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Objects and subjects of risk: a governmentality approach to education governance

Andrew Wilkins[a] and Brad Gobby[b]

[a]Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London, London, UK; [b]School of Education, Curtin University, Perth, Australia

ABSTRACT

Across the globe school autonomy reforms have been criticised for opening up public assets to various dangers or risks, from misappropriation of public monies by private sponsors to secretive governance structures maintained by homophilic groups. While these risks are not the exclusive product of school autonomy reforms, they are an endemic feature of the conditions made possible by these reforms, namely 'depoliticisation', 'corporatisation', 'endogenous privatisation', and 'disintermediation'. In response international organisations and national governments have called for improved accountability amid fears of corruption and governance failure. In this paper, we take a fresh look at the existing literature on school autonomy through a unique focus on risk as a rationality of government. Specifically, we adopt a governmentality perspective of school autonomy reforms in England and Australia to capture the significance of risk to recalibrations of education governance.

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Introduction

Across the globe, there is strong support for decentralised education systems that transform the capacity of traditional government structures, namely local and district authorities, to run and manage publicly funded schools. A core design of decentralised education systems is devolution and the transfer or delegation of discretionary powers to school leaders and governors to pursue strategic and budgetary decisions unencumbered by local government structures. For national governments keen to 'disable or disenfranchise or circumvent some of the established policy actors and agencies' (Ball 2008, 748), namely the political influence of locally elected councillors and civil servants, decentralisation makes possible new kinds of spaces through which to extend the rule of central government, albeit at a distance and through the agency of new intermediary actors and organisations sufficiently removed from local government influence (see Wilkins 2016). The multitude of trends resulting from these reforms are too numerous to mention here, but suffice to say they include: 'depoliticization' or the subordination of politics to economic evaluations and technical achievements (Flinders and Wood 2015); 'corporatisation' or the 'relocation of decision making from representative institutions into corporate-controlled arenas' (Gunter 2018, 10); 'endogenous privatisation' or 'the importing of ideas, techniques and practices from the private sector in order to make the public sector more like businesses' (Ball and Youdell 2007, 14); and 'disintermediation' or

CONTACT Andrew Wilkins andrew.wilkins@gold.ac.uk University of London, London, UK

'the withdrawal of power and influence from intermediate or "meso-level" educational authorities that operate between local schools and national entities' (Lubienski 2014, 424).

On this description, decentralising reforms or 'governance' (governing without government, see Rhodes 2007) can be viewed in two separate ways. On the one hand, governance appeals to a utopian version of society in which state power is thought to be substituted by the strategic-rational interaction of service providers and stakeholders working collectively towards achieving different kinds of conflict resolution and bargaining that serve mutually influencing sets of goals and interests (Kooiman 2003). On the other hand, governance can entrench rather than displace state power as many networks and partnerships appear to develop through 'the shadow of hierarchy and coercion' (Jessop and Sum 2006, 378; also see Davies 2012) as ancillaries to government rule. In education, for example, the shift from government to governance has been accompanied by the rise of new techno-bureaucratic settlements that function as important relays for linking the formally autonomous operations of schools with the political ambitions of the state. These techno-bureaucratic settlements range from professional school governing bodies (Wilkins 2016) to charity and private sector school sponsors and managers (Hatcher and Jones 2006) and business models of educational leadership (Gunter and Forrester 2009), all of which assist with practices of 'roll-out neoliberalism', namely the 'construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations' (Peck and Tickell 2002, 384).

For international organisations like the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank, decentralised education systems are desirable because they improve quality and local accountability, where quality refers to performance efficiency and local accountability refers to 'allocative efficiency' (matching provision to need) or stakeholder governance (see OECD 2011; World Bank 2016). Yet despite support for school autonomy at both the international and national level, the evidence linking school autonomy to improvements in school performance and student achievement is uneven and inconclusive in some cases (see Jensen, Wiedeman, and Farmer 2013; Hanushek, Link, and Woessmann 2013). Moreover, school autonomy reforms have been criticised for exposing public assets to new kinds of financial and ethical risks. In England, successive governments since 2000 have made it possible for wealthy political supporters to enjoy 'philanthropic' control over publicly funded schools as separate legal entities called 'academy trusts' (a company limited by guarantee and exempt charity). A consequence of these reforms has been growing public concern with the ethical and financial risks associated with the transfer of discretionary powers to CEOs and executive teams to run schools as academy trusts, namely the ways in which some schools operate as uncontested policy spaces for the creation of opaque management structures that function independent of public scrutiny and community consultation. This has given rise to public cynicism and lack of trust in those services, evidenced by the numbers of parents and carers across England rallying against their schools' 'academisation', with protests in Essex, Kent, London, West Yorkshire, East Sussex, Dorset, Hertfordshire and beyond (Weale 2019; also see Hatcher and Jones 2006). To mitigate these risks, international organisations and national governments typically aim to balance school autonomy with 'hard regulation' (sometimes called 'rigorous accountability') in order to maintain and restore public trust in education services amid fears of opaque or corrupt governance structures (OECD 2011; World Bank Group 2016).

While the global scale and pace of school autonomy reforms are uneven owing to the unique path dependencies and value systems of different countries, the policy narrative used by international organisations and national governments to legitimate these reforms is a familiar one: school autonomy, realised through different forms of new public management, improves school efficiency and effectiveness through displacing the slow, cumbersome bureaucracy that characterises traditional public administration (Wilkins et al. 2019). Traditional public administration refers to the management of public sector organisations by state-employed professionals and elected officials. In education, these arrangements are more or less important to schools depending on the commitment of central government to full or partial decentralisation (Wilkins et al. 2019). For many national governments, traditional public administration lacks the kind of flexible and responsive structures that enable and incentivise service providers to tailor provision to local need. Borrowing from neoclassical ('supply and demand') and public choice theories (Dunleavy 1991), many national governments appear to agree that public service improvement is best achieved through the development of structured incentives based on choice and competition (Le Grand 2007).

A key focus of the existing literature on school autonomy has been to document (1) the relationship between school autonomy and school performance and student attainment (Steinberg 2014; Woessmann et al. 2009); (2) the capacity of school managers and governors to use autonomy to achieve specific outcomes (Neeleman 2019; Triant 2001); and (3) the impact of school autonomy on equity and social justice (Keddie et al. 2020; Liu et al. 2020). Taking a different approach to these issues, we document how school autonomy reforms produce certain effects that include an image of schools as risk environments vulnerable to abuses and accidents, including corruption and governance failure. The spectre of risk, we argue, emerges as a central rationality for recalibrating governance through improved 'professionalisation' and 'modernisation'. This includes, on the one hand, acting upon subjects 'so that the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed' (Foucault 1982, 790) towards risk mitigation; in other words, producing subjects who are cognizant of their role and obligations as bearers of risk responsibility and risk management. On the other hand, it means recalibrating governance as ancillaries to more entrenched forms of business ontology and market discipline, namely the insistence that schools are risk objects requiring improved calculation and prudent management by governance experts. On this understanding, school autonomy reforms can be viewed as expressions of a contradictory movement in which schools are granted freedom to govern themselves but only within a highly prescriptive framework of self-regulation; or, what Foucault calls 'introducing additional freedom through additional control and intervention' (Foucault 2008, 67). Risk, we argue, has become a framework of government for perfecting these methods of control and intervention.

Governmentality

According to Foucault (1982, 790), 'government' refers to

> legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection but also modes of action, more or less considered or calculated, which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to control the possible field of action of others.

On this definition, risk can be viewed as a rationality and framework of government with its capacity for 'ordering reality, of rendering it into a calculable form' (Dean 1998, 25). Power et al. (2009, 304) for example draw attention to the ways in which organisations like insurance and credit control companies make use of proxy measures to articulate hazards or danger 'as a social fact, as a "risk object"'. Similarly, Hilgartner (1992, 52) shows how 'risks are created, controlled and distributed' within technological networks made possible by communities of specialists and technical experts. Both Power et al. (2009) and Hilgartner (1992) are useful here for showing how certain operations and actions acquire the provisional conceptual identity of risk objects as a condition for their management and control. As Hilgartner (1992, 47) observes, 'the definition of risk objects can redistribute responsibility for risks, change the locus of decision making, and determine who has the right – and who has the obligation – to "do something" about hazards'.

On this definition, our adoption of the concept of risk differs from the 'risk society' approach of Beck (1992) where risk is understood as a reflexive confrontation with the consequences and costs of technological-scientific advances to peoples, infrastructures and the biosphere more generally. According to Beck (1992), risk – or 'risk society' – can be analysed as something endemic to the development of globalisation and its modernising processes, from technologically driven social connectivity to trade liberalisation. On this understanding, risk society is something spatially and ontologically unique to the development of modern or reflexive societies under globalisation since it captures the emergence and acceleration of events and dangers that exceed the calculations and control of pre-modern societies. In contrast to a risk society approach, where risk is seen as epiphenomena or effects of larger socio-economic processes, we adopt a governmentality approach to risk to show how calculative rationalities based on risk management or the creation of risk objects can be studied as specific modes of governing directed towards the accomplishment of specific political and economic goals. As O'Malley (2008, 57–58) explains, 'The point in governmentality research is not to evaluate whether such risk-based procedures are accurate or fair, but rather to analyse what are the specific characteristics of this way of governing uncertain future events'.

To understand how risk functions as a rationality of government therefore means paying close attention to the ways in which techniques and strategies that are developed to mitigate risk also work to harness the responsibilities and self-governing capacities of individuals to serve particular goals or ends. This includes a focus on how individuals are compelled to actively manage risk through the availability of specific technologies and techniques that 'enable certain governmental agendas – particular rationalities of the state – to be articulated through the ethical self-knowledge and self-practices of subjects' (Hook 2007, 2). A governmentality perspective is particularly useful here with its focus on 'the technologies through which governing is made practicable and the forms of rationality … that render domains and problems of government thinkable and analysable' (Dean 1998, 26). To the extent that individuals perceive and manage risk on the basis of these technologies and techniques, the formally autonomous activities of individuals can, in theory, function to establish important 'relays between the calculations of authorities and the aspirations of free citizens' (Rose 1999, 49). On this basis, it is important to examine how different individuals are called upon to internalize and manage risk as a condition of their role and responsibility. To empirically trace these issues, we turn our attention to school autonomy reforms in England and Australia to capture how the spectre of risk works to implicate individuals and organisations in new forms of responsibility and self-governing centred around prudentialism and calculation. A key focus of our analysis concerns how risk helps to normalise school trustees, school leaders and board members 'as calculators, managers, and tutors of risk, taking on educative, estimative and preventive functions' (Dean 1998, 35).

Academy trusts (England)

A long-held ambition of British governments since the 1980s has been to reshape schools in the image of businesses and arguably give more scope for wealthy political supporters to enjoy 'philanthropic' control over publicly funded schools. Fulfilling this ambition, successive British governments since 2000 have made it possible for schools to operate outside the purview of local government authorities as legal entities called academy trusts, a company limited by guarantee and exempt charity. While all schools operating as 'academies' (publicly funded independent schools) are setup as academy trusts under the Academies Act 2010, not all academies enjoy the same autonomy under these arrangements. On the one hand, there are 'converter academies', sometimes called stand-alone or free-standing schools, that have converted to academy status on the provision of a 'good' or 'outstanding' grade from the school's inspectorate, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Converter academies retain a governing body with separate statutory rights and powers to the academy trust and head teacher, making them responsible for holding senior school leaders to account for the educational and financial performance of the school. On the other hand, there are 'sponsored academies', referring to those schools that have been forcibly converted to academy status through takeover by a sponsor (business, university, other school, faith group or voluntary group) on grounds that they have been identified by Ofsted to have 'serious weaknesses' or require 'special measures' under section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005. Unlike converter academies, sponsored academies are stripped of their assets and any legal entitlement to self-determination where they are subject to the scheme of delegation set out by a board of directors who manage the trust as well as administer the land/building ownership, set the curriculum and admissions policy, employ staff, and source suppliers and consultants (Wolfe 2013). The government's stated policy ambitions include the growth of these sponsored academy models or 'multi-academy trusts' in which

> the best governing boards will take responsibility for more schools. As fewer, more highly skilled boards take more strategic oversight of the trust's schools, MAT boards will increasingly use professionals to hold individual school-level heads to account for educational standards and the professional management of the school. (DfE 2016, 50)

Academy trusts are therefore designed to replace traditional government structures, such as the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) who are responsible for resolving disputes about the transfer and disposal of school premises and assets and ruling on objections to and referrals about state school admission arrangements. In effect, the liability of the school is transferred to the board of directors of the academy trust who absorb the kinds of risk responsibility and risk management formerly managed by local government authorities. In practice, this means that academy trusts are not directly accountable to local government authorities, other than on matters of special needs and exclusions, but instead are accountable to central government according to a funding agreement with the Secretary of State.

At the time of writing there are 9752 open academies in England, i.e., 38% of primary schools and 79% of secondary schools (DfE 2022). The effects of these reforms, both intended and unintended, are various and contested. There are a multitude of financial and ethical risks associated with these reforms, for example, including a series of cases documenting the misuse of public monies by some academy trusts (Wright 2019). In July 2020, the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) revealed that £5.6 m was lost to fraud, theft and financial irregularities by academy trusts in 2019–2020 (Roberts 2020). This included evidence of related-party transactions (when academy trusts buy services from a company run by one of its members or trustees) and 'mega-salaries' for academy trust chief executives (Busby 2020). Moreover, in order to 'game' the system and improve school reputation and performance, it has been documented by Ofsted (2017) that some pupils face disproportionate risk of unofficial exclusions or 'off-rolling' from these schools, specifically disadvantaged children and pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND). Other perceived risks include 'system redesign' (Rayner, Courtney, and Gunter 2018, 143) that perpetuates unique forms of producer capture and private monopoly, namely arrangements in which large numbers of publicly funded schools are clustered together under the legal and management control of a single board of trustees (see Wilkins 2016). Related to this are anti-competitive arrangements, assuming we want to construct anti-competition as a risk. When large numbers of publicly funded schools in England are absorbed into single management groups called Multi-Academy Trusts (or MATs), the effect is less choice and less competition (Salokangas and Chapman 2014; Wilkins 2017).

As a result, there is some uneasiness among government and non-government authorities concerning the ways in which school trustees and governors discharge their responsibilities as custodians of public services. In response, different authorities stress the importance of risk regulation in education, referring to 'the identification, measurement, management, monitoring and reporting of threats to an organisation's business objectives' (ESFA 2019). There is no strict, direct monitoring of education-based risk regulation by the government, but there are quasi-autonomous non-government organisations, such as Ofsted, who perform inspections of school governance on average every four years. This includes charities, such as the National Governance Association (NGA), and private companies like The Key for School Governors, both of whom promote a strong business case for governance in which schools are trained and incentivised to better organise themselves in response to target setting, performance indicators and quality assessment frameworks. 'Risk registers' for example work as a proxy measure to help schools construct different threats and dangers as 'risk objects', in effect to make certain intangibles amenable to control and corrective interventions. Typically, schools use risk registers and other information management tools, including data dashboards like the DfE School Comparison Tool and Analyse School Performance (ASP), to conduct risk assessments and performance evaluations. Effective reporting and management of different risks, from student attainment to budget spending, is one way in which academy trusts demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness as public organisations.

School autonomy allows school trustees and governors wide discretion over finances, purchasing and staff pay and conditions, making it appear incumbent upon them to inhabit and perform the role of risk managers and performance appraisers. In 'non-academized' schools for example, such as local government authority-maintained schools, school leaders and governors have similar roles and commitments, including statutory duties, albeit it is the local authority rather than a board of trustees who are ultimately responsible for the school. The effect of school autonomy therefore is a more high-stakes environment for school trustees, leaders and governors who must internalise the kinds of risks and liabilities formerly managed by local government authority agents, such as local authority officers and elected councillors. To achieve 'good governance', for example, academy trusts are typically required to have in place 'people with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity', 'structures that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities', 'compliance with statutory and contractual requirements', and 'evaluation to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance' (DfE 2017, 9–10).

To support these interventions, there has been a strong emphasis from both government and non-government authorities for schools to improve risk regulation by ensuring appointments to the school governing board are subject to skills audits and competency assessments. In 2008 PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), a non-governmental multinational professional services network, released a document called Business in the Community (BITC) in which it recommended the 'government clarify the strategic rather than operational role of the governing body' and give greater attention to the 'skills of individual governors' as well as subject governing bodies to a 'standardised skills audit and performance self-assessment' which 'Ofsted should comment on this in their inspection reports' (BITC 2008, 4). In their 2011 report, Carmichael and Wild (2011, 13) made a similar set of recommendations, namely that schools should actively recruit governors from the business sector, stressing that 'governors should be appointed on the breadth of skills and experience they would bring'. Echoing this, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools Lord Nash said: 'Running a school is in many ways like running a business, so we need more business people coming forward to become governors' (GOV.UK 2013). Later in 2018 the charities Education and Employers and NGA followed a similar set of recommendations by launching a government-funded national campaign – 'Inspiring Governance' – to help attract more business people into the role of school governors.

Here the spectre of risk is represented by the threat posed by unqualified, unskilled individuals performing 'amateurish' governance (former Head of Ofsted Wilshaw quoted in Johnstone 2015). In effect, risk functions as a framework of government for normalising and celebrating the authority of new types of 'knowledge actors' (Gunter and Mills 2017, 2) in the field of education governance, namely 'business figures' (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education Lord Agnew quoted in Whittaker 2019) and 'skilled professionals' (Education Secretary Damien Hinds quoted in Whittaker 2018) who possess the 'relevant' knowledge and skills or 'governance capital' (Gobby and Niesche 2019) required to sustain the smooth running of the school as a high-reliability organisation. In this sense, risk as a rationality helps to 'fabricate particular forms of identity, agency and expertise' (Dean 1998, 30) but also contributes negatively to restricting governance participation to those with specific epistemic capabilities. In England, for example, there have been increased efforts since 2010 (around the time the then Conservative-Liberal-Democrat Coalition government expanded the academies programme by making it possible for all good and outstanding schools to apply to convert to academy status) to replace the traditional stakeholder model of school governance with a professional model of school governance (Wilkins 2016). The normative preferences guiding school governance up until 2010 were primarily focused on proportional representation and community involvement (see DfES 2005; Education Act 1980;

Education Act 1986; Education and Inspections Act 2006), with a unique focus on the statutory rights of parents to be elected as governors. Many academy sponsors, notably those running MATs, have rescinded these rights, however, and in some cases removed the governing body to enforce a prescriptive, command and control governance setup in which no 'independent' authority exists to challenge the decisions of the board of trustees (Stewart 2016). Where a governing body does exist (sometimes called a 'local governing body' or 'advisory board') they are a function of blanket policy prescribed by the board of trustees (Wilkins 2017).

We can infer from the above trends in education governance that 'risk' is a provisional concept whose meaning, while contested and inherently unstable, is held together through a fragile synthesis of contingent relations and regularities sustained by the actions of specific groups and authorities. One of the major consequences of school autonomy reforms in England, and the most recent iteration of this trend, namely the academies programme, has been a collective effort by government and non-government authorities to delegitimate proportional representation and community consultation as an asset and strength of 'good governance'. In fact, the concept of 'good governance' (or 'effective governance') has taken on a very specific meaning for government and non-government authorities where it is used to stress the importance of risk regulation and mitigation, namely the school's commitment to strategic management and self-evaluation according to the explicitness of performance indicators and output controls (see DCSF 2010; Ofsted 2011). One of the implications of this corralling of meaning has been that stakeholder governance, with its emphasis on citizen involvement and proportional representation, is framed in anachronistic terms as not fit for purpose, as ineffective, even obstructive and corrosive to the realisation of the smooth running of the school as a business. A corollary of this shift towards risk regulation is a set of pragmatic and strategic concerns with achieving consensus within programmable actions and actionable solutions that sustain the visibility of the school as a high-reliability organisation. In effect, good governance is made synonymous with anti-democratic measures aimed at diffusing or neutralising political conflict and disagreement that may undermine the efficiency of organisations. Risk, in other words, has emerged as a rationality for insulating (even protecting) schools from the kinds of protracted and unwieldy value conflicts that do not automatically lend themselves to consensus.

Independent public schools (Australia)

School autonomy also has a long policy history in Australia. As a federated nation, each of Australia's eight states and territories is responsible for their education systems, meaning that despite the influence of the federal government, education policy making is mediated by federal-state relations (Savage 2020). This includes the policy of decentralisation (or devolution and autonomy) where as far back as the 1970s the Whitlam Labor federal government proposed and attempted to implement a national social democratic and progressive vision of devolved decision-making (see Karmel et al. 1973). However, the devolution of decision-making has been largely piecemeal and ad hoc for most of Australia's public school systems. It was principally the state of Victoria that advanced through discourses of neoliberalism a systematic decentralisation agenda in the 1990s (Blackmore et al. 1996), before the more recent implementation of school autonomy policies such as Western Australia's Independent Public Schools programme (IPS) (late 2000s), which is the focus here.

Drawn from discourses problematising the supposed defects of the public bureau (see Du Gay 2000), and intended to promote innovation, community empowerment and strategic, flexible and efficient decision-making, IPS devolved a range of responsibilities to schools that opted into the programme (Gobby 2013). Under this model of education governance, principals of schools that can demonstrate capacity for efficacious self-government are granted IPS status. This gives principals of IPS schools the authority to recruit staff, change their staffing profile, manage budgets, enter into contracts, and establish a business plan with long-term strategies and targets (Independent Public Schools 2021). While each school operates within a centralised framework of performance monitoring and benchmarking and is overseen by a school board it forms, the locus of control remains with the principal, with the department being a significant feature of the programme as it is the primary source of resources, and it maintains policy, procedural and reporting controls. In 2022, over 80% of WA public schools are IPS. IPS is not simply technical changes to organisational processes and structures. School autonomy policies like IPS assume and enact a business ontology that transforms schools into economic units and generalises the enterprise form to the conduct of the organisation and the principal (Gobby 2013). This 'endogenous privatisation' (Ball and Youdell 2007, 14) enjoins principals to treat their schools as small businesses, to exercise their freedoms through corporate know-how, and to shoulder responsibility for the activities and performance of their schools (Keddie et al. 2020). In what is an increasingly uncertain, complex and demanding environment, the principal's role has become 'risky business' (Thomson 2002, 3).

Using the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, Du Gay (2000, 66) argues that 'governing organizational life in an enterprising manner involves "making up" new ways for people to be; it refers to the importance of individuals acquiring and exhibiting specific "entrepreneurial" capacities and disposition'. In this sense, school autonomy performs identity work on principals. The increased local decision-making like that found in IPS is a means by which school leaders' self-governing capacities are cultivated through a repertoire of market, corporate and bureaucratic rationalities, techniques, practices, and technologies. The activation of school leaders' freedom through this repertoire is 'a kind of power one brings to bear upon oneself' (Rose 1999, 96) as corporate know-how is used to establish 'a certain entrepreneurial form of relationship to themselves [principals] as a condition of their effectiveness' (Du Gay 2000, 65). This process of neoliberal subjectification in which principals become enterprising, innovative, flexible, and self-reliant is exemplified by the use of performance contracts, like the *Performance and Delivery Agreement* (DPA) that IPS schools would enter into with the department (Gobby 2013, 2016).

The DPA is a three-year agreement between the school and the Director-General of the department of education that stipulates measurable targets for the school and the responsibilities of both parties. The DPA informs the school business plan, which all IPS schools are required to develop, with the school performance reviewed by the board and department at the end of the agreement. As du Gay observes (2000, 65), the use of personnel and organisational contracts in public sector reform establishes contractual relationships that make 'units of management [i.e., the school and the principal] function like little businesses or "enterprise forms"'. By assigning a function or activity to the principal and a school alongside them assuming increased responsibility for achieving organisational goals, the contract submits both the school and principal to entrepreneurial rationalities. This has enabled principals to conduct and regard themselves as enterprising managers with freedom to strategically lead, manage and deliver improved school performance and outcomes in the context of competitive pressure and external scrutiny (Gobby 2013). The DPA functions therefore as a self-steering mechanism governing school leaders' self-government, resulting in leaders becoming entrepreneurial managers of their own and their school's performance and risks. While this exposes principals to personal risks and costs, such exposure is 'a means to their empowerment because it is held to encourage them to build resources in themselves rather than rely on others to take risks and endure uncertainties on their behalf' (Du Gay 2000, 67).

This exercise of discretionary power within the context of corporatised logics opens the public sector including public schools to new objects of risk. For Du Gay (2000), the entrepreneurial culture denigrates and displaces traditional public sector organisational norms (i.e., transparency, process, fairness, the public good) in favour of entrepreneurship, which poses the risks of mission drift, nepotism, fraud, corruption, and the accidental misappropriation of funds. While no cases of corruption or financial misuse have been publicly reported since IPS's inception more than a decade ago, this is not the case elsewhere in Australia or internationally. In the Australian state of Victoria, which was an early adopter of decentralisation in the 1990s, a recent case of 'governance failure' (Victorian Ombudsman 2021, 64) involved deliberate breaches of public sector standards. A principal misused and mismanaged school funds and failed to comply with department procurement and recruitment processes. In its investigation, the Victorian Ombudsman found the principal and school business manager lacked governance, accounting, finance management and business skills, knowledge, qualifications, and training. Tellingly, in response the Ombudsman recommended more corporate governance. Acknowledging difficulties in being an educator *and* CEO of a small business (the school), the report suggested the principal should have educated themself on financial management and recommended school principals take responsibility for possessing financial management capability as a condition of their employment (Victorian Ombudsman 2021). Through this corporate-governance know-how, risk rationality functions to normalise the reforming of school leaders' identities to identify, calculate and manage risk as a condition of responsible autonomy.

With increased autonomy, the risk of errant principal conduct is present in Western Australia and the school board has been brought into the web of processes for managing the risky principal (and school). School boards and governing bodies function to provide corporate oversight, risk management and to strengthen organisational performance (Wilkins 2016). To build up their school's 'governance capital' and 'social capital', principals in WA have recruited community members with business acumen, representatives from local Chambers of Commerce, professionals and even politicians (Gobby and Niesche 2019). This has not been without its troubles and risks, with a high-profile incident in which differences between the board members of Perth Modern School and its principal spilled into the media and led to several board members resigning and demanding the principal's dismissal (ABC 2017). A key issue in that incident was the principal's failure to consult the school board about plans to build a AUD$10 million, 700-seat auditorium. The school board is what Dean (1998) calls a responsibilising technology that manages organisational risk, so a lack of clarity around its functions, use and the knowledge and skills of its members risks the governance efficacy of the board itself (Gray, Campbell-Evans, and Leggett 2013). Indeed, the Victorian Ombudsmen in the above case of governance failure found the school council was ill-equipped to detect irregularities and therefore to self-scrutinise (2021, 63). So, while the principal may be a risk so too is the school board.

In response to a perceived 'risk to the governance of risk', the WA department of education commissioned a report on school boards' functionality and effectiveness (Gilchrist and Knight 2015). Co-authored by Professor David Gilchrist, an accountant and former assistant Auditor General of WA, the report recommended greater clarity around the purpose of school boards, the development of greater accountability of the board for school performance, and for board members and principals to be better equipped with corporate and governance know-how, behaviours and attitudes to discharge their responsibilities. The report led to the requirement that all board members complete a mandatory short course in the accountability, evaluation and corporate functions of school boards. Further to this, the report recommended principals attend board meetings of organisations outside of the education sector to better learn about their responsibilities and the effective functioning of boards. In a Foucauldian sense, this self-education is a means through which 'the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self' (Foucault 1997, 291). Constituted as risky subjects, the self-education of principals and board members enables not only scrutiny of schools and principals, but also the self-scrutiny and self-management of principals and board members in terms of risks posed by their conduct and performance. Hence, the 'multiplication of the perceptions of risk' (Rose 1999, 247) created by these corporatised systems serve to promote corporate capabilities and qualities that echo and redeem the state's school autonomy agenda.

Concluding remarks

In this paper we have used England and Australia as two empirical case studies through which to trace some of the conditions and effects of school autonomy reforms, with a unique focus on two very specific iterations of school autonomy, namely the academies programme in England and the Independent Public Schools (IPS) programme in Western Australia. On the one hand, we want to avoid describing these two case studies as evidence of the homogenising effects of global policy influence and inter-governmental policy convergence because to do so would mean making certain assumptions about the structural coherence and determination of school autonomy reforms, namely that the success or implementation of school autonomy reforms can be effortlessly traced to a similar set of interests and motivations. We recognise that the development of school autonomy reforms across the globe are uneven and contested owing the sensitising contexts through which they emerge. As Li (2007, 13) observes, 'what appears to be rational landscape design or 'management' is the serendipitous outcome of everyday practices that have quite disparate motives'. What is omitted from this paper, therefore, is a consideration of the active, dynamic processes through which school autonomy reforms are 'resolved contingently in specific contexts, as assemblages of heterogeneous actants cohere, and the properties and capacities of these actants are variously mobilized' (Baker and McGuirk 2017, 430). On the other hand, it is important to recognise the variety of ideas, objects, relations, and practices that are present in both case studies, namely 'depoliticisation', 'corporatisation', 'endogenous privatisation', and 'disintermediation'. Furthermore, there are similarities across case studies in terms of how risk functions as a rationality for recalibrating education governance, whether it is through the identification of key actors as 'risky subjects' requiring reskilling or replacing, or through the constitution of key practices as 'risky business' requiring improved monitoring and control.

Through the adoption of a governmentality perspective (Dean 1998; O'Malley 2008), this paper aims to contribute something qualitatively new and different to the literature on school autonomy. Our focus has been to document the ways in which risk functions as a rationality through which new types of school practices and subjects are imagined, compelled, incentivised, and regulated. This includes a focus on how the spectre of risk works to implicate individuals and organisations in new forms of responsibility and self-governing centred around prudentialism and calculation. From this unique perspective, we have explored how risk helps to sustain the kinds of arrangements that calls for and 'multiplies the domains to be monitored and prudently managed' (Dean 1998, 35), and how these new arrangements create conditions that appear to limit governance participation to those with suitable knowledge and skills (also see Gobby and Niesche 2019; Wilkins 2016, 2019). The above issues are not only under-developed within the wider literature on school autonomy, and therefore point to a knowledge gap worth addressing, but they represent unique opportunities for adopting a governmentality approach to risk with a focus on the discursive boundaries that define (and limit) relations and practices of education governance.

Using a 'risk society' approach (Beck 1992), we might describe risk in these contexts as epiphenomena or effects of larger policy movements, economic experiments and political tactics. The increased vulnerability of schools and education systems to corruption or fraud can be considered something endemic to these changes and their multiple and varied instantiations, be it privatisation or devolved management structures removed from local democratic accountability. A risk society approach is useful here for capturing how schools and education systems, now increasingly removed from traditional forms of control and management, encounter new threats and dangers or hazards as a result of their confrontation with 'modernisation' and the ideologies of market governance (see Wilkins 2016). At the same time, risk, or the spectre of risk, can be viewed as a rationality or framework of government that works to harness the responsibilities and self-governing capacities of individuals to serve particular goals or ends.

In education research, the concept of risk has been interrogated to some extent, mainly by sociologists of education interested in how definitions and categories of risk are mobilised in the social construction of children and young people as disadvantaged or vulnerable (Lubeck and Garrett 1990; Ratner 2019). These important contributions from sociologists of education have been crucial to developing an understanding of risk as socially contested and constructed. More practically, they help to draw attention to the discursive and material effects of definitions and categories of risk, specifically the ways in which certain children and young people are represented as particular kinds of risk subjects and in turn constituted as 'risk objects' to be actively managed (Hardy

2015, 389). Yet despite these important problematisations of risk, a dominant use of risk in education is to indicate disadvantage or vulnerability, either among individuals or within systems more generally. Here risk is typically used to describe children or young people who struggle academically, who are disengaged from forms of employment, training and education or who are more likely to experience early school leaving (Hodgson 2018). Similarly, risk has been used to characterise teachers as subjects of intense performance management, liability exposure, stress, bullying, and physical and emotional injury (Perryman 2006). In other examples, risk is used to justify punitive measures against teachers seen as a threat to student well-being and national security (Holloway 2017). On these descriptions, a dominant use of risk in education is to signify a particular kind of subject (a distressed subject, a maladjusted subject, an irrational subject, a marginalised or deprived subject) and a specific set of relations or conditions against which the subject is judged to be vulnerable or powerless. Moreover, these descriptions appear to rely on deficit understandings of risk: people are judged to be at risk either because they lack certain social, psychological or intellectual utilities, they fail to utilise their decision making in rationally and morally superior ways, or are subject to environments that impede their personal freedom or personal responsibility.

These accounts also omit something important about the ways in which risk and its securing is devolved from the centre, and functions to recast problems of society into problems of individuals, communities and organisations. As Chandler and Reid (2016, 28) acknowledge, the creation of resilient subjects, namely the development of agile, flexible subjects who can absorb disturbances, overcome precarity and adapt to crises, often means constructing problems 'from the bottom-up; as problems of the subject's inability to govern itself on the basis of the consequences of its choice and actions' (also see O'Malley 2010). While precisely who is called upon to manage risks varies alongside ideological orientations to risk, to be resilient means to enter into 'a permanent process of continual adaption to threats and dangers that are said to be outside its control' (Chandler and Reid 2016, 53). To be more precise and specific to the aims of this paper, what tends to be overlooked in many accounts of risk are the processes of 'subjectification' and 'objectification' through which specific individuals and practices are transformed into the bearers and functions of risk responsibility and risk management.

The aim of this paper therefore has been to demonstrate the value and application of a governmentality approach to risk and to hopefully stimulate and encourage among education researchers a more critical and politically engaged critique and appreciation of the role of risk, or the spectre of risk, as a rationality and framework of government that serves particular political and economic ends and projects, including the cultivation of schools as risk environments requiring improved calculation and prudent management by governance experts. As detailed in our analyses, a key consequence of this emphasis on risk responsibility and risk management are new social arrangements and institutional logics that appear to limit governance participation to those with suitable knowledge and skills, thus pointing to unique forms of epistemic injustice within the field of education governance. This means shifting the focus away from ordinary, everyday mobilisations of risk as 'unwanted events' or epiphenomena and effects of larger socio-economic processes, and instead interrogating the importance of risk rationality to the fabrication of wider systemic changes within education, changes that include the recalibration of sites of governance as ancillaries to more entrenched forms of business ontology and market discipline.

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ORCID

Brad Gobby http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2170-5435

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