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Principal Role and School Structure

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Abstract**—**This main purpose of the study reported here was to investigate the extent to which the form of school governance (particularly decision-making) had an impact upon the effectiveness of the school with reference to parental involvement, planning and budgeting, professional development of teachers, school facilities and resources, and student outcomes. Particular attention was given to decision-making within the governance arrangements. The study was based on four case studies of high schools in New South Wales, Australia including one government school, one independent Christian community school, one independent Catholic school, and one Catholic systemic school. The focus of the research was principals, teachers, parents, and students of four schools with varying governance structures. To gain a greater insight into the issues, the researchers collected information by questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and review of school key documents. This study found that it was not so much structure but the centrality of the school Principal and the way that the Principal perceived his/her roles in relation to others that impacted most on school governance.

Keywords**—**governance structure, principal role, school effectiveness, stakeholder involvement

I. INTRODUCTION

EDUCATION in Australia is constitutionally a state responsibility with the national government providing some general and special purpose grants. Each state has a different governance arrangement for the effective management of government schools.

In terms of school type, it is necessary to note that Australian schools are divided into government and non-government sectors. Non-government schools include independent primary and secondary schools, Catholic parish primary and secondary schools, and primary and secondary schools with other religious affiliations or associated with particular philosophies. All non-government schools are partially government-funded and the policies of Federal and State governments appear to support the increased privatisation of education. According to the study by Caldwell, 70 percent of students attend government schools, and 30 percent attend schools operated by churches and other non-government organizations [1].

While all Australian territories are engaged in decentralization in public education, the speed of change, the areas of management chosen for decentralization, and the change processes utilized, have varied markedly from system to system [2,3]. However, the common feature wherever school-based management has been implemented is that there has been an increase in authority and responsibility at the school level, but within a centrally determined framework that ensures that a sense of system is retained [2].

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II. LITRATURE REVIEW

Different studies define various characteristics of effective schools. In fact, school effectiveness is influenced by a variety of factors and the governance arrangement is only one of them. For the purpose of this study the researcher limited school effectiveness criteria to parental involvement, professional development of teachers, student outcomes, resource and facilities, and planning and budgeting. The literature review is divided into four major sections: governance; governance and school effectiveness; leadership and school effectiveness; and stakeholder involvement.

A. Governance

During the last 10 to 15 years educational systems around the world have encountered great challenge and change in relation to reforms in public education intended to develop more effective schools and raise levels of student achievement [4]. The 1990s saw considerable structural reform in school education in many western nation states, marked by trends towards school-based management [5].

There have, however, been concerns over the success of school-based management. While there are significant variations in the degrees of school-level authority, countries such as America, Australia, and Sweden all vest the ultimate constitutional authority for education decision-making at the state level, in Canada, the provincial level, and in England and New Zealand at the central level. There are, however, major differences in the ways in which these central governments have implemented educational governance reforms [6], 2003). Bottani raises an important point that when there is an increase in decentralization of schools in some management areas, it has been accompanied by an increase in control by the centre in areas such as curriculum [7]. However, the common feature wherever school-based management has been implemented is that there has been an increase in authority and responsibility at the school level, but within a centrally determined framework that ensures that a sense of system is retained [2].

Whitty et al note that in Australian education, educational provision is mainly the responsibility of each of the six states and the Northern Territory and ACT [8]. The Federal government has some influence on education, particularly by providing financial support to all non-government

schools, developing nationwide policies and distributing particular grants to 'offset regional disadvantages'. According to a national report by Morgan, the present status of educational reforms in Australia includes a mixture of school-based management practices and centralist management [9]. Curriculum decision-making is strongly centralist, and in government schools central management through statewide systems largely controls staffing decisions.

B. Governance and School Effectiveness

An important point in the area of school effectiveness is that not only do researchers not agree on a definition of school effectiveness and the characteristics of effective schools, but they also disagree on the factors that make a school effective [10]. Some authors [11,12] define school effectiveness as congruence between objectives and achievements. Many studies, especially in the US, use quantitative assessment of student achievement and measure achievement according to student academic outcomes and the concept of the value added by the school. The fact is, however, that academic outcomes are only one aspect of the education process and assessing school effectiveness [13,14] and determinants of school effectiveness through test scores is a narrow and limited approach [15,16].

Affective measures are also identified as important components of school effectiveness and quality assurance as well as their enhancement being linked to implementation of school reform and improvement [13]. Reynolds and Cuttance [17] point out, however, that only a few school effectiveness studies try to identify relationships between aspects of school-based management and school effectiveness in terms of both affective outcomes (e.g., school climate, sense of community, sense of self-efficacy, morale) and cognitive outcomes (student academic achievement).

There are contradictory views and evidence on structural factors and school effectiveness. Renchler [18] explains that in spite of little quantitative evidence on the influence of governance structures on student academic achievement, many people appear willing to experiment with changing those structures in the hope that the changes will encourage teachers and students to perform at higher levels. Teddlie and Reynolds in their *International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research* [19] conclude that when schools have more control of their academic operations, their effect is greater. Urbanski and Erskine [20] claim that decentralized governance structures promote changes at the classroom level because teachers and parents in each school community and at the school level have greater authority and capacity to adapt teaching and learning methods to address achievement standards as well as the unique needs of their students.

The fact is that decentralized decision-making is an organizational rather than an educational reform and researchers believe that there is a difference between the two. McNeill and McNeill [21] explain that, "Educational reform is improvement in the specific kinds of work schools do but organizational reform is improving the way an organization is structured for reaching its goals efficiently and effectively".

C. Leadership and School Effectiveness

It is broadly accepted that effective leadership is a key component in achieving school improvement [22,23] and successful school reforms [24,25]. Management style adopted within a school is seen to be of central importance to the perceived and realised effectiveness of the whole school [26] and empirical results of a recent study by Dinham [27] indicate that leadership is a critical factor in the attainment of exceptional educational outcomes and in developing effective, innovative schools and facilitating quality teaching and learning.

Studies [28] confirm that the principal's leadership has a strong direct effect on in-school processes and only indirect effects on educational outcomes. This result is consistent with the later study of Leithwood and Jantzi [29], which indicates that effective leaders have a powerful indirect impact on student achievement and school effectiveness [2006]. Hallinger and Heck [31] report that the effect of leadership on school effectiveness occurs largely through actions by the principal such as providing a clear school mission and a positive school climate and Harris [32] highlights such features of effective leaders as alignment to a shared set of values, distributed leadership, investment in staff development, developing and maintaining relationships, and community building.

D. Stakeholder Involvement

The issue of stakeholder involvement has been an important consideration since the 1980s and the notion that schools can benefit from the input of different stakeholders is a focus in the literature, including such things as empowerment and localization of decision-making at the school level. Griffith [33] refers to an increased emphasis on the inclusion of other stakeholders (e.g., parents, community groups, and relevant others) as well as school staff in public education during the last decade, and Davis [34] indicates that parent and teacher consultation and collaboration in school decision-making creates the climate for greatest fulfilment of a student's potential.

An important aspect of educational leadership, therefore, is the involvement of stakeholders, particularly teachers, in school decisions. Dinham [27] and Florez et al. [35] indicate that the levels of participation in school decision-making are dependent largely on the leadership style of the principal and that it is important that the principal promotes democratic leadership in schools. Although the role of the principal may vary according to the type of school, the principal is still at the locus of decision-making and plays the critical role in management of decision-making within the school [36].

One aspect of the leadership behaviour of the principal is that of teacher empowerment [37]. The nature of the relationship between principal and teachers influences teachers' willingness to be involved [38], and if principals do not trust their teachers, [39] or if they perceive a lack of teacher commitment to organizational goals, they will not share authority or responsibility [40]. Duke [41] points to the significant role of interpersonal skills of principals rather than the structure of the school or systems within the school in encouraging successful teacher involvement, and Dufour and Eaker [42, cited in Chui et al.,37] see the principal's willingness to share power with teachers as an important condition for empowering teachers.

There is a general view that it is valuable to have parental involvement in school activities and decision-making and there is considerable evidence that parents can bring particular skills and support to students and teachers [43, 34,44,33,45,46]. Consequently, many countries have developed programs to encourage parents to become more involved in their children's schools and education [47, 46]. However, opinion is not all positive and evidence is less than conclusive, particularly on the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement [48, 49].

Students have limited say in some school decisions and often only relatively few students in the form of committees and student organizations. They are, however, rarely involved in core decisions such as on pedagogy or school organization. Many [50,51,28] advocate more meaningful student involvement and believe that it has many benefits for both students and schools, although the literature does not confirm this in relation to student outcomes and school effectiveness.

III. RESERCH METHOD

As the main purpose of this study was to identify how different forms of school governance affect selected aspects of school effectiveness, a multiple case studies approach was regarded as the most appropriate after considering other approaches. Information was gathered from four Australian schools with varying governance arrangements - one government school, one independent school, one Christian community school, and one Catholic systemic school in New South Wales (NSW). This study employed a mixed method approach because of the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, and to generate data rich in detail and embedded in context.

This study drew on Principals', teachers', parents', and students' views, ideas and opinions regarding relationships of governance arrangements and selected aspects of school effectiveness. The research used multiple data-gathering techniques in order to make general inferences about the impacts of governance arrangements on school effectiveness.

The questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with respondents were the primary sources of data. In addition, supplementary data were collected through reviews of school policy documents, Newsletters, Annual Reports, and management plans.

IV. RESULT

A. Government School

This school was relatively large and one of the well resourced government schools in the area with many students from different nationalities, low socio-economic status, and non-English speaking backgrounds. As a government school it was part of a centralised system. Although various stakeholders perceived that the Principal had considerable decision-making authority, several of them, and the Principal himself, were aware of the limitations imposed on in-school decision-making by the policies and legislation of the State government, the Board of Studies, and system policy and budget constraints. The Principal pointed to his limited control over curriculum, budget and staffing, both numbers and selection.

The curriculum framework was set by the Board of Studies, and in-school decisions were confined to its implementation at school level. Major financial support was provided by the State Department and determined on the basis of student enrolment. The Principal and teachers, however, had considerable say in how the budget was spent.

The Principal had made considerable efforts to establish a collegial school community where staff, and other stakeholders to some degree, participated collaboratively in important decisions and there was general agreement on the success of this approach. One teacher said, "I have been here for 20 years and I've seen Principals come and go and the Principal at the moment seems to be one that's got the most ideas about how to make decisions and use the expertise in the school."

Only a small group of parents were actively involved in School Affairs and were happy with this involvement, and unwilling to have a say in the professional development of teachers. A parent explained, "I don't think that I should be able to make decisions about children's education…. I think I should help in decisions on sorts of things like whether we should have a School Bus or not…" Some expressed the view that more extensive involvement of parents would be beneficial, although a number of "barriers" to this were widely recognised. Communication with parents and the local community by the school was a feature.

Students had very little say in major decision-making in the school and had only limited awareness of the complexities involved. With some exceptions, students were relatively happy with this situation. A student pointed out, "We participate in some decisions; we have a Student Representative Council, and students are elected from every year. They make decisions based on what students want."

Stakeholders were involved in decision-making in different ways. In relative terms, the Principal played the major role in decision-making in the school, with Executive, teachers/staff, parents, and then students having some say. The Principal's authority, together with his broad awareness of issues and knowledge of possibilities and limitations, were major factors in his position at the locus of decision-making and stakeholders were happy with this and with the contributions they were able to make. Decision-making at the school related positively to all the major indicators of school effectiveness although not necessarily directly.

B. Independent Christian Community School

This school was a small low-fee independent community school with a small number of low-income families and geographical limitations on expansion. Parents controlled the school and there was extensive direct parental involvement in school activities, although some of the parents who were involved in school governance were not well educated. The school had a highly decentralised system of governance although the Principal and teachers saw the Principal's authority as being limited by State government policies and legislation, the Board of Studies, and the School Board. One teacher argued:

> I do not think (the Principal) has enough autonomy because there is a School Board. At the moment a number of people on the Board are very controlling and they are actually making life very difficult for the Principal to be able to make the decisions which are necessary.

The Principal did not believe he/she had real control over the curriculum and the amount of government funding. The School Board had full authority for selection and appointment of staff. The curriculum framework was set by the Board of Studies but the school had considerable say in

implementation of the academic curriculum at the school level, and the curriculum in religious education.

The amounts of both government and non-government funding were based on student enrolment. The school had a Business Manager and the Principal worked collaboratively with him to ensure that the educational needs of the school were addressed. Because of the consultative nature of school governance and the high degree of parental involvement, the governance processes were slow.

Within the constraint of School Board control the Principal tried to use collaborative decision-making and consequently staff felt that they were listened to more by the Principal than the School Board.

A teacher in the interview claimed:

> …I think people feel listened to, particularly parents and students. I think teachers are not listened to more than anyone else. Not so much by the Principal and Executive but by the Board…

In terms of teacher willingness to participate in school decision-making, one of the teachers believed that, "As a teacher, I think there should be, in decision-making, more listening to the teachers. I do not think there is enough, particularly for those who are more experienced and know the school well."

A large group of committed parents were active in School Affairs and were largely happy with the opportunity to be involved, but barriers such as work and other commitments and limited time prevented some parents from greater involvement. A parent said in the interview:

> Most committees in the school have got parents on them. I don't think they [parents] have any limitations [in participation in the planning and budgeting decisions]. They can come to any meeting that they want. So, parents are always welcome to the school.

In spite of the fact that students had very limited say in school decisions and did not understand the complexity of decision-making as well as other stakeholders, they were happy. The Principal considered planning and budgeting decisions as an area in which students did not possess enough expertise to make important contributions.

Stakeholders were involved in decision-making in different ways. In relative terms, the Principal had most say in decision-making at the school, then teachers, parents, and then some students. Some students and teachers felt a need for more inputs in school decisions.

The Principal and the School Board had the clearest ideas and awareness of issues because they were close to the locus of decision-making. The school facilities were limited because the school was a low-fee paying school, had two campuses and a geographical problem. Overall, the school had an inclusive and positive decision-making culture and all stakeholders, especially parents, were reasonably happy with opportunities to be involved. Decision-making at the school related positively to all major indicators of school effectiveness including parental involvement, professional development, planning and budgeting, resources and facilities, and student outcomes.

C. Independent Catholic School

This school was an independent Catholic school owned by a Catholic religious order and governed by a Board of Directors. Many of the school families were professional or in management while some were tradespeople, or salaried employees. The school had a very high rate of fee collection (over 95%), which suggested that the community was reasonably affluent, placed a high value on education, and made the required sacrifices to meet their financial obligations.

The school had a substantially decentralised system of governance and the Principal used an authoritarian leadership style with a "hands on" approach to decision-making. There was insufficient evidence to indicate the use of collaborative decision-making. Although the Principal enjoyed considerable authority and autonomy in substantive and strategic matters as a result of the more decentralized governance structure, he/she did not have complete control over the curriculum and the amounts of government funding. The academic curriculum was set by the Board of Studies although the school has some say in its implementation at school level, and more in the curriculum in religious education. The Principal believes that he/she has considerable authority in important matters such as budgeting, but feedback from his/her interview indicates that this authority could be greater. The Principal explained:

> I have enough autonomy because I am the employer and so I have control over all employment decisions and I have major influence on all budgetary decisions and I am consulted by the Business Manager and Finance Committee. Basically I direct where the resources are going to go and I direct where the money goes and also policy direction. I initiate and drive policy direction, changes in educational direction, and introduction of new curriculum.

The school had a Business Manager who was accountable to the Principal who was accountable to the Finance Committee of the Board. The amounts of government and non-government funding were determined according to student enrolment. However, teachers and, especially, the Principal and Business Manager had considerable say in how the non-salary budget was spent. Although staff had important say in the curriculum offering, budget, and resources and facilities decisions, they had limited say in the professional development of teachers and parental involvement decisions. However, the Dean of the Community (Assistant Principal) had considerable authority in professional development of teachers. Barriers such as busy lifestyle, lack of time and inadequate financial knowledge prevented teachers from effective participation in school financial decisions.

The Principal argued that in planning and budgeting decisions the students did not possess enough special expertise to make important contributions.

With some exceptions, stakeholders were involved in decision-making in different ways. In relative terms, the Principal has most say in decision-making at the school, then teachers, parents, and some students. The Principal had the most information and awareness of issues because he/she is central in decision-making processes.

School facilities are limited because of the school's geographical situation. Overall, since this school had a unique governance structure and dynamics of leadership, it had a positive culture, and most stakeholders were happy with existing opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes.

D. Catholic Systemic School

This school was a Catholic systemic co-educational high school established in 1982 and was under the management of a NSW Diocese. The population served by the school was diverse both in socio-economic characteristics and geographic location, ranging from farming to coastal centres to newer urban areas. As a Catholic school servicing a vast regional area, it enjoyed a rich multicultural background.

The school was part of a semi-centralised system and the Principal used a consultative leadership style with extensive delegation to staff level. The Principal explained:

> Hopefully, there is enough autonomy for the Principal to make decisions. Within that autonomy the Principal does not make decisions on his/her own. The Principal can make decisions but generally it is a whole-school thing. Then it's always done democratically. It is very rarely a single person decision.

The Principal had authority in budgeting (for maintenance), staffing and policy within the school. Although various stakeholders perceived that the Principal enjoyed considerable authority, the Principal himself/herself saw his/her authority as limited by the policies and legislation of the State government, the Board of Studies, system policies of the Catholic Education Office, and teachers' union/ industrial agreements. The Principal consulted with senior people in the Catholic Education Office on a regular basis. Decisions on appointments to the positions of Religious Education Coordinator, Deputy Principal, and Principal were made at the Office level. The Principal did not have complete control over the curriculum or the amount of budget. The curriculum was set by the NSW Board of Studies although the school had some say in implementation of the curriculum at the school level and the curriculum in religious education.

The amount of budget was largely based on student enrolment, but the Principal, the Deputy Principal, and the Bursar had considerable say in how the budget was spent. The Principal had made many efforts to establish a collegial culture where staff had opportunities to participate in important decisions, but lack of time and financial knowledge prevented some staff from effective participation in the school's financial decisions.

Caution had to be exercised in drawing definitive conclusions about parental involvement because of the very small respondent sample. However, although surveyed parents were divided on the adequacy of their involvement in school decision-making, in the interview they expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to be involved. The Principal claimed that more parental involvement was related to the decision-making relevant to 'kids' and the student representative council. Parents did not think that they should play a major role in regulating the school. They had adequate opportunities to be involved, but common barriers such as lack of time and busy life prevented some parents from more active involvement.

Students on the other hand had very limited say in school decision-making, but were happy with the range of opportunities available to them. Lack of time and of financial knowledge was the main barriers to their involvement. The Principal did not believe that students should participate in budgetary decisions because they lacked adequate knowledge and experience to participate in complex school matters.

With some exceptions, the Principal, teachers, students, and parents were largely happy with their inputs to decision-making in the school. Stakeholders were involved in decision-making to varying degrees. The Principal was most involved in school decisions, then teachers, parents, and then some students. The Principal had the most information and awareness of issues because he/she was closest to the locus of decision-making.

The school had adequate facilities though some teachers and students felt a need for more. Overall, a lot of collaborative work has been done. The school governance and collegial culture, level of resources, pastoral support for students, and collaborative leadership style of the Principal appear to have had very positive impacts on student retention, learning outcomes and student achievement.

V. DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the impact of different governance structures on school effectiveness. However, what the researcher found was that it was not so much the structure but the centrality of the Principal and the way that the Principal perceived his/her roles in relation to others that impacted most on school governance.

It is apparent that the personal qualities of the Principals here were a major influence on their role. There were also two other broad influences on the role of the Principal in school governance and decision-making. These were the Principal's perception of stakeholder status and power, and school culture, context, and, to a small degree, structure. As a result the Principals seemed to have adopted particular styles or approaches to consciously managing the decision-making of the school and this is reflected in leadership style and stakeholder involvement in decision-making. These in turn then influence back on school culture, context, and structure but as far as school effectiveness and student achievement go, it is more difficult to demonstrate a direct cause-and-effect relationship [52].

The following flow chart maps the emerging issues found in this study and their relationships with school governance, school effectiveness and student achievement.

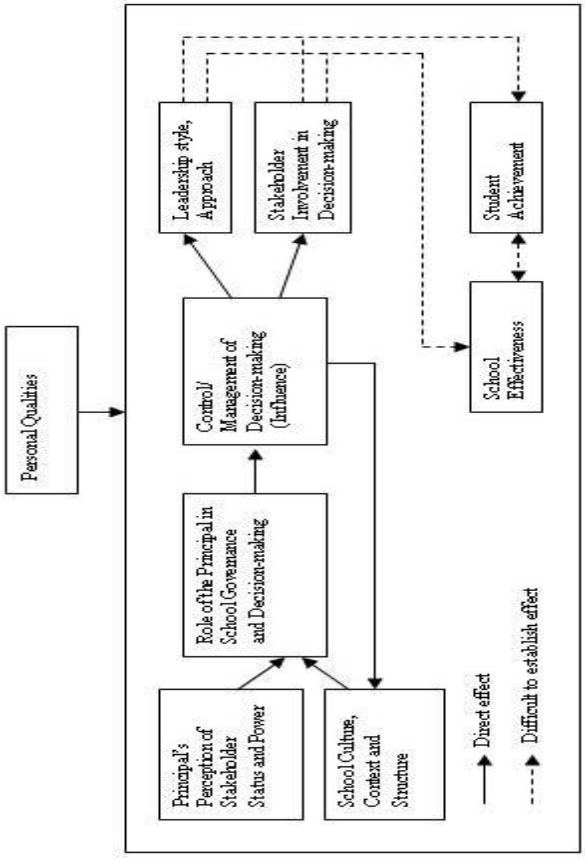

Fig. 1 A Model of School Governance and Decision-making: Influence of the Principal

A. Role of the Principal in School Governance and Decision-making

Literature on school governance confirms that the quality of the principal is a critical factor in the success of a school (Southworth, 1999). Hallinger and Heck (1996b) conclude that school principals affect school outcomes by mission building, effective organizational structures and social networks, and working through people.

This study looked at school governance and decision-making and found that the major influence on these is the principal. This is in agreement with the findings in the research literature that the principal plays the main role in school governance and decision-making to varying degrees depending on the degree of centralization of school governance. Based on the study's findings, it matters less what kind of structure in which the principal acts; he or she has the main responsibility for and influence on governance and decision-making in the school.

However, the type of structure in which the principal performs could facilitate or limit his/ her role. The school context and culture may also impact positively or negatively on the principal's role. Importantly, the principal's perception of stakeholder status and power also impacts on their role in governance and managing of decision-making in the school. It is clear that a principal who feels other major stakeholders should be involved in school governance performs differently from the principal who does not believe in involving other stakeholders or believes that a particular group of stakeholders should or should not be involved in some types of decisions. Additionally, the personal qualities of the principal are important influences on how they perform their role.

In the government school, respondents agreed that the Principal had adequate involvement in different school decisions except staffing. The Principal of this school felt frustrated in some areas, particularly staffing. This shows how the structure could constrain or facilitate the Principal's role. In the Independent Christian community school there was a partnership between the Principal and the School Board, and the Principal explained that the Board Treasurer, Business Manager, and the Board Chair made most budgetary decisions. The Principal in the independent Catholic school had considerable autonomy in school governance and decision-making and claimed that there was nothing within the school that he/she did not direct, and that he/she did not have to answer to anybody except the Board of Directors. In the Catholic systemic school, the Principal had flexibility in school-based decisions within the context of the school environment, but sometimes needed to consult with senior people in the Catholic Education Office in decision-making regarding the school.

B. Principal's Perception of Stakeholder Status and Power

Findings from this study highlight the point that the statuses of various stakeholders can influence their involvement in certain types of decisions. Their involvement in decision-making reflects their standing, or status in the organization or the school community could further reinforce their status. In the schools studied here, the Principals clearly played the major role in the decision-making process. Teachers, except for some in the Christian community school, were next in order of importance in the process, followed by parents, then students.

This study demonstrates that the principal's perception of stakeholder status and power could influence the decision-making opportunities provided by the principal for different stakeholders. In other words, if the Principal wants to share power with others in certain areas, he/she will provide situations and opportunities for those others to be involved in school decisions. It is clear that the personal qualities and leadership style of the principal, and the personal qualities, abilities and experience, and organizational positions of stakeholders, can also influence the principal's perception of their status. For instance, an open and inclusive leader with a distributed leadership style allows and encourages participation of different stakeholders. Stakeholders with perceived positive personal qualities and relevant experience and abilities, or with higher organizational positions, are also more likely to be involved by the principal in school governance and decision-making.

The Principal's feelings about sharing power and the status of stakeholders, and the sorts of decisions that different stakeholders should be involved in, were different among the studied schools. Overall, Principals in both the government and Catholic systemic schools included stakeholders in most areas of decision-making to some degree, but the Principals of Christian community and Catholic schools did not involve all stakeholders to the same extent. The Principal of the Christian community school stated that teachers should be involved in some decisions, but that other decisions should be made by the School Board or the Principal and teachers merely informed. This reflected the differences in the Principals' attitudes and leadership styles. Dufour and Eaker [42, cited in 37] see the principal's willingness to share power with teachers as an important condition for empowering teachers and Newcombe et al. [40] indicate that the principal's perception of teacher commitment to the school's organizational goals also determines the extent of teacher involvement in decision-making. Davis [34] found that parent and teacher consultation and collaboration in school decision-making create the climate for greatest understanding of a student's potential.

C. School Culture, Context, and Structure

This study suggests that the principal's leadership style plays a major role in creating a positive and encouraging climate in the school and, in turn, influences school governance and school effectiveness. Obviously, principals are influenced by school culture and context, but they also shape that culture and context over time. According to the study by Deal and Peterson (1998), principals are central to shaping a positive school culture. Researchers have noted that principals in successful schools create a school culture that is caring, risk-taking, open, and supportive [53,54]. In fact, leadership is a two-way process in which the behaviours of the leaders influence school climate and are also a product of the school environment and interaction with others [55].

A common finding across the studied schools was the existence of generally positive cultures with varying degrees of inclusiveness. For example, in the government school the Principal had to work within more constraints on his/her autonomy than the other Principals. Yet the data indicate that despite those constraints the Principal was able to manage the school in a positive way.

This study indicates that the studied schools varied in contextual factors such as size, characteristics of the school community, type of school, socio-economic backgrounds of students, physical environment, and parental engagement, and that these contextual factors could impact on the Principal's leadership and management and consequently on student achievement. Nevertheless, the studied schools, operated in a similar context and region. For example, all four schools were situated in a city and except for School A, all were religious schools; except for the Christian community school, all schools had large student populations. The schools operated within frameworks of the same curriculum, and similar policies, industrial agreements, associations of parents, and councils of students. Such contextual factors are evidently not as important here as indicated in other studies [56, 57].

Despite some differences, these schools operated within similar governance and decision-making structures and constraints. They were all secondary schools and operated within the NSW Board of Studies framework with similar industrial union and legislative constraints. All schools had parent bodies, staff meetings, and the Principals, at the end of day, were accountable. As a result, structural influence was not so significant on school effectiveness and student achievement.

D. Control/ Management of Decision-making

The literature indicates that because of the principal's central position of power, he/she essentially dictates how community involvement might develop in his/her particular school [58]. This study found that principals actually manage school decision-making to varying degrees of formal, conscious control depending on the factors discussed above. As previously mentioned the principal's personality, leadership style, perception of stakeholder status and attitude to sharing power, school culture, context, and structure all influence decision-making. The influence of decision-making on school context and culture and, particularly on school effectiveness and student achievement is more difficult to demonstrate in terms of direct cause-and-effect. Some principals try to control decision-making more and some are happier to share and create a democratic environment in their schools.

E. Leadership Style and Approach

This study indicates that the studied Principals typically used one of two broad types of leadership styles. The Principals of government and Catholic systemic schools used more distributed leadership and the Principal of Christian community school, within the constraints of the School Board, also tried to use distributed leadership to some extent; the Principal of independent Catholic school was a more autocratic leader. There are several possible reasons for these differences, including the personal qualities of the Principals and the degree of accountability. In decentralized schools principals are accountable to the school community and the School Board and therefore may retain decision-making authority and use more autocratic leadership. According to the study by Calnin and Davies [59], principals in independent schools differ from principals in government schools in the key areas of accountability to parents and governors, fiscal responsibility, admissions and enrolments, building and fundraising, and legal and business decisions. It could also be that because of the greater authority of principals in decentralized governance structures they may wish and be more able to share their authority with others and use more distributed leadership.

This study indicates that a decentralized governance structure did not in itself seem to be a major influence on decision-making and governance; rather it was the Principal's feeling about sharing power, the statuses of various stakeholders, and the types of decisions that impacted most on school decisions.

The empirical work of Florez, Carrion, Calero, Gershberg, and Castro [35] supports the view that the levels of participation in school decision-making are dependent largely on the leadership style of the principal and it is important that the principal promote democratic leadership in autonomous schools. Some researchers [60, 61] indicate that when there is collaborative leadership and teachers are involved in issues significant to them, student outcomes are more likely to improve.

F. Stakeholder Involvement in Decision-making

There were some subtle differences among the four schools in relation to stakeholder involvement in school decisions.

Teachers

Teachers had more involvement in government and Catholic systemic schools than in Christian community and independent Catholic schools and some teachers in all schools did not want to be involved in all types of decisions. Some explanations for the different degrees of teacher involvement in different sorts of decisions could be that some teachers selectively engage in school decisions; or that the Principal does not trust teachers to make decisions in the best interest of the school, or considers teachers as a threat to their power and position; or thinks teachers do not have appropriate expertise. The findings also reveal that teachers in the government and Catholic systemic schools perceived the school culture as more positive for and encouraging of their involvement in school decisions.

Parents

Researchers [62,63] have found that parental involvement in school activities is vital both for the families and for school performance improvement. Moles [64] recommends that schools must facilitate parental involvement in decision-making at the school. The study by Telem [63] found that the principal plays a central role in promoting parental involvement. With the exception of the Christian community school in this study, however, only a small group of committed parents in each school were involved in school decision-making. There were different opportunities to participate in school decisions, but all interviewed parents believed that they had equal parental involvement opportunities whether they took those opportunities or not.

Limited parental involvement could be related to the governance structure of the school, the leadership style of the Principal and the Principal's feeling about parents' status and power, and school climate. It is possible that limited experience, or trust in the school and the expertise of school members, may contribute to parents' reluctance to be involved in school decisions, or that schools may discourage such involvement, or that some parents may involve themselves selectively.

Students

Across the four schools the findings also indicate that while there were some opportunities for students to participate in decision-making, typically only a minority of students were involved and not in the core areas of staffing, curriculum, professional development and school budget. Except for the Principal of the government school, other Principals seemed reluctant to allow students more involvement in such core areas, perhaps because of lack of time and/or confidentiality issues, or the Principals not being comfortable with such student involvement, or because of students having less power and status than other stakeholders. Additionally, not all students wanted to participate, perhaps because they did not have the appropriate knowledge and expertise, or that the structure and climate of the school discouraged such involvement.

A recent study by Fletcher [65] finds, "In spite of the evidence, researchers and advocates still find that students are continuously neglected, sometimes actively denied, any sort of role in their school's improvement programs."

F. Student Achievement and School Effectiveness

While the principal is central to the extent of stakeholder involvement, the relationships among the principal's leadership, student achievement, and school effectiveness are more indirect, both in this study and in the literature. Leithwood et al. [28] found that the principal's leadership has strong direct effect on in-school processes and only indirect effects on outcomes. The study by Gurr et al. [66] also found that principals have a key role in the success of schools generally and, especially, in student outcomes. This result is consistent with the later study of Leithwood and Jantzi [29], which shows that effective leaders have a powerful indirect impact on student achievement and school effectiveness.

As Heck et al. [67] note, "Principals do not affect individual students directly as teachers do through classroom instruction, but that activities of the Principal directed at school-level performance have trickle-down effects on teachers and students." This is also consistent with the findings of researchers [28, 68, cited in [69, 57] that the principal's leadership has a direct effect on school conditions such as school goals, planning, structure, climate, and work conditions which in turn show a direct effect on classroom conditions such as instruction, policies, and procedures.

However, Ainley and McKenzie [70] declare that research evidence on the effect of school governance on student outcomes is not extensive and that the literature on the principal's role in school effectiveness is inconclusive. As studies (Keller, 1998; Maehr & Fyans, 1989) vary in their results on this relationship, there is clear need for further research on it.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this investigation was to study the impact of governance arrangements on selected aspects of school effectiveness, and it provides evidence of the key role of the principal in school governance and decision-making.

The findings indicate that although NSW schools have different governance structures, from highly centralized governance to relatively decentralized, they have similar limitations imposed on in-school decision-making by the policies and legislation of the State government, the Board of Studies, and system policy and budget constraints and therefore that schools are very similar in their approaches to governance and decision-making. The Principal was the locus of decision-making in all studied schools and the involvement of different stakeholders largely depends on how the Principal felt about sharing decision-making power and responsibility in terms of the status of different stakeholders and their potential influence. Additionally, the Principal's personal qualities and leadership style impacted on his/her role in the management of decision-making in the school and the creation of a positive and encouraging school climate and that climate also influenced the behaviour of the Principal.

While some researchers have shown that there are positive relationships between student participation in decision-making and improvement in their academic and non-academic performance [51,65,71,72] this relationship was not evident here. In fact, in all the studied schools only a minority of students were involved in very low-level decision-making and it was apparent that they did not understand the complexity of decision-making as much as other stakeholders.

The following implications are based on the conclusions drawn from this study on the impact of governance structure on school effectiveness.

- This study indicates that professional development of principals should include focus on leadership styles in relation to governance structures, decision-making and the involvement of other stakeholders.
- Personal qualities of the principal could be taken into account in relation to the school context when considering candidates for principal positions prior to appointment.
- Education authorities and policy makers should be aware that for enhanced effectiveness, change in school structure alone is not sufficient because it is only one of the factors involved and that the relationships among the principal, school culture and context, and stakeholder involvement are complex.
- One implication of this study in relation to the inter-relationships of school governance and parental involvement is that if principals and school systems provide parental involvement opportunities, encouragement and assistance, they could increase parent involvement in school governance and decision-making.
- Another implication of the study for education systems and principals is that it is important to have efficient communication systems with related stakeholders regardless of who is involved and the degree of involvement.
- Evidence on the impact of governance arrangements on planning and budgeting is inconclusive and further research is needed to reveal the specific impact of these factors on school effectiveness.
- Given the reluctance of teachers, to be involved in financial decision-making, perhaps more consideration in teacher professional development could be given to decision-making processes, leadership, and financial management for those who are interested.
- While no direct relationship could be clearly established here, the indication elsewhere of positive outcomes

from student involvement in decision-making suggests that this involvement be increased. It follows, therefore, that it would be reasonable to give students more training in and opportunities for leadership and decision-making.

- It is also clear that further research needs to look further at relationships among governance, leadership, and student performance.

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