arguing that teacher "praxis in education today is endangered" by a form of practice that amounts to simply following the rules (p. 5). Consequently, the 'moral agency' of teachers and their professional identities is threatened as "praxis demands creative thinking, care, compassion and critical consciousness-thinking outside the rules" (p. 5). Accountability mechanisms that are externally determined are a key disciplinary practice that uses threat and fear to ensure schools conform to central bureaucratic directives. Perryman (2006) terms this the vigilant eye, which she claims is increasingly used through accountability mechanisms.

In education, performativity has minimal connection with educational ideals, but is instead focused on the extent to which education contributes to the performativity of the social system. In other words, education is perceived as providing the raw components that contribute to capital formation in the social and economic arrangements of society, and only those parts of education that augment productivity and human capital formation are truly valued (Spring 1998; 2004). For Lyotard (1984), educational institutions are incapable of possessing the autonomy to make decisions about which forms of knowledge should or should not be taught as they are subjected to funding allocation for survival. Ball (2003) expands on this line of argument when

he claims that in a performative culture, it is the performance that has consequence because only the performance is the measure of productivity, output, or display of quality.

A focus on performance in education generates problems as performance is defined as student achievement in standardized testing. In Australia, for example, NAPLAN testing is the linchpin of this performance regime; results are published on the My School website, which allows direct public comparisons to be made. Many schools use NAPLAN data as an indication of the success of the school; hence it is high stakes testing (Thompson & Cook, 2013; Thompson & Mockler, 2015). Schools use their performance as a measure of their individual and collective quality in the market place. For those located within a performative discourse, the demonstration of productivity is demanded of everyone (Meadmore & Meadmore, 2004). The function of schools is, therefore, to develop, "active, enterprising and optimistic individuals who are market assets" (Meadmore & Meadmore, 2004, p. 376). Schools located within such discourses are deemed successful predominantly through accountability mechanisms that utilize efficiency and effectiveness as measures of achievement.

The lexicon that has emerged as a part of the current GERM includes key phrases such as the market, school choice, strategic plans, managerialism, and outcomes, which serves to offer a limiting and insipid version of education. This particular dialect has emerged to enable those working in education to "describe roles and relationships" (Ball, 2003, p. 218). In responding to these types of demands, school leaders have sought to "develop characteristics, traits, behaviours and structures that add to the performance of the system" (Niesche, 2012, p. 6). The new vocabulary prescribes signifiers that severely limit the capacity of those working in education to

represent themselves differently. This observation suggests school leaders in this study are firmly located within a particular neoliberal language game that has performativity as one pivotal component. While they have the agency to conceive of themselves, their schools, and education outside of this particular language game, they feel pressure to professionally present these aspects in terms of a performative dialect.

### 3.4.2 Steering at a Distance

The notion of steering at a distance forms an extension of the argument surrounding performativity. Kickert (1993) coined the phrase 'steerage at a distance' to describe mechanisms used by governments to give the illusion of autonomy while maintaining control over them (Ball, 2006; Smyth, 2003). Hartley (1993) argues that governments need to direct policy while appearing not to do so (p. 100)—in other words, offering words like 'autonomy,' 'choice,' and 'ownership' while 'steering at a distance.' Such a discourse retains liberal ideals through an emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy but set against utilitarian ends such as attaining performative goals. These ends, according to Hartley (1993), "are not necessarily those of pupils, teachers or the school. They are the ends of the state" (p. 111).

Although governments appear to reduce their involvement in managing public utilities, they are no less active in setting rules and managing expectations, which is intended to shape how government organizations govern themselves (Wilkins & Gobby, 2020). In the context of a devolved education system there has been a commensurate reinforcement of control mechanisms, especially national targets and other pieces of performative information used by schools to self-evaluate (Ozga, 2009). Since the 1990s, performativity through self-evaluation has been linked to the increasing use of

supposed objective and depersonalized data (Ozga, 2009). However, there is an inexorable link between performative data and centralized authorities. Self-assessment appears on the surface to be a shift away from centralized control but those things that are to be measured are determined and managed for reporting purposes by the central authority. Ball (2003) believes this form of control through judgement reinforces the argument that real autonomy is purely illusory. Self-evaluation processes cannot disguise the increasingly insidious and constraining mechanisms of control by central authorities.

Principals lead through performativity because for them to demonstrate achievement of students, performative data are required. This means their success as school leaders is directly linked to achieving performative data goals. As a consequence, school leadership in government schools is increasingly defined around a particular series of narrowly conceived and instrumentalist performance indicators that allow individuals to be held accountable for measures of school improvement (Gunter, 2011). The production of the performance enables individuals in government schools to demonstrate their "worth, quality or value to the larger government education system" (Meadmore & McWilliam, 2001, p. 32).

As Ball (2003) argues, performativity is part of new policy technologies that "play an important part in aligning public sector organizations with the methods, culture and ethical systems of the private sector" (p. 216). Of significance to this thesis, Ball (2003) contends that devolved environments give the appearance of shifting away from a centralized bureaucracy, but in effect there remain monitoring systems and the production of performative information controlled by the central bureaucracy. This, in effect, is steering from a distance (Smyth, 2011). These performances are important

as they "serve as measures of productivity or output or displays of quality or moments of promotion or inspection" (Ball, 2006, p. 216).

In performance systems, there is the appearance of freedom through a devolved system, but authority is retained by those who "determine what is to count as valuable or effective or satisfactory performance and what measures or indicators are considered valid" (Ball, 2003, p. 216). Thus, the issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial as it is this group who steer at a distance (Ball, 2003). In supposedly autonomous government schools, the government does not disappear, rather it retreats into a more powerful role of policy setting, or steering at a distance (Smyth, 2011). In this context, those who work in government schools find their personal and professional identities increasingly constituted through the practices of the neoliberal language game that permeates the school autonomy movement.

### 3.4.3 Homo Economicus

The concept of homo economicus adds an additional layer to my understanding of the enactment of the IPS policy because it represents the embodiment of the new reality facing school leaders in government education in WA. It is now the common sense approach to public sector management and by extension the nature of school leadership (Harris, 2007; Kumashiro, 2004). Under the neoliberal language game the body is ultimately subjected to economic influences encapsulated in the idea of homo economicus, which in the case of school leaders in IPSs means perpetual competition through performative data.

In this section I argue that the neoliberal language is much more than related to differing means of governing or economies. Foucault (1982) argues that it is ultimately linked to the practices of governing the individual by prescribing specific manners of

living. In his (2008) words, "The new art of government therefore appears as the management of freedom" (p. 63). In developing this line of argument, Foucault (2008) draws a distinction between classical liberalism and neoliberalism. According to Foucault (2008), while there is a focus on economic activity for both, at the core of classic liberalism the market is viewed as a place of autonomy. The state, through the free market, ensures the unconditional right of the individual and protection of private property. Exchange is the matrix of society. However, the neoliberal language game shifts the focus from exchange to competition (Foucault, 2008).

The shift from exchange values to competition is significant, because individuals no longer collaborate, but compete instead. The change is consequential in this study because one of the major outcomes of the IPS policy is that government schools are now viewed as competing business units. Additionally, leaders in these schools have been similarly compelled to act in competition with others. In doing so, individuals "become complicit in governing themselves as enterprising individuals" (Smyth, 2011, p. 102).

To ensure perpetual competition under the neoliberal paradigm, the state is required to constantly intervene in the conditions of the market (Read, 2009). It is noteworthy that the distinction between classical liberalism and neoliberalism is intervention, as opposed to ensuring market conditions. Equally significant is the transformation of homo economicus from an individual who exchanges their labor and collaborates, to one who competes. The neoliberal homo economicus is an individual who systematically responds to modifications, who "in the variables of the environment, appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically

to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment" (Dilts, 2011, p. 131).

Foucault (1988) argues that the idea of homo economicus within the neoliberal paradigm refers to a person who is extremely governable. This individual becomes the correlate of governmentality (Dilts, 2011). To put it another way, the individual enters into a mutual relationship with the governing body. As the power of the governing body appears to be less restrictive, there is an increase of intensity by limiting the possible actions of the individual (Nealon, 2008). Deregulation under neoliberalism might signal a retreat of state power, but it simultaneously represents an expansion of that power by creating possibilities through the market, for the conduct of individuals to be directed (Wilkins, 2017). In autonomous government schools this can be seen as individuals acquiescing to the usage of performative data to validate their merit in the school.

The reconceptualization of homo economicus in this way implies everything the individual needs to achieve their ends. It can be understood economically through the calculation of cost/benefit. Additionally, labor is redefined as human capital where wages are attained through investment by the individual in their skills. Any activity including education that increases the wage capacity of the individual is an investment in human capital. The problem lies in those aspects of the human condition that cannot be altered, such as race, social class, and gender, even though there might be some technologies to assist the individual in overcoming their natural limits (Foucault, 2008). Homo economicus under this neoliberal reconceptualization is essentially an entrepreneur of oneself (Read, 2009).

Foucault (2008) expands on this line of argument within the neoliberal paradigm by developing insight through the notion of regimes of truth. Foucault (1977) identifies a new series of technologies joining power and truth coalescing to constitute the subject. Foucault (1977) claims that the concept of disciplinary technology explains how the individual is "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p. 136). In describing processes of subjectification, Foucault (1977) states the body is:

> directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs … this subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology … it may be calculated, organized, technically thought out; … this knowledge and this mastery constitute what might be called the political technology of the body. (pp. 25–26)

It is Foucault's (1977) view that disciplinary technology operates through combinations of subtle mechanisms such as hierarchical observation, normalizing judgements, and the examination. As Rabinow and Rogers (1984) explain, the state develops an increasing totalizing web of control through increased specifications of individuality (p. 22). By using a variety of disciplinary techniques, the state becomes both a totalizing and individualizing institution (Rabinow and Rogers, 1984, p. 22). Foucault (1977) claims that "hierarchical observation" is a significant coercion technique (p. 170). Similar to panopticons, Foucault (1977) argues schools are designed and organized to produce constant surveillance, policing, and self-regulation. Disciplinary institutions such as schools maintain secret machineries of control that function similar to microscopes of conduct (Foucault, 1977, p.170). Normalizing judgements, according to Foucault (1977), serve the purpose of correcting those individuals who fail to measure up to the rule.

The state depends on individuals making calculations in their interests (Read, 2009). The neoliberal paradigm as a mode of government operates predominantly on the individual's interests, desires, and aspirations; as opposed to their societal rights and/or obligations. In autonomous government schools, this translates into performative data being used to measure specific conduct, such as student performance in literacy and numeracy, and rewarding those schools and their leaders showing improvement against these measures of desirable behavior. However, other areas such as student wellbeing are not similarly measured; as such no rewards are linked to schools addressing these needs unless connected to improved performance data.

The neoliberal paradigm endeavors to generate social realities, which proponents claim exist already and are 'natural' (Lemke, 2002). For example, there is a trend away from long-term stable employment toward temporary part-time work. As an economic strategy, there are efficiencies to be gained as this frees organizations from expensive commitments to workers' rights and conditions (e.g., superannuation, annual leave, and sick leave) (Read, 2009). Significantly, this is also an effective subjugation strategy as workers conceive of themselves as companies of one. Curtailing the power of organized labor through the construction of a perspective of society comprised of individual entrepreneurs is a fundamental goal of the neoliberal language game (Read, 2009). Thus, deregulation is a pivotal tenet of the neoliberal language game as it offers opportunities to govern through isolation. Nealon (2008) believes the illusion of governing bodies appears less restrictive when in fact there are greater restrictions in the range of possible actions. While IPSs may be under the illusion they are unconstrained or 'free' from central bureaucracy, there are nonetheless clear constraints through the restriction of the range of decisions that can be made at the

school level. For example, central bureaucracies prescribe the curriculum and link it to funding related to specific performative goals.

From this perspective, the neoliberal language game represents an elemental disruption of democracy as concepts such as public good, rights or reasoned debate lose validity as citizens in the reformed society do not work cooperatively; instead, they strategize out of self-interest (Dilts, 2011). The challenge ahead is to better understand what this new entrepreneurial environment means for the ways in which school leaders think and act in regards to the IPS policy.

### 3.4.4 Leadership: Playing the Game

The neoliberal language game ultimately disrupts perceptions that government education might be associated with concepts such as democracy, reasoned debate, or human rights. For school leaders who find themselves located within such language games, there is a clear dilemma. They can either participate in the game, or resist. The concept of leadership is fundamental to this thesis as I endeavor to explain how leaders in IPSs have been effectively coerced by the neoliberal language game to lead their schools predominantly through the use of performative data.

Gronn (2003) argues that since the mid-1980s, leadership has been canonized and management demonized. The point is that the skills needed to effectively lead are valorized over the day-to-day functional skills required to ensure the school operates within budgetary and human/physical resource administration. In fact, a vast leadership industry has emerged, making the discourse of leadership ubiquitous. A part of that discourse includes an overabundance of activities associated with leadership, including course and subject retitling, the growth of leadership centers, job vacancy wording, and the body of conceptual and research literature (Gronn, 2003).

Amid the flurry of activity little seems to have actually altered. Leadership in education is a highly contested term among researchers. Many studies drift into what educational leaders should or should not do, or explore strategies that can be optimized for schools to be successful (Vennebo & Ottesen, 2011). Certainly, educational leaders have been conflated to the extent they are perceived as rightful translators of policy (Vennabo & Ottesen, 2011). This has resulted in them being bestowed with power and resources to enact policy at the school level.

Relatively recent emphasis on performative mechanisms within wider social services has resulted in a renewed examination of leadership standards and competencies through the use of capability frameworks (Niesche, 2012). Defining educational leadership is at best elusive with the interchanging of terms such as 'leadership,' 'leading,' and 'leader' (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008). In Australia, for example, there is a focus on performance and the specific use of Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Standards as the field of judgement through which teaching and leadership can presumably be measured. At their core, schools remain mechanisms to organize teacher labor, student participation, and pedagogy (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008). In the neoliberal language game, educational leadership is grounded in the notion of 'best practice' imported from the world of business. This search revolves around providing a sense of predictability, efficiency, order and control, and outcomes (Niesche, 2012). Smyth, (2011) describes this as a type of "zombie leadership," as it impugns the capacity of educational leaders to act autonomously and theorize about their work. Significantly, this is a language game that ultimately disguises alternative approaches to school leadership founded on the principles and values of school leadership.

The general belief that leadership can be quantified through professional standards frameworks is problematic. Attempts to identify check lists of leadership traits and behaviors—and how they might be acquired in complex organizational sites like schools leading to school improvement and effectiveness—is problematic (Niesche, 2012). While the search for positive leadership practices appears simple, concurrently the use of 'best practice' models lacks credibility. Lyotard (1984), for example, illustrates how it is possible to rethink taken-for-granted approaches to school leadership by highlighting the ways in which language games construct particular realities within communities of practice.

Concepts of leadership are contested spaces (Niesche, 2012). When educational leadership is critiqued, this results in reconceptualization of assumptions upon which accepted practices are based. When this is done, it is difficult to continue acting in ways that might be viewed as common sense or natural. This implies that critique of existing language games around school leadership is urgently required if there is to be any hope of transforming it. In other words, when contradictions in concepts of leadership are made visible, it becomes possible to think outside of existing paradigms. Lyotard (1984) forces the need to question assumptions of totalizing theories and to champion notions of difference. In particular, reality is constructed through language games, and words such as 'leadership' can be considered a move in a pragmatic world (Lyotard, 1984). Social problems, however, cannot simply be resolved through differing models as each model raises issues of translation. Prescribed definitions are local, but once context dissipates any definitions lose their meaning. Lyotard (1984) claims that such concepts can only be analyzed on a case-by-case basis.

### 3.4.5 Educational Leadership in Neoliberal Times

In this section I examine the ways in which school leadership is construed within the language games of neoliberalizing logic. In particular, I focus on the development of educational leadership standards frameworks, which seeks to produce forms of designer leadership whereby individuals are constituted into particular ways of being or subjectivity (Niesche, 2012). According to Wilkins (2018):

> At the heart of neoliberalism is a commitment to certain economic and political theories and philosophical perspectives concerning the ontology of the subject (or subjectivity) and the relationship between the state and the economy. (p. 511)

As the links between education and national economic goals has been strengthened over the past 30 years there has been a much greater emphasis on making financial and philosophical investments in generating environments where schools are coerced into aligning with the needs and performative goals of the economy, and this is measured through student performance on standardized tests such as PISA and NAPLAN (England, 2006). Schools are judged on student performance in high stakes testing regimes, which places pressure on school leaders to focus attention on using economic tools such as statistical analysis, to build data-driven communities (Male & Palaiologou, 2012).

The consequent teaching to the test narrows the curriculum and impoverishes student experiences, especially in those areas deemed less important, such as arts and humanities (Male & Palaiologou, 2012). In this context, good pedagogy is a casualty as school leadership becomes increasingly obsessed with narrow sets of performance data. There are of course some school leaders who choose to reject participating in this particular kind of language game, although it requires leaders with courage and

the capacity to 'fly under the radar' in an increasingly oppressive audit culture (Power, 1994). These individuals favor a more educative and ethical understanding of the public good associated with government education (Blackmore & Sachs, 2012). However, it is argued in this thesis that the leadership that has emerged is predominantly focused on narrow sets of pre-determined benchmarks of performance, devoid of context.

A further consequence of this form of educational leadership lies in the upward trajectory being simply unsustainable. At some point, it must stall and ultimately slip (Male & Palaiologou, 2012). Further, a focus on educational performance using outputs is at odds with other educational approaches such as collaborative platforms through digital technologies. Educational leadership dependent on narrow performance indicators is ill suited to furnish appropriate environments for students because the focus on performance simply lacks flexibility and fails to comprehend the complexity of teaching and learning. The ascendancy of the neoliberal language game and the culture of performing schools has resulted in those working in them being objectified and stratified into leaders and followers. There is a distinct risk that educational leadership will continue being narrowly defined into technical managerial roles (Ball, 2003). This shift is a direct attempt to restructure the professional identity of educational leaders through mandated training and specific social relationships needed to sustain "technicist job requirements" (Gunter, 2011, p. 41).

The neoliberal language game uses this technicist discourse to describe those working in schools as front-line staff ,which positions them both figuratively and literally as members of an educational workforce who are in receipt of work delegated to and within the school. There are divisions of labor through job descriptions, organizational

structures, and remuneration agreements (Gunter, 2005). As a consequence, there is a privileging of distributive leadership whereby the principal is authorized by the central bureaucracy to make organizational decisions. In essence, the principal leads their school but only according to official policy requirements (Gunter, 2005).

## 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has been (out of necessity) relatively wide ranging, tracing a number of key themes to provide a better understanding of the nature of school leadership in the context of the IPS policy. In drawing together these themes, the intent has been to lay the theoretical foundations for comprehending the experience of school leaders. At the center of the chapter is the notion of performativity in the context of homo economicus. I argued that IP schools are performative machines. Drawing on Lyotard's (1984) notion of language games I attempted to explain how school leaders have been constituted within a particular neoliberal language game based on performativity.

This chapter was organized into four broad themes. In the first section I argued that theory provides a set of tools to assist in the task of disrupting orthodoxy (Ball, 1994). In particular, I located my theoretical orientation in the tradition of critical social research to help me challenge popular celebratory accounts of the IPS policy. This allowed me to not only provide a critique of the IPS policy in the context of the GERM but to render alternative readings of how language, power, and policy impact on the lives of school leaders.

In this context, I turned to Lyotard's (1984) concepts of language games and the differend, to provide explanatory power to the stories revealed through the

ethnographic fieldwork. I argued that the concept of language games provides a means of comprehending how individual thoughts and actions are shaped and also distorted in particular ways, thus excluding alternative possibilities. At the heart of these language games, I argued that performativity was a pivotal mechanism in constituting the entrepreneurial school leader through normalizing practices of regulation, comparison, and judgement (Ball, 2003).

Central to this chapter is the argument that the neoliberalizing logic focuses on efficiency and effectiveness as mechanisms to compel those in the schools to submit to the authority and rationality of the central bureaucracy located within the orbit of a wider set of travelling GERM policies. There is a link between performativity and the neoliberalizing agenda, which focuses on efficiency and effectiveness as control mechanisms. These are then used by the central authority as a way to submit control. This is known as steering at a distance (Ball, 2006; Smyth, 2003). Into this mix falls the reconceptualized homo economicus that disrupts democracy as individuals strategize for themselves. I argued that school leaders in IPSs are similarly coerced and this affects leadership styles. I argued that the IPS policy forms part of a neoliberalizing agenda utilizing performativity, and this affects the range of possible actions available to leaders.

# Chapter 4

# Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three I described the theoretical foundation of the thesis and the ways in which the ideas of language games and performativity provide a lens through which to investigate the lived experiences of IPS leaders in three low-SEI government schools in WA. In considering how best to approach this work methodologically, I wanted to foreground the voices of those most directly impacted by the IPS policy enactment, namely school leaders. The methodology of CPE suited my desire to understand the daily realities of individual lives in the context of broader structural and institutional arrangements in which they work (Mills, 1959).

Significantly, CPE provides a way to integrate an understanding of how the IPS policy affects the work of government school leaders, alongside an analysis of whose interests are predominantly served through this policy. Consequently, this thesis examines school leaders in three government high schools and how the IPS policy affects their professional identities and practices, using CPE as the methodological framework.

This chapter is organized around four key moves. First, I draw on the tradition of conventional ethnography to help locate my thesis methodologically. In this task, I examine the origins, features, and limitations of conventional ethnography. Second, I pursue in detail the nature, purposes, and processes of CPE with a focus on what makes it critical. In the words of Kincheloe and McLaren (1994, p. 145), CPE seeks to connect, "critical theory with the particularly everyday experience … and concurrently

redefining the nature of ethnographic research in a critical manner." I also discuss data collection methods including interviews as "purposeful conversations" (Burgess, 1984). Third, I explain why I have adopted CPE in this study with recognition that ethnographic data are produced, not found (Simon & Dippo, 1986, p. 200). Finally, I elaborate on the process of critical data analysis and forms of representation. The focus is on how themes were extracted from interviews, and the challenges of re-presenting the stories of participants.

## 4.2 Conventional Ethnography

### 4.2.1 Definition and Features

One reading of the tradition of ethnography is that it is an attempt to free researchers from the constraints of positivist, quantitative research (Walcott, 1975). Over the decades the field of educational research has endeavored to shed the dominating influence of positivist views of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In the words of Lather (1986), we now live in a post-positivist world in which researchers are more inclined to draw on interpretive, critical understandings of knowledge and research. For example, Denzin and Giardina (2016) challenge existing paradigms by re-imagining: frameworks, methodologies, ethics, and politics. In addition, the lives of researchers are constantly changing and increasingly dominated by the demands of the market (Denzin & Giardina, 2017).

To begin, early ethnographers were concerned with uncovering the native perspective on social life and 'local knowledge.' In this tradition, "An ethnography is, literally, an anthropologist's 'picture' of the way of life of some interacting human group; or, viewed as process, ethnography is the sciences of culture description"(Walcott, 1975, p. 112).

In conventional ethnography, symbolic actions are foregrounded with humans and their interpretive and negotiating capacity placed at the core of analysis (Anderson, 1989). The ethnographer is predominantly concerned with social interaction as a technique of negotiating meaning in contexts. Thus, conventional ethnography is a form of reflection that examines the interplay between culture, knowledge, and action. As such it provides the means through which horizons can be expanded. In doing so, it broadens the capacity of individuals to see, hear, and feel (Anderson, 1989). Consequently, the researcher is able to discover layered meanings and alternative interpretations connected to the policy as well as multiple layers of policy processes.

Naturalism is a social research method that reveals natural processes of social action and interaction (O'Sullivan, 2009). It claims human behavior should only be understood within context, and the behaviors of individuals are a reflection of meaning that a situation has for them. This approach uses observation and unstructured interviews. The researcher is situated to interpret and understand social actions in context. Cultural context necessitates the researcher understanding different events and social interactions within the specific cultural context. This means the focus is on how a culture might shape how participants interpret their world and interact with others (Patton & Westby, 1992). Immersion and connection rely on the researcher developing close connections with participants in their research. The aim is to observe various social interactions from the perspective of participants. However, the researcher is at risk of imposing their views on the research; thus, they attempt to understand meaning for the participants of social processes and actions (Harvey & MacDonald, 1993).

Processes of privileging local knowledge recognize that ethnography should not produce grand theories. Instead, local knowledge is privileged and theory building is a means to create particular truths (Geertz, 1973). In this tradition research data are open to interpretation—both partial and tentative. This draws attention to matters of uncertainty regarding a situation (Prasad, 1997). As stated by Wilkins (2020):

> Ethnography as a method and methodology is useful to this end as it concerns using thick description based on ethnographic observations to document the interface between structure and agency and the resulting contingent formations we might call culture or sociality. (p. 6)

Thick description is a process whereby the researcher might increase their understanding through participants making meaning from their experiences in relation to specific occurrences (O'Sullivan, 2009). There is identification of events having multiple levels of significance and endeavors to locate them within a social and cultural context (Geertz, 1973).

This study fits within the broad methodology of ethnography as it seeks to describe participants' actions, intentions, motives, reasons, and intersubjective being as they respond as school leaders in government schools with IPS status (Smyth et al., 2000). As such this study seeks to describe processes, experiences, and events around the IPS policy within a wider structural and cultural context, which locates it within the ethnographic methodological tradition.

### 4.2.2 The Limitations of Conventional Ethnography

Conventional ethnography has both benefits and restrictions as a methodological tool. Certainly, it allows a focus on how individuals interact with the world around them through conferring and negotiating social interaction (Thomas, 1982). However, as

Thomas (1982) argues, "by overemphasizing the given, ethnography rarely raises above the immediacy of the examined situation" (p 129).

When considering utilizing conventional ethnography as a means to understand the lived experiences of government school leaders in IP schools, there are certain shortcomings. The first of these, according to O'Sullivan (2009), is the attraction of criticism based on the construction of meanings as reality. Although this is a collaborative process, there is ignorance of the suggestion that whatever definition (in a situation) ultimately prevails within a group, it is one that has been influenced by relationships of power (Angus, 1986). A second shortcoming is the failure to attend to structural factors, whereby participants are constrained in certain ways, thus preventing an "understanding of the dialectic between continuity and change between human agency and social structure" (Angus, 1986, p. 68). The third shortcoming lies with conventional ethnography's failure to acknowledge and examine how ideas, interests, structures, and practices gain and maintain prominence in social contexts (Thomas, 1982). Finally, the researcher utilizing conventional ethnography becomes cast in the role of disinterested researcher, which carries the implication of positioning the researcher as supposedly objective and value free (Connole et al., 1993). This particular construction of the researcher's role becomes limited as there is little to no acknowledgement of how the researcher becomes integral to research processes and context. This generates a problem for the relationship between participant and researcher (Altheide & Johnson, 1998).

Given these shortcomings in utilizing conventional ethnography as a methodology to understand the lived experiences of leaders in government high schools with IPS

status, I turn to CPE as a means of investigating and explaining the experiences of IPS school leaders.

## 4.3 Critical Policy Ethnography

### 4.3.1 Definition and Features

When discussing the specific features of CPE, it is important to be wary of using a methodological recipe. Willis (2004) specifically warns against using a scripted methodology. Instead, he advocates an "ethnographic and theoretical sensibility" (Willis, 2004, p. 168). In other words, what is needed is:

> a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents, and … richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partially in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experience. (Willis & Trondman, 2000, p. 5)

Ball and Bowe (1990) argue that for policy ethnography the concern needs to be both with exploring policy making—in terms of the processes of value dispute and material influence that underlie and invest the formation of policy discourses—as well as portraying and analyzing the processes of active interpretation and meaning making that relate policy texts to practice.

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) argue there is a theoretical shift implied that makes CPE the more appropriate methodology to allow an understanding of the lived experiences of leaders in government schools with IPS status. In their (1994) words: "Critical policy ethnography attempts to connect critical theory with the particularly everyday experience … [and at the same time] redefining the nature of ethnographic research in a critical manner" (p 145).

In particular, O'Sullivan (2009) asserts that a focus on meanings generated by individuals to social phenomena is a hallmark of qualitative and ethnographic research. This does not exist in isolation but instead occurs in relation to the social structures in which people live and operate (Anderson, 1989). It is possible to assert that the methodological assumptions underlying CPE are suitable and compatible with understanding the lived experiences of the school leaders in this study. Acceptance of this allows attention to now shift to the particular features associated with this methodology.

The focus thus is on meanings generated by individuals regarding social phenomena. According to Levinson (2001), CPE is informed by the basic tenets of critical theory. There is analysis of domination with a search for alternative approaches to social justice. Critical policy analysis is a constantly reflexive approach to the practice of gathering data and generating knowledge (Levinson, 2001). As such, for ethnography to be considered 'critical' there are three conditions that should be addressed according to Simon and Dippo (1986). These are:

- The analysis should utilize an organizing problematic that defines the data and analytical procedures consistently with the work.
- The analysis should be situated (at least partially) in a public sphere that permits it to become the starting point for the analysis and transformation of the conditions of the oppressive and inequitable moral and social regulation.
- The analysis should address the limits of its own claims through consideration of how (as a form of social practice) it is also constituted and regulated through historical relations of power and existing material conditions.

In these ways, CPE attempts to make power visible in particular situations. In doing so, there is no pretense that the analyst is detached or neutral. As the research lies embedded in the context of empowering individuals, the 'critical' element involves the struggle against injustice in society (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). The methodology of CPE examines how particular policy regimes impact on the conduct of human behavior in specific social situations, and includes behaviors that might be shaped and/or constrained by those policy/ices. It is also concerned with how the individual might understand and interpret their experiences in regard to the policy (Wilson & Chaddha, 2009).

There are four distinct characteristics of ethnography that make it critical, according to Willis and Trondman (2000). The first, is "recognition of theory as a precursor, medium and outcome of ethnographic study and writing" (p. 7). Willis and Trondman argue that theory should be 'useful' and consequently the researcher should not be concerned with "grand theory, pure scholastic reason, or abstracted empiricism" (p. 7). The theory used should have aspects of generalizability and possess some main organizing feature (or principle of change) in contemporary society. The task of ethnographic methodology is to identify, record, and analyze day-to-day human practices.

Second, the centrality of culture lies at the heart of ethnography, by which Willis and Trondman mean a broad sense of "the increasing imperative for all social groups to find and make their own roots, routes and lived meanings in societies undergoing profound processes of re-structuration and de-traditionalisation" (p. 8). They believe such processes are eroding past certainties and are inciting cultures to "re-establish themselves in new forms" (p. 8). According to them, the task of the critical ethnographer is to undertake "sensuous practices of 'meaning making' in historical

and social context with an eye open especially for picking up and theorizing the emerging outlines of 'emergent' cultures and cultural forms" (p. 9).

Third, ethnography should have critical focus in research and writing. This involves a broad sense of "recording and understanding lived social relations, on par at least, from the point of view of how they embody, mediate and enact operations and results of unequal power" (p. 9). Central to the argument is the view that 'the social' has been written out of the social sciences, thus erasing the political, radical, and progressive edge of social analysis (p. 10).

The final characteristic is an interest in cultural policy and politics. Willis and Trondman (2000) claim the aim should be to re-connect and commit academic work to larger social projects with the identification and "formulation of the different possibilities of social becoming in an era of intense change" (p. 11).

Expanding on these threads of criticality, Smyth et al. (2006) provide a helpful list of features of CPE, which are worth quoting at some length:

- The need to use embedded interviews, or extended conversations. It is these powerful conversations that acknowledge the power in "shared meaning construction" (p. 136).
- There is also the feature of dialectical theory building that allows the researcher to "hear data speak" and use emergent themes to interrogate theory and if necessary modify (and possibly) supplant it.
- Multi-sitedness is a further feature that allows associations and connections among sites to be examined.

- Voiced research "from below" allows the researcher to fully understand social realities (p. 138).

- A further feature involves "prolonged immersion in the settings being studied." Time in the field allows the researcher to "discern both the depth and complexity of social structures and relations" (p. 138).

- "Speaking data into existence" is a feature that involves engaging informants in complex conversations in order for them to reveal insights of which they may not have been conscious.

- Advocacy and a politically oriented approach implies making visible connections between political and moral conditions and individual lives.

- The research also needs to allow for unpredictability accompanied with the need for the researcher to be reflective of their own implication in the research.

- Further the researcher needs to actively listen for silences and then prepare to pursue those silences.

- Finally, Smyth et al. (2006) cite Weis and Fine (2004), to assert the need for multiple positions. This is a reference to researchers being, "grounded, engaged, reflective, well-versed in scholarly discourse, knowledgeable as to external circumstances, and able to move between theory and life on the ground" (p. 140).

Thus, CPE allows me to re-present the realities of school leaders and at the same time provide more powerful social explanations that are sensitive to "the complex relationship between human agency and social structure" (Anderson, 1989, p. 251). In other words, CPE endeavors to bridge gaps between micro and macro levels of analysis. It addresses the dialectic between "broad issues of social structure and interaction" involving human agents (p. 61). It is also an appropriate methodology for

"cumulative work of interrogating theory with data and vice versa" (p. 61). The assumptions underlying the methodological approach to CPE are attuned to examining the experiences of leaders in government high school with IPS status.

**4.3.2 Relevance to This Study**

The use of CPE as a methodological approach allows me to examine the lived experiences of leaders in IPSs with a sharper focus on the dynamic interplay between broader institutional discourses and language games, and the policy enactment process as experienced by school leaders. Policy does not simply emerge from a vacuum; rather it is the consequence of struggles between competing interest groups whose interests, aspirations, and beliefs collide and render policy analysis a difficult task (Liasidou, 2011). Thus, this research is an attempt to illuminate the ways in which policy serves to reproduce existing structures of domination and inequality. From a political perspective, CPE provides a voice to the study participants and as such uses theoretical constructs to describe their experiences in relation to the broader social context (Gunzenhauser, 1999). This opens the way for a clear emancipatory and empowering political agenda.

CPE also presents a way to unveil unequal power relations in research settings (Liasidou, 2011). In doing so, it seeks to expose hegemonic discourses and their constructive effects upon social identity, relations, and systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough, 1992). As this methodological approach involves examination of language (spoken and written), subtle characteristics in language and the power relations that become apparent reveal relationships of domination.

Further, CPE attempts to identify spaces for social agency, resistance, and change in political, social, and economic structures that may be oppressive (Kincheloe &

McLaren, 1994). Apart from being overtly political, this form of ethnography examines social relations while acknowledging social theory as a means by which to analyze data that describe the experiences of participants and their understanding of a particular phenomenon. In short, lived experience is subject to social critique (Carspecken, 1996).

I argue CPE is a means to plot mismatches between contending discourses at work (Willis & Trondman, 2000). As such there is clear recognition of a distinction between policy intent and the 'lived' experience of policy (or policy cluster as is more often the case). There is space to acknowledge that policy intention is comprised of ambiguity, contradictions and omissions. This methodology allows exploration of tensions between discourses; in doing so it reveals that policy, rather than being static, is in fact a series of settlements occurring as a consequence of contestation, appropriation, adaptation, and resistance (Willis & Trondman, 2000). Through CPE it becomes possible to closely illustrate policy effects, creating a focus on local actors who adapt, modify, circumvent, or resist policy in numerous ways. Consequently, this methodology allows individuals to see past the text of policy and commonsensical explanations of the everyday to imagine what is possible.

### 4.3.3 Positionality and Reflexivity

Critical scholars have increasingly engaged with notions of what it might mean to be reflective and how this might be meaningful to ethnography (Berry, 2011). Goodall (2000) provides a definition of reflexivity, arguing it is, "the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal the deep connections between the writer and his or her subject" (p 137).

Reflexivity can lead to 'disturbing' texts containing multiple voices and the discovery of the frequently hidden 'I,' the self of the researcher, no longer absent from the final reporting of results (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995, p. 10, cited in Berry, 2011, p. 166). Reflexivity in CPE is defined by Foley (2000) as, "the capacity of language and of thought—of any system of signification—to turn or bend back upon itself, those becoming an object to self" (p 473).

There is shared agreement that ethnographers are subjective individuals who are ultimately implicated in research practices. The variety of meanings attached to reflexivity and its uses are persistent, generally political, and "often complicated conversation partners in ongoing discourse concerning ethnographic research" (Berry, 2011, p. 166).

To conduct ethical research of the kind advocated in this thesis, it is necessary to be conscientiously reflexive to be engaged and evenhanded so that it is possible to produce "rich fair cultural accounts" (Berry, 2011, p. 167). Additionally, reflexivity provides the ethnographer (regardless of their individual practices, orientations, and traditions) with a means to examine the personalized aspects of this methodology, such as addressing why ethnographers might practice ethnography.

By embracing critically reflexive approaches in the course of this research, it is acknowledged it is not possible to remain a neutral observer. Instead I became an integral constituent of the research process. This means the use of reflexivity in CPE involves:

> a dialectical process among (a) the researcher's constructs, (b) the informants' commonsense constructs, (c) the research data, (d) the researcher's ideological

biases and (e) the structural and historical forces that informed the social construction under study. (Anderson, 1989, pp. 244–255)

When reflecting on the methodological approach for this study with due consideration for reflexivity, this means, "we are forced to explore the self-other relationships of fieldwork critically if we are to produce more discriminating, defensible interpretations" (Foley, 2002. p. 475).

In this context, my own personal history, values, and experiences are intertwined with the stories and power relations in the field. Taking a reflexive turn allows for an awareness of "the nature of the interactions between researcher and researched" (Lather, 1986), and how my own assumptions about knowledge are central to my analysis. There is candor in acknowledging the agenda brought to this study that guided the approach to the interviews and exploration of data.

### 4.3.4 Data Collection Methods

The term 'multi-sited ethnography' is used in this study to denote the practice of completing fieldwork over more than one geographic location. I have used this approach to gain a better understanding of how the IPS policy has affected school leaders across sites (Marcus, 1998). At each site, access was gained to policy documents unique to each school, such as the school development plan, strategic plan, business plan, behavior management policies, and other similar documents. The intent was to examine these documents to arrive at an understanding of each school's policies and practices. The three sites were selected based on: firstly having IPS status, secondly being a low SEI school and finally located within the Perth metropolitan area. An additional consideration was agreement from the three Principals to allow research to be conducted in their sites. At each site, I conducted

two semi-structured interviews spaced some two months apart. Those interviews involved the Principal, Deputy Principal and two HOLA's, totaling four leaders at each site.

While intensive observations of individuals in their 'natural' environment has informed much conventional ethnography, interviews are generally acknowledged as a more realistic approach to data collection (Harvey & MacDonald, 1993). In-depth interviews provide a space for conversations whereby the researcher invites participants to communicate in their own words experiences and attitudes relevant to the research topic (Walker, 1985).

There is a tendency for interviews to be largely open-ended and lacking structure. There is a reliance on spontaneity and a flowing conversation (Patton, 1990), or what Burgess (1984) describes as "purposeful conversations." As Wainwright (1997) argues, the researcher does not commence collecting data with an "empty head," but instead is "pre-armed" with insights gleaned from social critique. For this reason, I endeavored to construct semi-structured interview questions as provocations to enable my participants to share their experience.

The use of semi-structured questions enabled information to be obtained from participants while remaining flexible to hear specific issues and exploration of some complex matters in depth. The semi-structured nature also enabled me to ask participants to clarify their responses where necessary. Hence there were opportunities for a dialogue to emerge between participants and myself beyond superficial thoughts (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

To prompt conversations with my participants I adopted a multi-pronged approach. First, there was more than one interview with each participant; this enabled a level of

rapport to be built with my participants. The first interview involved exploring the professional journey of participants, and was characterized through 'getting to know you' type questions. This was followed by targeted open-ended questions about perceptions of the school, and the implementation of the IPS policy in the school. The second interview occurred three months after the first, with this spacing designed to give participants time to reflect on their thoughts about the policy.

Another element of semi-structured interviews involved the use of prepared semi-structured questions. Interviews did not strictly adhere to these; instead there was the ebb and flow of an extended focused conversation. Finally, the interviews were structured to allow participants sufficient scope to recall and illustrate events in the school from their perspective. The semi-structured nature of interviews provided some direction for the interview.

### 4.3.5 Ethical Considerations

There are a number of ethical matters to consider in conducting this research, the first being the issue of "researching up" as described by Walford (1994). This clearly relates to power relations with subordinates, but as I was professionally equivalent to interviewees, this did not affect interviews. The second concern is ensuring transparency, including the need to be explicit and clear to all participants about the data collection used and the aim of such collection—namely the writing of a PhD thesis. Third, confidentiality is an ethical consideration addressed here through the use of pseudonyms for the schools and participants. Finally, participants were provided with opportunities to review and adjust transcripts. They also had the option of withdrawing from the research process. Additionally, participants were provided

feedback when requested, and offered the chance to review early summaries and the final transcript, via personal contact with me.

The ethical consideration surrounding confidentiality and anonymity of participants was problematic. While the research was conducted in three suburban high schools, I was obliged to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, especially as there was familiarity between participants in the same schools. The chance that participants might be identified was very real as there was a finite number of low-SEI government high schools in the Perth metropolitan area with IPS status. This potential privacy shortcoming was made explicit from the outset of the study. I endeavored to maintain confidentiality while ensuring participants were cognizant of their right to validate all interview transcripts. However, there does exist the possibility that participants, particularly principals, could be identified by a determined individual.

Pure anonymity is problematic when research is undertaken using specific criteria to select schools and participants, as the pool that can be utilized is shallow. Several participants expressed a willingness to forgo confidentiality and allow the use of identifiable characteristics. This would have generated a further layer of difficulty as identifying one participant would identify their school and by default other participants from that school. Therefore, pseudonyms were adopted for all participants to ensure anonymity and privacy as far as practical.

## 4.4 Data Analysis and Representation

### 4.4.1 Re-Presentation of Stories

The process of interviewing participants who were in formal leadership positions in the three government high schools presented a distinct dilemma. These individuals might

be considered 'elites,' presenting the issue of researching up with resultant implications for the mode of interview (Walford, 1994). The interview process can be considered an extension of a play of power, as opposed to being removed from it (Ball, 1994). This perception around the relationship between elites and the researcher was not based on a "one-dimensional hierarchy," as power does occur on varying levels and can operate in differing directions (Duke, 2002). Consequently, there was an ongoing negotiation of issues, status, and power that formed a crucial element of the relationship between myself and participants (Ball, 1994).

Throughout the interviews, I was mindful of the tension in managing issues of power and authority when conducting the interviews. A constant concern was probing issues surrounding the implementation of the policy in the schools, which placed at risk the cooperation of participants. In the case of the three principals, there was the risk of not being able to access the schools. This concern emerged after I was refused access to other schools whose principals citied concerns that their school's reputation could be adversely affected. There was a need during the interview process to address any possible disempowerment as well as digging beneath surface appearances (Harvey, 1990). This was necessary if there was to be any hope of comprehending tensions, contradictions, and unequal power relations, which seemed to characterize the experiences of participants. The concern increased with participants from higher strata of leadership.

In attempting to turn the recorded interviews into text, I transcribed all interviews. This process was completed as soon as was practical after the actual interviews. The decision to transcribe in this manner was to ensure complete accuracy in transcription and to maintain a sense of nuance and awareness. This process was a means to

remain close to the data (Merriam, 1998) and at the same time ensure trustworthiness with the data source. Tilley and Powick (2002) believe a lack of attention to the transcription process is at least partially related to perceptions that transcription is simply a matter of transferring talk to text. There is the implication that the reality of a conversation that occurred in an interview is captured in a transcript. Such assumptions are based on the belief that transcripts are authoritative texts holding certain truths (Tilley & Powick, 2002). It is important to acknowledge that the transcription process involves interpretation and analysis as well (Tilley, 2003). Each transcript was reworked up to four times as it was considered imperative to ensure clarity, but also maintain the participant's intended meaning as far as possible.

Each participant was provided with a copy of the transcript and an invitation to amend the wording where they felt their intended meaning was ambiguous. People do not often speak in exact, coherent, or succinct sentences. During the process of transcription, there was the conscious decision to insert punctuation based on gaps and pauses in the talk. This meant the transcripts contained text with gaps, silences, and hesitations; this also meant the text produced more closely reflected the speech patterns of participants. Each participant, when presented with the transcript of their interview, accepted the transcript as an accurate account of what they had said. One participant made contact as he was confused about the quality of the grammar. However, when it was explained to him that the transcript reported verbatim the interview to capture hesitations, gaps, and silences he accepted the transcription as an accurate record. Many of the participants spoke of the interview process and receipt of transcripts as cathartic as it allowed them to voice their opinions, frustrations, and aspirations within the school environment.

## 4.4.2 Establishing Rigor

As a critical policy ethnographer, it is important to clarify the roles of researcher, theory, and the participants to address questions pertaining to validity and objectivity (Anderson, 1989). Competing research paradigms and epistemological standpoints impact assumptions about the nature of knowledge and truth, which in turn informs judgements about trustworthiness, rigor, and quality (Crotty, 1998). As such it is necessary to formulate an audit trail of the research process in the interests of transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lather (1986) argues the term validity carries positivist overtones as it can be used to "circulate and break signs that decode it" (p. 674). She (1986) also asserts that to demonstrate the validity of critical social research, there is a need to utilize self-reflexivity through reformulations of triangulation, construct validity, and catalytic validity. Wainwright (1997) claims this perspective implies validity and can be better understood as a process of reflexivity moving between the participants' stories and associated themes, and a process of broader social structural and historical analysis. Garman (1994) outlines a series of criteria to be used in identifying the quality of qualitative research. These include whether the work rings true and is structurally sound. The notion of rigor is also crucial, and the extent to which the work is useful, meaningful, enriching, and ethical must be considered. Garman (1984) adds the work must also have an aesthetic appeal which provides sufficient detail of human experience.

To maintain an audit trail, analytical files were developed that consisted of 'raw' data of interview audio files and transcript notes. These files also included my notes about any ethical concerns, as this could affect decision making during the research phase. Qualitative methodology typically uses triangulation to augment validity and reliability.

Lather (1986) asserts there is a need for triangulation to shift beyond a psychometric definition and include multiple "data sources, methods and theoretical schemes" (p. 67). Instead, there is the need to seek "counter-patterns" and convergences if data are to be credible (Lather, 1986). To protect against bias by the researcher, data need to be cross-checked through the combination of differing perspectives of events and/or issues to provide a broad interpretation (Tritter, 1995). This particular approach is appropriate for CPE research that seeks to respond to multiple readings of policy enactment in a contested and complex domain. During interviews, I endeavored to extract alternative perspectives from participants to "fill the gaps in theoretical formulation" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 141). Differing perspectives of the policy enactment were triangulated to determine contested and contradictory interpretations in the schools. This was achieved through comparison of responses to discern common threads.

Face validity is a further means to corroborate the integrity of research data and findings (Lather, 1986). A part of this process lies in notions of reciprocity between researcher and participant (Lather, 1986). As a critical policy ethnographer, it was necessary to pursue means of involving participants maintaining levels of control over the research process while yielding a more democratic form of knowledge production (Carspecken & Apple, 1992). This study attempts to build into the research design an empowering dialogue that has notions of reciprocity wherever possible. The dialogue with participants was ongoing. For example, I spoke to them about their expectations from the research, and how it might be beneficial. By taking some of the research materials back to participants who had indicated an interest, the reciprocal nature of the relationship with me was enhanced (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Few participants took up this offer but they were also presented with informal opportunities to discuss the

research. This process allowed adjustments to be made to themes and an attempt made to represent contested perspectives in a more articulate manner. Lather (1986) asserts 'face validity' is established when participants provide a 'yes of course' response as opposed to a 'yes but' response to research. Further, this reaffirms their understandings. Based on feedback from the participants there appeared to be a consensus about a particular set of truths in terms of the research findings in regard to how the policy was enacted in their schools.

In this study, there was also a need to ensure 'construct validity,' which Lather (1986) asserts is necessary provided there is also recognition of its origins in theory construction. This means there is a requirement for continuing reflexivity between ethnographic methodology and critical social theory, for there to be interaction between the lived experiences of participants and theoretical constructs (Hammersley, 1992). For there to be 'construct validity,' theory should not be overlaid on data; rather theory and data should be interactive (Lather, 1986).

According to Lather (1986), catalytic validity refers to the extent to which research practices re-orientate, energize, and encourage participants toward knowing reality to transform it (Lather, 1986). To put it more succinctly, catalytic validity has occurred if participants further their self-understanding and preferably achieve self-determination as a consequence of taking part in the research. Catalytic validity also means that participants reach a deeper understanding of the issues in the study (Anderson et al., 2007). To establish whether or not this has occurred there is a need to assess the extent to which the research might contribute to social change (Lather, 1986). Rather than making broad generalizations, it was hoped to provide sufficient depth and detail for readers of the thesis to make connections to the study and thereby deepen their

own understanding of the issues within it (Seidman, 1991). By exploring the lived experiences of participants, this study contributes through documenting how leadership in these three high schools addressed challenges presented by the policy. As such it highlights how issues such as agency and structure simultaneously constrain and enable participatory processes (O'Sullivan, 2009).

### 4.4.3 Limitations

To establish the validity of this study, it is necessary to declare its limitations (Glesne, 1999). As such there needs to be an open declaration about some of the limitations. The first is the question of representation and awareness that this research focuses only on school leaders as one group of stakeholders among others not included here—including teachers, students, and parents, and their experiences of the IPS policy. Further, not all formal leadership positions in schools were interviewed. Instead, a sample of school leaders from different tiers of school leadership were selected given the availability of time and resources. There were attempts to triangulate information from participants through cross-checking against other data sources. I am aware that involving a broader range of perspectives and stakeholders from across the spectrum of the school community may well have offered a range of experiences and interpretations.

## 4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the nature, purpose, and processes of CPE to investigate the lived experience of the implementation of the IPS policy in three low-SEI government high schools in WA. I argued that this methodology is appropriate for investigating and explaining how school leaders understand, experience, and respond

to the IPS policy enactment. CPE is unashamedly political in its aims as it draws on the theoretical tradition of critical social inquiry to challenge common sense explanations of everyday life by critically analyzing the experience of participants in a social context. This kind of analysis involves locating data generated from the field in the context of macro, meso, and micro levels to understand how power, ideology, and social structures constitute participant identities and experience.

Participants were identified using purposeful sampling processes (Alston & Bowles, 1998). This approach allowed me to recruit participants from the three strata of formal school leadership at each school site: principals, deputy principals, and HOLAs. As noted earlier, a limitation of the study lies in not seeking out teaching and non-teaching staff, students, parents, or community representatives. This is further impeded by accepting a narrow definition of leadership as applying only to those holding formal positions. The choice to employ a 'dialectical deconstructive–reconstructive' approach as a process allowed the dynamic interaction between data from interviews and theory to produce themes reflective of the interrelationship between human agency and social structures as they relate to CPE (Harvey, 1990). It is notable that rather than endeavoring to make the data fit the theory, counter-interpretations of relationships between data and theory were sought to generate alternative readings, which emphasizes omissions and limitations of CPE in explaining some features of the data (Lather, 1986).

To establish this research as trustworthy, there was an attempt to triangulate data. Lather's (1986) reformulation of construct, face, and catalytic validity as applied to critical social research was helpful. There is a need in CPE to adopt a critically reflexive perspective to reinforce the political nature of participant representation, field work,

and knowledge representation (O'Sullivan, 2009). This necessitated making allowance for reciprocating dialogue that enabled participants to become involved in knowledge construction processes. Having considered the methodological processes in this study, it is now apt to turn attention to examining the three government high schools on which this research is grounded.

# Chapter Five

# Acacia Senior High School

## 5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have introduced the study, outlining the overall aims; examined the context of the IPS policy; delineated the theoretical framework; and explored the methodological approach taken. The purpose of the next three chapters is to describe the ethnographic evidence from the three case study schools. The aim is to allow the participants to describe their perceptions of IPS and how they made sense of its enactment in context. In pursuit of this task, I prioritize the participants' own explanations to provide a sense of authenticity before undertaking a more critical analysis in Chapter Eight.

Interviews were conducted over a period of around three months, and transcribed as soon as practical, thus ensuring minimal elapsed time between transcription and interview. This also minimized the potential to mispresent participant responses. A complicating factor in transcription is punctuation as, obviously, people do not speak in neatly clipped grammatically correct sentences. Similarly, as transcripts are verbatim and participants did not speak in complete sentences, reading their words provides a further layer of complexity. To enhance the readability of transcripts, minor editing has occurred to improve the flow of responses without changing the intention and/or language of participants' words.

In this and the following two chapters I set out to enable the voices of participants to take center stage. The aim is to use their words with minimal interference or theoretical interpretation at this stage. My own level of narration is deliberately kept to a minimum

to help frame the participants' accounts around a set of emergent themes. As per ethical requirements, pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis to maintain confidentiality. Each participant at Acacia Senior High School (SHS) has a pseudonym beginning with the letter A; the next chapter on Banksia SHS uses the letter B; and Casuarina SHS the letter C. This allows the reader to easily shift between participants in later chapters without necessarily continuously using their school's name.

Each of these more descriptive chapters (Five–Seven) follows a similar format. After a brief contextual discussion I organize the discussion around a set of emergent themes from the data analysis phase. The first is the participants' views about the perceived benefits of IPS status. This includes the initial justification for seeking IPS status and identifying benefits linked to that status, with some discussion around potential new capacities resulting from such status. The second theme is the negative effects of IPS status from the point of view of school leaders. In the third theme, the pedagogical impact of the IPS policy is examined, as this was a major justification for its introduction. While the research does not undertake a classroom-level analysis of classroom practices it does seek the views of school leaders about pedagogical change. Finally, participants spoke of potential concerns and issues for the future of IPS.

## 5.2 Context

### 5.2.1 Acacia's Surroundings

Acacia SHS shared the name of the suburb in which it was located. It could be described as essentially working class, and is approximately 20 kilometers south of Perth. Census details for the suburb reveal 35.2% of the catchment's population were

born overseas (ABS, 2018). Of the whole population above the age of 15 years, 62.3% were employed full time. The unemployment rate in the suburb was 4.8%, which is comparable with the whole Perth metropolitan area (ABS, 2018). In that catchment area the predominant occupations were in the technical and trades area, with 20.6% (of total employed) working in this capacity. Around 20.5% were employed as laborers, machinery operators, and drivers (ABS, 2018), while 13.8% were employed in clerical and administrative work, and 13.7% as professionals (ABS, 2018). Approximately 15.7% of the area's population aged over 15 years had a university education. Of the houses in the area, 53.3% were mortgaged and 24.9% rented. At the time of the study, the mean household income was $1412 per week with an average monthly mortgage of $1733 (ABS, 2018).

The school's catchment area at the time of the study was established around 1982 and was bounded by a freight train line and a significant south–north freeway. There was a relatively recent attempt to build an east–west road freight link close by, but protests by environmentalists and promises by the newly elected Labor State Government resulted in these plans being shelved. The suburb and school lies beneath the flight path of a significant airport, which records approximately 275,000 takeoffs/landings per annum, making it one of the busiest airports in the nation. The suburb is reasonably flat, with predominantly sandy soil, and comprised of comparatively moderately priced single-story brick and tile homes.

### 5.2.2 The Participants' Stories

The principal of Acacia was Andrew, who had worked in public education for many years. He began his career as a physical education teacher in a Pilbara town, but also worked as a math teacher. From there he moved to some suburban schools, also

working in the School of Distance and Isolated Education as a curriculum writer. Shortly after this he took a position as a HOLA at a major suburban school, and then shifted to another southern suburb school as the manager of student services. He noted though that he also spent an amount of time in an acting deputy principal role. Andrew again shifted schools, picking up a substantive deputy principal position. When interviewed, he had been in his current principal position for around seven years.

Similar to Andrew, Adam, the deputy principal, began his teaching career as a physical education teacher:

> It was my main aim at school to be in the Olympics. So then I did the course at uni that would allow me the most time off to pursue that. And then after that wound up I thought I better do something so I did a Dip Ed. And went into teaching. But I've always loved working with kids. It was a natural fit.

Following graduation, he worked for a time in the UK before returning to WA and working in some remote Aboriginal schools in the north-west Kimberly region. Adam stated that he never relied on the DoE for employment, which resulted in him completing some research projects for a WA university before returning to work in a southern metropolitan SHS, where he also held a HOLA position. His career then involved returning to the Kimberley as a deputy principal, before returning to the metropolitan area in a deputy principal role. At the time of the interview, he had worked at Acacia as a deputy principal for five years.

Abraham, one of the two HOLAs, came to education via a circuitous route and worked in private enterprise in another state. He stated he had read a newspaper article and from there gained a position at a private Perth school where he taught math. Abraham

also talked about being brought up in a working class suburb in another state and claimed this led to him seeking employment in a difficult-to-staff Perth suburban high school, where he also acted as the HOLA from time to time. From this position, he shifted to Acacia as a member of the foundation staff. This meant that at the time of the interview he had worked as a HOLA at Acacia for almost 20 years.

Aaron, the second HOLA, spoke about his university days and how this led him to choosing education as a career:

> If I go back to what clinched it for me I was at uni doing an accounting degree that I wasn't enjoying and I was making poor choices, missing classes and everything and I ended up basically getting an ultimatum from the uni: "You need to make decisions about whether you're going to stay here or not." So I'd always liked teaching and I'd had good teachers. I enjoyed my high school experience and my primary school experience. I decided to get into teaching.

From university, Aaron worked in two suburban high schools before taking a permanent position in a Pilbara high school. He then transferred to a high school in a south-west WA town where he worked in a middle school. He had held short-term acting HOLA positions before taking a substantive HOLA role at Acacia. He had been at Acacia for only 12 months at the time of the interviews.

### 5.2.3 The School: A Checkered Past

Acacia SHS is located on a flat stretch of land on the fringe of the suburb sharing its name. It is less than 500 meters from the city's main freeway, with another significant arterial road to the south. Overhead electricity pylons are also to the south. To the west is a swampy parkland area. It was the middle of summer when the first discussions with Andrew were conducted. Bright sun reflected off buildings and sand,

making it difficult to see clearly without the aid of sunglasses. There was no respite from the oppressive heat.

The school buildings were wholly single story and oriented north. Next door was a community recreation center that also had an indoor pool. This facility was shared with the school. To access the school administration offices, it was necessary to cross the carpark. All interviews were conducted in these offices, which were also clearly signposted. On the first day of interviews it was necessary to enter the administration through double glass doors that had been shattered in an overnight attempt to break into the school. A tradesman was repairing the damage.

The reception area included a small area for visitors to wait, with numerous displays of prominent alumni of Acacia. The administration area was predominantly open plan offices for the deputies, principal, and business manager leading off from the central core. This area was fairly well lit, carrying an atmosphere of busy professionalism. In fact, these administrative offices could easily be mistaken for any group of corporate professional offices. In particular, it was noted that students did not access this area through the front doors, instead using doors to the rear. The administrative area was largely and curiously devoid of students for a large government SHS. As a means to enhance its corporate image, Acacia, similar to other government schools, had its own website; however, unlike its contemporaries, Acacia also had a Wikipedia page. This particular page highlighted increased student numbers and showcased notable alumni such as an Olympic athlete and two other athletes who competed at the Commonwealth level. The staffroom could also be accessed via the central administrative core. Interviews were conducted either in the offices of Andrew or

Adam, or a larger conference room accessible either through Andrew's office or via the staffroom.

Acacia was established in 1990, making it over 21-years-old when it gained IPS status in 2011. Its checkered past was acknowledged by Andrew, who stated:

Look this school wasn't a sought-after school. It wasn't a school that local residents valued highly. It had a high degree of behavior management issues when I first came here.

Andrew identified the school as being professionally challenging as he felt it was not valued by the community, and students brought with them certain problematic behaviors:

It has a high turnover of staff, higher than I'd like. When you had a position, you didn't get a lot of applications. So therefore, you're not only losing staff, you're struggling to replace them with good staff. Kids didn't really value themselves or the school. There really wasn't a lot of self-esteem about us, similar to a lot of down the corridor south-east and south-west schools.

Andrew spoke of the difficulty in finding what he described as 'good' staff. He also shifted between past and present tense, suggesting the school was not a sought-after school. His use of present tense indicated that the difficulties still existed at the time of the interview.

Notions of Acacia being a 'challenging' school (in the past) were similarly acknowledged by Adam, who stated:

When I first arrived [this school] probably similar to Dryandra (a pseudonym for a similar school) but nowhere near as challenging in terms of the sheer volume of kids and parents with mental health, drug, and alcohol issues. But still the people

here felt it was very challenging and seemed challenging and it had a bad reputation. People didn't want to come here and all that sort of stuff.

The choice of past tense by Adam too, appears to indicate he held a belief the challenges that existed at Acacia were in the past.

Abraham had worked at the school since it first opened its doors. He too conceded that there were difficulties in the school:

I started here in the early 90s; it grew to 800 students at one stage. There was lots of discipline problems … Behavior policies and everything left students in schools that had clear psychological problems with little support.

Abraham's response indicates that Acacia was a challenging school almost from its inception, and those challenges were inadequately addressed. He went on to state:

They were just put into mainstream and you had to deal with them with the limited resources you had. Nobody had any power to do anything about it. As a matter of fact, the power seemed to be largely with those students. You could have 50 students with psychological problems draining the resources of the school.

The second part of his response indicates Abraham's apparent frustration with addressing challenging student behavior and the effect it had on staff and students.

Andrew in particular consistently insisted that while the school had been previously considered low SEI, he did not at that time consider this to be the case any longer. His explanation was that while the school was located in a low-SEI catchment, the area was evolving into a more socially mobile middle class and aspirational suburb. At the time of the study, Acacia had a slightly higher SEI than the other two government schools in this study, but still lagged considerably behind those government schools

colloquially known as leafy green schools, a reference to them being located in leafy green, upper middle class suburbs.

## 5.3 Emergent Themes

### 5.3.1 Benefits

*5.3.1.1 Identifying Benefits*

Early in the interviews, participants were asked who might benefit from IPS status and how. Abraham stated:

> Well you always like to think it's the kids that benefit most from it. And I do think they do indirectly. By … particularly by us being able to get the right teachers in for them. And deal with it. So at the end of the day I think the kids do. They mightn't notice things that are happening. You know some of the smaller decisions we can make ourselves.

Ellipsis points within this quote indicate a long pause from Abraham, as opposed to an editorial tool addressing superfluous information. It was apparent Abraham believed IPS allowed for localized hiring practices, which he felt led to improved pedagogy. However, he was unable to expand further on this line of argument. Aaron's response was similarly ambiguous:

> I think because of the image and how that translates into a relaxed atmosphere throughout the school I think the kids do. The kids are the most benefit.

When asked to elaborate, Aaron stated:

> The specialist program in terms of music. One thing I really noticed when I first came here was the whole feel at an assembly was completely unique at the assemblies that were run because of the way the kids sing and the music that

they make part of every assembly and everything. And that tone sort of translates into the rest of the school community. Just creates a nice feel.

This elaboration appears to be in some way linked to an improved atmosphere in the school that, according to him, benefited students. He later claimed the improved atmosphere translated into classrooms but was unable to specify how this resulted in benefits for students.

Adam was similarly ambiguous, stating, "it would have to be the kids," but when asked for elaboration he stated:

> If the principal is operating in the best interests of the community and for the direction of the school and what the community and the students need. And can put in place the things that will enable that. Then it can only benefit the kids.

Adam's response appears to provide detail, but on close examination reveals further ambiguity. It seemed he felt students benefited as the principal was able to ensure appropriate programs. Andrew's initial response closely mirrored Adam when he guardedly stated, "Well the correct answer should be the students. And if done properly it would be students." He went further, stating:

> Oh because of the resources. The way you run your school is the best way and most efficient way to meet their needs. IPS shouldn't do that, that's why I'm guarded. You should do that anyway. IPS has made it a little easier. The other beneficiaries of it … certainly the students benefit through the selection process. Of being able to control what teachers come into this school. They undoubtedly benefit. As does the whole school. Staff, parents and everybody else. When you've got, when you're able to recruit people who are you know comfortable with your ethos, image, beliefs, value systems. Makes life a lot easier to strategically get what you want to get.

It is worth noting that Andrew spoke of students benefiting because the school was now free from centralized staffing placements. In the second interview he was asked to specify some benefits for students:

> Well directly nothing to tell you the truth. Indirectly they benefit from having better teachers. Because from the staffing component they benefit indirectly from resources being allocated to them in the best way possible. Because we have flexibility with resources, especially with some of the school support type funding.

It was evident Andrew believed students benefited from IPS status, but was unable to specify in what way. Instead he claimed staffing freedoms led to indirect benefits, which could not be named explicitly.

Adam in the second interview claimed the principal was the predominant beneficiary of IPS status:

> Ok the benefits for the principal are the autonomy of decision making so they're the CEO [chief executive officer], they've got a budget and they've got people and you have to allocate those people and the budget in a way you see best benefits the students.

Of interest is the juxtapositioning of perceived beneficiaries. On the one hand, Adam claimed, there was a benefit to the principal through autonomous decision making, but this was restrained by accountability mechanisms. Equally important is Adam's inability to clearly articulate benefits for students. Aaron also spoke about the principal benefiting:

> The main benefit that I see is the principal can have a leading role in directing where the culture of the school really needs to go. So they can have much more say I think in terms of funding toward a specialist program. Drawing kids in from a particular clientele. The whole direction of the school because the principal

becomes almost like a business manager as far as I can see. And that direction and vision of the school can I think become a lot clear more clear cut. So that is a huge advantage in terms of IPS, in that it gives the principal that autonomy to actually run it the way that…

Aaron also discussed how the principal gained the authority to "draw kids from" *a* particular clientele. Abraham similarly spoke of the principal being the predominant beneficiary:

Oh he can choose his own staff to start with. He can choose where some of the resources are placed. And redirect at least a bigger chunk than what he could before. So it gives him control over his destiny and he can build some things and not others.

It was apparent that participants wanted to respond to these questions that students benefited from IPS. However, they were unable to extrapolate and instead, there was general discussion of the benefits of staff selection. Additionally, there was dialogue concerning the principal benefiting through this shift. As respondents claimed students benefited from IPS status, I attempted to drill down and asked whether they could describe any pedagogical changes arising from the introduction of IPS status. This issue is taken up later in the chapter.

*5.3.1.2 The Search for Credibility and Prestige*

Participants were invited to respond to questions allowing them to focus on the reasons behind seeking IPS status. Later questions sought to clarify their beliefs concerning potential negative effects as well. Aaron stated:

I think of it's been around this school had to consciously turn itself around in terms of the way it's perceived in the community. Some of the behavior issues that had existed in the past in the school I think have been quite challenging.

This first part of the response addressed the way in which Aaron felt the community understood the school. He appeared to claim that student behavior might improve as a consequence of IPS status. The second part dwelt on the principal having the capacity to employ 'appropriate' staff:

> And I think one of the benefits of being an IPS school is certainly people like Andrew can, you know, hand pick and have a bit more say in the staff that come into the school and therefore drive the way he wants them to work in terms of toward a central vision.

Aaron reinforced the point of staff selection and injected notions of improving the credibility of the school in the broader community:

> Yeah the staff selection I think. The setting targets around performance management and business plans certainly helps. I think for us being able to compete with other schools and have that image, that brand … having a clear identity as part of our IPS is helping us in the community enormously.

Staff selection appeared to be a separate theme associated with the reasoning behind pursuing IPS status. However, participants tended to link (in this series of questions) staff selection to the credibility of the school. When Adam was invited to reflect on the same issue, his response acknowledged the capacity to select staff unfettered by the centralized bureaucracy as a crucial component:

> You know you can pick your good staff and that sort of thing. You've sort of always been able to do that a bit. Staffing is still … it's not like if someone's performing poorly you can say, "look you've got to go, you're fired." You can't do that. But it does seem that we've been able to more easily get very good staff.

Similarly, Abraham made specific statements surrounding staffing and improving the status of the school was a predominant motive for the school pursuing independence:

Staffing. I've actually been able to hire my own team over the past four or five years in one form or another.

It is necessary though to acknowledge an apparent disparity in Abraham's response regarding the timing of Acacia gaining IPS status: he claimed to have had the capacity to hire staff for around five years when in fact independence was gained three years prior to interviews. There was shared frustration by participants regarding existing centralized staffing. They held a common belief that the school improved its credibility through autonomy in staffing decisions.

When asked about the motivation for his school pursuing independence, Andrew asserted:

One was the staffing benefits were very attractive. Two it provided status for us to get that in this community. We were very much about marketing and image and where we're at the moment in terms of we're highly competitive for students in this area.

Andrew went on to explain how the status of the school improved as a result of IPS through the selection of staff. In his words:

being able to control what teachers come into the school. They [students] undoubtedly benefit. As does the whole school. Staff, parents and everybody else. When you've got, when you're able to recruit people who are you know comfortable with your ethos, image, beliefs, value systems. Makes life a lot easier to strategically get what you want to get.

He also spoke of head hunting potential staff, claiming the capacity to place job adverts was a significant improvement. According to Andrew, responses to employment advertisements also indicated an improvement in the school's credibility:

Years ago we were putting job ads out for anything here and we were only getting 10 applicants. Last year we put out a maths … a couple of positions including maths, we were getting 70 or 80 for each.

It is evident that Andrew's statement closely mirrored Aaron as he linked staffing to the school's image as the key impetus.

Andrew went on to provide a third impetus linked to the school gaining IPS status. He argued decision making across the school, "was made easier," as the school was freed from oversight and control of a centralized bureaucracy:

So you know has a lot of stuff I was doing pre-IPS, um. I was doing because we needed to do it and we needed to think differently about how we do it. Sometimes I was pushing boundaries and roadblocks in order to do that whereas now I've been given a clear path.

Similarly, Adam alluded to the school gaining greater autonomy from the central bureaucracy as a key argument for IPS status:

I think just that, I think autonomy, the ability to set your direction and to run the school as you see fit for your community.

Aaron made a similar statement:

The thing I do like about IPS, is it seems to be clear what Adam puts forward is the business plan and the vision of things is well worked out, which it needs to be as part of that process. And because that's worked out and clear that's filtering down into a focus for me as HOLA.

*5.3.1.3 Growing Gap Between Rhetoric and Reality*

My questions transitioned from staffing mechanisms to examining potential new capacities for decision making that transpired from IPS status. It should be noted that

the term 'new capacities' did not originate from participants. Rather it is a phrase I used to explore perceived benefits of local decision making that could be attributed to IPS status. Abraham backtracked and once again discussed the capacity to select teachers rather than being linked to a centralized staffing process:

> The biggest freedom I think comes in being able choose our own staff. The whole freedom from my side of it on the ground is staffing. And if you've got good staff around you it makes life easier.

He was pressed on this point and responded that having the freedom to appoint 'like-minded' colleagues was important:

> Well really the only thing I can say is because the teachers on the ground are hand chosen for the circumstances. So they end up more of those. And they can relate to them a bit better. So they can see it from that side.

Apart from staffing, Abraham was unable to describe any other new capacities. Aaron, when asked the same question, also spoke predominantly about staffing:

> The main freedom, that I know of, is the principal being able to advertise for staff and then select them. And that freedom is huge because Andrew can get loads of people here who agree with his vision for the school. This is good for the kids.

Clarification was sought concerning this response and he was asked specifically about new-found capacities for the school. Initially he was hesitant:

> Oh a lot of the stuff we do under IPS you can do in other schools, if your administration team have enough knowledge. It's mainly the staffing side of things that we can do differently, so that's more of a freedom we have that other schools don't.

It was apparent, at the HOLA leadership level, that participants were unable to recognize major changes (beyond staffing) that resulted from IPS status.

When Adam was asked about new capacities, his response was limited when he bluntly stated, "Well I don't notice a difference." Further elaboration was sought, eliciting the following:

> I haven't noticed any difference in the way I operate here than at any other school. The way that I operate here today and can do things. Change management etc. It's the same. The principal may notice a difference but I haven't.

Following this, I asked him to hypothesize what a school might gain from IPS status. I wanted to gauge whether teachers might develop new capacities or 'freedoms' to challenge existing pedagogical paradigms. His response mirrored his earlier candor, "Not that I've noticed." He stated further:

> In a classroom they can teach the way they see fit for their kids. The mandated stuff that comes down like Australian Curriculum they respond to. And they do. I operate the same way. The only way I see it being different is actually … the only way that's noticeably different is for the purpose of the government being able to reduce what you've got.

Adam was clear that day-to-day classroom activities were unchanged by IPS status. For him, financial decision making was the only apparent change, while simultaneously indicating this was no more than a cynical exercise in accounting.

Andrew's response to questions about new capacities also centered around staffing, although he tended to be more circuitous:

> Financial. So doing more with less. So here's your principal, here's your money and what it turns out to be is you know one teacher, 32 kids without all of the add

ons we used to get. To me it's an exercise in how to do more with less. And where we sit, "oh wow we can make the decisions about that," but by golly they're tough decisions because we don't have much to work with. We're really having to make tough decisions.

Later he also spoke about the new capacities to allocate resources as he saw fit: "Where allocated resources don't make a difference we don't allocate. We don't do things because we've traditionally done them." A commonality between participants was their inability to clearly describe new capacities that might be attributable to IPS status, beyond financial decision making.

**5.3.2 Negative Effects**

*5.3.2.1 Increasing Workload and Pressure*

Following discussion of the benefits of IPS status, questions shifted focus to inviting participants to consider potential negative effects on the school. The concept of increased workload quickly emerged from both Andrew and Adam. In fact, when the question was first put to Andrew, his response was succinct: "It's workload." In direct contrast, Abraham and Aaron struggled to explain any negative effects they might have encountered.

Following his initial short response, Andrew extrapolated further:

> There's workload for the school. So the principal, the responsibilities and workload for the principal increases. As does the workload and responsibility for the business manager. They're the two people who directly feel the workload and responsibility. The day-to-day teacher in the classroom not so much. The school officers a little bit.

Adam tended to be slightly more obscure in his response, claiming:

I haven't really thought about that. Let me think about that … I think it might be … I don't know but if you had a rogue principal. I don't know … but I don't know if that's going to be an issue because the principal's so accountable to the Director General; they can act if they want to against the principal. No I can't really see any negatives.

After having some time to consider his response, Adam was invited to discuss who might benefit least. He answered it was the principal:

It's a tough game these days. You're incredibly accountable. If everything's by the numbers, by data. The principal's responsible for everything. Everything that happens can go wrong. You live and die by the sword on that account. So the Director General can go.

Although his response did consist of personal possessive pronouns, it was evident Adam was in fact making a direct reference to Andrew. I asked him about the pressures he might feel in his role as deputy principal:

Well I'm close to it. And it's … if this doesn't go right it's on your head. If I go down, you get you know … because I make that … I've got to make it happen.

It appeared Adam was being slightly vague in describing pressures IPS placed on individuals. However, when considered in context it was evident Adam was making direct allusions to IPS status increasing professional pressures on himself and Andrew. For Adam that pressure translated directly into increased workload.

Both HOLAs failed to acknowledge any increased workload when they responded to these questions. Aaron's subsequent answer was:

I don't know that I can think of any. Other than maybe the constraints of what IPS can actually do in itself in terms of the way that the budgets are delivered.

It is worth noting that Aaron's second sentence appears to be an attempt to deliver an expected response. He was asked to elaborate and provided a reaction that could be considered ambiguous:

> When they made the IPS process because at my last school we were applying for it as well. In a lot of what was explained to me is that then OK the funds and everything is delivered has to be delivered in a one-line budget. And maybe that's you know can have some impacts and some detriments because you might not … it might be a bit more economical in terms of the way funding is allocated. So there might be a little more of a tightening of resources. In a sense.

When faced with similar questions, Abraham provided an ambiguous response touching on increased pressures for those in senior management:

> I think they probably see it at the front office in terms of there's probably more responsibility with the management side of work and everything what's going on. The fact that you've got to hire and fire. Means that you've got to have staff like me willing to put the time in to go through those processes. I had to read 40, 50, 60 applications at a time when I do that. So that becomes a time-constraining thing. Other than that I don't think there's any problem with it whatsoever.

While Abraham hinted at increased workload, he framed this in terms of greater responsibility. His reference to "front office" alluded to senior management, and more "responsibility" equated to increased workload. He also appeared to claim his workload increased because from his perspective it involved reading numerous job applications. At Acacia the predominant negative effect of IPS status was largely framed around increased workload for those in management positions.

*5.3.2.2 Recentralized Control and Accountability*

In the IPS acronym, the letter 'I' denotes 'independent.' The official IPS prospectus claims enhanced "flexibilities of being an Independent Public School involve creative thinking, a solution focus and a shift from external to internal control" (Musumeci, 2013). The assumption is that there would be greater autonomy from the central bureaucracy for schools. However, there was a clear contradiction evident during the interviews as there was a palpable increase in accountability mechanisms linking the school to the central authority.

Andrew described in some detail the accountability mechanisms in the school that appeared to link the management of the school to the central bureaucracy, and consequently to classroom level priorities:

> The accountability … look there's stringent accountability mechanisms within the school. It starts off with in an IPS set up your business plan. So that's your whole school direction and where you're heading and what your major priorities are.

He then went on to describe his business plan in terms of the need to perform. His use of the term "business plan" to describe school planning documents indicates the extent to which the neoliberal language game has impacted day-to-day school thinking:

> The way our business plan, you've probably seen is very outcomes oriented. That drives what we call learning areas … so my deputy principals for instance have duty roles or they have roles but they also have outcomes. They're responsible for certain outcomes in certain portfolios.

He also described in general terms how these accountability mechanisms sifted to the down to the classroom teachers:

The teachers, the expectations are very clear. What we expect of them. What they should be able to do. AITSL [Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership], we use AITSL that tightens that up. So, the bottom line is they're expected to meet those standards of AITSL. And performance management is about demonstrating that you can reflect on and tells us where you think you sit with this. Then that accountability message streams into classrooms.

When asked similar questions about accountability, Adam's description paralleled Andrew's. For Adam, the increased level of accountability was directly attributable to IPS status:

There's a lot of accountability to data and the kids' results. And this is all taken care of through performance management. So, it's very important that performance management is very clear, concise, and is an accountability tool. Not just a discussion tool. Through our Level 3s and their operational plan school improvement and what goes on in the classroom there's a lot of accountability there for all of us. For me, the principal, for the Level 3s and the teachers.

For Adam the use of quantitative data was the essential means of demonstrating accountability:

The data would … we get a lot of really good data now. And not just, we've obviously got all of your testing data then you've got teacher judgement data. Grades. You've got attributes data, as in how a student is going; behavior etc. Parent survey data, student survey data.

It was evident that for both Adam and Andrew, accountability pressures had increased as a result of IPS status. Further, accountability was predominantly described through quantitative data. It was also apparent that pressure was felt at the level of the HOLAs.

Although Andrew and Adam spoke of accountability reaching into the classroom, Aaron and Abraham perceived this differently. Aaron's focus was on his personal professional accountability in terms of ensuring students were engaged in classrooms:

> So this year I set two for my team so my two … what the main priority is about engaging classrooms engaging having students that are engaged in their classes. So that's part of my school development plan.

It was evident Aaron felt the pressures of accountability, but he did not appear to feel it as keenly as either Andrew or Adam. This sentiment was shared by Abraham:

> Yep. Clear cut. One of the good things that [Andrew] has in here and he's put into it. And you know we all agree with it. Particularly there was advice that came from myself and others we tried matching up the education department priorities matched up to the school priorities. Which now match up to our department priorities. Maths and science department. Inside each of those there are certain goals that are set.

It is of interest that Abraham perceived the importance of linking accountability back to DoE priorities. He also described accountability in terms of quantitative data:

> So they've got specific targets for a school. At our level within our department we also have to implement some of those things. I mean so we put in attainments for those. Sometimes they're easily quantifiable; sometimes they're not.

It was evident the shift to IPS status at Acacia brought with it a perceived intensification of accountability mechanisms linking the school with DoE priorities and policies. This leads to the assumption that rather than becoming more independent, opportunities were in fact restricted. Based on the evidence presented here, it appears that claims of greater school autonomy to address, "the needs of their students and communities" (Straus, 2013) were nebulous at best.

### 5.3.3 Changing Pedagogy, or Not?

Questions about potential differences between IPS and non-IPS classrooms were put to participants. One particular claim made about IPS status was that schools would have, in the words of the Minister of Education, "the autonomy to make [their] schools more distinctive and shaped by the needs and aspirations of [their] students" (Collier, 2013). Likewise, the Director General of Education claimed that IP schools could find "new and innovative ways to forge exciting learning opportunities for students" (O'Neill, 2013). Thus, the aim of direct questions about differences between pedagogy sought to explore whether there was in fact a change and if so, the form this might take.

Andrew was specifically asked how pedagogy in an IP school might differ from that in a non-IP school:

> The teacher in the classroom on any given day is not a lot different. I told staff here that other than these other things that benefit the school, all staffing and that sort of stuff. I was quite open when we went there; I said look the workload's going to fall on me. And the workload's going to fall on the business manager. You won't notice a lot in the classroom. Not directly.

The first part of the response indicates that Andrew felt there would be no difference at the classroom level, and he later went on to reinforce this. Instead, he returned to the issue of increased workload for senior management. Any differences, he later claimed, came through staffing:

> They do indirectly notice because resources line up a bit more effectively. And they also benefit from the fact that the peer sitting next door to them is not somebody who's been forced to come here that doesn't really want to be here. They don't really believe in what we believe in.

Andrew's focus, apart from his own increased workload, fell back onto staff selection and that this would somehow allow pedagogy to be different:

I don't think … the difference or whatever you see whether you're IPS, the difference in the classroom is more about the quality of teachers than anything else. So IPS helps you get a better quality of teacher. It isn't a guarantee. And it doesn't mean to say that you can sit on your hands and say, "yippee I'm an IPS school so therefore I'm going to have teachers who don't need developmental roles." You do.

Later in this response Andrew was able to articulate many positive things occurring in the school, but he did not link these to IPS status. Quite the opposite in fact. For Andrew, key differences between IP and non-IP schools lay in administration, not pedagogy. This was mirrored by other participants at Acacia.

Other participants also struggled to clearly describe key differences between pedagogy in IP and non-IP schools. Adam's response was close to Andrew's:

There'd be no difference. Well I'll clarify that in saying there's nothing about IPS that would necessarily make it different in the classroom. Except that you have much higher quality teachers since going IPS. Which has made a difference.

Adam used the term "higher quality" teachers to explain the benefits of staff selection due to IPS status. In his words:

Yeah we've been able to more easily get good quality teachers and get rid of poor teachers. And in terms of the teacher who's been here for 20 years her practice hasn't necessarily changed unless we do something about pedagogy. That's unrelated to IPS.

Of particular interest was Adam's assertion that the school had been able to "get rid of poor teachers." Under IPS, however, this is not the case. In fact, industrial awards

covering DoE employees' conditions of employment remain unaffected by the IPS policy. It seems Adam's belief that he had the capacity to terminate staff was not based in fact. Aaron was equally unable to provide a response about pedagogical differences:

> To me in terms … from an IPS perspective in terms of the organization of the school. Once it gets to the classroom level I don't believe it makes any difference at all.

However, he did seek to elaborate using the example of English teaching to illustrate:

> So you're teaching English in a school and the way you run your class whether it's IPS or not could look exactly the same or vastly different from another school whether they're IPS or not, just because of your style as a teacher. Because you make those decisions.

Abraham was likewise unable to describe differences in classroom pedagogy:

> Well my classroom personally probably wouldn't be that different because you're talking about an experienced teacher going from one to the other.

These responses to questions around pedagogy indicate there were no perceived differences between pedagogy in IPS and non-IPS. This can be juxtaposed against previous claims that students were the beneficiaries of IPS status.

### 5.3.4 Resourcing and Ideology

In conclusion, participants were invited to discuss the possible future of the IPS policy. It was of interest that Andrew decided to return to the topic of staffing and the potential for principals to "move staff on." In particular, he highlighted how in its [then] current format the capacity to move those staff on was hampered:

131

It's not easier with IPS. In fact in some ways it's harder. You can't EIP [employer-initiated placement] people. The only time you can EIP is because your numbers have dropped. Our numbers aren't dropping, they're going up. It's not an issue for us. The only other one you can do is substandard performance but IPS schools don't have an advantage over substandard performance.

EIP refers to a DoE process whereby teachers can be placed into a school by the central bureaucracy. Andrew's extended response drifted to the need for IPS principals to gain the capacity to terminate staff:

Oh they'd like to have … oh absolutely. The current substandard performance process there's a new one before the DG [Director General]. Will be looking at this week. The current substandard process is too long winded, it's too difficult. Doesn't deal particularly well … the situation gets too tied up in bureaucracy that quite frankly a teacher's got to be really substandard or driving you nuts so that you'd go there in the first place.

It is worth noting Andrew continued to describe his frustration with processes used by the DoE to address underperforming staff. He spoke hypothetically of ways to address the future employment of teachers:

There have to be mechanisms but we have teachers within our system who have very poor behavior management classroom management skills. Poor content skills. And they just tickle above and don't [inaudible]. To be able to deal with them in a better way. More effective way … you know I propose you do three months if you're identified as one of those teachers you get three months in another school and if they identify you in the same way well there's got to be something.

The transcript might capture Andrew's words, but it does little to describe the frustration that was evident in his tone and body language. Certainly, during other

interviews, issues affecting the employment and retention of staff consistently came to the fore.

Adam similarly spoke of the future of IPS involving the capacity to move staff on. He was specifically asked if the policy was in his opinion leading to situations whereby staff could be terminated:

> Well I think it has to be easier to get high performing staff and it has to get easier to get support to move someone on who isn't cut out for a classroom and is killing the kids and the school.

This response is of interest as it substantiates Andrew's perspective regarding the difficulties of addressing underperforming staff. Later in the response, he demonstrated cynicism in the political motivations underlying the policy:

> Well I always saw it as an ideological political exercise. I was under no illusions that it was a way for a Liberal Government … I think it was a Liberal Government that brought it in, I'm not sure … I can't remember. But for me it was always an exercise in government being seen to do something. And that something was trying to make government schools look like they could be private schools under the same kind of banner. And apart from that I'm really not sure. The principal autonomy is one. I mean I think it's important that the principal has autonomy for hiring and firing staff. But I really don't think they have much autonomy. If we have an underperforming staff member it's just hard to remove them as it ever was.

In this exchange, Adam drifted into the ideological nature of IPS, then pivoted to principal autonomy, while simultaneously recognizing any such autonomy was illusionary. From that point he returned to addressing underperforming staff.

Responses elicited from both Aaron and Abraham tended to be more circumspect than those of Andrew and Adam. Aaron at first claimed:

I don't follow it that closely but what I think I see happening is that the vast majority of schools I think will become IPS that actual streamlining of processes in that thing that will happen with schools will just be shaped down, for want of a better phrase, in terms of you know finding out the deficiencies within that. I don't see it evolving or going away. I think school, the IPS essence is essentially schools becoming more like businesses where they have to be more client savvy. Rather than schools that people come to regardless.

Aaron perceived government schools as involving more than the education of students and as a result he drew on a business model, whereby he discussed each business unit being required to compete against the others in the future. Later he observed the future of IPS as involving principals gaining an increased capacity to address underperforming staff:

Yeah I think so. That will happen. To me that's a good thing. Because I think there's still a lot of dead wood in some aspects of education that do need to be moved on.

Abraham similarly tended to be circumspect and dwelt on the central bureaucracy and, by default, the state government maintaining control over schools.

The final interview questions provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on what they felt might happen to those schools that did not gain IPS status. Abraham was relatively blunt:

Their principals will move on and they'll get a new principal; then they'll get an IPS status. There will be a time when every government school will get an IPS status. You see if you're going to have an IPS school you've got to have somebody in there that's capable of doing stuff. And not all of them are. Some very nice people in there but not all of them are. You know I've seen private schools that are run by registrars.

Abraham believed there was a danger that IPSs might become more like private schools where business-oriented registrars and market competition may unduly impact on educational matters. He was concerned that IPS policy could result in non-educators gaining control over schools.

Adam tended to be somewhat ambiguous in his response:

> I don't think anything will happen. To be honest. I don't think the public domain is really … if you walked around now and asked anyone they wouldn't care two hoots who was IPS and who wasn't. I don't see that it makes any difference.

Andrew was hesitant on this issue and instead chose to deflect in his response:

> Look I think there's a bigger problem. The bigger problem with more schools on IPS the actual resourcing to support IPS schools. You know I think that's going to be stretched. That's a far bigger problem than schools that don't get it. I think that schools that don't get it are already marginalized. IPS isn't going to make any difference. They're marginalized for other reasons, whether it be geographic or whether it be … reputation. I think that people make too big a thing about that. IPS isn't going to save them. And under an IPS environment maybe they're better off even not having it. Because they need system of support at a high level and if that happens, great. The biggest problem is those schools that gain IPS and come into the new batch. I benefited from lots of training and lots of resources and lots of development. I can't see they'd get anywhere near the same.

Nonetheless, Andrew articulated what he believed to be a fundamental flaw with the state government education system in WA in terms of under resourcing of public schools. Ultimately though he did not answer the question as to what might happen to those schools without IPS status in the future.

## 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has deliberately used only the voices of the respondents, free from theoretical interpretation and with minimal commentary. It was evident during the interviews that there were similarities and differences between respondents. Certainly, when invited to describe the school itself, the principal (Andrew) went to great lengths to distance Acacia SHS from popular community perceptions about the label of low-SEI government schools. Both HOLAs, however, spoke openly of the challenges confronting those working in the school. Like many principals, Andrew was endeavoring to portray a positive image of his school.

Responses to questions about the justification for the school seeking IPS status appeared to parallel each other. There was a shared focus on improving the status of the school in the wider community and gaining the capacity to be freed from a centralized system for staff selection. In particular Andrew drew a direct correlation between IPS status, public image, and staff selection. In addition, there were claims that IPS status in some way freed the school from much of the oversight from the central bureaucracy. However, this sentiment directly contrasted with responses to later questions regarding accountability mechanisms.

When asked to respond to questions about negative effects that could be associated with IPS status, participants spoke uniformly about increased workload for the principal and other front office staff. When participants were asked about the prime beneficiaries of IPS status, they consistently claimed it was students. However, when pressed, participants fell back on assertions that because the school had the capacity to select staff, then it followed students somehow benefited. There was a clear

perception that the principal was a beneficiary of IPS because he supposedly gained the capacity to make decisions in the best interests of the school.

As participants claimed students were beneficiaries of IPS status, it was thought they might be able to support this claim through actual examples of pedagogical change. Hence, they were asked to describe any differences between pedagogy at Acacia (an IP school) and non-IP schools. Participants were unable to specify any differences and almost uniformly claimed the only differences between IPS and non-IPS sites occurred predominantly in the school administration. Participants did discuss the onerous nature of accountability mechanisms resulting from IPS status, with particular discussion of the pressure this placed on the principal. Given the IPS policy was widely touted as a means to free government schools from central bureaucratic authority, increased accountability to central office appears to contradict these beliefs.

The notion of 'new capacities' provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on fundamental changes in the school that might be attributed to IPS status. In response, participants highlighted the ability of the principal to hire staff without taking referrals from the central authority, although the EIP process ensured this was largely illusionary. When participants were asked to project into the future there was a consistent belief about the principal gaining authority to more easily remove underperforming staff by circumventing a centralized staff placement system.

# Chapter Six

# Banksia Senior High School

## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine Banksia SHS, the second case study site. I begin with a brief description of the catchment area and school context to provide a backdrop to the interviews and emergent themes. The participants' professional trajectories are also included to provide a further layer of context. The emergent themes are divided into four headings. The first addresses benefits associated with IPS status, where participants discussed status and potential career growth, as well as endeavoring to articulate new capacities connected to IPS status. This is followed by negative aspects of IPS status. Similar to the preceding chapter, participants discussed at length the pressures of accountability mechanisms. A further emergent theme addresses whether there might be pedagogical differences between Banksia and non-IP schools. Finally, there is exploration of the future of IPS, with participants discussing a potential two-tiered government education system emerging.

## 6.2 About Banksia

### 6.2.1 The Surrounds

Like Acacia SHS, Banksia SHS was located in a predominantly working class area 71 kilometers south of the Perth central business district. Census details for the area reveal that around 63% of the area's population were born in Australia. Of the total population over the age of 15 years, 51% were employed full time. The unemployment rate for the area was 9.2%, placing it well above the averages for the state and nation.

When considering household employment, 13% had both of the couple employed full time. Of the employed population over 15 years, 19% were employed in retail, 15% in health care and social assistance, 13% in construction, and 9% in accommodation and food services (ABS, 2018). Approximately 10% of the population had completed a university education, while 23% had a Year 10 or less education. Of the homes in the area, 36% were mortgaged and 27% rented. The median monthly mortgage repayment was $1820, with median house prices of $407,000, which was 18.5% lower than the Perth metropolitan median (ABS, 2018). The median household income where both partners worked full time was $1435 per week, while individual income averaged $555 per week. It is also important to note the area had a significantly lower proportion of individuals with high incomes (more than $1500 per week) than the rest of the state.

Banksia SHS was located in a city originally established in 1830; the 1837 census recorded the population as 12 individuals living in three households. During its formative years, the main industry was centered around a fish cannery, the first established in WA. In 1949 a Roads Board was established to administer the growing town until it was reconstituted as a shire in 1969. Industrial development in a nearby region, accompanied by a localized mining boom, resulted in population growth and the shire was upgraded to 'town' status. In 1990 it became the fifth non-metropolitan area in the state to become a city. The city was considered a 'gateway' to the state's south-west region and as such had a variety of tourist attractions. In the city there were clear areas of opulence with large multi-story homes on man-made canals; however there were also areas of evident poverty.

### 6.2.2 The Participants' Stories

Brenda was the principal of Banksia. She spoke about limited career choices for women when she first entered education, but she also followed her personal interest in physical education. Her first posting was in the country:

> Yeah I was under the … back then you had to do two years' country service. And so I was fortunate enough to be sent to a district high school in the north suppose central midlands area. And um yeah great. Stayed in the country for the next 23 years.

In particular, she discussed building her career from classroom teacher to HOLA, then deputy, and finally principal in a large country SHS, holding that position for 10 years. She also spoke of effectively being 'head hunted' for Banksia and being given the mandate to improve the school environment.

Beverly, the deputy principal, described a fairly normal career trajectory. She spoke of having a passion for history and the influence of significant teachers. This resulted in her studying both history and education at university. Her first job in education was in a country school as, "that's what you did then, went bush then picked up permanency then took a transfer back to the city." She was employed in three different SHSs in the metropolitan area before picking up a HOLA position. Beverly discussed holding HOLA positions in two other schools and feeling 'drawn' to difficult-to-staff, low-SEI schools. She also held two acting deputy principal roles before securing her current substantive position at Banksia.

The HOLA for humanities was Barbara. She described getting into education as a "late career change" as she had previously worked as a professional historian and museum curator. She stated:

So at the end of that journey I was looking for a challenge and education had always been something in the back of my mind. And I decided to jump and did my Dip Ed with a view to work in low socio-economic schools and the public system. From that I was first posted to [a metropolitan SHS] for a year. And I found my way to [a low-SEI suburb] and worked at [the school within that suburb] for six years.

She went on to describe being responsible for working across two sites and leading the subjects of English, S&E, LOTE, and media. Bethany was the HOLA for math and spoke of originally being employed at an elite girls' school in Melbourne. She discussed having been influenced to enter the profession by some of her teachers. Bethany had worked in WA for at least 20 years, predominantly in difficult-to-staff, low-SEI schools before taking up her posting at Banksia.

### 6.2.3 The School: A Description

Banksia SHS was divided between sites approximately five kilometers apart. The city itself was the location for a DoE experiment in using a middle school model in the early 2000s. This involved three dedicated middle schools catering to Years 8–10, feeding into a senior campus catering to Years 11–12. When this experiment ended, two of the middle schools expanded to cater to Years 8–12, while the remaining middle school and senior campus were amalgamated to form Banksia SHS. In this thesis the former middle school site is referred to as Beaufortia, and the former senior campus, as Boronia. Beaufortia, prior to amalgamation, bore the name of the city and was purpose built as a SHS in the late 1970s. Boronia was purpose built as a senior campus in the late 1990s.

Beaufortia was located on fairly swampy ground prone to becoming waterlogged in the winter. Surrounding the buildings were numerous industrial sites offering services

including mechanics, electricians, and carpentry. In addition, backing onto Beaufortia was a primary school with which it shared some facilities. The school buildings, although clean, were showing their age with stained brickwork. The reception area adjoined the offices of the principal (Brenda) and deputy principals (one of whom was Beverly). It should be noted that as Banksia was spread between two physical sites, teachers and others worked at both sites. As such, Brenda and her deputies maintained offices at both sites. The main administration building was the only two-story building on the Beaufortia site, with a staffroom located above the offices and small interview room immediately behind the reception desk. It was in this room that I conducted interviews with Barbara and Bethany (HOLAs). Beverly was interviewed at Boronia in her office. Barbara's first interview occurred at Boronia, while the second one was in her city campus office.

Boronia was located in a designated educational precinct within walking distance of a TAFE (technical and further education) and university satellite campus. All buildings were single story and quite modern. The reception area of Boronia also abutted the offices of Beverly and Brenda. This part of the school was open plan with the exception of staff offices, and was generally light and airy, with a busy professional atmosphere. Banksia's website acknowledged that a decision to amalgamate the two sites occurred in 2011 and that the school as it existed, began operations in 2012. Both sites had a professional buzz about them, in that there were people coming and going, tending to differing tasks. There were some students in both reception areas, but there was an overwhelming prevalence of busy adults.

### 6.2.4 The School: A Tale of Two Sites

Bethany described her school in the following way:

> This school? It has become a very good school. So in my time from when I first came here it was extremely rough. It was very small. Lots of kids from socio-economic backgrounds. Low socio-economic backgrounds.

In simple terms, she confirmed the low-SEI context of the school and in particular spoke of difficulties with student behavior. She went on to talk about Beaufortia, where the interview took place:

> This site was a middle school site and it contained 8s, 9s, and 10s. And had very few classes because of the area that we're in. When the school was first built we had 1500 on site. Since then it has become a major industrial area. So the numbers reduced drastically. I think at one stage they were even looking at closing, it was so small.

Bethany went on to briefly touch on the amalgamation of both sites into one school:

> Since then because of the amalgamation three, two years ago? Three years ago? The school has developed into something which I'm quite proud of. Going from where it's been to where it is now. The students are wearing uniform. The atmosphere is totally different. Its good. I like it.

While she was generally positive about the direction in which the school was headed, she did make a statement about her dissatisfaction with the teaching staff in general:

> What don't I like about the school? Um the let me think. The attitudes of some of the staff. Particularly staff who have been on the PET site for a considerable number of years. What don't I like? The walk up and down the corridor every day.

Similarly, Barbara talked about her perception of staff politics as a negative aspect of her school:

> Oh that's hard. I guess what I don't like about this school would be the same at any other school, that I'm in. And sometimes that's the staff politics and once again it's the challenge of being in a leadership role of having to deal with staff conflict and issues. That's probably the biggest negative. But it isn't an easy job in any career.

After some discussion about her career trajectory, Brenda described the process of merging two sites:

> That's really a … I mean that was a political decision so it's not really in my field. Um out of our control. The decision, the announcement to merge was made in I think September; no it was earlier. I would … may have been in the May. No earlier than that even. It was um early in 2011. The decision to merge the schools was made. No actually you know when it was? I think it was the November of 2010 that the Minister announced that. But announced that it wouldn't take place until you know 2012 or whatever.

From this point, she went on to describe what she perceived to be distinct advantages of a school divided between two sites:

> Well it's actually um. I think the biggest thing for um from a student perspective it's given students' opportunity to curriculum expertise. Um having the two campuses. It's given both sets of students' access to facilities. So from a student perspective that's a bonus.

Apart from discussion of the potential benefits to students from having a school across two sites, Brenda also spoke about the benefits to staff.

> From a staff perspective, it's a great decision for them with their career pathways. Because it's actually giving them breadth of curriculum that neither campus gave

before. So it certainly did do that. The other thing I think from a community perspective is that changed a whole mindset of what was a perception of a one of the sites. It was very negative. And that's certainly turned around hugely. Yeah so no I think that they're the benefits.

Beverly was invited to comment on aspects of her school she quite liked and responded by discussing the strength of the staff:

I quite like that most staff are willing to give things a try. We are in the middle of a fairly big transition, you know, with both sites when we used to have one. And there are those who will always complain no matter what. But a strength I think is those staff who are really willing to have a go.

However, unlike Brenda, Beverly spoke of the challenges that working across two sites presented:

Well I'm not convinced about the two sites for the one school. Look it probably looks good on paper, but the actual management of it is pretty tough going. Trying to shift staff from one place to another really puts a lot of strain on all of us.

Generally, all participants spoke positively about having the school spread between two sites. However, salient points emerged around the school being difficult to work at, attributable to student behaviors; and staff politics was perceived as a detriment, although this was in contrast with Beverly commenting that most staff were willing to "have a go." Further, Barbara spoke of career benefits for staff from working at both sites. It should be noted that Barbara spoke of having little control over the merger and cited political decisions. It is perhaps this point that indicates minimal control over significant decisions about the school.

## 6.3 Emergent Themes

### 6.3.1 Benefits

*6.3.1.1 Independent Public School Status Equates to Career Advancement?*

During interviews participants provided fairly narrow responses in regard to the school seeking IPS status. However, Brenda's response contrasted with the others as she predominantly spoke of how IPS allowed her to advance her career as she gained skills in operating a business as opposed to an educational facility. Predominantly, there was discussion of gaining the capacity to directly employ staff separate to the central bureaucracy staff placement system. In particular, the Beaufortia site was only able to attract inexperienced staff, which affected the quality of pedagogy. Gaining improved control over finances through the one-line budget was a further factor in the school seeking IPS status.

Brenda's response was perhaps the most surprising of all when she spoke frankly about the personal benefits she gleaned:

> My biggest ticket item in an IPS is for me personally for my own personal professional growth has been the governance structure of the board. That's been fantastic and maybe I'm just lucky that we just have a really proactive board. Why I see that as a bonus is that they've shifted my mind, my sense of thinking into a running a business. Rather than just running an education facility.

Brenda's choice of language and description of changing her approach so that she was more in tune with operating a business is an indicator of the neoliberal language game at play. In particular, she detailed how she professionally benefited from managing her school in this way:

You know constantly monitoring the business plan against the budgets. Setting long-term strategic budgets, financial budgets. That's been the beauty that I see. The other thing I enjoy about IPS is that we've been able to look at the flexibility with the budgeting. I mean, sorry, with the salaries. We manage our own relief as well. We manage our own faults. So we've been able to create quite a business model. Where both of those areas are working in our favor as a school we have control over; for example faults. We have created a model where we actually have our own employed handyman. And we also have the ability within that to determine, for us to determine what faults we fix. What faults are outsourced.

Later in her response, Brenda discussed staffing benefits from IPS status:

Look for me as a person whose most of my career has been in the country. I see IPS as a benefit to quite isolated rural communities that struggle to get staff in. In one respect. And struggle to get quality staff.

She further elaborated:

Before because you were given FTE [full time equivalent] you weren't given a bucket of money. To be able to do something outside of the square because you couldn't fill staffing you had to go through a lot of hurdles to get there. Hoops to get there. With a one-line budget people in those situations could be as creative as they wanted to. Because now they don't have to go and beg and plead that they could trade in a FTE to dollars or whatever. So I think for schools that are struggling to get staff that want to do things really differently.

It was apparent Brenda linked gaining IPS status with the capacity to staff the school in a way that was perceived to be a good fit.

Beverly, when asked about the reasons for Banksia seeking IPS status, spoke about the capacity to employ staff without having to use a centralized placement system:

Oh I think it was just the right thing for us to do. I mean it gave us more control over different stuff. You know now we get to choose our staff, instead of Silver

147

City just sending people. We could sort of do it before, but now we have more control. And the budget stuff is good too. Instead of them in Silver City telling us where to use our funds, we get to have much more say. So in answer I think those are probably why we went to IPS. And the time was right with the merging of the two sites.

Bethany spoke about what was happening in other government schools and the general move toward IPS status:

Um I think the vision was that this was the way that schools are going in the future. That this was something that would benefit us in the long run. Um where as if we stayed just a normal school we wouldn't have the extra. I would say ... say in what we do.

Barbara too described the perceived staffing benefits of IPS status. In particular, she focused on the difficulties created by poor quality teachers allocated by a centralized system over which she had no control:

Because the teaching staff that we had here on the (former middle school) site. A lot of them weren't qualified to teach in their subject area. So I think IPS allowed us the fact that we wanted certain staff and we weren't willing to accept anyone else. So the pools in particular had made it pretty good.

She went on to discuss how some staff had decided to move on:

We didn't previously have any maths staff on this site. So um we had lots of graduates. Um and because they weren't maths trained but we needed maths teachers so they might have been PhysEders or you know science teachers you know. But some of those have left because they've got other jobs in their field. Some have left because they weren't suited to teaching. And the pools have allowed us to go through and go yes we want this person, we want this person, we want this person. So in terms of my maths teaching staff, I've now got a maths graduate.

While Barbara spoke of the challenges that IPS status presented for the day-to-day running of the school, she also spoke of the positive aspects:

I think that being an IPS school presents a number of challenges but it also presents a number of opportunities. I think that being an IPS school and your impressions of that is very much tempered with whether or not you're in a low-socio-economic area or you're in a very affluent area. So it all comes down to the dollars at the end of the day. For us here, some of the challenges about being an IPS school to me have been magnified by the fact that we didn't just have the implementation of Banksia Senior High School as an IPS school. We had to merge two schools with two very different staff at the same time as managing a change to IPS. So for us I think it was very complex, that process. And we are getting there with that. There have been a lot of challenges along the way.

Bethany's response to questions about the reasons for pursuing IPS status also alluded to staffing benefits. In particular, she talked about the challenges of having inexperienced staff at two sites:

Likewise, Beaufortia when I arrived was pretty much graduate high. We had that many graduate teachers down here. And we needed the stability and the mix of graduate and longer-term teachers to improve a number of elements down here including the BMS. And getting that balance right. So staff was an issue.

In addition, she spoke of the merger of the two sites and IPS status, as seemingly a part of what she termed, "a natural process":

So I suppose to me I kind of felt like I was in a sort of … in a holding pattern for three terms while everything was worked out and I was very much on the Banksia Senior Campus site at that point in time. I think the reason why the IPS happened was largely to do with Banksia Senior Campus at the time. Although the history side of this is something I'm not completely up to date with. So Boronia was IPS and so the merger brought Beaufortia into the IPS as Boronia. And there was a

lot of sense I suppose in Banksia Senior College going IPS in terms of the location with other providers.

The issue of staffing was apparent in the responses of most participants, in so far as they perceived difficulties with the [then] existing staff placements from the central bureaucracy. Such a system resulted in staff being placed at either site who were either not suitable or ill equipped to work within the contexts. Gaining the capacity to expend funds separate from the central bureaucracy was also perceived as advantageous. Finally, there was discussion of how IPS status could professionally benefit at least one of the participants.

*6.3.1.2 Providing Opportunities for Professional Growth*

Official rhetoric surrounding the IPS policy indicated that it would allow schools to focus on 'core business,' namely providing the best possible education for children in the state (O'Neill, 2013). In light of these claims, I expected the participants' responses would focus on the benefits to students. Two participants mentioned the benefits to students; however, the other two spoke largely about their own personal professional benefits.

Brenda was invited to reflect on who she believed benefited most from the school gaining IPS status. She described her own professional growth as being a personal benefit:

Look the benefits from … and this again is me personally, is that I have been able to think more strategically. And to really perhaps take more risks. In relation to the direction of the school. And that's been encouraged through the board structure that we have. So for me that's certainly a benefit. It's also for me and again it's been my experience, is I've had to think more in a business sense rather

than just educational. And that for me has been a great professional source of professional learning for me.

From this frank observation, Brenda went on to discuss how the IPS policy enabled her to take professional risks as a principal:

Ok so I suppose part of the underlying philosophy of IPS is to challenge, while we can't, we've still got to work within the act. We can certainly challenge aspects of policy to make it work better for us on the, you know, on the local sense. And that's why you'll see a lot of the department policies are being reviewed at the moment. So perhaps the more risk taking stuff might be around some of the staffing that may have happened. We can do whatever we want to do as long as we got to that end point. So it still has to have an educational philosophy behind it but how we go about getting to that business is different. So yeah. So from a risk perspective that's what I'm saying.

Brenda was then asked to extrapolate and comment on the potential benefits that eventuated for teachers:

Look I think that IPS is really about mindset. And empowering people. And if a principal has a mindset where they're thinking outside that box. Then it enables staff to feel more empowered; especially in relation to some of the decision making, because their recommendations would go purely through to the board. For final sign off. So from a staff perspective they would … you'd like to think there's a greater sense of empowerment. And a greater participation in decision making.

In contrast, Beverly's response focused on the benefits to students as a consequence of the capacity to hire staff independent of the centralized process:

Well obviously it is students who benefit. By that I mean it allows us, and in particular Brenda, to recruit the right teachers. You see in the past we just had to take whoever Silver City sent to us. And sometimes they sent people who were

really not suited to teaching these types of kids. Brenda worked hard to deal with some of those more difficult teachers. People who were probably not here for the right reason. So now with IPS we can look at people and if they don't fit at interviews, then we don't have to take them. It has made all of that staffing thing so much easier. And because we are getting better teachers, better quality people, the kids benefit from that.

Barbara's response to this same line of questioning tended to vacillate slightly but ultimately followed the pattern evident in Beverly's response. However, it is worth noting that in her hesitancy, she also revealed a line of thought similar to that of Brenda:

That's a really hard question to answer because I guess if I try and look at it from the different hats perspective as a Level 3 administrator, there are a number of advantages for us. And benefits there. If I look at it as a school of which I obviously am at Banksia, there is not necessarily a benefit to staff. And I think probably the biggest benefit of all is to the students.

Like Brenda, Barbara spoke about the personal professional benefits before shifting to discuss students as beneficiaries. When asked how students benefited she too referred to the capacity to employ staff:

In terms of the quality of education that we have been able to offer them and really focusing in and meeting their needs as 21st century learners in a way that otherwise I don't think we would be necessarily able to if we weren't an IPS school in control of where and how we get to employ staff that meet our needs and also how we spend the money for the school. That one-line budget gives us a lot more freedom.

Bethany's response also closely mirrored Brenda's point, about the capacity to employ staff:

> For us I think the kids have … we got a lot of … I'm not sure whether it was because of IPS, but we got a lot of extra benefits. Things like the kids were all given a clothing voucher so that they would all have school uniform. Benefits for the kids. The kids I think more. I think. Making sure that particularly with IPS. Making sure that we have the right staff for the kids. Because of the wide variety of things that we've had. We've had a big drop in staff. In all areas.

Initially, it was anticipated that responses to questions about the main beneficiaries from the policy would involve discussion of students. However, both Brenda and Barbara in particular spoke mainly about personal professional benefits. It should also be noted that similarities existed with Acacia in that benefits to students were linked to the school gaining the capacity to employ staff separate from the centralized system.

### 6.3.1.3 Doing Things Differently

Ironically, when asked about accountability, participants focused on gaining the capacity to approach things differently. This resulted in questions around potential new capacities that might be attributed to IPS status. Most participants spoke about gaining the capacity to staff the school through merit selection as a way in which the school operated differently from non-IP schools. Bethany spoke of the school still having to comply with external control mechanisms such as the Australian Curriculum. These factors, Bethany claimed, inhibited the potential to do things differently at Banksia.

When asked about doing things differently, Barbara returned to the school's capacity to employ its own staff:

> Without doubt it's about being able to select staff. For me that's huge. Yeah the freedom to choose the right staff is a big one. Because when I hire the right staff, have that freedom, it means I don't have nearly as many problems as what happened when they were just put here by other people like staffing. Having good

people around me makes my life a lot easier in my role. I guess Brenda must feel this as a huge freedom too because she doesn't then have a bunch of teachers who might not agree with the direction she is taking the school in.

Barbara was then asked to elaborate on how gaining the capacity to hire staff separate from the centralized system was beneficial to students:

Oh you know there have been these people here who have just resisted everything. And it makes life just so difficult … and I don't think the kids are going to learn too much from people like that. I spend … well am spending less time as we hire better people … I spent a lot of time just trying to get those sorts of people just to do their job. And met with just so much resistance. In terms of freedom, it's about being able to hire the right people.

To a large extent, Bethany's response partially mirrored that of Barbara, in so far as when asked about different capacities under IPS, she focused on staffing:

You know being able to finally hire the staff that I want, or rather that Brenda wants in the school would have to be the big one. There are just a number of people here, in my … that I have to deal with … who are just not suited to teaching these types of kids. And that's not a reflection on them … they're probably pretty good if they work somewhere else. It's just they aren't really suited to this school and these kids. The problem has been the system just places these people here without really looking at their suitability.

Bethany was pressed to provide examples of teachers placed at Banksia by the centralized system, who she felt were unsuited to the school; she spoke of two staff members in particular:

Ok they um, I had two teachers on site for the first time on Monday afternoon. I took them into what is our marine science group, which is our top group. Now these kids are very intelligent but they're noisy. You know they want to get in there, they want to get things done, they blah blah blah. I took these two teachers

in and introduced them to the kids and when the staff member started teaching or started to get the kids organized, their jaws dropped. You could just see the look of shock and horror on their faces. They stayed in the room for about four minutes. Now they are going to be required to take a class on Monday afternoon because I've got staff going out on an excursion. The only way I can get them to do it is if I split up the class and give them six or seven kids each.

Following this response, Bethany outlined how teachers at Banksia were offered little choice in classes they were expected to teach. However, they resisted in other ways. She was asked to provide practical examples of how these teachers resisted change:

By trying to get the kids to do what they want them to, which is sit down shut up and don't make any noise. That's the way they have been teaching and our kids aren't used to that. So making excuses for not coming over here. Taking leave. Sick days.

For Bethany, teachers expecting children to sit without making noise was unrealistic. In her view, it reflected student resistance to more traditional didactic teaching processes. I asked Bethany to elaborate on how she went about managing this form of teacher behavior. In her words:

I hate every minute of it. Um so. I've got some staff who are really good at coming over. One young girl who's here today. She's just sitting in a class and she's just roaming around and helping and that's better than walking out of the room after four minutes. I've got one staff member who, he's been allocated five extra hours that he needs to be on this site. And if he goes a minute over that he tells me about it. I'm dealing with a whole range. I've got some staff who … one woman in particular she came over this morning and I said to her just go into morning muster and just stand there as a staff member. And I came back out from what I was doing and she was sitting outside. They don't want to mix up with the kids …. So they're very negative. Very negative. Teaching needs to be done silently. Kids aren't allowed to say anything. They're sat in separate desks.

Beverly, similar to other respondents, had difficulty in identifying specific examples of doing things differently, apart from the capacity to decide staffing:

I'm not sure we have any more freedoms. We still have to teach to the Australian Curriculum, so there's no change there. When you talk about freedom it's not as though we suddenly want to change absolutely everything. If you walk around this place you're not going to see anything that you wouldn't see in another high school. Oh yeah sure we have the two sites and on one of those sites we have very long periods. But that hasn't come from IPS. Freedoms … well the big one would be being able to hire the right people you know those people who are suited to working with our kids … yeah I think that would have to be it because really apart from being able to hire teachers, there aren't that many other things that we have the freedom.

Brenda also stuck to a response about the school gaining the capacity to select staff based on merit:

Yeah look merit select was certainly you know provided that to us. It's also you know the board have the opportunity to be involved in that if they wish to. We don't, from a teaching staff perspective. But I was talking to a school just a couple of weeks ago. And the board want to be involved in that. Because that's emphasizing to them … you know this is the standard we want. And this is from the board. So that's given them that better connection. So from our school perspective it's certainly given us the merit select access. And because we've done some of our business differently we can actually go out to the market and say, "well this is our expectation this is what we want, can you do it? Can you deliver?"

A clarifying question was asked of Brenda about whether, in her opinion, she was able to hire better quality teachers:

Probably because you can actually put those expectations out there. Yeah … maybe but again its location too. Yeah I don't think that has changed. The

location. I think if you're giving more empowerment to staff. And more opportunity for innovation you will attract more of those types of staff. Rather than wanting to go into schools that are more traditional in their mindset.

It was evident through responses that participants were for the most part unable to unequivocally provide evidence of additional positive effects the school gained from IPS status, apart from the ability to hire staff separate from the centralized staffing system. Merit selection of staff appeared to be a practice animating Banksia's desire for IPS status.

**6.3.2 Negative Effects**

*6.3.2.1 Increasing Levels of Accountability*

Participants were asked to consider some of the possible negative aspects of IPS status. Similar to Acacia, the notion of increased workload emerged as a negative effect. Participants also spoke of feeling pressure from the school board to be accountable. Generally, participants were apprehensive about being more accountable to parents through the school board. At least one participant focused on the principal being forward thinking. Brenda focused on potential hazards rather than negative aspects of Banksia gaining IPS status, and discussed the risk of individuals not having the capacity to understand the mechanics of one-line budgets. She also noted ancillary staff were not beneficiaries of IPS status.

Bethany spoke about the perils of being accountable to a school board; in particular parents. In her words:

Well I think the fact we are ultimately responsible to a board is a double-edged sword. So on one hand it gives us this opportunity to really embrace the community because we then serve the community of the school. But at the same

time there's a danger of that as well, in that it depends on what it is that perhaps the board wants to push. And you are to some extent having to prove the worth of some things that other non-IPS schools just do and don't necessarily have to justify in the same way.

She was asked to clarify whether the school board pushed particular programs, but Bethany instead spoke about the difficulties around clarifying fees charged and how the board could potentially delay fundamental decisions, for example:

> They want to know where money is being spent. But they don't necessarily have an understanding in the one-line budge of what's committed and where and they may get to the end of Term 2 and go, "oh you've only spent this much of your budget, which obviously means you're charging students too much," without knowing that list of everything that needs to come out in Term 3. So these elements where you're having to spend more time justifying. No this is the actual situation. In terms of pushing anything educationally nothing that's impacted directly on me as a HOLA.

While Bethany spoke generally about potential delays and the frustration this generated for her, she was unable to specify an occasion when the school board had attempted to push a particular agenda.

Barbara had difficulty in speaking specifically about disadvantages in the school gaining IPS status. On this question she deferred to some general points about the school principal:

> Um, I don't really have any arguments against it. I just thought it sounded like a good idea, may as well do it. Brenda's fairly um future … she looks into the future. And anything that appears to be new and innovative she will go for. So she's not the sort of principal that sits back and waits for things to happen. She will make them happen if she thinks that they're going to be for the school.

When I asked again about potential disadvantages, she stated:

I can't think of any. I'm sorry. For me because I've had so many changes of position. Every day we get a new job. It just seems like it's one of those things. I think one of the big changes is having a board. Who literally run the show.

For Barbara there didn't appear to be any disadvantages in her school gaining IPS status besides the potential for the school board to "run the show." Even this was perceived from the point of view of a professional advantage in terms of membership of the school board and the potential career rewards.

Beverly identified increased workload as a negative effect of IPS status:

But at my end and at Brenda's end, there has been a huge increase in just trying to manage funds and oversee that one-line budget. And the board make sure we are accountable. They can ask some really tricky questions and I have to be ready to answer those. So yeah the workload would have to be the one big drawback of IPS.

Brenda identified potential hazards of IPS status such as the need to have individuals in the school capable of managing differing layers of complexity associated with IPS status. She was also able to project to other sites and identified what she believed to be a major risk:

I would suggest, I can't validate it but I would suggest that some principals see IPS as a perhaps a power play. That's their business but I don't … you know.

The responses to these questions were similar to some of those from Acacia participants in terms of increased workload for those in senior positions. In addition, Brenda indicated some principals might perceive IPS status as a means to exercise power over those in the school. Respondents also discussed feeling pressure through

accountability to the school board. Finally, there were perceived hazards of individuals lacking the capacity to adequately manage one-line budgets.

### 6.3.2.2 Reinforcing Top-down Accountability

In this section participants were very clear that accountability mechanisms linked Banksia more closely to the Director General and central authority, rather than granting them greater autonomy. In the case of Brenda, she felt pressure to be directly accountable to the Director General through the mandated tri-annual reporting requirements. When asked to describe accountability mechanisms in her school, Brenda was adamant Banksia had a bottom-up structure. However, she described a process that tended to be top-down driven. There was also discussion of her feeling accountability to be both public and personal. Generally, participants described accountability that utilized fairly traditional top-down line management, especially when assessing teacher performance focused on the use of performative data.

When Brenda was asked about accountability, she first outlined decision making processes in her school:

> We have a process where—and look please I need to emphasize that this is still a process that's being embedded; it's going to take years to change it—we have a process where our leadership group will thrash out a concept. We will table those concepts if needs be with key players in the school. So say about ICT [information and communications technology]. So I'm not an expert on ICT so I may bring in some experts or people who have an interest. They put a set of recommendations through to leadership group. The leadership group refine those. And it goes through to the board for final sign off. I will intervene in between the leadership group and the board. I will tweak it if need be. And then it goes to the board. I'll speak to it at the board and then we get final sign off.

It was suggested to Brenda that the processes she described appeared to be predominantly 'top down'; however, she asserted the opposite:

> Ah well its coming from the bottom up. Because it's actually staff or whoever has the interest is really doing all the research coming up with the concept. It's coming from the bottom up. And my experience has been that there's been nothing that's been pushed back. Some that's sought more clarification.

Brenda then went on to describe accountability mechanisms in the school, and the kinds of pressures she endured:

> Sure yep. Look in IPS the level of accountability is huge. Like a great deal more public and personal than it's ever been in a traditional school environment. So that self-assessment that's got to be rigorous and continuous is forefront.

Beverly was reasonably explicit in her description of accountability mechanisms and went to some length to point out external sources of public accountability such as the My School website:

> Oh look the accountability in this school is huge. I am the line manager for a group of HOLAs and other Level 3s, and they in turn manage staff. And I am obviously managed directly by Brenda. I guess as far as accountability is concerned, she, you know Brenda, is then accountable to the board but of course they don't manage her. She's managed by the RED or more likely by the DG.

When asked about accountability, Bethany at first chose to describe a reasonably fundamental line management process, but then went on to explain the accountability pressures she felt the principal might feel:

> Well for teachers it's pretty obvious the accountability that's used. I act as line manager for a group of them as do other people at my level. And we … I use … we use the teaching standards to look at the performance of teachers. And my

line manager uses a series of leadership standards to look at me. And I guess something similar happens with her being accountable to Brenda and so on up it all goes … Brenda's accountability is pretty tough. I mean she has to answer for everything that happens in the school … which is alright if things are going good … you know we're getting the results, and attendance is good, and there aren't too many bad behaviors, and no real complaints and all that.

Barbara's response mirrored Bethany's in that she talked about accountability pressures on the upper management of the school:

Oh I don't feel too much of the pressure to be accountable … no that's not right … I mean I have the normal accountability … what I should have said is that it's not any different at my level in an IPS school than I would feel at a normal school that isn't IPS. The big difference is above me are the deputy and principal. They have to answer to a board and to the DG. So the pressure on them is huge. We have a fairly normal system here at my level … but yeah, those above me—huge pressure to perform.

Questions about accountability were pertinent as gaining IPS status implies a level of autonomy. However, such autonomy appeared to be illusionary as accountability mechanisms firmly linked Banksia to the central authority. While Brenda asserted accountability in the school was bottom-up driven, her description implied it was a top-down mechanism. Other respondents also described traditional mechanisms using line management. The use of performative data as a part of accountability takes on some significance during the discussion phase of this thesis.

### 6.3.3 False Promises of Pedagogical Change

One of the key promises of IPS status was the benefits to be gained from pedagogical change and innovation. Barbara claimed there was in fact no discernable difference in pedagogy that occurred because of IPS status and instead suggested she struggled

to get her staff to shift their teaching approaches beyond expecting students to sit in rows. Beverly pointed to the two sites and the need for teachers to travel between them, suggesting this was different to other government schools. Bethany discussed how use of data at Banksia was different from at other schools and allowed change to occur. Brenda claimed there was simply no difference from other government schools.

Bethany stated there was no perceivable difference in pedagogy as a consequence of IPS status. She explained:

> Well there's no difference is there. I mean getting IPS, us being IPS has not made a huge difference at the classroom level. If you want to see a difference between those schools with IPS and those without, you have to look at how we administer the school. But in the classroom. No difference. I'm struggling with some of my staff to teach differently. They come onto this site, the old middle school site, and they want kids to sit in rows and keep quiet. That's never going to happen. I wish I could say there's a difference in classrooms, that we're somehow doing things really out there. But that's just not happening. It's all about being able to administer and hire the right people.

In contrast, Barbara initially claimed there were differences because of the school's capacity to hire people; yet toward the end of her response she indicated that there were no differences in classroom pedagogy:

> Oh that's a good one isn't it … I think … there are some differences. No perhaps not … wait a second. There should be differences because we can hire who we want and by rights we should be hiring those people who can innovate in the classroom. But that would be down the track some. I think that over a long period of time, we should be able to hire these types of people. Right now though, if I'm honest about it there's no real difference between us and those that aren't IPS.

Beverly continued to prevaricate about whether there were discernable differences:

There should be shouldn't there? I mean if I'm going to say it is students who benefit, then I should also say there are differences between classrooms in this school compared to those non-IPS schools. So I should be able to say our classrooms are very different … hmm. But I'm not sure if I can point to one of our classrooms and say, look how different it is. There is difference because of the two sites. That's for sure. Not sure if there are many schools where some teachers have to actually travel between sites. But that's just the way the amalgamation of the two sites went. It's not about being IPS it's more because we joined both schools together … This is a good question and to be honest I can't really point to any difference. So the short answer is there is no real difference that I can think of.

Brenda differed from the other participants. She pointed to the impact of "continuous and rigorous" self-assessment and the ways in which this was reshaping classroom practices around data-driven performativity. She explained:

Yeah look I see that it's more a case of under the IPS banner as I've said to you the self-assessment has to be more continuous and rigorous. Because you are really. The Director General is saying, look I'm going to let you loose for three years. I'm going to let you go out there do your business on the understanding that you will work toward improving student outcomes. So I would suggest from a teaching staff perspective they're more skilled now than they were before in understanding data. And how to adjust their delivery to improve those outcomes. In the past I would suggest it has been a top-down data information giving. In this situation the staff are more actively involved in that data. So I think if you asked the staff two and a half years ago to now, has their knowledge of how to use the data improved? I would say your answer would be "yes." So they've used that to adjust their teaching/learning program. To better engage and improve the outcomes.

Drilling down a little further she noted how teaching staff were able to use student performance as a means to self-assess:

Exactly, well the other thing we also use was the AITSL framework. But I mean you don't have to be IPS to do that. So if you're asking in the context of IPS certainly the agenda of the self-assessment. Because a self-assessment is really a reflection of the business plan. And the ability of the school to achieve those targets. So…

Based on the evidence presented by participants in this section there are mixed messages about the effectiveness of the IPS policy for changing pedagogical practices at Banksia. While the research did not set out to assess such claims, it is interesting to note how school leaders themselves viewed the limited impact on pedagogy given its centrality to the IPS policy.

### 6.3.4 Creating a Two-Tiered System

As a means of concluding interviews, participants were invited to project into the future and discuss where they felt the IPS policy was heading. Two participants spoke about staffing. They focused on teachers who opted out of IPS and where they might end up. In particular, there was a perception that these teachers might be less capable than those who were merit selected for IP schools. The residual effect, they believed, could result in a two-tiered government education system. Another participant stated she was having difficulty simply getting her head around IPS and had not given any thought to future implications. Brenda, for example, was somewhat elusive:

I've got no idea. We were just talking about that actually an hour ago. I don't know. I haven't actually thought about it. I haven't … no I haven't gone there. Can't respond. At this point.

Brenda went on to provide a more expansive response by saying:

Look some of the things that we certainly do as an independent public school I believe that you can still do as a non-independent public school. You can certainly … you know if you're an innovative principal you can still go about changing mindsets. You still have to do a self-assessment process. How rigorous that is, is of your own professional ethics. I suppose. You don't have you won't have your access to the flexibility but there's ways perhaps that you can look at innovation within your school. I don't believe if I think that if this next lot of IPS schools goes through. If they all went through 65% of the schools in WA would be IPS. And 80% of staff would be working in IPS. So whereas before IPS was used as the opt out and it created that redeployee issue. I think that's going to get less and less. So I don't believe that it's going to emphasize more of a residual two tiered because of the volume.

Brenda raised concerns about the potential to create a two-tiered government education system. However, she then dismissed that thought and proceeded to discuss the impact the policy might have on rural schools in this way:

Look I'm really … I will tell you that what I've done in the last two weeks is travel the state with IPS. And there's quite a few schools that are in the country that are independent public schools and still putting their hand up to say. And we're not talking big schools. Some of these schools are little schools of 50 kids. So it's really about the connection with the community. The only ones that I think will be a challenge and will always remain a challenge and whether that's on a different model I don't know. Is the remote schools. Because they're a completely different context. And I don't know how you'd manage that.

Brenda's initial point about a two-tiered government education system was echoed by Beverly, although she optimistically believed that any adverse effects from the policy would be mitigated. Nonetheless, Beverly too identified the potential emergence of a two-tiered government education system by redeploying staff who were not merit selected to IPSs. As she explained:

I think it … it's easier for some schools to get really good teachers … those ones who are just good at their jobs. Kids like them, they like kids, parents like them. All that stuff. Those schools won't ever really struggle to get teachers. And a lot of them are … what we call the leafy greens. They're not like us. We're not a leafy green. We have problems because of where we are and where our students come from, and this school will probably continue to have those problems for a while. I think those schools will get IPS and … then there're those schools like us that have problems … through no fault of their own … but problems, and they will always have problems getting staff. As all of this goes on, there's going to be this bunch of teachers out there who can't get employment in IPS for a lot of reasons. Well what's going to happen to them? I am guessing they will end up in those schools without IPS. Which isn't a good thing. Because sometimes those sorts of teachers perhaps aren't the best at their job. My answer is I think there will be a big difference between those schools with IPS and those without.

Barbara took a slightly different tack by suggesting that government schools might become more like private businesses as a consequence of IPS:

I'm just sort of getting used to us being IPS and getting my head around what that means for me in my job and how I can use IPS to do better things for kids here. With what we do here, I guess we're more like a business. You know we have to have a school business plan and we have the one-line budget, so I think we are more like a business now than we were before. And that's not a bad thing. I think perhaps we might see schools … the private schools are probably more so … government schools like us will probably become more like businesses. But if that way of doing things … administering things … lets us do more things for our kids, then it's not a bad thing.

Bethany's response differed from those of some other respondents in that she did not point to a potential two-tiered public education system. Instead she focused on all government schools gaining IPS status:

I suppose we will all end up being IPS. I can't think of the department running schools differently. It is a big ask to move everyone over to IPS … they probably have some sort of time in mind, years from now … when everyone will be IPS. That's what I think anyway. It wouldn't be fair to the other schools not to get IPS, but I don't think the department can really force them to change over if they don't want to. They will just have to decide for themselves … when the time is right for them … they can change over. But I also think at some point they might be just told they have to.

Based on the responses provided by participants about the potential future of the IPS policy, it was evident that at least two believed it was possible for a two-tiered government education system to emerge. The other participants gave varying responses about schools resembling private enterprises and all government schools ultimately becoming IPSs.

## 6.4 Conclusion

As with the interviews conducted at Acacia, a number of emergent themes could be identified for Banksia. These were grouped under benefits and negative consequences. When speaking of benefits, participants mentioned improving the status of the school and the potential to advance careers through professional growth. Brenda spoke from a purely personal perspective, stating that the reason for seeking IPS status was directly related to her personal professional growth. However, she also spoke of a reason for pursuing IPS status as being linked to the capacity to select what she perceived to be appropriate staff. At the outset of the first interview Bethany spoke positively of the school, discussing how it evolved into what she termed a "very good school." Similarly, Brenda spoke positively of her school, explaining the advantages of having two sites.

Respondents also spoke of staffing benefits that could be gained from IPS status. Beverly discussed getting to select staff as the predominant benefit, as did Barbara. She was, though, speaking specifically about some staff members at one of the sites as not having the necessary qualifications to work in a particular area, but still being placed by a centralized system. Barbara spoke of the opportunities IPS provided to operate the school differently. Although she did not clearly articulate what those opportunities might be, she did speak of the opportunities offered by operating two sites. Bethany spoke of staffing benefits as being the underlying reason for the school gaining IPS status.

For participants, the negative effects of IPS status tended to center around accountability mechanisms. Bethany spoke of her concerns over the pressure to be accountable to the school board. She essentially saw this as a double-edged sword in that IPS was the opportunity to include the community in decision making at the school, but she felt pressure to prove the worth of some programs. Brenda asserted she felt increased levels of accountability as a consequence of IPS.

Respondents were asked to differentiate between IPS and non-IPS pedagogy. Bethany was not able to point to any differences. In fact, she spoke openly of her difficulties in influencing teachers to adopt appropriate pedagogical processes. Barbara similarly experienced difficulty in stating differences between IP and non-IP schools. She went on to claim that perhaps a difference would be evident at some point in the future. It was evident the respondents focused a great deal of attention on the staffing freedoms they felt had occurred as a consequence of IPS. Certainly, this was mirrored in the responses from participants at the other two schools in the study.

# Chapter Seven

# Casuarina Senior High School

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the experiences of participants at Casuarina SHS, the third case study site. In undertaking this investigation I chose three sites to help me collect a range of voices from different contexts, although bounded by low-socio-economic circumstances. Drawing on these experiences I seek to identify patterns, continuities and/or differences. As in Chapters Five and Six, I report the experiences of school leaders at Casuarina SHS by first describing relevant contextual information, then extracting a series of emergent themes addressing both the positive and negative effects of IPS status, before considering whether there has been any perceivable shift in pedagogical practices as a consequence of IPS status and how the participants foresaw the future direction of the policy.

## 7.2 About Casuarina

### 7.2.1 The Surrounds and Stigma

Casuarina SHS is located in a southern suburb that shares its name with the school. This suburb also abuts Banksia. Similar to the other two schools, Casuarina lies within a predominantly working class area some distance from the Perth CBD. The name for Casuarina comes from a Noongar word describing the mouth of the nearby river system. In 1956, a park estate carrying the suburb's name was subdivided and by 1970 it was gazetted as a suburb. Following construction of a significant shopping center in the city of Banksia, demand for housing in the area increased. Casuarina

SHS was consequently built in 1989 to accommodate the expanding numbers of students in the area. The Casuarina Garden Estate Caravan Park was also constructed in the suburb and catered to approximately 200 individuals.

Census details for the area reveal that for people over the age of 15 years, 13% were divorced, compared with 8.4% for the entire state. When considering country of birth, 72.6% were born in Australia; of those, 59% had both parents born in Australia (ABS, 2018). Of this same population over 15 years, 49% were employed full time, compared to 60.7% for all of WA. Unemployment for Casuarina was 10.6%, compared with the state average of 4.7% (ABS, 2018). From the perspective of households, 8.6% had both partners working full time, compared with 20.8% for the state. The median household income for the area was $710 per week, and personal median weekly income averaged $380, compared with $662 across the state. When considering areas in which individuals over 15 years were employed, 21.3% were employed as technicians and trade workers, 16.9% as laborers, 14.1% as machine operators and/or drivers, and 12.5% as community and personal services workers (ABS, 2018). Only 3.8% of the area's population had a tertiary education. The median mortgage repayment was $1400 per month. Of the dwellings, 27.5% were mortgaged and 36.5% were rented (ABS, 2018).

### 7.2.2 Participants' Stories

This section of the chapter introduces the participants and their path to their current school leadership positions. At the outset of the first interviews, participants were asked about their career trajectories. Carol, the school principal, provided a very personal narrative, talking about her daughter being diagnosed with a brain injury and this resulting in Carol working with students at educational risk (SAER). This led to her

teaching "naughty" Year 9 boys, then shifting to student services. Interestingly, she did not describe a series of planned career choices resulting in her becoming a principal. Instead she spoke of a "feeling" that she should take the next step. When she was promoted to a Level 3 position, it was because the substantive individual retired:

> To pick up a Level 3 job acting for the year. Because the person retired. Oh no he was on leave that's right. Extended leave. So I filled in for him and then he retired and I won that position. And then it's just the same thing. All the times I did the next step I just felt like I could do that job that that person's doing. If I did it, it's going to impact on me less than that person doing it. And that's where I've got to.

Christine, the deputy principal, described a career path that began with studies at an interstate university, before arriving in WA and completing a Diploma of Education. This was followed by country postings. It was during one of these postings that she was promoted to HOLA level. She then worked at a large southern metropolitan SHS in a student services role:

> And the principal here John Smith [pseudonym] … John and I worked in [a country school] together. When I was just starting down the student services. And he was principal here and I just happened to see his name in the paper. Gave John a call. And said "what's going on in education around Casuarina?" and John said, "come in for a chat."

This resulted in Christine running an engagement program for severely at-risk students, and eventual promotion to her current position as deputy principal.

Camila was an English HOLA. She described the early influence of her mother in her career choice:

My mum was a child minder and so I used to come home from school and round the kids up and take a register and that kind of thing. I just didn't know what subject area I wanted to go into. I had very inspirational teachers myself.

Following university in the UK, she took jobs in low-SEI schools in the UK. She spoke of a career where she quickly rose through the ranks to become an assistant principal after eight years. Camila then emigrated to WA and was employed in Casuarina in an engagement program before gaining promotion to her HOLA current position in the year prior to the interview.

Clara, another HOLA (of math), spoke of her experience of working overseas as a teacher before returning to Australia and working in private enterprise:

I did a lot of other things and whilst doing all those things I decided that I really did love the teaching. So I went back and got qualified here. And have been teaching ever since. And I'm still doing it because I love it.

Her first teaching postings in WA were in country schools where she specialized in teaching Aboriginal students. On returning to a southern metropolitan school, she found that a lack of fundamental skills was not isolated to students in country towns:

Although I teach maths, I've spent all of my time teaching literacy and numeracy. Alongside with my maths. And I'm consistently appalled at the low levels here. It surprised me as a developed country. And it's one of the things that keeps pulling me back. I keep thinking these kids need to be taught. They're not competitive. And I think I have a role to play.

### 7.2.3 A Description of the School

Casuarina SHS was purpose built as a SHS; however, similar to Banksia and other government high schools in the area, it became part of a middle school experiment in

173

around 2000. As such it became a designated middle school catering to Years 8–10 and feeding those students into the Boronia Senior Campus for Year 11–12 students This experiment lasted until 2010 when Casuarina reverted back to a SHS catering to Years 8–12. The school is located in a suburb that shares its name, but is close to bushland and a significant river. On approaching the entrance to the school, there was a large sign with the school's logo and motto, and a digital message that could be changed. On one of the interview days, the message pertained to safe driving. A carpark was immediately in front of the school, and this needed to be navigated to access the main administrative building.

Most interviews were conducted in the administrative building as both Carol and Christine had offices there, and a nearby large meeting room was available for the other interviews. The school buildings, including the administrative area, were around 22 years old at the time interviews were conducted, and externally showed signs of wear and tear. In the administrative area, the ceiling was fairly high with a mezzanine floor to the center. The majority of the area was open with offices located to the sides. The office area had a professional atmosphere with students being attended to and others moving purposefully about the area.

**7.2.4 A Volatile Playground?**

After questions regarding career trajectories, participants were asked specifically to describe their perception of Casuarina. Carol spoke about originally being the deputy principal:

So I've been here eight years. Came as the deputy. Acting again for six months. And then I won the position. When I walked through the door. I think there were three things I noticed. One the place was very unsafe. The kids were all over the

place. Two, the staff were shattered, I think. They were really damaged through the EIP process. ... And the other thing was that the community hated us. With a passion. And so it was really volatile in the playground. Very little learning going on in the classroom.

Casuarina, similar to Banksia, had undergone a shift from a SHS to a middle school, then back to a SHS:

And so when we went back to the senior school that was really interesting. Because the senior campus had the monopoly on the courses. There was all this political nonsense about what you can and can't do. And so we really at the end … were left with all kids getting Ds. Cause Senior College wouldn't take them into the courses. Or they didn't get the prerequisites. So go back to your school sort of thing. So we had to be really creative and that's when we started the alternative program.

The alternative program to which Carol referred was specific to her school and involved targeting specific literacy and numeracy skills, with the aim of ensuring students transitioned into tertiary education or employment. There was also a program aimed at—in Carol's words—"dysfunctional students," as well as independent learners.

When asked to describe her school, Christine spoke about the school having undergone a transition from one where there were numerous challenges, to one that had become calmer:

This school? This is a very different school to when I started … when I first started I was deputy, Term 4 of 2008. Now coming into a school at the end of a year is quite difficult. Then it was quite difficult. No matter how good you are at your roll it is quite difficult. So and this school I think it was still in crisis. Not only because of that car accident. There had been a number of principals here. Financially the school was not going very well. And the teachers were struggling. I think they

175

were quite damaged. I think it also goes back to quite a few years previously where in this area schools had become middle schools and senior schools.

The car accident to which she referred had resulted in the deaths of a number of local students. She went on to discuss in specific terms, her school.

Right, so you understand and the teachers that were left behind felt like they were second-rate teachers. Which was not the case. I saw it from a distance. I was at [another southern government high school] and in [the other school] we heard about the nature of the split. So very damaging. And the teachers were only teaching middle school. And there's a stigma attached to teaching Year 11 and 12.

Christine then discussed the impact this stigma had on the staff and students at Casuarina:

And all that went with it. So the teachers were left with a middle school with poor structure I think. And it was just a battle. So the teachers were damaged they were battered, bruised. The kids were battered and bruised.

However, she also went on to claim that under the leadership of Carol, the school had fundamentally altered:

Now it's quite different. I can have a meeting like this. Sit here and not be interrupted. I can have a planning meeting with the principal and other deputies, which we've just had, and not be interrupted. It was a totally reactionary school at that point. I would now say that it is cool, calm, and collected. The students are in their classes. The teacher is able to teach. And the kids are sucking up the learning. So it's quite different.

Christine seemed to mirror Carol in speaking about the dysfunctional aspects of the school, and then transitioning into a more positive description, when discussing the school at the time of the interview.

Clara claimed the school operated predominantly in the interests of students and in doing so mirrored the language of Christine in describing it as "different":

Yep. This is considered a low socio-economic school. A high proportion of Indigenous students. Its run, I believe, very differently from other schools. In the area.

She was asked to specify how her school differed from others in the area and spoke of "targets":

In that it, I think targets and caters for the needs of the students a lot better in terms of … it runs several engagement programs. So it's very, very flexible. It's looked at our community. Its looked at the kids we've got. Our data is not very good. And I think the school is putting plans in place and actioning that by … you know … tailor-making programs and things to suit the student's needs.

Camila (HOLA) also discussed the social disadvantage of students and talked about them needing better education:

Very unique. Very different. Our kids come from such a diverse background. Much of it disadvantaged. A great deal of disadvantage. And I'm stunned about how well they cope with life despite some of their disadvantages. And although we have some rugged kids here, we've got a bunch of really, really beautiful kids. And I think kids who really deserve to have some good teaching. They deserve it. And it keeps me here.

## 7.3 Emergent Themes

### 7.3.1 Identifying Benefits

*7.3.1.1 Gaining Flexibility and Choice Over Staffing*

Responses to questions concerning the reasons for the school pursuing IPS status fell into two broad categories: first, there were perceived staffing benefits; and second there were perceived flexibilities to be gained. When asked about the reasoning behind the school seeking IPS status, Camila spoke of freedoms:

> I think from our perspective some of those key arguments are that we have more freedom. As you've said to run different programs and changing structures. And probably with staff as well up to a point at least.

While Camila did not elaborate further on what she meant by "different programs and changing structure," Clara was more articulate, focusing on the school gaining the capacity to appoint staff independent of the central bureaucracy:

> I think it's great. I mean to be honest only having been here for three years and coming from England. I didn't have a great understanding of what the difference was. But then having to go through the sort of reapplying for your job every year and staffing issues and that kind of thing. I quickly realized not being IPS was really problematic. Certainly with getting the right staff for this school. So now that we have IPS we have that bit of sort of flexibility now. And a bit more control over it.

Christine's response dwelt briefly on the process the school went through in applying for IPS status:

> Well it took us three years to get it. So we were very passionate about becoming independent. I always have a bit of a joke with [Carol] that we aren't normal. You

know this is not normal. Whatever normal is we are normal normal same … ah no different different same. Not different same anyway. IPS means that we have that flexibility to respond to our kids, our community, our parents.

She was then asked specifically about flexibilities in the school that she believed resulted from IPS status:

Sure. We have … we can run different programs if we want. So for example we have [a teacher's name] who runs an Indigenous program right through from Year 9 right through to Year 12. So we've taken [another teacher] out of S&E and put her into … oh you've heard about that. IPS too with the staffing. I do the staffing and I lived staffing before IPS. So I felt really restrained in what I could do and who I could have. I was dictated to by the department with staffing. Now I can go through the process and select and find the person to suit our context, our kids. Whereas that wasn't really considered too much before it was just "does that teacher have English and S&E? yeah ok they'll fit."

While Christine began by discussing having flexibility to run what she termed "different programs," she tended to focus on staffing:

Not everyone wants to work in a school like ours. There are special people that work here. I have now the opportunity to talk to people and find out who they are. And are they going to work here? Or are they just looking for a job? I want to hear that they're passionate about low-SES [socio-economic status] kids.

Christine was of the view that teachers working at Casuarina needed to have specific abilities, such as the capacity to deliver curriculum to severely disengaged students.

Carol indicated that her predecessor made the decision to seek IPS status:

[It] Wasn't my decision. I guess was the first thing. That was um [name of the predecessor]. The principal before me. He applied for it twice. Did he miss out twice? Or apply for it? No he missed out just once I think. And it was interesting

because he was not happy with the way the process went. And why we actually missed out. And it was really all about um interpretation of his application.

She then went on to discuss the different reasons and strategies the school adopted in their application for IPS status. Again, staff flexibility was pivotal:

Key arguments. Well that was one of them. I suppose that we can … it's the autonomy of it really. It's about you know … it's so good in terms of our staffing profile and looking at the way we do that. I think the other thing is that the principal actually impacts. You have a big picture of everything. What's happening. See it's almost … you can see the overall lay of the land. You can see how the money sort of fits with what you're doing and you know it's all of that. And I think it's because you can see it, it's very visual. As opposed to "oh the money just comes in the account." You know what I mean.

For Carol, gaining professional knowledge was important; for example, managing a one-line budget that saw her role transition to a business model as opposed to being an educator:

And so any conversation you have with teachers for example, we've got our music teacher. Who you know, you get the SIMs [School of Instrumental Music] funding whatever and she comes to me saying it's not enough. Is there another way I can get more funding to fund the teacher for longer or whatever? And so then I've got to make decisions around that. Based on where're the areas of need. Is that really an area of need or can we do that differently? So they're the things that you think about. Which you probably wouldn't necessarily have before.

In the responses the two themes of staffing and flexibilities were dominant. Further, both Carol and Brenda spoke about the personal professional gains, especially as they related to new skills around business management and budgeting.

*7.3.1.2 Focusing on Students, Maybe?*

Consistent with findings in Chapters Five and Six, the potential benefits of IPS status tended to fall back onto issues of staffing flexibility, which involved the ability to employ their own teachers. In addition, participants openly referred to benefits for the principal through the enhancement of their leadership role. Based on claims by Minister of Education Peter Collier (2013) and Director General of Education Sharon O'Neill (2013) that students would be the likely beneficiaries of IPS status, I anticipated that this might be the case at Casuarina, although given the experiences at Acacia and Banksia it was hardly surprising that student learning was seldom mentioned.

Clara was quite blunt when talking about who might benefit from IPS status, saying, "I would like to think the students." When asked to explain, she remained vague and was not able to provide concrete examples of improved student learning experiences other than the ability to offer more alternative programs:

> If we have the freedom to make more choices and to offer them more programs, then we can cater for them a lot better.

Likewise, Camila sought to link flexibility around administration and staffing decisions with student learning:

> I think ultimately the kids. Because if we've got a leadership team and staff team who are happy with the decisions being made around staffing and timetabling and money, then it does obviously impact on the kids.

Christine also claimed that students would benefit from enhanced autonomy over staffing:

Well they get the right person in front of them in the classroom. It's got to happen in the classroom. So … yeah it's the kids.

During the second round of interviews I endeavored to more explicitly pursue the question of who benefited from IPS by identifying principals, teachers, and students to draw out whether students actually gained anything. Carol first spoke of the benefits to the principal by having a wider representative and set of views on the school board:

For the principal? I think one of the most important ones is the school board. You get the school board right. You get the quality of people on the board, it really gives you a perspective, which I guess has a difference from education. You know what I mean. So you can actually listen to a whole range of people and their thoughts around … but for example I've the CEO from [local] Commission, [local] Development Commission. And so our last meeting around her was that she explained all around the blue print for Casuarina. And where that looks in terms of industry etc.; so then we had conversations around what does that mean for the school. We've got [inaudible name] from [local name] University so then we have conversations around low-SES kids getting into higher education. It helps me shape my thinking I guess with that variety of different conversations.

Christine this time around offered a more considered response in terms of the benefits for the principal:

Making decisions based on the school context. And local context. My opinion is that the principal will have more control over the finances, staffing, and direction.

In terms of her own role as the deputy principal, Christine was keen to link greater flexibility and control over administrative matters with student learning:

Well I do the staffing and I guess I've been here for seven years so I know the school, I know the area. And like the principal I respond to the needs of the kids absolutely. So I can … I have control over the selection of staff at the school. Whereas before it was you know from the department. And people were just

placed regardless. So I have a lot of control over that. I was doing timetable as well. And a very good understanding of the needs so I do the selection, the interviewing, get to know them and their stuff for the applicant to see if they actually fit the context. That's a big thing.

Clara also focused on flexibility in financial management as one of the major gains for the principal:

I guess the benefits are around sort of flexibility for the principal in decision making regarding finances and staffing and things that you're able to do within the school. Yeah.

Camila reinforced the commonly held view that the principal's role and authority were greatly enhanced:

I think that the principal has a bit more autonomy than previously. Particularly in the selection of staff. And that of course benefits the students. If we get good staff our students benefit.

For Camilla, the main benefit involved having "better staff [teachers] to work with." In her words:

I guess it's just a knock-on effect from the decisions that a principal makes. I think the teachers have got a strong voice here. When they're able to go to the principal and go "I've got this idea." If she can make it happen she's very responsive to it and has the flexibility to change things around and move pots of money or whatever. And make it happen so…

While Carol supported Camilla's views about the benefits of flexibility for the leadership team, she added that teachers also benefited by gaining permanency:

I think teachers, as I think I pointed out to you before, was all about the way we marketed the fact we were IPS. And so I think it's … is it one of the main things

that is beneficial to our teachers? Does IPS do that? Or is it other things? I'm thinking being an IPS school they get permanency because a hard-to-staff school there are probably some other things. I think though that they … though that's just the leadership team. I think the other thing is they are aware that we manage our own resources. They are aware of that and so I have a conversation with … if you need anything to do your core business, you lets us know so we can actually look at our resourcing to make sure that happens. Which I suppose is that awareness.

Christine expanded by arguing that teachers felt more 'in control' under IPS status:

I think that teachers feel that they … there's the capacity to have more control over what's going on in the school and what happens with the money. So if they have something that they are passionate about and it fits within the direction of the school then we can go "yeah, that's great, let's run with it."

When it came to students, her response referred back to the school gaining greater control over staffing:

Students, well I'll go back to the staffing I guess because I … the students it's all students centered so I'm very aware of what the students need. So it's about me selecting the right people for the kids. Making sure that I've got the right person standing in front of them in the classroom. So that is a big thing.

Unsurprisingly, Camila also claimed that students benefited because the school could now select appropriate staff. This view was shared by Clara when she spoke about the benefits of the school employing "passionate teachers":

Same thing really. Just that if you've got passionate teachers who have ideas that they want to be inventive with their curriculum or want to run different programs or if they want to change timetable or that kind of thing and the principal has the powers to do that. Then it just has that knock-on effect where the principal can

make it happen because she has flexibility; got teachers coming up with ideas and they're able to run with it. Then the knock-on effect with the kids as well.

At both Acacia and Banksia, the participants were able to speak quite explicitly about the potential benefits, whereas at Casuarina I had to dig a little deeper at the second interview to obtain more detailed responses. However, ultimately the same trend arose around the school gaining the capacity to employ suitable staff and gaining autonomy from the centralized bureaucracy.

### 7.3.1.3 Creating a Unique School

At Casuarina participants struggled to identify any discernable new capacities or changes attributable to IPS status. At both Acacia and Banksia there was a clear view that the schools gained the capacity to employ staff independent from the central bureaucracy. At Casuarina, Camila's initial brief response appeared to dispel any misconceptions. In fact, when asked whether there were any new capacities, she simply responded, "No." I then asked whether IPS status was used as a vehicle to drive change in the school. I wanted to tease out whether there were any new capacities now available to the school:

> I don't see that the changes we're trying to effect here in this school are necessarily the result of IPS. A lot of the pedagogical changes and improvements that we've been putting into this school have been changes borne out of need. And those are the changes as you mentioned that can be done without IPS. Things like rebranding and all that, maybe IPS has given more freedom. I'm not a hundred per cent sure about that. I agree that a lot of stuff could have been done under just about any system. If you want to improve a school, there shouldn't be anything stopping you. I'm not convinced that IPS has given us much more freedom than that.

Carol's response to a question about new capacities was a brief negative, "No." This meant the questioning moved to probing about possibilities, with Carol observing that IPS was being used by "some people" as a means to generate change:

> That's what started the change yes. Well … yeah. I guess that's when I sort of came in and did all school improvement around it; probably started more with the national partnerships funding. That's probably where it really started. But then I used the IPS … but when we actually achieved the IPS I made this big song and dance and had a big assembly and all that. And I definitely can say that. I say now well I'm accountable directly to whatever and that we're very open, we're transparent. It's all up to us etc. etc. you use it as a…

In this second response, Carol was stating that recent changes in her school were initiated by another program, *National Partnerships*, and that IPS occurred at a later date and was therefore not linked to changes.

Clara was also circumspect about the development of new capacities that could be attributed to IPS status. In her words:

> To be honest I think this school's pretty unique. And it's had good principals in the last few years who have, I wouldn't like to say fought the system but have got the department to come in and you know this doesn't work for us. Whereas it works in other schools and we've kind of had the ok to be a bit more flexible with our programs and things.

Her response attributes any changes that had occurred in the school to leadership rather than the IPS policy itself:

Christine, in contrast, believed there were definite gains in terms of greater control:

> Feeling? Yes I do. I feel that we have more control of the school. That we're not you know dictated to in a sense. That we have the control of directing our school

in the way we want to. Which again I go back to the response to the needs of our kids. We know our kids. I know this community. I know these kids, I know the parents, I know what they want for their kids. I know what these kids want. I think I am the best one to make the judgement around the staff that come into the school; how the resources are used. For me I have a sense, a personal sense that I am more in control. I've had staff I guess—it comes back to staffing—I've had staff come into this school that I would not and we would not have chosen to put in front of our kids. You can do that. Would not have put them in front of our kids. And it's gone pear shaped and then the resources in the school are sucked up because you are in damage control because someone made a decision without knowing the context of the school. Without knowing the kids. Without knowing all the other dynamics that are in play. And that is frustrating. It is time consuming. And its damaging to the kids.

In this detailed response Christine focused on staffing. In fact, when asked about staff driving change she was unable to provide an example, instead stating that new capacities were used by the school leadership to promote change.

From these interviews, it was apparent that apart from perceived new capacities to staff the school separate from the centralized bureaucracy, respondents were not able to clearly identify any other capacities gained from IPS status. This was consistent with the other sites.

**7.3.2 Negative Effects**

*7.3.2.1 Increasing Accountability at all Levels*

At both Acacia and Banksia, school leaders consistently identified the negative impact of IPS status on workloads for senior management. Therefore, it was surprising that participants at Casuarina only mentioned workload intensification fleetingly. In fact, the respondents struggled to find an adequate answer to the question about workload.

For example, I tried to get Carol to identify who might benefit least from IPS status. She indicated there were increased levels of accountability. That accountability was to the Director General, the school board and teaching staff.

Carol was fairly blunt when asked about who she was accountable to: "the Director General", was her total response. This implies that she and by default the school remained firmly linked to the central authority. I asked who else she was accountable to. She replied frankly, "I guess the school. And the board." This led to a question inviting her to describe how she went about demonstrating that accountability:

So well when I meet with the board once a term, I usually meet them twice a term I use the resource budgeting … whatever on the system. Which has got some really great graphs I also share that with the leadership team. I do a financial … you know … review I suppose for the board and for staff. I think you become more accountable to staff and the community as opposed to … I think that's more of a driving force, is our accountability within ourselves.

She was then asked how she specifically demonstrated accountability to her teaching staff:

Oh well … things like the 360-degree feedback. I haven't actually received that back yet. I think it closed today from memory. So I've done that. And surveying the community. Things that exist already I suppose.

I then asked Carol a question about mechanisms she used to demonstrate areas of need for students:

Well we do the budgeting at the end of the time, but it's run through the business plan. And so you've got the priorities through the business plan and so we have six priorities; for example our first one is all around improving quality teaching and the quality of the teaching within the classroom. And so we then have to look at

what does that look like. We want to create collaborative groups; we had to sort of change the times of the school day to make sure that we leave staff with time. What PD [professional development] we want to bring in for the improvement for that. That's sort of how we do that. Discussions with the leadership team. So we have the leadership team.

Christine was able to elaborate in more detail on how accountability mechanisms operated across the school:

Ok so we have employee performance, exec we catch up once a week. So we're accountable to each other. Debrief on our portfolios. We have a Level 3 exec meeting once a fortnight. That's where we do check in, check out, what's going on for each of us. Oh we do the … we haven't done it for a while the walkthroughs of the classroom; you know that the teachers are still following through with things that we're doing around the school. They're the main things that come to mind.

I sought to identify how particular areas of need were identified through these accountability processes. Carol referred to a particular example whereby:

Often it's a response to something that's going on. So we've had some issues around a particular cohort and grew and that's how this agency idea has developed. Yeah generally it's responsive.

In the context of school performativity I was keen to know whether statistical data were used to identify areas of need. Carol stated:

Yeah data … how else? It might be that a teacher is passionate and has something that they would like to…

However, she then went on to explain how in reality staff consensus tended to be used to identify areas of need and where resources should be focused, as she explained:

Consensus yep. Lots of conversations. And we did a lot of work with staff last year around reaching consensus. That's how we…

When I asked Clara similar questions concerning accountability mechanisms she at first baulked, seeking clarification as to whether I was asking who was accountable to her, or to whom she might be accountable:

Both ways? So I have one of the deputies is my line manager. So I'm accountable to him in the first instance with regard to any issues relating to my year group. And my responsibilities are engagement programs. And then I have six people that I line manage. Who I hold accountable for things like the attendance in their classes, the progress that the kids are making in class. Silly little things like kids in their uniform. And stuff like that. I support them in the term, so providing resources or professional development that kind of thing.

I also asked her about the types of data used in the school to demonstrate accountability. She explained:

Well at the moment we're using SIS [Student Information System]. We've just invested in a new system called Role Marker that will hopefully help us. There's a few glitches. SIS can be quite cumbersome to use. So we're kind of hopefully improving practice there. It's not just if kids move from one percentage to another. But it's things like has the homeroom mentor recorded the reasons why they've been off, have they been in touch with home. So that we've got the accurate codes in the system. So, kind of getting down to that nitty gritty.

Camila was very particular in her response, as she preferred to describe accountability in terms of different stakeholders:

I'm accountable to students and their parents. I'm accountable to my principal. My line manager. I keep documentation to back up what I do. And to keep track of what I don't do as well. I use the data from students' results; their outcomes. And I have discussions with people in administration, with my colleagues to get

their feedback on what I'm doing. Because my staff also hold me accountable. Or I feel that I'm accountable to them. So, I get feedback from them. Which in turn makes me behave differently if necessary.

I then invited Camilla to describe the types of information she utilized to demonstrate her accountability and "behave differently." She explained:

Discussion, I find discussion is very useful. People tend to be quite honest in discussions. I think they're a little bit more fearful sometimes of putting things in writing. For fear that it might come back to them. But casual friendly discussion sometimes over a cup of coffee; I find that's quite useful. And that gives me information that I want. Because you can often tell if people are being honest or not. And when I ask for honest feedback you know verbally people often give it to you.

Beyond discussion, I wanted to identify how she used more formal kinds of data in decision making:

We use a lot of the NAPLAN data. And that informs at least some of our planning. Individual teachers keep track of their students and that's data that we look at as well. Because I don't want to use just NAPLAN. That's one way. I think that teachers' professional judgement with their students is also important. So the marks and the grades that they allocate are important. And what we're doing at the moment is starting to develop processes for moderation within the learning area. We haven't had a great deal of that but we're working now and there's an agreement among us that that's what we're here for so we're developing common assessment tasks. We're doing that collaboratively regularly on a weekly basis. And once those start operating, once we start using those we're going to come back for moderation processes. And I can see we're just going to keep improving and getting better. Because we haven't been very good at that.

The responses to my questions about negative effects associated with IPS status revealed increased workloads through intensified accountability mechanisms. That

accountability was to the Director General, the school board, and other staff in the school through line management. Accountability was also used to identify areas of need in the school and as such could be considered responsive to some environmental factors.

### 7.3.3 Creating a Friendlier School Environment

While there were no discernable changes to pedagogy as such, school leaders talked a lot about a more friendly school environment. When invited to respond to questions regarding differences between pedagogy in IP and non-IP schools, Clara was unable to specify distinctions:

> It's always been very kind of inventive and flexible anyway. So me personally I would agree with what you're saying; in that IPS—does it make a difference or not? On the ground I couldn't say for sure. Carol's probably the only one who could tell you for sure that it's made a difference to her but we've always been quite … yeah quite inventive.

I asked whether it was possible for her to discern a noticeable difference in pedagogy. She responded, "No not particularly. Not directly related to IPS I think." This led to me asking whether teachers at Casuarina were using IPS as a mechanism for driving pedagogical change. She answered:

> Not specific to being an IPS school no. I wouldn't say so, not on the ground level today as a teacher, no.

Camila was also asked to describe whether there were differences between IPS and non-IPS pedagogies. Initially she was reluctant, pointing out that the school was still in the early stages of IPS:

It's a bit early. We've only just gone to IPS so we're going to need a bit more time for our data to come in.

Shortly after this she spoke in abstract terms of a "feeling" the school had changed and was somehow different to non-IP schools:

Yes, the feeling out there in fact this was commented on recently by a relief teacher who came into the school who used to work here years ago. His comment was it was such a friendly environment here in the school; that the kids were very friendly; the kids were no longer fighting about having to go into the classroom. They were coming into classrooms. A comfortable feeling between staff between students. And for those of us who've been here for a while we're starting to feel that change as well. It's a nice place to be.

Following up on the theme of a more friendly school environment I asked Christine to describe improvements in pedagogy that occurred as a consequence of IPS status:

Well we did a lot of work on um what's going on in the classroom. And did a lot of PD with staff; got them to focus on one thing at a time. Bringing all these strategies into their classroom. One of the biggest changes now that there's consistency from classroom to classroom the same thing is happening, the same process happening in the classroom. And the same language is being used. So a student can go from one learning area to another and they'll be doing similar things. So that's been one of the big changes. The classrooms are calmer. There is a focus on learning; not so much on the behavior.

Again, it seems school leaders struggled to identify concrete pedagogical changes related to IPS status. I went on to discuss with Carol whether IPS status enabled the school to challenge existing paradigms:

I think … I don't know that IPS has done that Iain. I think even still if I go back to what change management is really about the urgency around low SES, its more about the low SES I think because we had that partnerships meeting, we had we

193

sort of our original plan grew from … and we got extra funding around that. So IPS then made it … it's almost like we can do this it's more like a how do we feel about ourselves. I think that staff go because we're an IPS we can do this. I hope that they have that understanding that because we're IPS we can do things our way.

Although Carol was unable to make any explicit connection between IPS and pedagogical changes she did note that one-line budgets and funding afforded the school an opportunity to bring about changes. She believed that IPS status provided staff with an opportunity to look at things differently.

### 7.3.4 Feelings of Uncertainty

Finally, Casuarina participants were asked to project the potential direction of the IPS policy. Some expressed uncertainty about where they felt the policy was heading. As with Banksia, some of the participants hinted that a two-tiered system could emerge in the future. Carol's response dwelt on the direction the DoE was taking in managing government schools:

> I think I guess it's what the department wanted. That there was actually for there to be increased belief in public education I suppose. And I think we've certainly used it like that. Believe in us because we've got this IPS and what have you. And I think they're actually saying principals and schools' leadership teams can operate schools to the needs of your kids. It's more effective because they are those things. So again I just think it's symbolic.

Carol reflected on whether or not IP schools had gained additional new capacities, but believed this was not the case; it was largely symbolic. Carol went on to explain what might happen to those government schools without IPS status:

My belief is they'll change processes and systems so that they aren't disadvantaged. I hope that they would. So I don't think it's going to be an ongoing…

The reference to "ongoing" by Carol was about the continuation of the IPS policy. While Carol hinted at a two-tiered government education system, she also stated her belief that the centralized authority would ensure non-IP schools were not disadvantaged. In her view, there were many "good parts" to IPSs, especially related to one-line budgets and staffing:

Well already they're doing the one-line budget. And that's the next phase. Who knows what the funding is going to look like. Or what pockets of money are going to be there. I mean you could say things about staffing and the redeployee and that. But I think all schools have … like in My School for example the new system now around because of hard-to-staff school. Before you could be here for two years and you get permanency but you're not attached to the school.

Again, she appeared to be reflecting on differences in capacities between IP and non-IP schools and stated that the supposed advantage of one-line budgets—which were originally exclusive to IPSs—were currently available to all government schools anyway. She also appeared to be stating that while staffing might be a benefit for IP schools, those without IPS status were equally capable of staffing their own schools.

Christine shared similar uncertainty about the future of IPS policy:

I'm not quite sure where it's going next. I don't know if … I don't know what kind of other flexibilities they want to give the schools. I don't know. What will it do for us? I just think that the flexibility has meant that you know the staffing is getting the right people in front of the kids.

She spoke of flexibility and then tended to drift back to staffing as a benefit from IPS status. When prompted further however, she went on to comment about the potential of a two-tiered government education system when she spoke of a possibility that non-IP schools may be forced to take on staff who might not be suited to a school's context:

Dreamt one of the great, the big fears I guess concerns that I've heard in conversations with other staff at other schools that are non-IPS is that they don't have choice. So redeployees. Yeah the lack of choice. So they're not getting … they're not getting the best people for their school.

When asked about where IPS might lead, Clara tended to be rather ambiguous, speaking instead about her own school:

Um it's my understanding, I'm not 100% sure, being an IPS school you get the review process every three years. Is that correct? Yeah. I think in terms of accountability for the school that would be good. I think that … and to be honest I've only been here for four years and this is my only school so I haven't had experience in other schools in how other things run and work completely but certainly in the last couple for years since we had the review before we became IPS and we got all the data back that says the recommendations. You know this needs to happen. There's definitely been a more focused drive on specific things. So then when we come to review that again I think it's the end of next year I think we'll be three years; it will be good to see what difference it's made.

Certainly, she appeared to speak about benefits from schools gaining IPS status because of high levels of accountability to the centralized bureaucracy. Clara went on to explain her thinking:

Well again I'm not 100% sure but if you don't have IPS you have less flexibility with your staffing you have to … like we can pick from different pools whereas non-IPS don't. So I guess you could be concerned if you weren't an IPS school

that you might get not to be offensive but the bottom of the barrel with teaching staff. All the redeployees. So I guess that's a concern for all non-IPS schools.

Clara held a perspective similar to that of Christine in that she perceived staffing to be a hurdle that might be faced by non-IP schools in the future.

Camila provided an interesting perspective. Rather than focusing on where IPS was heading for government education, she chose to talk about the motivation of the centralized bureaucracy in implementing the policy, linking that decision to attempts by the department to cut costs:

> I've wondered about it actually … because I see it as a financial thing that the department may find it cheaper to run schools this way. That's my thinking and I could be wrong. It's just what's sitting in my head because I can't think of any other reason for it. I think it does give the opportunity to get better staff. But then bear in mind we're a sort of school where staff is hard to get. So it may not benefit us to the full extent. We're still out of the way. We're still … we still have a reputation that we're trying to defend and change. So that's impacting on us as well.

Camila acknowledged that schools without IPS status were struggling and "chugging along. As they have before." She speculated that non-IP schools might become "dumping grounds" for unwanted staff:

> But then the schools that I have in mind already were a bit like that in the first place. But yes a dumping ground is something that's I suppose is a reality for that. You do have to put those staff somewhere if they're permanent, although I wonder about the future of permanency.

While participants shared a common sense of uncertainty about the future impact of IPS, there was general agreement (for a range of reasons) that there were potential problems to address. Carol hinted at the potential for a two-tiered system when talking

197

about some schools being disadvantaged. Camila's description of non-IP schools becoming potential dumping grounds for unwanted teachers also appears to hint at a two-tiered government system. Christine spoke of disadvantage although this was in terms of staff being permanently attached to schools and having little opportunity to shift sites. Additionally, Clara picked up on this thread of staffing, suggesting non-IP schools might employ "bottom of the barrel" staff.

## 7.4 Conclusion

This chapter, similar to the two preceding, has been divided into emergent themes. It discussed the context of the school in terms of why it could be considered low SEI. There was also discussion of volatility in the playground. Carol described a sense that it was unsafe; staff were disillusioned, and the community was disengaged. However, she also spoke of how the school had improved. Christine also discussed the school being "difficult," with a regular turnover of leadership in the period preceding Carol. She too stipulated the school had transitioned onto a "better" school catering to the needs of students. This was followed with background stories of the participants to provide the reader with a more three-dimensional perspective of them.

Discussion of benefits that might be gained from Casuarina gaining IPS status dwelt on assertions that students' needs were being addressed through greater flexibility. However, it was difficult for participants to clearly articulate those flexibilities. Instead, it translated to gaining the capacity to employ staff. In particular, Christine spoke of the need to have teachers suited to working with students of Casuarina. She suggested that under a centralized staff placement system, the school had experienced difficulties through inappropriate individuals being placed at the school.

Answers to questions about the negative effects from IPS status focused predominantly on increased levels of accountability to the Director General, school board, and other staff. This inevitably led to perceived increased workloads, particularly for the senior leadership of the school.

Questions surrounding who might benefit from IPS status tended to elicit responses about the capacity to staff the school. This would, according to participants, result in better programs for students. The focus on the school gaining this capacity along with attaining greater autonomy from the central bureaucracy were common threads between responses. Such autonomy however, is illusionary.

Some responses dwelt on IPS as a means to create a friendlier learning environment. In addition it was claimed that having a one-line budget allowed flexibility to address the educational needs of students differently. However, further probing revealed there was little difference between pedagogy in IP and non-IP schools.

Finally, participants were asked to project the IPS policy into the future. There was some discussion of the potential for a two-tiered government education system to emerge. According to participants, this would result in non-IP schools becoming residualized. Other participants felt that eventually all government schools would gain IPS status.

# Chapter Eight

# Discussion

## 8.1 Introduction

This chapter deploys a more dialectic engagement between theory and experience than was described in the previous three chapters. Drawing on the experiences of participants described in Chapters Five to Seven, a number of emergent themes, questions, and concerns require critical analysis. A central argument of this thesis is that Lyotard's (1984) notion of language games and differend provide a powerful set of explanatory tools with which to comprehend the introduction of the IPS policy in WA. In this task, I opened up in-depth conversations with school leaders to get up close to their experiences to better understand how policy is enacted at school level and with what effects in the broader landscape of neoliberal language games. I also refer to the work of Ball (2003) around performativity as a disciplining mechanism in constituting individual identities as they relate to school leadership.

To recap my arguments so far, Chapter Two explored the background to the IPS policy in the context of a broader global shift to the ideology of neoliberalism (Gobby, 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Sahlberg (2011) describes this interconnectedness as GERM. The chapter also drew similarities between logics of autonomy across three contexts, (US, England and Australia), but such autonomy was set against high levels of centrally imposed accountability mechanisms (Keddie, 2016).

Chapter Three described the theoretical origins and usefulness of language games to provide an explanatory framework for the lived experiences of IPS leaders in low-SEI government high schools. In this context I argued that theory is helpful to the extent

that it enables me to disrupt common sense perceptions of the move toward government school autonomy in WA. In particular, I draw on Lyotard's (1984) notion of language games and the differend as key theoretical tools to better understand the experience of school leaders. In this context I now turn to Ball's (2003) understanding of performativity to explain the pressures impacting on IPS leaders as they confront a range of performative measures especially around standardized testing. Importantly, this conceptualization differs from Lyotard's (1984) exploration of performative utterances. I argue that performativity involves increasing levels of accountability managed from a distance by the state through the DoE.

Marshall (1999) argues that performativity is a comparatively "ugly" phrase. Lyotard (1984) asserts it is a significant part of the postmodern condition. As such it is a "game" with no pertinence to "truth" or "beauty," instead being concerned with technical moves linked to efficiency. In education, performativity does not address educational ideals. Instead there is a predominant focus on how education can contribute to the efficiency of the social system. Leaders across the sites felt pressure to produce performative data. This provides further evidence of the extent to which the three sites were firmly located within the neoliberal language game.

I argue that the neoliberal language game has pervaded educational policy discourses to the extent that it has now become the common sense way in which individuals interpret and act in the world around them. Foucault (2008) claims the concept of homo economicus within the neoliberal paradigm, altered from an individual who seeks to exchange to one who competes. This means the individual becomes an entrepreneur of self. In an IPS, teachers compete for employment and the school competes for

funding and students. This can be achieved through numerous mechanisms such as marketing and attaining performative goals.

My aim in this thesis is to understand how these broader dynamics play out in the lives of school leaders in low-SEI IPSs where success is largely based around high stakes testing regimes such as NAPLAN, Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA), and ATAR. This places overt pressure on leaders to focus on utilizing 'economic' tools such as statistical analysis to build data-driven school communities (Male & Palaiologou, 2012). While school leaders are offered the promise of greater autonomy to lead, in reality decisions are bounded in accordance with official policy mandates and requirements (Gunter, 2005).

Chapters Five to Seven reported the experiences of participants to provide insight into the enactment of the IPS policy. Drawing on this evidence, I identified a range of similarities and some differences across the three school sites. These findings were grouped into emergent themes organized around potential benefits, negative effects, perceived changes to pedagogy, and reflections on the future of the policy.

Building on these data, the purpose of this chapter is to engage in what Lather (1986) describes as "dialectic theory building," whereby "data constructed in context are used to clarify and reconstruct theory" (p. 267). Putting it another way, building empirically grounded theory requires "a reciprocal relationship between data and theory" (p. 267). In pursuing this task, I turn to the prime emergent themes from Chapters Five to Seven. This chapter examines neoliberal language games as a kind of meta-narrative surrounding all facets of the IPS policy and leadership in government schools. Another logic easily discerned is supposed flexibilities around employing staff. A key argument in my thesis is that autonomy is illusionary, which is why the recentralization of

accountability is addressed, followed by the terrors of performativity. A section on reshaping educational leadership enables me to critique corporate managerial approaches. This is followed by a section on image and marketing, which leads into discussion as to what schools can actually do differently as a consequence of the policy. Following this discussion chapter, the thesis then shifts to providing a conclusion and summary of the major findings.

## 8.2 Neoliberal Language Games

The term homo economicus is used in this thesis to illustrate how neoliberal language games constitute the self. The neoliberal homo economicus represents a fundamental disruption of democracy. In liberalism, exchange forms the matrix of society. However, within the neoliberal language game there is a distinct shift from exchange value to competition between individuals (Foucault, 2008). The shift appears to be subtle but is significant. A central argument of this thesis is that the IPS policy enactment across the three sites coerced schools into acting predominantly as competing business units. Under such a regime, individuals are not expected to work cooperatively but rather in competition. What we witness then is the attempt by individuals to strategize for themselves rather than the common good (Dilts, 2011). In this sense, the promise of greater autonomy is in fact a sham as school leaders are compelled to compete against each other and in doing so, are complicit in governing themselves as enterprising individuals (Smyth, 2011).

In considering the research question addressing how the participating school leaders understood and experienced the IPS policy implementation in their contexts, it is necessary to recognize how the notion of homo economicus operates within the neoliberal paradigm. Foucault (1988) argues such an individual is more governable

because they become the embodiment of this form of homo economicus. Given strengthened accountability mechanisms linking classrooms to the central bureaucracy, such an observation appears substantiated. Dilts (2011) argues that the neoliberal homo economicus enters into a mutual relationship with the governing body. Within the neoliberal language game, the power of the governing body appears to become less restrictive. However, this occurs against a backdrop whereby there is a commensurate increase in the limitations of possible actions by the individual (Nealon, 2008). It can be argued that respondents across the three sites experienced the IPS policy through the neoliberal language game and as such became entrepreneurs of self. Within this language game, notions of public good, rights, and reasoned debate become increasingly eroded. The respondents did not necessarily work collaboratively, but instead strategized in terms of self-interest (Dilts, 2011).

Foucault's (1988) reconceptualization of homo economicus within the neoliberal language game implies that everything these respondents needed to achieve their ends could be understood economically through the calculation of cost/benefit. This means the labor of respondents becomes redefined as human capital whereby wages/promotion are attained through the individual utilizing their skills. Andrew spoke of IPS as presenting an opportunity to market the school and be competitive. Certainly, there were commonalities from the Acacia respondents concerning a shared perception that IPS status enabled competition. This is in apparent opposition to working collaboratively with other government schools. When considering the neoliberal homo economicus these similar responses are examples of individuals strategizing in terms of self-interest, as described by Dilts (2011).

Homo economicus has come to be embodied by participants such as Brenda. This became apparent through her discussion of personal professional benefits she gained from IPS status. In other words, she discussed becoming an entrepreneur of self as she believed she acquired particular skills. If this is the case, then it is also possible to argue she and others across the three sites are more governable. To demonstrate success, such individuals produce performative data. Although the central bureaucracy's power appears to be less restrictive, it is also evident that control is maintained through performative data. It can also be argued the illusion of less restriction occurs in an atmosphere whereby there is an increase in limits placed on potential actions by individuals (Nealon, 2008).

It is argued above that respondents' choice of langue indicates the extent to which they were immersed in the neoliberal language game. Further, it is argued such immersion provides evidence of the extent to which respondents came to embody neoliberal homo economicus. At Casuarina, discussion of staffing provided such evidence because the perceived capacity to select staff free from the central bureaucracy enabled greater competition through better quality teaching. Camila spoke openly of staffing capacities, as did Clara. Christine used the metaphor of gaining the capacity to run programs different from other schools. Carol spoke of funding and staffing. Casuarina respondents made similar statements in terms of gaining the opportunity to compete with other schools. Thus, the emphasis was not on collaboration with other schools but individual .

The neoliberal homo economicus does not value exchange, instead it seeks to compete with others (Read, 2009). This also means that governing bodies (such as DoE), to ensure conditions under which the market can continue must foster in

individuals those personal facets associated with competition. Everything the human does (or does not do) can be understood economically. Calculations become reduced to cost against benefit. Participants, through the language of competition, indicate the extent to which the neoliberal homo economicus is embodied. Participants in this research made regular statements across sites in terms of the school gaining particular attributes (e.g., better quality teachers, flexibility, one-line budgets) to help them compete against other schools and thereby gain greater market share.

## 8.3 Justification: Selecting Good Staff

The primary research question asks how school leaders understand, experience, and respond to the implementation of the IPS policy. To address this question I interviewed school leaders at three school sites to better understand the key logic and reasoning behind their thinking. Consistent across all sites was the view that the school principal would have greater control of staff appointments and this would lead to enhanced school performance and ultimately student learning, although there were nuances expressed by participants.

Drawing on Lyotard, I argue that the language game constructed around the logic of staffing benefits was evidenced by parallel semantics across the sites. This involved regular statements around staffing and IPS. In particular, the language used originated from a neoliberal discourse whereby staffing benefits would supposedly bring greater efficiencies to the three schools as less time would be used addressing poor teacher performance. Additionally, the three schools would become more competitive as better quality teachers would ensure improved student results. Succinctly, the participants spoke of costs and benefits in terms of improved school performance as a consequence of having control over staff selection.

At Acacia, for example, there were consistent similarities between participants in terms of the perceived staffing benefits from IPS status. For example, Aaron stated, "Yeah the staff selection I think." Abraham claimed, "I've been able to manage to hire my own staff." Andrew insisted, "One was the staffing benefits."

At Banksia, participants also focused on staffing as the prime justification. Beverly claimed, "You know we get to choose our staff, instead of Silver City [DoE] sending people." Barbara claimed that, "IPS allowed us the fact that we wanted certain staff and we weren't willing to accept anyone else." Bethany was equally adamant: "and getting the balance right. So staff was an issue." Brenda also argued, "I see IPS as a benefit to quite isolated rural communities that struggle to get staff in." However, she also asserted she gained professionally:

My biggest ticket item in an IPS is for me personally for my own personal professional growth has been the governance structure of the board.

Casuarina participants also dwelt on perceived staffing benefits from IPS status. Camila spoke of innovative programs and changed structures, which she attributed to the shift. Similarly, Clara claimed, "certainly with getting the right staff for this school. So now we have IPS we have that bit of sort of flexibility now." Christine's response was more detailed, but focused on staffing: "I lived staffing before IPS. So felt really restrained in what I could do." She then specified, "Not everyone wants to work in a school like ours. There are special people that work here." Carol too was adamant staffing was a core justification for seeking IPS status. She argued, "it's so good in terms of our staffing profile and looking at the way we do that." A similarity in response occurred between Brenda and Carol as both perceived benefits for principals as an additional justification. Carol stated, "I think the other thing is that the principal actually

impacts … you see the overall lay of the land." Given regular statements about staffing from participants, the logic of autonomy over staff selection provided a powerful justification for seeking IPS status.

However, as Wittgenstein (1953) points out, like everything metaphysical, harmony between thought and reality can be found in the grammar of language. Within language games, nothing is stable as even when meaning is supposedly fixed, the symbols used are no more than a way humans have decided to speak and write (Wittgenstein, 1953). The rules of any language game are neither right nor wrong (Woodward, 2006). Lyotard (1984) claims members of a community develop ways of speaking that serve the specific needs of that community. This he identifies as a language game. Such language games do not carry with themselves their own legitimation, but are instead a contract between players (Lyotard, 1984). Woodward (2006) cites Lyotard (1984) to claim language games are predominantly political in nature. I do not argue that the participant statements cited above are the sole example of a neoliberal language game at play across the three sites; rather, they represent a mere iteration of that language game. When considering how school leaders in low-SEI government IP schools understood the implementation of the policy, I argue such an understanding came about through the lens of a neoliberal language game and the ways in which it constituted individual identities of participants.

A second key logic centered on personal professional development and career opportunities presented by IPS status. For some participants, like Brenda and Carol, the perceived benefits of IPS revolved around individual benefits in terms of their own career advancement. However, while these responses did not speak predominantly about staffing benefits, they still fell within a neoliberal language game. Both spoke of

governance and in so doing alluded to improved efficiencies. It can also be argued these responses form part of the entrepreneurial culture that is celebrated and fostered within neoliberal language games. Staff are reconstituted as competitors. This reconceptualizing of homo economicus is addressed later in this chapter. A further logic at play here is the capacity to 'weed out' underperforming teachers. There are ultimately winners and losers.

Harris (2007) argues that the neoliberal paradigm pervades to the extent it is perceived as the 'common sense' approach. Participants' claims around staffing can be viewed as an iteration of the pervasiveness of the neoliberal language game. Across the three sites, participants went to lengths to claim localized solutions to staffing simply made sense, or 'common sense.' Further, teachers—in having to apply and interview for limited positions in IPSs—have become entrepreneurs of self. To remain employed, teachers have to compete against each other. Such a situation is considered evidence of the neoliberal homo economicus. Read (2009) argues the reconceptualization of homo economicus within the neoliberal paradigm results in individuals who become entrepreneurs of self. Foucault (1984) asserts such an individual becomes more governable. At the three sites, because there were such levels of competition, employed individuals could be considered as having entered into a mutual relationship with the governing body (Dilts, 2011).

Notions surrounding competition do not apply only to teachers competing for positions. Participants also spoke of the need for their schools to compete with others for students. At Acacia, Andrew openly argued about the need for his school to compete with private schools and perceived IPS status as a means to achieve this. According to Ball (2003), education has become re-rendered as a cost-effective policy outcome.

When responding to questions concerning the justification for the three sites pursuing IPS status, regular statements from the participants indicated that a primary benefit of IPS status was the capacity to select and appoint staff independently of the DoE central bureaucracy. This provided evidence of a neoliberal language game across the sites. Such a language game has pervaded to the extent it is perceived as the 'common sense' approach.

## 8.4 Recentralized Accountability

The 'I' in the IPS acronym stands for independent; thus it might be assumed that schools with IPS status would gain a level of autonomy. However, respondents revealed that the central bureaucracy maintained firm control through accountability mechanisms utilizing performative data. Andrew in discussing accountability provided a direct link to the Director General. Similarly, Adam spoke of the workplace pressures he felt from accountability mechanisms. Although both HOLAs approached accountability from a different perspective, it was evident they too felt pressure and there were direct links to the central bureaucracy.

The term 'steering at a distance' refers to those mechanisms used by governments to give the appearance of autonomy while at the same maintaining control (Hartley, 1993; Smyth, 2003; Ball, 2006). In doing so, it seeks to preserve the liberal ideals of individual freedom but set against utilitarian goals measured through performativity. However, performance goals set by the state are not always in the best interests of the individual (Hartley, 1993). At Acacia, for example, participants were very clear that the apparent shift to IPS status resulted in an intensification of accountability mechanisms to the DoE. These were directly linked to DoE priorities and policies such as annual focus documents and DoE tri-annual strategic plans.

Ozga (2009) asserts that devolved government education has been accompanied by a commensurate reinforcing of control mechanisms. These include performative information that schools might use to "self-evaluate." Such levels of performativity have, since the 1990s, been linked to supposed objective and depersonalized data (Ozga, 2009). Although claims of the data being objective might be made, there is an inexorable link between such data and the authority of central bureaucracies. Self-assessment provides the illusion of shifting away from centralized control. However, those things to be measured remain within the purview of the central bureaucracy. Ball (2003) terms this the "field of judgement."

IPSs such as those in this study undergo rigorous tri-annual reviews. This includes the use of performative data from student results in standardized testing such as, NAPLAN, OLNA, ATAR. Any sense of autonomy is purely illusionary. Processes of self-evaluation do not disguise insidious constraining mechanisms. Accountability through producing performative data is a fundamental component of the neoliberal language game. Therefore, the systemic pressures from the DoE to be accountable through performance is a further example of the extent to which these three school sites were firmly located within the neoliberal language game.

As a consequence principals are compelled to demonstrate success though achieving performative goals. Gunter (2011) argues leadership in government schools has been narrowly defined as a specific set of performances with individuals held accountable. Producing a performance allows the individual to demonstrate their worth to the needs of the larger educational system (Meadmore & McWilliams, 2001). Certainly, at Banksia it was evident that IPS status resulted in an intensification of accountability with performance clearly linked to the central bureaucracy.

Beverly was explicit about accountability, describing a linear process with teachers held accountable through performative data to their line manager, who was in turn accountable to the upper management of the school. It is significant that she went further in describing accountability links between the principal and central bureaucracy. Further, it can be argued that the discernable link between the school and the central bureaucracy, through the production of performative data, reflects the notion of steering at a distance described earlier (Smyth, 2003; Ball, 2006). Certainly, there was the illusion of autonomy through a raft of self-evaluation processes. However, these self-evaluation processes were at the behest of the central bureaucracy (Ozga, 2009).

For participants, this kind of accountability involved various mechanisms, such as Carol's experience of the 360-degree feedback approach, whereby selected staff answer a series of survey questions on the performance of school leaders. This information is not only used to monitor school leaders but constitutes their sense of self about what it means to be a leader. While this process of self-evaluation seemed useful at one level for the individual when pressed, Carol believed it was used to demonstrate accountability to the central bureaucracy. She expressed the view that the feedback approach relied on a narrow range of performative data to demonstrate accountability. My argument is that school leaders are constituted in particular ways within the bounds of neoliberal language games. Particular managerial versions of leadership are valued, while alternative educative possibilities are devalued. In other words, in the neoliberal language game leadership is constrained through a series of narrowly defined performance measures linked to specific indicators of school improvement (Gunter, 2011). Across the school sites, performance in standardized

testing such as NAPLAN, OLNA, and ATAR was identified as a pivotal measure of worth for school leaders and the school itself.

Despite the rhetoric surrounding IPS status to act autonomously and change pedagogy, the lived experiences of the participants across three sites indicates otherwise. Accountability requirements linked each site to the central bureaucracy in stringent and limiting ways. Performative data required by the DoE to demonstrate success served to limit autonomy and types of leadership possible.

## 8.5 Managing Schools Through Performative Terror

In the preceding section I argued that participants demonstrated a sense of worth of self and the school through accountability regimes emanating from the central bureaucracy. I have also argued that performativity is a characteristic of the postmodern condition (Lyotard, 1984). Part of that language game involves maximizing the efficiency of outputs and inputs (Niesche, 2012). In this section I argue that these regimes are used to manage or steer schools from a distance.

Perryman (2006) claims performativity is about performing the normal within a particular discourse. In a performative regime, schools and those who work in them are considered successful when/if externally established criteria are attained. For the participants, performativity was firmly engrained into all facets of working at the three sites. For example, Andrew spoke of performative data in the school business plan. Similarly, other participants at Acacia described accountability mechanisms utilizing performative data to link the classroom to the central bureaucracy. Performativity provides a further indicator of the extent to which participants were embedded within the neoliberal language game. In fact, Abraham spoke glowingly of the value of

establishing performative targets, and working toward them. This suggests the neoliberal language game had become accepted as the common sense approach to school leadership at the three sites examined in this study.

In supposedly devolved education systems there is a commensurate reinforcement of control mechanisms utilizing externally dictated performative data (Ozga, 2009). Control over the field of judgement remains firmly within the central bureaucracy (Ball, 2003). Principals and other school leaders in this study led through utilizing performative information as an accountability strategy. This resulted in leadership across the three sites becoming narrowly defined as a series of performances of individuals to demonstrate worth (Gunter, 2011).

Brenda bluntly described the production of performative data as "huge" and pointed to increased tensions generated by these data being more public and personal than at non-IP schools. Similarly, Beverly used the term "huge" to describe pressures she felt from performativity. She also linked her performance directly to the central bureaucracy. In specifying performative data, she made reference to externally dictated measures such as ATAR and NAPLAN. Both Brenda and Barbara mirrored the responses of their colleagues in discussing distinct pressures in an IPS to produce performative data. Carol simply stated she was directly responsible to the Director General for performative data as was the school. Similarly, Christine, Clara, and Camila linked a range of performance data directly to the central bureaucracy. Thus, while IPSs used the rhetoric of autonomy, intensified pressure to attain externally dictated performative goals directly forestalled any real autonomy.

The use of performative data across the sites linked them firmly to the central bureaucracy, as it was the bureaucracy that ultimately set those performative goals.

Leadership in the schools was in turn linked to attaining those goals. I argue that leadership in these schools was diluted to a narrow set of performances as these respondents (and their subordinates) were held accountable for those measures of school performance (Gunter, 2011). In essence, the worth of the individual in a larger government education system can only be demonstrated through particular kinds of performance (Meadmore & McWilliams, 2001). The rhetoric of IPS dealt with autonomy. However, intensified demands to perform as indicated by respondents across the sites reveals there were clear restrictions on what was possible.

## 8.6 Reshaping Educational Leadership

I argue notions of leadership have been reshaped and this occurs in several main ways. First, there is an emphasis on performative data as a means to drive the behavior of leaders. Second, leadership has been reconstructed around corporate language of business plans, one-line budgets, and staffing profiles. Third, there is the emergence of capability frameworks that use generic terms to describe 'good' leadership.

In recent times, we have witnessed the emergence of a leadership industry based on the discourse of new managerialism (Gronn, 2003). In education, leadership is a contested term among researchers. For example, there is transformative, distributed, collaborative, and informal leadership among others. In this study, leadership refers to those in formal positions, such as the participants in this research. For principals, the emphasis of their work has shifted from educational leadership with a focus on fostering effective pedagogy, to a focus on corporate governance (Niesche, 2010) as evidenced by the participants' stories around the use of increasing levels of accountability and performative data.

Aaron spoke of setting performance-based targets and, later, the use of business plans, describing the principal's role as similar to that of a business manager. Andrew spoke of the need to market his school through generating an image of competitiveness with other schools. Adam spoke of performative data as the driving force for school change. Consistent statements by Acacia participants focused on corporate governance, as opposed to effective pedagogy. Such statements provide evidence of the extent to which leadership at Acacia was constructed predominantly on the principles, values, and strategies of corporate governance.

Further, Brenda explicitly spoke of governance addressing pressures she felt to align the school business plan and budget. She also worried about matching budgets against staffing needs. In other words, staff are viewed as expendable budget items that need to be weighed against the financial needs of the school. By this logic the reduction of staff to monetary value (dollars) is symptomatic of the neoliberal language game and indicative of the extent to which school leaders like Brenda are re-purposed around largely instrumentalist and technical versions of leadership and corporate governance.

Foucault (1977) argues that under neoliberalism, the individual is measured, compared, and described in comparison with others. This then allows those individuals to be corrected, classified, normalized, and/or excluded. Barbara described the importance of business planning and one-line budgets as she endeavored to justify and prove the worth of particular educational programs. The reduction of people to objects, a focus on corporate governance, and the lack of discussion of pedagogy function to inhibit the likelihood of creating a more progressive democratic vision of school leadership in contemporary times

In the SMS, numerous 'taken for granted' practices serve to rationalize levels of self-management (Niesche, 2010), including annual reports, accountability frameworks, and submissions. Such actions consequently reduce schools and their principals to administrable objects (Niesche, 2010). Given common responses across the sites, we see evidence of how participants embodied these dehumanizing practices in ways that limit possibilities for a different kind leadership (Gunter, 2001). This leads to narrowly conceived and instrumentalist 'truths' about the school and principal (Niesche, 2010). It also perpetuates a hierarchical approach to leadership in which power is stratified into those who lead and those who follow (Gunter, 2001). As a consequence, there is an emaciated view of leadership defined in terms of enforcing rules, routines, tasks, and behaviors.

Nowhere is this more apparent than Brenda's observation about the necessity of schools having a business manager cognizant of one-line budgets and "maximizing flexibilities," which provides an indication of the extent to which leadership has been colonized by the neoliberal language game. Semantics around corporate governance was evident across the sites. Christine spoke of budgetary considerations and financial management with a particular focus on principals gaining greater financial control as a form of governance. Camila's response mirrored that of Christine as she spoke of monetary flexibility and the use of performative data to inform strategic decisions. Carol openly compared her functions to those of a CEO when describing budgeting and the school business plan.

Studies of educational leadership often drift into discussion of activities concerning what those leaders should or should not do in terms of 'managing' schools. It becomes a largely technicist version of leadership, which fails to imagine alternative possibilities

of school leadership (Vennabo & Ottesen, 2011). Those in school leadership positions have become conflated to the extent that they are perceived as the 'rightful' translators or 'deliverers' of policy determined by those most removed from schools. Such views bestow the principal with status, power, and resources to enact policy at the school level (Vennabo & Ottesen, 2011).

In addition, the recent emphasis on performative mechanisms across the social services has resulted in the development of leadership standards and competencies through capability frameworks (Niesche, 2012). These types of standards remain the field of judgement by which leadership and teaching are measured. At their core, schools remain as mechanisms through which teachers labor and student participation can be organized (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008).

As a consequence, schools become even more bounded by the vision and practice of leadership construed by the central bureaucracy (Niesche, 2010). Rather than gaining autonomy the school, through governance processes, becomes more controlling.

## 8.7 Image and Marketing

There is a great deal of rhetoric asserting that IPS status can improve pedagogy, but compelling evidence has yet to surface. The propensity to support such rhetoric has been described as "market glitterspeak" (Smyth, 2011). According to the official rhetoric about the benefits of IPS status, schools would be empowered to "develop the right responses to the reality of their needs and challenges at the local level" (Barnett & Constable, 2009). I argue such claims are illusionary especially, as they relate to improving pedagogy and learning outcomes for students. Instead, the IPS policy has deflected school resources "into costly marketing and image self-promotion endeavors

in an attempt to capture 'market share' in the context of dwindling central resourcing" (Smyth, 2011, p. 113).

At the initial interviews participants spoke overwhelmingly in positive terms about their schools. Andrew went to lengths to claim his school was located in a middle class aspirational area, despite evidence to the contrary. Brenda spoke of her school providing opportunities and Christine discussed how her school had become a calmer place. Responses such as these might be described as participants arriving at a fitting performance. Such responses reflect what Ball (2003) describes as "fabrication," where truthfulness is not the point. Rather, institutions like schools are required to fabricate particular truths for market appraisal, comparison, and/or inspection. While often with the best intentions, the participants genuinely believed such truths were a necessary part of the school's positioning in the market and their own professional identity and commitment. Hence I use the term fabrication cautiously. The use of the term does not imply any dishonesty. It is a mnemonic. Ball (2003) uses the term "fabrication," while Smyth (2011) uses "glitterspeak." Both are interchangeable as they refer to the rhetoric used to generate a particular version of the truth.

Organizations produce a range of possible representations that can be described as glitterspeak or fabrication. These are written into existence through performative texts using appropriate signifiers. Such representations are predominantly driven by priorities established by a policy environment (Ball, 2003). IPS policy documents argue that creativity and determination would emerge in IPSs, leading to improved educational outcomes. Glitterspeak of organizations such as schools is a version that does not exist, yet it is not 'outside the truth.' Instead, it is purposely produced to be accountable (Ball, 2003). It is significant to this thesis that fabrication and glitterspeak

become embedded to the extent that other things not fitting the accepted version are excluded.

The IPS prospectus claims IPS status enables schools to "deliver the best educational experiences for their students" (DoE, 2009). In light of this claim it might be expected that the study participants would be able to articulate how classrooms and pedagogy differed from non-IP schools and how students benefited in terms of learning. Andrew spoke of IPS status as an opportunity to make decisions free from the central bureaucracy. This was mirrored by Adam. Bethany claimed her school had become a good school, and Barbara talked of students gaining access to improved facilities. However, participants notably were unable to substantiate their claims.

Further evidence of glitterspeak came from Beverly, who claimed that staff were willing to experiment but was unable to substantiate this view. Carol also spoke of gaining the capacity to be creative as she believed the current curriculum was stifling. However, when asked for specific examples, she was unable to provide any. Clara claimed her school was "different," and Camila discussed the school being unique. Beyond these general claims there was little evidence to substantiate this difference and uniqueness. In fact, across the sites, participants made varying claims of their particular school being in some way superior to other government schools; however, there was a definite disparity between claims and evidence. Smyth (2011) argues there is a staggering lack of evidence supporting the claims of the proponents of school autonomy that it produces better educational outcomes for students.

One prime motivation for seeking IPS status lay in seeking to improve community perceptions of the three sites. The three principals during their initial interviews used synonyms for 'school image' at least 18 times. This particular focus on image, as

opposed to improving pedagogy, provides tangible evidence of how glitterspeak functions to promote the school's market share. Andrew put it well when he stated that IPS "provided status for us in the community. We were very much about marketing."

Regular statements by participants about IPS status improving the image of the three schools appear to corroborate Ball's (2003) claim that schools are encouraged to differentiate themselves from one another, to stand out and improve themselves. We can see evidence of how leaders across the three sites were involved in re-imaging a new reality. Notions of re-imaging remained a substantial facet in decisions for the school leaders pursuing IPS status. Each of the principals openly discussed how IPS status provided opportunities to alter existing perceptions of their schools. Carol did not want Casuarina to remain a "residual" school. She stated IPS was about improving the reputation of her school. She further reinforced this during the same interview by describing how she spoke at a whole school assembly where students were told their school was now of similar stature to other schools because of IPS status.

Brenda described how the school board attempted to actively alter community perceptions of the school through marketing strategies. She claimed to have deliberately brought in expertise in marketing. The regularity with which these different leaders across each site spoke of image reinforces the view that it was a crucial factor in pursuing IPS status. Once that status was achieved, respondents believed the status of their individual schools had improved.

I assert that there is a great deal of rhetoric about improving the quality of education through government schools becoming self-managing, but little compelling evidence that such improvements have occurred (Smyth, 2011). Simply declaring a school is better as a consequence of IPS policy does not make it so.

## 8.8 Workload

This research has attempted to identify some of the potential negative aspects of IPS policy from the point of view of participants. At both Banksia and Acacia, there were similarities of experience while Casuarina offered some additional insight and differences around the negative effects of IPS policy. Respondents at Acacia and Banksia discussed increased workload as a major negative effect of IPS status. Andrew stated, "so the principal, the responsibilities and workload for the principal increases." Adam concurred, claiming "the principal's responsible for everything. Everything that happens can go wrong. You live and die by the sword on that account." At Banksia, Bethany discussed pressure she attributed to accountability mechanisms from differing stakeholders. In particular, she spoke of the school board pushing certain agendas and the pressure this generated for the school leadership. It should be noted that although Brenda spoke of an increased work tempo for herself, she also spoke of potential pitfalls.

When analyzing supposedly meritorious policies, it is essential to exercise suspicion according to Apple (2009). In fact, he advises such policies might contain intent that is contradicted by the policy reform's function in practice. Terms such as 'flexibility' and 'flexibilities' are dispersed throughout the policy documents to the extent that one might assume government schools with IPS status gain greater flexibility. However, statements from participants at two of the sites about increased workload (and such workload being attributed to performative data collection and accountability) appear to contradict assertions about flexibility.

Unlike those at Acacia and Banksia, Casuarina participants did not refer to increased workload as a negative effect of IPS status in the first round of interviews. However,

this does not mean pressure to produce performative data was not felt by this school's leadership. In later interviews increased levels of accountability and the work pressures this generated came to the fore in ways that reinforced control from above (Niesche, 2010; Ozga, 2009). Such views support Niesche's (2010) observation that the SMS is still under the gaze of centralized power. He cites Smyth (1993) to argue the restructuring of education has resulted in a focus on managerialism, performativity, efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. In other words, schools and school leadership have adopted competitive business practices whereby children are constructed as customers (Niesche, 2010).

## 8.9 What Can Schools Really Do?

Given the regularity of statements around performativity, accountability, and an unchanged pedagogy, it was apt to invite respondents to discuss any new capacities to emerge as a result of IPS status. I use the term 'new capacities' to refer to anything the school was able to achieve that it could not have as a non-IP school It includes things like altered pedagogy, alternative structure and timetabling changes. While participants did not use this particular expression it provided a way for me to understand how school leaders reasoned about the advantages of IPS status and how they imagined themselves being different and innovative. Both Collier (2013) and O'Neill (2013) argue that IPS status was founded on the assumption that schools would be empowered to shape themselves according to local needs, priorities, and circumstances. The notion of 'shaping' implies that IPSs should be able to work differently and in this context generate a new set of capacities to enhance pedagogical practices. Herein lies the core logic of the school autonomy movement.

However, it was evident during interviews that participants almost unilaterally were unable to provide examples of these new capacities. For them, the notion of new capacities largely centered on staff selection as the prime motivation. At Acacia, Abraham claimed, "the whole freedom from my side of it … is staffing." Aaron too identified staffing as the key capacity gained by his school. While Adam believed there were no differences in the operation of his school, Andrew identified the new resource funding allocation or one-line budget as a major and significant advantage for the school's capacity because it provided some additional flexibility.

Responses from Banksia mirrored the other schools; in particular there was a focus on the advantages of staff participants. Beverly spoke openly of central bureaucratic mandates that made it impossible to have control over staff selection. When asked about whether there were any new capacities attributable to IPS status for Casuarina, Carol provided an unequivocal "no." There were regular statements across the three sites concerning new capacities, but these dealt mainly with staff selection processes rather than any inherent ways of doing things differently.

As Ball (2015, citing Foucault, 2010, p. 64) explains, freedom is illusionary because it entails "limitations, controls, forms of coercion and obligations relying on threats." Based on the experiences of the participants described throughout this thesis, there were tightened accountability mechanisms linking the school to the central bureaucracy through performative data. Principals of IPSs are compelled to sign performance agreements and undertake tri-annual reviews. Ball (2015, p. 5) argues the state establishes "the conditions of possibility for a market in all sorts of serious statements" but uses the illusion of freedom. Niesche (2010) suggests although the discourse of independence and self-management are used along with the rhetoric of

participation and democracy, the ultimate result is a further centralizing of power. Restructured government education has simply shifted the emphasis from socio/political processes to a focus on managerialism, performativity, efficiency, and accountability (Niesche, 2010). Within WA the IPS policy has transformed the educational landscape. However, rather than schools gaining new capacities and freedoms as suggested in policy documents, there has been a tightening of controls over IPSs.

## 8.10 Conclusion

This chapter has endeavored to connect responses from preceding chapters to the theoretical framework, linking back to the research question. At its core, this thesis attempts to explain tensions experienced by government school leaders between educational ideals and neoliberal pressures. Their reaction to the IPS policy provides the lens through which to analyze those responses. Additionally, it is possible to assert there has been a perceived increase in neoliberal influence on government education especially since 2000. . I argue such influences have been evident in WA much earlier and can be traced back to the mid to late 1980s as part of a set of wider global travelling policies (Browning, 2002).

I take on board Apple's (2009) warning that we must be vigilant and suspicious about supposedly meritorious policies that contain contradictory functions in practice. Certainly, the IPS policy appears to provide greater autonomy and flexibility to government schools to the extent that the term 'flexibility' is interspersed throughout it. However, this promise has not been born out, according to the statements of respondents across the three sites.

In the case of the IPS policy I have argued that participants' experiences must be located in the broader context of neoliberal language games or, as Foucault (2008) refers to it, homo economicus. These individuals were so deeply entrenched in the neoliberal language game that it became incorporated into their 'common sense' interpretation of the world around them. As such the respondents altered from individuals who seek to exchange to individuals who compete. This was particularly evident at Acacia where Andrew spoke openly of competing with other schools. At each site teachers competed for employment while the wider school competed for funding and students. It should be noted that under such a regime the neoliberal homo economicus enters into a mutual agreement with the governing body (Dilts, 2011).

A central argument of this thesis relates to the ways in which neoliberal language games and the differend can be deployed to comprehend experience. Lyotard (1984) argues that narratives of legitimation are appropriated by various institutions within their own language games. Narratives of legitimation in education are located within the wider logic of neoliberal ideology, which is reflected in the ways in which schools have been re-cultured and restructured by the central bureaucracy around a set of corporate values and practices. As such the IPS policy ultimately originates from within that narrative. Part of this narrative involves performativity. Consequently, the policy has ultimately increased pressure on IPSs and those within them through performative measures. In this thesis performativity refers to the state government through the DoE exerting control over teachers, leaders, and schools through requirements to justify themselves through performative data. This has been described as controlling the field of judgements (Ball, 2006; Smyth, 2003). Thus, the IPS policy represents an increase in authoritarian control by the central bureaucracy. Hartley (1993) claims governments feel compelled to limit the extent of the welfare state, but use mechanisms to make

those affected complicit. Such a discourse maintains the liberal ideal of freedom but is set against utilitarian goals, particularly the use of performativity.

Perryman (2006, p. 150) claims performativity can be considered "performing the normal within a particular discourse." At the school level this can mean lessons are taught in a particular way, and various school documents and policies reflect such a discourse. Under such a regime schools, and by default those who work in them, are deemed successful to the extent that they attain externally established criteria. There is little scope for teachers and schools to stray too far from what is expected. Ultimately they exist within a discourse that is expectant of a particular ideology and pedagogy. Given this understanding, questions of respondents around pedagogy and freedoms were moot.

A central contention of this thesis is that school leadership has become predominantly focused on performance inspired through managerial regimes of control. Schools are judged on student performance in high stakes areas such as NAPLAN. This places pressure on school leaders to use a range of economic and business tools such as business plans, performance targets, and outputs to build data-driven communities (Male & Palaiologou, 2012). The principal becomes the 'authorized' person to make organizational decisions. Although it appears the principal has the mandate to lead the school, they only do so according to official policy requirements (Gunter, 2005). Education, according to Ball (2003) has become re-rendered as a cost-effective policy outcome.

# Chapter Nine

# Conclusion

## 9.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to explain how school leaders understand, experience, and respond to the IPS policy enactment by studying three school sites in low socio-economic school communities in Perth, WA. In addressing the phenomenon of local school governance, the thesis pulls together a number of key threads. Theoretically, it draws on Lyotard's (1984) notion of language games and differend to help illuminate the daily decision making of school leaders and the ways in which their beliefs, values, assumptions, and actions are constituted by a broader set of neoliberal discourses in a culture of performativity. Methodologically, the thesis is located in the tradition of critical inquiry, specifically CPE, to reveal the experiences and sense making of school leaders. Practically, the thesis attempts to provide an alternative reading of those everyday celebratory accounts of the IPS policy that seem to dominant the policy landscape. Providing spaces for voiced research of this kind plays a crucial role in unearthing the realities of school leaders as they grapple with a host of disciplining practices driven by the values of market forces and neoliberal jargon.

In this concluding chapter, I return to the five guiding questions as organizers for the chapter. As such it is divided into four sections to address the following research questions:

1. What key neoliberal logics underpin the decision to become an IPS?
2. How do school leaders describe those logics?
3. On what basis do they make decisions?

4. What effect do these decisions have on the cultural, pedagogical, and organizational aspects of schools?

Following this, I return to Lyotard's notion of differend to discuss alternative possibilities and discourses, as well as some final observations.

## 9.2 What Key Neoliberal Logics Underpin the Decision to Become an Independent Public School?

A central argument of this thesis is that the rhetoric of the IPS policy has been driven by a set of neoliberal logics. As discussed in Chapter Two, neoliberalism is characterized by free market fundamentalism, privatization, individualization, reduced government spending, and a shift away from government involvement in welfare provision. These neoliberalizing logics provided fertile ground for the emergence of the IPS policy. WA DoE strategic planning documents from the 1990s onward borrow heavily from these broader neoliberal language games (Lyotard, 1984). For instance, the *School Education Act 1999* embeds many neoliberal policies and practices such as liberalizing catchment areas, meaning that parents are no longer compelled to enroll their children at specific government schools. The act also encourages competition, standardized testing, and local selection of staff (Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2012). In fact, corporate managerialism has become the dominant way of thinking about education as the language of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, audits, strategic reviews, mission statements, and business plans now permeates the vernacular of official policy documents. I argue that the push toward devolutionary processes and in particular the IPS policy can only begin to make sense in the context of these wider neoliberal logics.

In this context, the IPS policy can be perceived as a de facto shift toward privatization and free market fundamentalism in which schools are pitted against each other for market share. While these moves provide the illusion of loosening the control of central bureaucracies over IPSs, the reality is very different as accountability and performance regimes are tightened. Gobby (2013) argues the IPS policy problematizes the [then] existing government school system in terms of principals lacking the capacity to make fundamental decisions in response to the local context. This led to the WA state government seeking to use market mechanisms to generate competition through the policy. Further, the policy was an attempt to reduce spending by making IPSs responsible for key budget expenditure including facilities, staff, and contingencies through a one-line budget (DoE, 2009). Prior to the policy the central bureaucracy was responsible for managing significant portions of school budgets, procurement, recruitment, and employment (Gobby, 2013). However, with IPSs taking on significant parts of these management functions, the need for a large bureaucracy decreased, thus achieving efficiencies by shifting costs to IPSs. My interest is to understand how these broader neoliberal dynamics play out in terms of the decisions of school leaders wishing to achieve IPS status.

When considering how leaders across the three sites arrived at the decision to pursue IPS status, respondents almost uniformly cited selection of staff, increasing market share, and improving the image of the school. Factors such as these, it has been argued, represent key neoliberal logics. Aaron was succinct in stating, "Yeah the staff selection I think." Barbara directly reflected on unsuitable staff at her school who had been placed by the central bureaucracy, and the damage she perceived this had caused. She then used this to assert that gaining the capacity to staff the school was sufficient justification for seeking IPS status. Christine too provided site-specific

examples of gaining the capacity to staff her school. Andrew spoke of being able to "control" the type of teachers within the school, ensuring those employed were reflective of the ethos, image, beliefs, and value systems of the school.

During interviews, there was almost universal acknowledgement that the capacity to staff IPSs was a key difference between them and non-IPSs. At Acacia, participants spoke of gaining this capacity, with Adam stating, "You know you can pick your good staff and that sort of thing." Such statements reinforce the claim that participants perceived the capacity to select staff as a pivotal reason to pursue IPS status. This was mirrored at Banksia where Bethany identified staffing capacities as a key structural difference. Brenda claimed staff professionally benefited from being selected to work within her school. She also asserted staffing capabilities resulted in improved pedagogy, although she was unable to provide an example. Casuarina was no different with Christine stating:

> So I felt really restrained in what I could do and who I could have … Now I can go through the process and select and find the person to suit our context.

Carol too spoke of this issue: "It's about you know … it's so good in terms of our staffing profile." In considering any organizational difference between the three sites and non-IP schools, participants believed a key difference lay in the capacity to select their own staff. However, the human cost of this has resulted in staff being more easily compelled to operate in particular ways. Such a realization juxtaposes with notions of autonomy.

In other words, the justifications advanced by school leaders were deeply mired in neoliberal language games that became the common sense approach to the phenomenon of local school governance (Harris, 2007). In particular, the perceived

benefits of having control over staff selection fit comfortably with the neoliberal notion of flexibilization and casualization in contemporary workplaces. Indeed, the freedom to select staff was a key motivation of most school leaders interviewed in this research. It was viewed as a significant difference, even a badge of honor, because it allowed them to distinguish between IPSs and non-IPSs in the market place. School leaders went to great lengths, therefore, to claim that localized staffing solutions were simply common sense.

Given the focus on staff selection and the use of merit select processes to employ staff, those employed in the schools were compelled to compete for employment. Read (2009) asserts that the preoccupation with the notion of homo economicus as the primary organizer of social and economic life produces individuals who, through competition, are constituted as entrepreneurs of self. Foucault (1984) argues these individuals are therefore more governable through self-disciplinary processes and a mutual relationship with the governing body (Dilts, 2011). In simple terms, those employed across the three school sites could be more easily persuaded to conduct themselves in particular ways as self-governing subjects.

Overwhelmingly the school leaders in this study claimed the capacity to select staff was a positive experience to emerge from IPS status. However, the centralized staff placement system became largely redundant with all government schools gaining the capacity to merit select staff. Ironically, the Director General of Education through the *School Education Act 1999*, retains the authority to place any staff member within any government school, including those with IPS status. Since the interviews were conducted, the DoE has asserted its authority to compel IPSs to consider staff recommended by the central placement system, including re-deployees, prior to

initiating any localized merit select process. In a situation where a candidate is recommended by the centralized system but rejected by the IPS, it is incumbent on the school to justify their decision. In other words, any benefits from localized merit selection of staff for IP schools are purely illusionary.

The other dominant logic was the capacity to improve the image of schools through IPS status. This took the form of participants perceiving IPS status as an opportunity to improve the status of the school within the wider community. Such a belief appeared to come from perceptions that private schools were of a higher quality than government schools, and IPS status enabled the schools to operate in a similar way to these private schools. One of the participants, Brenda, presented an alternate response by identifying individual benefits in terms of her own personal professional growth arising from IPS status. She understood the policy as presenting developmental opportunities. It was evident, however, that the policy was understood by most participants as a means to gain greater market share through altering the community image of the schools.

This section has sought to understand key neoliberal logics underlying decisions for the three schools to seek IPS status. In addressing this question, it is evident there were two key neoliberal logics used by participants. First, there was the perception of new capacity for school leaders to select staff through merit select processes. Second IPS status was seen as a means to compete in the market place to attract more students. The irony lies in a closer examination of the lived experience of participants. This research reveals these two logics are largely flawed; for example, the belief in merit selection of staff has been undermined by the Director General of Education who retains the capacity to place any staff member within any government school; and

autonomy remains illusionary as the tri-annual reviews with the use of performative measures ensure oversight of IPSs by the central bureaucracy.

## 9.3 How Do School Leaders Describe These Logics?

In addressing the ways in which school leaders described neoliberal logics, there were three dominant themes: workload, accountability, and performativity. Those who held more senior positions such as deputy principals and principals, spoke of their increased workload. In fact, Andrew was explicit in his response pointing out the increased workload for himself, but concurrently noting this did not translate to the classroom teacher level. Accountability mechanisms were cited as the predominant cause of increases in workload. For example, Adam stated, "It's a tough game these days. You're incredibly accountable. If everything's by the numbers, by data." These types of statements indicate the escalating levels of workload linked to accountability processes.

Rather than being responsible to a Regional Education Director who is responsible to the Director General, principals found themselves directly accountable to the Director General through tri-annual reviews. This in turn led to increased workloads (felt particularly by principals), with demands for the school to achieve system-specific performative goals. It has been asserted above that such levels of increased accountability directly contradict assertions that IPSs gain autonomy. Further, performative goals might not be linked to the best interests of students (Hartley, 1993). A commensurate reinforcement of control mechanisms is a common feature of the autonomous government school movement (Ozga, 2009).

In Chapter Three I argued that performativity is a characteristic of the postmodern condition (Lyotard, 1984). Part of this neoliberal language game involves maximizing the efficiency of outputs and inputs (Niesche, 2012). A performative regime means that schools and those within them are only considered successful when and if externally established criteria are attained. Across the three sites, performativity was firmly engrained into all facets of the schools. Such externally determined accountability mechanisms result in conformity to central edicts (Perryman, 2006). Although there may appear to be fewer restrictions on the schools, there is an increase in limitations of possible actions. Any new capacities autonomous schools might appear to attain are illusionary (Nealon, 2008).

The use of performative data favors a particular style of leadership, as individuals are held directly accountable to measures of school performance (Gunter, 2011). The value of each individual to the larger system is demonstrated through performance. The increased pressure on the three principals to demonstrate their worth through the performance of their schools was transferred down to deputy principal and HOLA levels. Each interviewee discussed the use of data within their areas of responsibility. It was clear during interviews that I was observing direct evidence of the 'datafication' of education in so far as only data were used to demonstrate performativity. However, this also means those facets of education where the collection of data is problematic do not form part of the performance. In other words, they are valueless.

Respondents spoke of their frustrations whereby they increasingly found themselves forced to make choices in the expenditure of financial and human resources. In the past, leaders could distance themselves as such decisions were made by the centralized system. For example, *Schools Plus* is a central mechanism to address

SAER needs through the allocation of resources. Under IPS, however, funding is allocated directly to the school, and the principal or their delegate decides how to direct those funds. Within such a neoliberal language game humans become reduced to parts of some broader formula. Those working within these schools essentially enter into a relationship with the central bureaucracy whereby homo economicus is reconceived (Dilts, 2011). This means there is a distinct shift where government schools compete with others for market share. Certainly, participants spoke openly of such competition. However, in allocating resources, there was a tension for participants in having to address the human face of their decisions. There was also discussion from respondents on their school's capacity to address the needs of all students, as ultimately pragmatic financial decisions had to be made. An example of this lies in the three schools seeming to allocate limited resources to the socio-emotional needs of students. This was contrasted with resources being directed to those areas capable of demonstrable improvement through performative data.

At Acacia, for example, Bethany described the double-edged sword of being accountable to the school board. She also spoke of "having to prove the worth of some things that other non-IPS schools just do." Brenda spoke of the continuous and rigorous nature of performativity and being directly accountable to the Director General. Similarly, at Casuarina, participants spoke of intensified workloads associated with providing performative data. These findings are consistent with those of international research. Ozga (2007), for example, argues that the policy move toward autonomous schools led to increased control mechanisms and inspectorial regimes in the UK. Performativity through the application of 'objective' data firmly linked schools to the dictates of central bureaucracy. As a consequence, the field of judgement about school performance remained under the control of the central

authority (Ball, 2003). While there were differing responses to questions about the effect of the policy on individual leaders, there were commonalities in the form of increased workloads. This was in turn directly linked to demands for performative data to demonstrate accountability to the central bureaucracy. Given this understanding it is problematic to claim the schools in this study gained any meaningful autonomy.

## 9.4 On What Basis Do They Make Decisions?

In making decisions about IPS status across the three sites, a key commonality apart from staff selection involved IPS representing an opportunity to alter community perceptions about the schools. IPS was touted by DoE documents as a panacea through which government schools could transform themselves to address the needs of students in an increasingly competitive market place (Barnett, 2009).

School leaders perceived IPS status as a means to convince staff, students, and the broader community that it was a vehicle through which the school could somehow dramatically change to enhance its public standing. This was, however, juxtaposed against the participants' views that very little had changed in terms of pedagogy. Questions about the justification for seeking IPS status revealed a generally held belief that IPS status would improve the standing of the school within the community. My central argument is that much of the neoliberal rhetoric to validate the IPS policy represents a form of 'glitterspeak,' whereby fabrications become embedded to the extent that other versions of truth become excluded (Ball, 2003). An alternative version of this 'truth' could involve the schools' standing in the community not altering at all. School leaders typically used the rhetoric or 'glitterspeak' of neoliberal school reform including independent status, merit selection of staff, market share, and innovation to

legitimate their own standing in terms of being a 'good' school compared with non-IPSs.

## 9.5 What Effect Do These Decisions Have On the Cultural, Pedagogical, and Organizational Aspects Of Schools?

One of the key arguments advanced for IPS status was that it would led to innovative pedagogy (O'Neill, 2013). Across the three sites, the school leaders were unable to identify any pedagogical changes linked to IPS status. Andrew was typical of most school leaders when he stated, "The teacher in the classroom on any given day is not a lot different." Bethany too was unambiguous, claiming, "Well there's no difference is there. I mean getting IPS, us being IPS has not made a huge difference at the classroom level." Clara was unable to provide specific examples, and Carol similarly struggled. Hence, when considering whether the hyperbole around IPS matches the lived experience, it is clear that the shift toward IPS status serves purposes other than pedagogical change.

Given the rhetoric surrounding the policy, which claimed government schools would become autonomous and gain the capacity to shape themselves to the distinctive needs of their students, it was anticipated that respondents may have understood the policy as an opportunity to act in autonomous, independent, and progressive educational ways (O'Neill, 2013). Instead, school leaders were only able to speak about their policy experiences in terms of workload intensification, accountability, and performativity. Andrew indicated that despite the rhetoric of increased levels of local autonomy, the reality was very different, as "stringent accountability mechanisms" were introduced. This sentiment was mirrored by Brenda, who claimed, "Sure, yep. Look in IPS the level of accountability is huge." Casuarina participants similarly spoke

of experiencing increased accountability. This experience of the policy is reflective of observations by Gobby (2014) that while schools were promised greater freedom from the central bureaucracy, they remained subjected to centrally administered mechanisms of performance monitoring.

Thus, the reality for IPSs was a significant shift of administrative responsibility and burden onto the school; in particular, the school leadership (Jacobs, 2016). As a consequence, school leaders within these schools had far less time to devote to educational leadership as administrative responsibilities consumed most of their energy. A fundamental goal of the IPS policy was to improve learning outcomes by empowering school leaders and teachers to shape the overall direction of the school, and in so doing create the conditions to improve student learning outcomes. However, as I have argued throughout this thesis, IPS is largely an illusion that ultimately serves to erode local judgements, and instead reinforces a managerial culture more attuned to neoliberal logics. While the DoE claims that IPS status improves student outcomes, the relationship between autonomy and results is at best nebulous (Fitzgerald, 2016). Education is multifaceted, which means it is difficult to attempt to link improved student results with a solitary action such as greater school autonomy (Jacobs, 2016). It is evident that despite claims by the DoE that the IPS policy would improve student outcomes; such assertions are not supported by the experiences of school leaders involved in this research.

## 9.6 The Differend

In this thesis, I use the term language games as a means to emphasize the extent to which neoliberalism has subsumed all else so that school leaders are constrained in imagining education and educational leadership in any other way. Lyotard (1984)

argues that the rules of one language game cannot be applied to another language game. This means the rules of the neoliberal language game that chiefly describes education in terms of performativity, efficiency, and optimizing the performance of the social system cannot apply to a different language game. An alternative language game might describe education in terms of creativity and a sense of social responsibility, democracy and social justice. Such a description could focus on good citizenship. When language games such as these come into contact there is an incommensurate conflict. Such a conflict cannot be resolved in fairness to both language games. This is what Lyotard (1984) calls a differend. It is argued the school leaders within this study are entrapped within the neoliberal language game and therefore find it difficult to imagine an alternative way of thinking and acting.

## 9.7 Further Implications of The Independent Public Schools Policy

The IPS policy was announced by the then Premier of WA Colin Barnett on 12 August 2009. He claimed it provided principals with the mechanisms to lead their schools and make decisions to tailor them for improved educational outcomes (Barnett, 2009). However, it is evident that the DoE chose high performing schools to become the first to gain IPS status. In other words, this act increased the likelihood the policy would achieve its initial objectives (Jacobs, 2016).

At the outset, all government schools were invited to apply for inclusion in the first intake of IPSs commencing in 2010. Over 100 applied, of which 34 were eventually selected for IPS status. Representatives from the DoE claimed the number of applicants was indicative of levels of enthusiasm for the policy. However, there is evidence high performing government schools were overtly encouraged to apply (Jacobs, 2016). Such actions, it is argued, increased the likelihood of the policy

succeeding as these high performing schools also had very capable principals (Fitzgerald, 2016). This meant these principals had more capacity to address school autonomy and sustain high performance under increased workplace pressures. It can be claimed, given this understanding, that the initial success of the IPS policy was the consequence of a manufactured situation.

Several participants spoke of the dangers of a two-tiered government education system occurring, with those without IPS status becoming residualized. There is evidence the policy and its implementation have exacerbated inequalities. In a 2016 report on the policy, there is clear recognition of the reinforcement of inequalities, along with the risk of strengthening a two-tiered system (Jacobs, 2016). This is illustrated by Brenda, stating, "I think … it's easier for some schools to get really good teachers … those ones who are just good at their jobs." Jacobs (2016) claims the autonomy to staff IPSs has added to this as non-IPSs are required to accept staff placed by the central bureaucracy who might not be suited to the context of those schools.

Opportunities for principals of IPSs to professionally develop are more targeted than those available to non-IPS principals. This, Jacobs (2016) argues, results in high performing schools continuing to improve while lower performing schools become increasingly residualized. Gobby (2013) argues that autonomous schools can further advantage students from privileged backgrounds while further exacerbating negative effects on students from low-SEI backgrounds, such as those in the schools in this study.

## 9.8 Final Observations

There are clear contradictions between the stated aims of the IPS policy and its enactment in the three schools in this study. Although the DoE claimed IPS status would enable schools to become more flexible, resulting in improved learning outcomes for students, any such flexibility has been counteracted, as is evident from the participants' statements surrounding the genuine tension they experienced through accountability performances prescribed by the central bureaucracy. These performances served as a means for participants to demonstrate the value of their schools and themselves within the wider government education system. It is significant that it is the central bureaucracy that controls the 'field of judgement' and as such it is that same bureaucracy that constrains flexibility within the schools (Ball, 2003).

There is evidence that the leaders in this study wanted, or needed, their schools to stand apart from other government schools in some way. Although each endeavored to be unique, there was a degree of regularity in those attempts to be distinctive, which in itself is an incongruity. The use of 'glitterspeak' was evident in the interviews as participants sought to focus awareness onto what they perceived to be optimistic facets of their schools, while glossing over the negatives. In fact, there was an emphasis on generating an image of their schools that would not be out of place in a corporate culture to the extent that teaching and learning seemed to be on the periphery.

An area of clear commonality between statements from participants was in relation to staffing. There was a belief that IPS status was a means for them to 'free' themselves and their schools from a centralized system of placing staff. However, legislation made it clear that ultimately decisions relating to staffing government schools were still held

by the Director General and therefore the central bureaucracy. Additionally, mechanisms prior to the introduction of the IPS policy meant that any government school could opt to merit select their staff. Thus, the autonomy purportedly associated with the staffing aspects of the policy were purely illusionary.

The specific language styles used by the participants are indicative of the pervasive nature of neoliberalism and the extent to which they were embedded within that particular language game. It is argued this neoliberal language game has permeated ways of thinking to the extent it has "become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (Read, 2009). It can be argued this level of pervasiveness has come down to the language choices to describe the schools and day-to-day activities. As such it is an example of the neoliberal language game at play. Language choices also appear to support assertions that "we are spoken by policies; we take up the positions constructed for us within policies" (Ball, 1994). The neoliberal language game is more than a mere alternative ideology; rather it is a transformation of ideology because of its conditions and effects. Ultimately it is linked to governing the individual through promulgating a specific manner of living (Foucault, 1982).

The interviews revealed that while the word 'independent' is within the title of the IPS policy, there was at best minimal autonomy; in fact, the performative pressures represented an obvious assertion of centralized control over the schools. Any perceptions of independence were purely fabrication. The participants were experiencing part of a larger neoliberal reality in government education in WA.

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