

**SCHOOL GOVERNANCE:
PHASES, PARTICIPATION AND PARADOXES**

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This dissertation is a report of an investigation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Murdoch University

March 2004

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work, which had not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Signed

Murdoch University

March 2004

ABSTRACT

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: PHASES, PARTICIPATION AND PARADOXES

This research analyses the governance structures and processes of thirteen independent primary schools in Perth, and one state primary school in Western Australia termed an ‘alternative’ or ‘lighthouse’ school. More in-depth case studies were undertaken at five sites with participants from different time periods. All the schools had a school council or board since their foundations and notably all schools had their origins in the period of the alternative school and community empowerment movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

In an era of market reform and the corporatisation of schools, the critical areas of focus for this research were: how community expectations and school identity were maintained within council-governed schools; how democratic imperatives compete with professionalism and school improvement issues; and how schools confront dilemmas of governance. Three frameworks, *Phases of Development*, *Community Empowerment* and *Dilemmas*, were employed as useful means to discuss school governance. The results revealed changes in governance over time. Schools began to envisage themselves less as communities and more as businesses. The emphasis was away from parent involvement and towards efficiency and commercial practices. Tensions and dilemmas arose out of these changes.

The thesis concluded that it was not the structures or individuals that were crucial in governance processes but the playing out of particular tensions and dilemmas.

Principals and councils have to acknowledge the dilemmas that arise from competing values systems and make choices based on a clear understanding of these dilemmas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to those principals, board members and others who voluntarily participated in this research. They generously gave of their time and experiences with enthusiasm and candour. Without them this study would not be what it is.

Special thanks also go to my supervisors, James Bell and Jan Currie, for their continuous support and encouragement, for their unflagging reading and re-readings of my work, and for their unfailing belief that I was doing something worthwhile. Also thanks to Anna Alderson and Gayle Ward for their feedback and affirmation of my work.

Finally thank you to my husband Tjark who not only took most of the personal burden at home but also gave valuable technical support.

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