

October 2018

A theory of School Governance

and the need for a NZ community engagement governance model

New Zealand society, as a collective persona, entrusts its future generation to education specialists (teachers) to ensure that their development and potential for achievement is maximised. It expects their children to grow in the school environment and emerge as positive contributors to society.

Our society places a governing mechanism on these specialists in the form of parent representatives who have a responsibility to monitor, observe and assure that child development and achievement meets the democratically determined expectations and aspirations of its proximal community.

Parent representatives, as trustees, are legally entrusted to act on behalf of society and as such are the point of intersection between the community and the school. They aggregate, define and convey the broad range of the group's (the 'collective') expectations. They are to unite and provide both tangible and symbolic guidance, oversight and protection to the school.

the premise

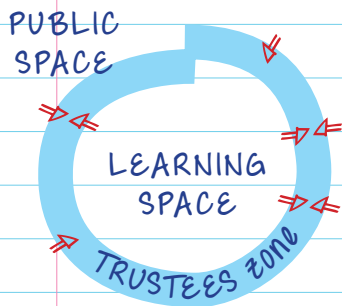
The current governance structure exists because community engagement and family partnership was recognised as a means to improve standards of child education in New Zealand. Prime Minister David Lange expressed intent for "Tomorrow's Schools" in the 1980's was to involve the local community in the education of their children and his determination led to the creation of governance roles for parents as majority representatives on school "Boards of Trustees." While the 1989 amendments to the Education Act specifically address 'governance' the unwritten motive was to enable community engagement and participation.



the practice

Unfortunately over the past three decades this has seen 'governance' get more 'air time' than community engagement. Each Board defines their own balance between governance and management roles, with Trustee personalities and length of tenures having a dominant influence. "Parliamentary Practice" (May, 2011), "Robert's Rules" (Robert, 2011) and "Members' Meetings" (von Dadelszen, 2012) provide Board influencers/leaders 'in the know' with the traditional enforcement tools for validating authority and maintaining control.

So where should Trustees be positioned? Education specialists, as teachers and administrators, are professionally resourced by society to deliver and fulfil its expectations during a set period of time (5 years, 8.30am-3.30pm). Trustees are placed at a boundary between school staff and the community; between those employed and those who employ.



It follows that interaction $\Rightarrow \Leftarrow$ between the staff and the community creates a boundary region in which Boards are authorised to operate. Trustees are not seen in the classroom but "at the school gate". They are the metaphorical boundary, the surrounding wall or fence, assigned to protect, filter and define. When a person, entity, object, transaction or proposal passes in or out of the boundary zone it gets the attention of the Trustees. For practical purposes service gates do remain in place for the Principal to conduct operational exchanges with suppliers and service providers with Board awareness, not involvement.

A tension exists at the school gate - the location of openings for transfer and exchange. Here is the point where the gatekeepers and sentries are assigned; where governance and management meet. It is the place of intersection for expectations and capabilities. For generalists and specialists. For short term contribution and long term commitment. It is a nexus of two forms of government; democracy and meritocracy. Equally balanced tensions should exist to maintain structure. If they are weighted unequally they are likely to become destructive.

GOVERNANCE $\Rightarrow \Leftarrow$	MANAGEMENT
employer $\Rightarrow \Leftarrow$	employee
outcomes ENSURED $\Rightarrow \Leftarrow$	outcomes ASSURED
expectations $\Rightarrow \Leftarrow$	capabilities
generalists $\Rightarrow \Leftarrow$	specialists
child for life $\Rightarrow \Leftarrow$	child for 5 yaers
empowered through DEMOCRACY $\Rightarrow \Leftarrow$	empowered through MERITOCRACY $\Leftarrow \Rightarrow$

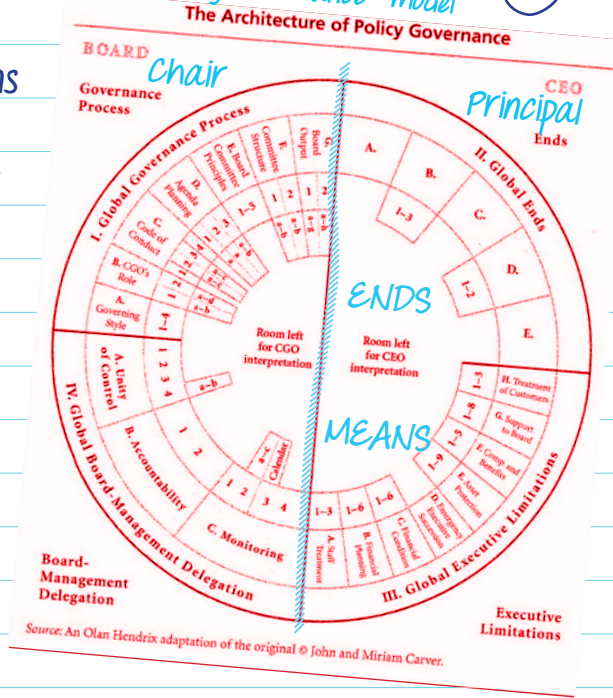
the children >>

...and through it all pass our tamariki - growing, changing and negotiating into pāhake.

Here's how some of the academics see the structural situation... Embedded into many non-profit governance models is a fundamental problem; that the models often foster a tendency for Boards to become so inwardly-focused that they become isolated from the communities that their organisation ultimately serves (Freiwirth, 2005). As observed by Cornforth (2012), governance studies continue to focus on boards in terms of their effectiveness, composition, roles and responsibilities, while topics such as involvement, participation and representation of stakeholders within boards are somewhat neglected (Rossi et.al., 2015).

One of the leading models to test these assumptions on would be John and Miriam Carver's

Policy Governance[®] model. It prescribes a Board framework that has been widely recognised and applied to non-profit boards (Carver, 1997). "Policy Governance separates issues of organizational purpose (ENDS) from all other organizational issues (MEANS), placing primary importance on those Ends" (Carver, 2016). Perceived as being universally relevant it assigns two quadrants to the Board Chair; "Governance Process" and "Board-Management Delegation", and two quadrants to the CEO (Principal); "Global Ends" and "Executive Limitations".



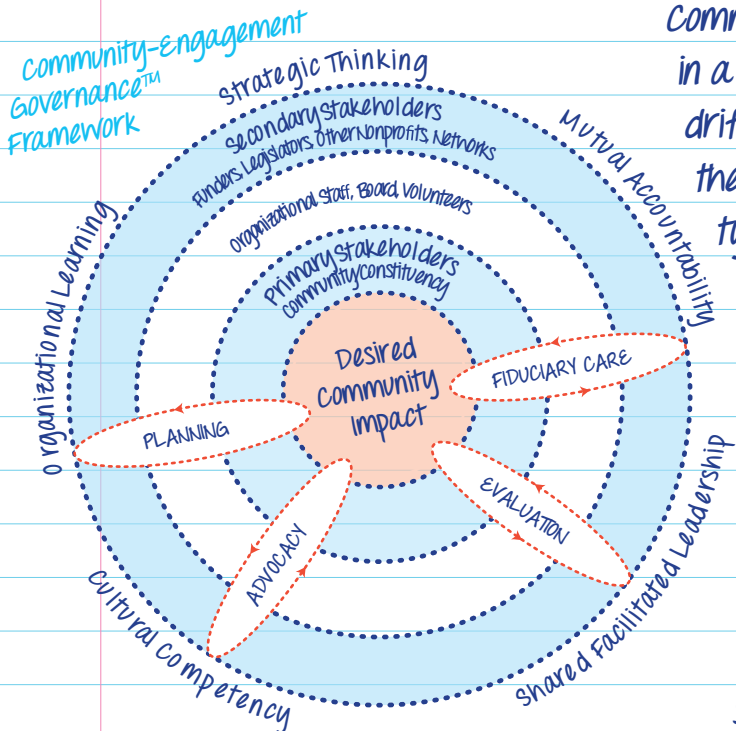
Picture an ancient sculpture of a mother surrounding her infant.

convincingly John Carver (2010) has stated that Boards should have their arms around the organisation (school) while not poking their fingers into it. Certainly an appealing proposition for school principals. Similarly he has expressed that Boards should not function at either extreme of rubber stamping or meddling in management actions.

A Board is to have one voice but many eyes and ears.
...my thoughts
It is not to be one eyed or listen with one ear.

But in the public school system does this model also understate the reason for its adoption? Does it fall into the trap described by Freiwirth and Cornforth of disconnecting the Board from the community it serves? Sarah Swisher (2011), at the Iowa City

Community School District thinks so and put it plainly in a local paper opinion piece that this model has drifted from its origins in the for-profit sector into the non profit sector because so many corporate types now serve on non profit boards. She notes that the Carver board governance model emphasises "strong executive leadership that is minimally limited."



An alternative, the **Community-Engagement Governance™ model** has been designed by Judy Freiwirth (2005). Her model treats governance as a function rather than a structure. It shares power transparently across

hierarchical levels fostering a broader 'buy-in', commitment and contribution. It has been tested over a range of non-profit organisations but not in the primary or secondary school sector. It does point to the possibility of exploring it as an alternative framework for schools that puts the desired impacts on community ahead of venerating the effectiveness of an organisation. It shows potential for honouring the democratic values and communal ideals for which Trustees were originally given the agency to act as representatives.

In order to be effective representatives each Trustee has the responsibility to listen to its community (the public 'owners' who empower the Crown) and to observe the consequences of operational actions. To function effectively a Board then must deliberately maintain channels of communication with, and proximity for observation to a broad range of community members. Even while having trust they are not to rely on the limited and interpreted view of its management leadership team as its primary source of its information. Trustees are not merely elected then isolated as a collective sample who bring their personal perceptions so as to flavour the Board's unified decisions. The Board is to speak as one voice but have many eyes and ears.

What should the Trustees be listening to? Dr. Joyce Epstein's "Six Types of Involvement" for family and community engagement have been proven in the field and form the basis of the National Network of Partnership Schools work in the U.S.

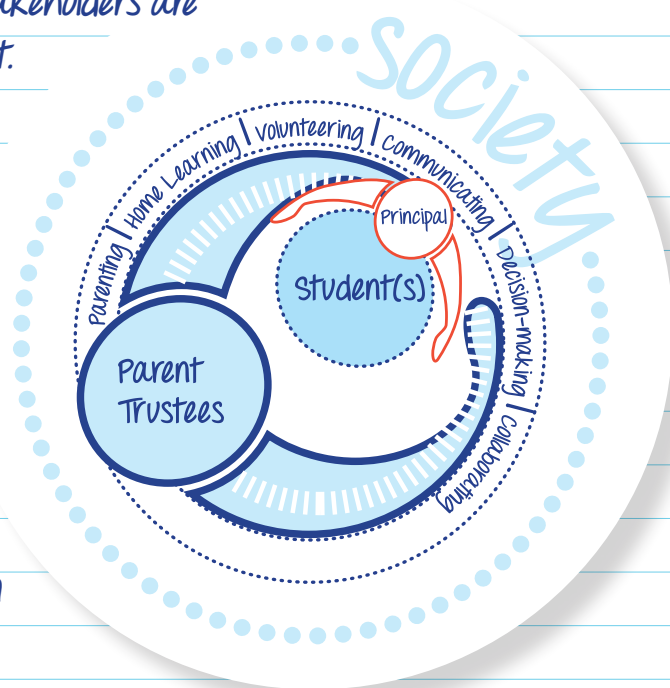
(2016). Her "types", designed to be collectively activated, can be used to categorise areas of engagement that populate the "Board zone" and indicate where responsibilities lie. By crossing the metaphorical and

physical boundary, ¹Parenting, ²Communicating, ³Volunteering, ⁴Home Learning, ⁵Decision-making or ⁶Collaborating with neighbours and stakeholders are the substance of Board attention and involvement.

Relations with external users of school facilities + policies affecting volunteers are in the "zone".

It's time for a community engagement governance model for New Zealand schools.

In a season of significant education review, when there is uncertainty as to the future governance structure and resourcing of primary and secondary schools, it is appropriate to find a governance model that enables community engagement to play a strong part and to provide tangible rather than espoused benefits for "Today's Schools". #



SO WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Even as we await the release of the Taskforce's recommendations to Government following their review of "Tomorrow's Schools" would you want to continue the conversation and explore the practical relevance of a community engagement governance model? If you are willing to put in time and thought then let's meet, in person or by video call. If there is more than one or two interested, then a group could come together as "School Community Builders" in New Zealand. Perhaps a small group meeting is a starting point to ongoing interaction and cooperation.

Email or phone me - we will be better together! As a school trustee I look to make a difference at my school.

Sincerely,

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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead

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