School Governance and the Mediation of Engagement

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Introduction: school governance under pressure

The *1988 Education Reform Act* radically transformed the local governance of education, according school governing bodies new delegated powers for budgets and staff as well as responsibility for the strategic direction of the school in a quasi market place of parental choice. To take up these new responsibilities the earlier *1986 Education Act* had created over 350,000 volunteer citizens in England and Wales to occupy reformed governing bodies: it was the largest democratic experiment in voluntary public participation. The governing bodies were constituted on the principle of partnership between all the groups with a 'stakeholder' interest in the school: parents, teachers and support staff would be elected, while other governors would be appointed by the local authority, and drawn from the local community (including local industry and commerce). All the interests would be regarded as equal, one no more important than another. The underlying principle had been that schools would only work well when the different constituencies were provided with a space to express their voice and reach agreement about the purpose and development of the school. The governing body was to have regard for the overall strategic direction of the school, evaluating its progress, and acting as the trustee of the community, publicly accountable for national and local policies (DfEE, 1998). 'The governing body is the custodian in perpetuity of community interests and ensures that developments and changes proposed by the school are in line with community aspirations and needs.' (Barton et al, 2006)

The reformed governing bodies faced many pressures in their new roles of providing strategic direction for schools. These would include forming judgments about resources and staffing in times of financial constraint, and clarifying the distinctive ethos of the school that would attract parents in making their choice of school in the new quasi market place. Perhaps the greatest pressure confronting school governors was the need to ensure sustained performance in improving pupil achievement. National Ofsted inspections would determine the public profile of performance with consequences, particularly severe in contexts of disadvantage, for parental choice and resource supply. From 1998 the New Labour Government had given school governing bodies the principal responsibility for implementing this 'standards agenda' (DfEE, 1998). By 2005, however, Whitehall's analysis (DfES, 2004a) of what schools had managed to accomplish revealed the persistence of 'underlying problems': disengaged pupils; compartmentalising of services and fragmentation of funding; and the centralisation of governance squeezing innovation and entrepreneurship. Most significant, while policy had succeeded in opening up educational opportunities at every stage of life, fifty years of development had not broken the link between social class and achievement. Underachievement of disadvantaged young people in particular was being accentuated by 'too many disenchanted pupils getting in trouble and dropping out'. Many schools have been unable to engage not only these youngsters but also their parents and carers. If these concerns were to be addressed, the Government argued, profound change would be needed in the culture and practice of working with children, young people and families. (DfES, 2004b)

In this paper I examine the response governing bodies have made to the pressure this standards agenda demanded of them to raise achievement and engage young people and their families. I will draw principally on my research over a decade[i] to provide evidence of the contribution which school governing bodies make to improvement and their potential to engage young people, parents and communities in contexts of disadvantage. The analysis will unfold in three steps. The first argues that school governance matters: it constitutes both the relations of public authority for schools and, principally, through practices of scrutiny, it establishes the institutional conditions for improving school performance. The second stage of analysis focuses on the cases of schools that begin to question the limits of a standards agenda that merely works by imposing external conditions for improving performance. When governing bodies begin to grasp that sustaining improvement requires

young people to be engaged and motivated then they understand the need to make the practices of learning and teaching more responsive to the needs and interests of pupils, and to include the voice of parents and communities in the processes of improving schools. The third stage of the analysis focuses on the implication of this understanding of the need for schools to become oriented to and responsive to their communities for the practices and structures of governance. This discussion focuses on a study undertaken between 2006 and 2009 which examined the way an emerging community orientation, led and reinforced by national education policy, was requiring schools to create a wider learning community that encompassed not only families and communities but other schools, agencies and services. The system level partnerships that developed from these networks had been leading, through the creation of school clusters,   to an emergent community governance.

I   Governance matters for improving school performance

While Earley and Creese (2003) could legitimately claim that there had been little research on the contribution of governance to school improvement, this has now been remedied with a series of major projects examining whether governing bodies make a difference. In recent years, the Universities of Birmingham (Ranson, 2004; Ranson et al, 2005a, 2005b); Manchester (Dean et al., 2007) and Bath (Balarin et al., 2008; James et al, 2010) and now NFER (Lord et al, 2009) have each undertaken significant programmes of research in an attempt to assess the effectiveness of governing bodies. The DCSF (2008) in a review of much of this research concluded overall that the 'evidence suggests that there is a relationship between good governance and pupil's achievements, the quality of teaching, as well as the quality of leadership and management', though, it added, with variable effectiveness in areas of disadvantage (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). From this research two layers of contribution which governing bodies make to school improvement can be identified. Governing bodies, when they work well, constitute the relations of authority and the institutional practices of performance.

1.Constituting the relations of public authority
Research suggests that the governing bodies exhibit very different kinds of structure and practice. Studies have clarified the distinctive forms of organisation, though typologies reveal the criteria that inform them. Kogan et al's (1984) interest in the nature of legitimacy leads to a typology of models of authority: 'accountable', 'advisory', 'supportive' and 'mediator'. Creese and Earley's (1999) interest in the nature of challenge in the governor/professional relationship produces a valuable typology that distinguishes 'abdicators', adversaries', 'supporters clubs' and 'partners'. The interest of my research in the nature of the functions fulfilled by the governing body complements these typologies. The distinguishing criteria focus on the definition of purpose and responsibility; the relationship of power between the headteacher and the chair of governors; and the extent of corporateness of the governing body in its deliberations and decision-making: is it a collection of individuals or an integrated body? Four distinctive types of governing body can be distinguished: the first two form weaker types of governance, the second two stronger types.

Governance as a deliberative forum (professional control): Here governance constitutes largely a gathering of members, often parents at which discussions of the school are determined and led by the headteacher as professional leader. Parents will not feel they can question the authority of the head though they may inquire about aspects of the school's progress. The second type of weaker governance describes *a consultative sounding board (deference governance):* Here governors define their role as providing a sounding board for the strategies and policies provided by the headteacher as principal professional. The head brings policies to the board for their consent and authorisation. There will be discussion and questioning and, on occasion adaptation of policy, but it is clear that the headteacher rules.

The stronger types of governance include *an executive board (power sharing):* In these schools a partnership has developed between the governors and the school and, in particular, between the head and the chair with the former leading 'primus inter pares'. There may be a division of labour between them. The board assuming overall responsibility for the business aspects of the school: the budget,

staffing and the infrastructure of building. Their concern is with their legal responsibility and accountability for the school. The head assumes overall responsibility for curricular and pedagogic aspects of the school. The board will, however, probably develop a strong role of scrutiny over the performance as well as the policies and financial well-being of the school. This may lead the board to develop systems of monitoring and review of school and its development. The board will comprise a number of professionals and businessmen and women who bring social capital to the governing body. There is likely to be a strong structure of sub committees with considerable delegation of responsibility to take decisions that will typically be ratified, or 'given an edge' by the full board.

Governance as a governing body exercises the most complete *public authority*. In these schools the governing body exercises overarching jurisdiction and responsibility for the conduct and direction of the school. The head will be a strong professional leader but a member rather than leader of the governing body that acts as a corporate entity. The agenda and the meeting will be led by the chair. The language of the head will communicate a different relationship: 'would the governors like to consider such and such' rather than 'I strongly propose the policy should be.' There will be systematic processes of scrutiny, but what distinguishes the governing body is the strategic leadership of the school.

The role which governing bodies play lies in reinforcing the quality of institutional leadership: providing strategy, enabling scrutiny of direction and practice, offering guidance and support, and ensuring accountability. These qualities secure the authority and trust of schools as public institutions. Research indicates that there is a relationship between the organizational form of the governing body and its potential to improve school performance and standards.

2. Constituting the practices of performance: the standards agenda
The focus of the series of national research projects referred to above has been on the role of governance in securing the institutional practices and conditions of performance. A recent overview of this body of research by the DCSF (2008), as noted above, concluded overall that there is a positive relationship between good governance and pupil achievement as well as the quality of school leadership. Better governance sharpens the practice of management which in turn generates improved standards of attainment. By helping to improve the working of the institution the governing body will make more effective the environment of learning and teaching and thus the possibility of enhanced standards of educational attainment. Better governance establishes processes that generate better results. But what is better governance. My own research with colleagues indicates the key practices of governance that can make a difference to school performance:

1. *Governance which exercises strategic oversight, planning and direction of the school*;
2. *Governance which provides scrutiny and accountability to assure quality and standards: by*:
   - Bringing high expectations to the school;
   - ensuring full deliberation and questioning of the policies, budgets and practices of the school;
   - putting in place systems for monitoring and reviewing the standards of achievement, financial plans and policy developments of the school
3. *Governance that represents the diversity of its parent communities:* including the participation and voice of different parents helps the school to understand the variety of learning needs as well as securing their commitment to supporting learning in the home;
4. *Close attachment of governors to the life of the school* through a system of links to curriculum areas and classroom visits in order to develop knowledge and understanding of the key practices of learning in the school;
5. *Close ties with the community:* involving parents and the community is key to the success of the school and the governors have a key role in securing that partnership.

The DCSF (2008) report concurs with such a profile of good governance and in addition emphasizes the importance of governor knowledge and experience, their communication skills and commitment to training. Research and government reviews (including Ofsted, 2007) conclude, therefore, that most

governing bodies carry out their duties well. The studies, however, indicate there is evidence that governing bodies in contexts of disadvantage do find it more difficult to act effectively. The DCSF (2008) report, nevertheless, argued that there was evidence of the action that can be taken in areas of disadvantage to improve the quality of the governing body, including the imposition of 'an interim executive body'. My national study of school governance in Wales (Ranson et al, 2005b) also demonstrated that the organisational form of the school's governing body can counter contexts of disadvantage. Exam and key stage test scores were collected over a four year period for the sample population of primary and secondary schools. Of these schools 44 exhibited clear trend data over time: either continually improving their performance, or in decline, or reaching a plateau of moderate performance which they seemed unable to improve upon. When this performance data was compared with governing body practices an association was apparent between stronger forms of governance (executive boards and governing bodies) and improving performance, with weaker forums and sounding board forms of governance 'stuck' in moderate performance or in steady decline.

Better governance, research concludes, matters for improving the performance of schools. By providing strategic leadership, scrutinising policy development and ensuring public accountability, governing bodies help to make schools more effective in raising standards of achievement. Some schools, however, though acknowledging that the standards agenda provided valuable practices of external challenge to schools – target setting and monitoring – came to believe that alone they were insufficient to ensure sustained improved performance. They came to understand the significance of the cultural conditions of learning and achievement.

II The limits of performativity and constituting the cultural conditions of learning

What was it about the experience of these schools which led them to question the dominant paradigm of 'performativity'[ii]? To develop this analysis I draw upon the experience of governance in four case study schools in contexts of disadvantage in England and Wales (Ranson, 2004). They had constructed strong governing bodies incorporating members with influence and social capital from the local authority, the professions and local business. They worked in partnership with professional leaders to clarify strategic purposes and translated these into articulate action plans and target setting for classes and individual pupils that were extensively communicated to ensure shared understanding, and subject to routine monitoring and review. These practices created the drive and leadership to transform the schools from failing institutions into achieving schools. Two schools - a County primary school in England, and a City secondary in Wales - emerged from 'special measures' (one of which received a letter from the Secretary of State to congratulate them for being one of the most improved schools in the country).

Yet improvement reached a plateau and began to stall. Despite such achievement these schools came to believe that the framework of improvement they had been pursuing was limited and would need further development if improvement was to continue and be sustained. The Headteacher of a primary school argued that the regime of targetting and monitoring could only achieve so much:

I feel we have done everything that we can possibly do as professionals. Massive folders prepared by teachers: lesson observation notes, target setting notes, and for every lesson taught, all the learning objectives, differentiation, plenary, key words and assessment all the way through. ..... What I am saying is that we could only further improve the results marginally..'

A co-opted governor of the primary school, a retired secondary teacher, reinforced this analysis believing that 'you can't keep putting pressure on, and putting pressure on and putting pressure on: it only works to a certain degree. Sooner or later you have got to start looking at other ways of improving things.' The secondary school in Wales had improved considerably, raising the number of students who achieve five GCSE's at level A to C from 24 per cent to 60 per cent. Yet the Headteacher was concerned that the school was 'now stuck on this plateau' and wondered 'how they are to move on'.

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Both schools identified two key sources of the constraints on their further achievement. One was the exclusion of specific parent communities from the life of the school and from representation on the governing body. Both schools drew from both advantaged and disadvantaged communities. Both excluded the disadvantaged and had come to acknowledge that this had been a fundamental mistake and formed a central barrier to continued improvement. The primary headteacher was clear that continuing with the 'performitivity approach' alone would only improve results marginally, 'but to actually make a bigger difference it's going to have to be by involving the parents; I have come to the conclusion that we must involve all the parents much more in education.' The school's deputy headteacher shared the analysis:

'Our governing body is not representative of our community…. I think perhaps parents from (the estate) have this mystique about the governing body, and they think that no one from their background would be able to do the job.
What is being lost?
A huge amount. For a start I think that if we had more mums and dads from that background it would raise standards immediately because it would encourage more parents to become involved and they would see the school more as theirs. It is a huge mountain, an obstacle, if you like, to try and overcome.'

The secondary school in Wales similarly believed the exclusion of parents from the two working class estates to be one significant reason that they were on a plateau of 'stuck' performance. The school had failed, he argued, to reflect on the learning needs of young people in two highly disadvantaged estates, and had failed to involve the parents of these communities both in the life of the school and on the governing body.

The GB is not representative: What is lost? Inclusion in a word. To get people to feel part of the school, and that's difficult. If we are not careful you can be governed by the more vociferous areas of the catchment and then you get the alienation where parents feel that their voice is not being heard. Their initial reaction is that the school will have a downer on their child, that they won't get fair treatment.10% of our youngsters could be really alienated with what we provide them. If they were better represented on the GB there would be a voice for more curricular choice, greater flexibility. If you haven't got the motivation and commitment of the community you're not going to get anywhere.

These schools had come to recognise that teachers working in isolation from their parents would struggle to transform the achievement of children. The support of parents, carers and the home was indispensable if children were to achieve and sustain their achievement. The professionals and governors in these schools had begun to learn what research has been communicating for some time (Wolfendale and Bastiani, 2000; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris et al, 2009) that parents are complementary partners if education is to succeed. Including parents was thus the first barrier to be overcome.

The schools had begun to identify a further limitation on extending and sustaining achievement: the 'performativity' approach to learning and teaching. The emphasis upon target setting and monitoring applied pressure to young people to concentrate and improve on their previous best results. It worked to a certain extent. Focus did improve performance on the tasks selected. But were the pupils motivated to continue their progress, enjoying their learning for the perceived benefits it was bringing to them? The co-opted governor of the primary school believed that 'the pressure pedagogy' alone could not sustain improvement: alternative approaches to encouraging learning needed to be developed. The head and chair of the secondary school in Wales also believed that the learning needs of the marginalised children had to be recognised and provided for if they were to achieve. The argument for the urgent need to find connection between the curriculum in school and the social and cultural frames of the community was expressed most persuasively by two African-Caribbean parent governors in a London Borough primary and secondary schools. These parents described the lack of understanding between school and home and the failure to acknowledge the parent as co-educator as serious barriers to motivation and learning.

> *Elaine (black parent governor: London Borough Primary)*
> ** dialect- speaking and reading, because they speak differently in slang or in Jamaican… if a school doesn't kind of value or recognise ways of speaking, that's where a lot of the children get left behind, because they're not understanding that the vowels, or the sounds in those vowels are completely different may be, and the pronunciation then would be for that child would be hard because he doesn't understand – he might be saying the words but it's not coming out in a way that the school or the teacher would understand it. So to them it's wrong, but yet it's right in his mind, and so then he's obviously feels (unfairly) rejected ... then it all turns round in his mind and obviously he'll then think to himself well he doesn't want to do this any more and the barriers go up really.*
> ** cultural differences and the curriculum- 'our children should know about their history'*
> *- issues of cultural identity should be in the learning process right from the beginning. More attention is paid than in the past, but much more needs to be done. 'I think they need to address that more simply because then everybody could connect.*
> *I have found within the school that the ethnic children are not really understanding, and because of their lack of understanding – the teachers they haven't got really may be the time to actually – they need a bit more one to one work, and things like that for them to actually catch up but again I also think as well that it stems back to the parents are not as involved with the child as well, they're not giving them enough.*
> ** resistance to change on part of parents and school*
> *It is about change and it is about, it's not just within the school environment, it's a lot to do with parents as well, and I think that's where the communication – at the moment I think there's a lack of communication between schools and parents.*

The schools' own diagnosis of their achievement was that the system of external targets and monitoring had supported the progress which they had made. Nevertheless, they had come to regard this model of 'performativity' as fundamentally limited, unlikely to extend or sustain the improvement they were making. Further improvement, they proposed, would only be realised by developing strategies that were more likely to motivate pupils and sustain their interest in learning. This required, they believed, a twin strategy of introducing new approaches to learning and teaching and encouraging parental participation in the life and governance of the school. The external goods of performativity needed to be enriched by developing the internal goods of cultural understanding and engagement.

The unfolding argument here proposes that learning grows out of motivation which depends upon recognising and valuing the distinctive qualities of each and the cultural traditions they embody. If learning expresses a journey between worlds, the challenge for the school is to create a learning community that mediates local and cosmopolitan in its pedagogic practices. This configuration of the school and its communities, by interconnecting the symbolic orders of each, creates the conditions for relevance, motivation and learning. Excellent teachers have always sought, as a defining principle of their individual practice, to relate activities within their classroom to the interests of the child. But the argument being developed here proposes that this configuration is a strategic and systemic task for the school as a whole institution and for schools together in relation to the wider learning community they serve.

Understanding this interdependence of learning and living leads to a conclusion that it is the function of governance to constitute the structures of mutual recognition within and between the school and its communities. The professional specialist will have a vital role to play in judging the appropriate learning materials that will forge the connection of meaning between cultures. But the task of creating the learning community to include worlds of difference, cannot only be the responsibility of the knowledgeable specialist. It is, principally, a function of governance to recognise the different forms of life in the public sphere and, in so doing, constitute the springs of motivation and the conditions of learning. Realising achievement depends on governance as the condition for recognition and motivation. But what form of governance is implied by such an orientation to create a wider learning community?

III Towards governing a learning community

The distinctive task of governance is to *constitute* a public sphere to undertake those activities which individuals cannot do alone, but only together, collectively. Arendt (1961, 1963) proposed that

establishing such a public space enabled the plurality of citizens to deliberate their different values and beliefs and to act together to resolve their common concerns. For her creating a public sphere, of necessity, often provides the opportunity for a new beginning, an opening up of a common world, and thus the possibility of engaging the common issues that citizens need to confront together in civil society. In the field of school governance there have been glimpses of a new beginning, constituting a framework of public spaces that might allow the plurality of values and purposes to be expressed. Below I outline the purposes, practices and structures of an emerging community governance of schools which some local authorities, encouraged by education policy (Ranson, 2008) had been striving to develop in the years leading up to 2010. The discussion will draw on my research on cluster governance of schools (Ranson and Crouch, 2009).

Purpose: transforming the object of learning and governance
The distinctive purpose of the new community-oriented governance of schools was to constitute the public good of creating an expanded learning community to engage children and parents, transforming the object of learning as well as the governance of schools. The near universal tradition of providing education had been to conceive the object of learning as the child in the classroom of a school detached from the community. Now the object of learning was becoming a more inclusive learning community embracing family and neighbourhood, with teachers, health and social workers collaborating to support all the learning needs of all children throughout their lives. As in the African saying, 'it takes a whole village to raise a child'. The role of governance expanded from inward gazing guardianship of the standards agenda to outward looking collaboration with parents and neighbourhoods to lead the learning community. A national Local Authority Governor Co-ordinator described the new purposes of governance being developed in her Local Authority and other reforming authorities. The agenda for school governance, she argued, was clear emphasising the family, responsibility for welfare of the whole child, supported by partnership building and collaborative working:

> *'These policies are all about engagement, involving the community to help shape services to meet the community's needs; active community participation in shaping services, and taking schools beyond the narrow inward looking standards agenda.'*

What was emerging, she believed, was the creation of a model of governance and accountability that reflected a very different conception of organizing education, from the tradition which located learning within an institution to one which makes the wider community responsible for developing education. If there had to be targets they needed to be set on an area basis, so that all schools would take responsibility for all the children in a community. This would prevent the process of passing 'excluded' children from one school to another in the attempt to improve results at the expense of others. The Educational Improvement Partnerships had begun to encourage this, asking secondary and primary schools to collaborate to address underachievement at an early age. The 14-19 diplomas would also require areas to develop joint expectations for behaviour, exclusions and staff employment. The partners in an area would need to decide issues together. 'This will be a challenge for the profession, but also a challenge for the governing bodies. It is difficult though to change the individualist mentality and culture that has developed over twenty years.'

> '*We are living in a new world, and governing bodies need to engage with the new policy agenda that requires us to operate differently. Those who recognize this are the vanguard that will create the future. Governing bodies are at different levels of understanding and achievement. We need to raise the bar for those that are good, while lifting up the others.*
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> *The localities model is the future. Collaborations have been growing for different purposes to enable community engagement and cohesion. We need governing bodies to broaden their remit, to engage more broadly with the community, to engage with the underachieving. Examine what are the obstacles, and identify those in the community who can help remove the obstacles to learning. This develops the role of governing bodies as leaders and enablers of community development. There is also a growing recognition that the new partnership agenda requires a process of accountability to the community for public services.*
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> *Joint governor arrangements are needed. At one level this is straightforward, requiring agreements to be minuted, but the next level it is the need for joint committee arrangements. These joint committees in 5-10 years will become locality boards. Education Improvement Partnerships use collaborative arrangements to create Joint Committees,*

> *not just for 3 or 4 schools but for the whole of a town. When partners want to speak to schools they will speak to the Joint Committee. That will become the mechanism for collective decision-making. Money in the future will be devolved to these Joint Committees.*
> *People are ready for this. It is not being resisted by heads. But it must be owned by governing bodies themselves: it should not be imposed on them.'*
> *(Local Authority Governor Co-ordinator)*

This Governor Co-ordinator believed this new community oriented governance should not be implemented top-down by central government according to uniform regulations. The model needed to develop flexibly to respond to emerging local needs and local groups and the Local Authority was the appropriate layer of governance to take the lead in creating the emerging system of community governance.

Practice: participation, voice and deliberation to develop capability

If the purpose of the new school governance was to create a wider learning community, then the practices of governance would need to make three tasks central to their strategic planning: deliberation in developing a motivational curriculum, including parents as partners, and enabling a new community of practice.

Deliberating a motivational curriculum The case study schools discussed above were learning what was being grasped in research (Hasan, 2005; Moll, 2005; Wells, 1999, 2008; Lingard, 2008) that motivation depends upon meaning, and meaning is constituted by the lifeworlds which shape our upbringing. If motivation and meaning are to be realised in school then a wider learning community is needed to connect to the worlds of home and school in order to enable the journey between worlds. The task of schools is to develop their curricula and pedagogic practices so as to mediate the language of home and community with the language of the public space. The precious parts of the learners' lived experiences, identity and history need to be recognised and valued within the school. As Richardson (1990) argues: 'their culture, language and dialect, and countless experiences, stories and memories of their families, communities and friends, including in particular stories of oppression and injustice' (1990, p. 101; cf. Richardson and Miles, 2003)). If learning is to connect with learners' own history and experience schools will need to learn to value the cultural capital which students bring and devise a socially and culturally relevant curriculum (Collins, Harkin and Nind, 2002).

This task, of course, will require professional advice to identify the texts, materials and processes that will encourage students to connect the languages and codes between worlds. But not entirely: governance has a crucial role to play. Because an education is about the unfolding of a life, rather than the induction of a skill-set, decisions about the purpose and content of an education are likely to reflect differences of belief and become inescapably the subject of public deliberation in the space of school governance. This dialogue cannot be a technical task of calculation, but will need to be governed by the principles of public discussion: inclusion, voice and deliberation. The space of public governance needs to include not only those directly involved in a school, such as parents and teachers, but take into account the interests of the wider communities across civil society, because all will be affected by the public good of educating every child. The voice of those included needs to be heard, with the giving and taking of reasons enabling issues to be expressed and differences resolved to secure public agreement.

(ii) *Including parents as partners*: The evidence that governing bodies can make a difference to school improvement has been vital but expanding understanding of the significance of governing bodies, in addition to knowledge of their variable performance in areas of disadvantage has only focused the gaze on the capabilities of governors. Have volunteer citizens the capability to govern a major public institution such as a (large secondary) school? Can amateurs, like 'ordinary' parents, rule over a professional community? This problematises what is to count as capability, and which capabilities count. If schools are to be responsible for managing themselves – their finances, land and staff – they have indeed many of the dimensions of a business in the private sector. They will need governors, as well as professional leaders, with the capability to understand and make decisions about resources and infrastructure that will necessarily influence their primary purposes of educating young people. Many

heads and governing schools have sought in recent years to strengthen their capacity to provide the leadership of these business aspects of their institutions by including members with appropriate expertise. They have endeavoured to accumulate *social capital* by appointing governors who bring their networks of information, knowledge and resource contacts to enrich the practice of a school.

Yet although 'business' is an inescapable dimension of the work of a school, it is not its principal rationale. It is a means to their primary purpose of enabling learning and expanding capability. An education is not in the end a technical activity about procedure but has to take into account considerations about the kinds of lives families and communities believe it is appropriate for their young people to lead and the capabilities they ought to possess. Discussions about the ends of learning cannot be separated from the purposes of living, the *making* of lives, and these considerations are social, cultural and political in nature rather than technical procedures. This is so because an education is a journey between worlds – parochial and cosmopolitan – and the challenge for the governance of a school, as well as for teachers is to mediate these worlds, if young people are to become engaged in learning and commit themselves to developing their potential. The practice of organising and governing education, therefore, does not depend alone on *techne* (technical knowledge) but on *phronesis* (wise judgement about the purposes and practices that will unfold the potential and capabilities of lives).

The way to develop the capabilities of parent governors is, a senior HMI advised, for a school 'to grow a governing body' if it is to fulfil the demands of constituting a learning community (Ranson, 2004). Parents from disadvantaged communities are more likely to develop the confidence to become members of the governing body when they have been involved in the life of the school. When they are invited to become mentors for young people, use their local knowledge and cultural capital to support the school, in helping to organise festivals, concerts, plays and musicals and artistic events parents will give expression to their varied capabilities. A school that creates forums for parents (in addition to those for children) at the level of the class, year group and schools creates arenas that encourage and support the capabilities of voice, deliberation and collective judgement that are the defining characteristics required for capable participation as volunteer citizens in the governance of schools. In this way governance is not a separate assembly detached from the life of the school. Rather, governance is integrally connected to and grows out of the life of the school as an expanded learning community. Schools, by expanding parent involvement throughout, become the nurseries of capability for knowledgeable participation and leadership.

(iii) Enabling a community of practice: Public service professionals have traditionally been defined by their training in a specialist body of knowledge which only they can practice with their clients. The emergent practices of community governance, by placing the child and the family first, have meant working out from the complex needs of the individual which would not necessarily fit within the narrow specialisms of any one profession. If the needs of the child and family were to be addressed as a whole then teachers, health and social workers would have to work together in new ways across their professional and organisational boundaries. A further change would involve the professions working much more closely with families and communities and young people, being willing to listen to their voice and engage them in a conversation about their needs and concerns.

These proposed changes of professional orientation would require a new community of practice, with professionals working across boundaries to develop a new language of practice (*Common Core of skills and knowledge for the Children's workforce,* 2005; *Making it Happen, 2008*) to prepare a 'whole system' approach to developing flexible and responsive and integrated processes to children's services. Schools began to reconfigure their extended practice in collaborative 'localities and clusters' to ensure the necessary collaboration because all the new services and curricular opportunities required could not be provided by each institution alone. 'System leadership' became the focus, moving 'towards a more deliberately collaborative and interdependent system and probably one more oriented towards the locality' (Fullan, 2004). There was growing recognition that these changes were re-describing not only frameworks of professional leadership but also governance (Bentley and Craig, 2005).

Structure: towards a system of community governance
The analysis here suggests that the arenas of governance may need to include different kinds of knowledge, generalists as well as specialists, but shaping and governing the deliberations should be an understanding of the universal goods that a public service should be providing and be accountable for. The qualities that are indispensable to forming judgements about the purposes and practices of learning will be provided by the wisdom of reflective citizens who will bring critical understanding about the qualities required to make the journey between worlds. This background understanding of the cultural conditions of learning will enable them to ask the questions that bring the necessary scrutiny to professional practice: the engagement of young people in learning will be in proportion to the capacity of schools to listen and respond sympathetically to the voices of the communities in civil society.

This argument underlines the case for the continuing relevance of the stakeholder model of including the different voices in a deliberation of the purposes of learning. At best the model needs amending to respond to aspects of change, rather than being redundant because its fundamental principles are no longer appropriate.

Recent research on school governance (Ranson and Crouch, 2009) identified a small number of authorities which, having experimented with new forms of cluster and locality governance, sought to move beyond experiment to establish a coherent system of school, community and local governance. The principles for such a framework of governance sought to accommodate and reconcile the tensions that presently frustrated the practice of good governance of civil society. The Authorities wanted the emerging community governance to be multi-layered and include: executive and scrutiny functions; specialist and civic knowledge; difference and deliberation; professional and citizen membership.

(i) The level of the school and neighbourhood cluster:

The cultural transformation of schooling lies in expanding the object of learning from the child in an 'enclosed' school classroom to the wider learning community of the family and neighbourhood. All the schools and centres in a neighbourhood cluster take on responsibility for care and learning of all the young people and families in the community. The challenge is to engage and involve those families in the value of learning that can enhance their capabilities and life chances. Assuming this responsibility of care is not a substitute for pursuing the highest standards of attainment but a condition for realizing them. Elaborating such a learning community can only be formed through cooperation with children, young people and families whose voices are crucial to shaping the purpose of expert knowledge. Forums will be required to allow a neighbourhood strategy and provision to be deliberated and planned. Many local authorities have been working with schools, centres and communities to develop these cooperative practices at the level of the cluster.

The momentum for reform may be slowest at this level because of the reluctance of some schools to cede authority to a federated governing body. A twin track approach of slow and accelerated reform may be necessary. But the model to which practice should develop is that of partnership governance. When a cluster is ready to strengthen its collaborative practice they will constitute a federation board that integrates the governing bodies of local schools and centres. The board's membership will include representatives of each school as well as the primary care trust[iii]. The work of the board will be supported by a community Advisory Council of parents and community interests that will deliberate the learning needs of the community and to scrutinize the work of the board. Each school will form an executive sub-committee of the cluster board.

(ii) The level of localities

If the community cluster is to be supported with all the extended learning activity envisaged in *Every Child Matters*, then this will require planning and coordination at the level of 'the locality', above the cluster and below the Authority. For many local authorities, the locality is a third or a quarter of the authority, perhaps 100,000 people. The number and complexity of voluntary services and agencies offering services to schools and centres needs to be negotiated and managed efficiently, preventing duplication and avoiding market manipulation. The local knowledge and intensity of networking required suggests a point of negotiation and leverage below the local authority, yet above the school

community. Furthermore, if clusters are not to become ghettos of learning, then localities provide a space within which young people can move not only in search of specialized courses, but in order to extend their learning about different social and cultural traditions so that they learn to become capable members of a cosmopolitan civic society.

The appropriate tier for governing the diverse agencies and services to develop the practices of partnership and inter-agency coordination, planning and distribution is the locality. A Partnership Board is proposed to include the variety of public, private and voluntary interests, and will focus on preparing the strategic plan for the locality. This Board might be quite large, in some local authorities perhaps 50-70 members. The Board would need to elect a smaller steering committee to organise the routine business of the Board.

(iii) The level of the Authority

What has become evident during the unfolding development of clusters and localities is that the support of the local authority is indispensable. Strategic planning and development will be needed to assess the diversity of needs and to ensure the distribution of resources that meets all those needs. If it is acknowledged that there is no neutral, technical education that can be detached from the perspectives of different lifeworlds, then politics is an inescapable reality of the public sphere. Indeed, as we discussed above, an essential role of governing civil society is to ensure that differences are voiced, deliberated, and mediated. The central function of a local authority is to govern the local political deliberation about the purposes and content of education, through processes that ensure public reason so that the shape of local education as a whole is agreed and is believed to be fair and just. The role of the local authority is to build coalitions that create the climate for, and thus legitimate, change. If the indispensable role of the local authority in the emerging layered system of school and community governance is to be acknowledged and reinforced its authority and powers need concomitantly to be clarified and strengthened. The local council as the democratic centre of local services needs to be restored to its principal role in leading the public sphere of civil society.

IV Concluding comments

What can be learned from this discussion about the governance of school improvement? First, that governance matters because: it strengthens the practices which secure institutional performance; it mediates the social and cultural conditions that engage young people in their learning; and it constitutes the practices of engagement, participation and deliberation which secure that mediation. Second, the participation of volunteer citizens matters because practical wisdom has a crucial role with professional expertise in mediating the journey of learning between worlds. Finally, the object of governance should include the wider learning community as well as the individual institution. The purpose of governance is to develop the public goods of learning and citizenship, and to mediate differences so as to secure public agreement about those goods of educational opportunity. A public education cannot be left to chance and contingency, nor to the interested decisions of a corporate club or association. It is the responsibility of the community and civil society as a whole.

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Notes

This paper draws in particular upon Ranson, 2004; Ranson et al, 2005b; and Ranson and Crouch, 2009.

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ii The concept of 'performativity' describes a quantitative approach to school evaluation with abstract standards of input-output effectiveness imposed externally by state inspectorates in the form of exam and test score targets. This calculative model should be distinguished from an assessment of performance, discursively established by the partners to a school providing an account of standards that grows out of agreed judgements about the potential and achievement of students (a dialogue of accountability). (Cf. Ranson, 2003)

iii Primary Care Trusts provided a local tier of governance in the National Health Service in Britain until 2011. Their function has been to provide and commission health services in response to local need. The governing boards of the Trusts comprised non-executive directors who were recruited from local people.