



Research in Social Sciences and Technology

Review of Modernising School Governance: Corporate Planning and Expert Handling in State Education

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Wilkins, A. (2016). *Modernising school governance: Corporate planning and expert handling in state education*. New York, NY: Routledge. 172 pp., ISBN-9781138787476.

Modernising School Governance: Corporate Planning and Expert Handling in State Education is a part of Routledge Research in Education Policy and Politics series which aims to enhance readers understanding of key challenges and facilitate on-going academic debate within the influential and growing field of education policy and politics by Routledge. Andrew Wilkins, the author, is a senior lecturer in Education Studies at the University of East London. *Modernising School Governance* is a product of a three-year project conducted between 2012 – 2015 and supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in England.

Modernising School Governance aimed to investigate the impact of the latest reforms on the role of school governors in the English state education system. The authors aimed to examine how the role of school governors changed by considering the market-based reforms from the 1980's with a particular emphasis on accountability, freedom and responsibilities, verification, and the needs of modernized market. *Modernising School Governance* provided detailed information about how the creation of greater school autonomy diminished local government support and effects of centralized accountability on school governors' daily practices. This book also investigated both

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government and non-government demands on training, professional development, skills audit, performance evaluation, rituals of verification, evidentiary decision-making and consensus-driven language. According to the author, school governors stand at the intersection of state and market prerogatives. Thus, school governors have been encourage to meet the challenges of new modernized market and education system, which entails acquiring new skills and knowledge as well as the ability to use new technologies. Modernising School Governance also highlighted how school governors become captured in governmental fields of power.

In order to examine school governors' role in the shed light on recent reforms, the author adopted elements of Foucauldian theory and governmentality approach. By using these approaches Wilkins described the dividing practices through which governors are classified as 'good' or 'poor', 'strong' or 'weak', 'amateur' or 'professional'.

In the book's introduction, Wilkins briefly explained the change of state education with a particular emphasis on school governance. Wilkins described school governors as 'a band of volunteers who are expected to provide appropriate challenge and support to senior school leaders on issues relating to the financial and educational performance of the school'. This definition ties school governors to community, local and national government, and modernized market. Wilkins briefly maintained the latest educational reform that diminished local government involvement in the governing of school and the impact of business on school governance. According to the author, school governors never stray too far from the demands of state and market.

In Chapter 1, Wilkins provided an overview of historical development of school governance and the role of governors in the English state education system. Wilkins criticizes and problematizes the meaning of school governance and its relation with power. Wilkins started this chapter by explaining what he means by a genealogy of school governance. He stated that 'there are no universal categories, transcendental continuities and immovable truths determining what school governance is or ought to be.' (p. 11). Wilkins also mentioned in this chapter that school governance should not be understood as tautological terms as the gradual, unending movement towards a universal model. The author argued that school governance has strong bound with politics and markets. Wilkins also criticized women, older people and ethnic groups' under

representation in the body of school governance. At the end of the Chapter 1, Wilkins provided his own definition of school governance.

In Chapter 2, Wilkins provided a discussion about democracy in the school governance and skill-based model of school governance. Wilkins explained the changing role of school governors. Because school governance cannot be separated from politic, cultural and economic realities, Wilkins analyzed different governments policies related to school governance and provided a detailed analysis of various phases and forms of school governance under the different governmental regimes. He explained how central governments extend the responsibilities of school governors and empowered them from the role of managers, trustees, and/or stewards to articles of government.

Wilkins started Chapter 3 with the discussion of modalities of neo-liberalism. He asserted that there are promiscuous array of definition and theoretical framework about neo-liberalism. This ambiguity causes significant critics which pointed to muddiness of neo-liberalism and its abstract multi-faced imprecision. After this brief discussion, Wilkins provided four approaches to read neo-liberalism and explain its relationship with the government and public education. In this chapter Wilkins also explained how neo-liberalism, as a conceptual strategy, formed the conduct of governors.

Chapter 4 is the first empirical chapter of the book. In this chapter, Wilkins investigated the changed role of governors by providing several opinions from the participants of his research. Wilkins tried to investigate daily practices of school governors and the effects of public, market, and government expectations on school governors. Wilkins used Foucault's insight of governmentality, which can be described as 'active government characterized by permanent vigilance, activity, and intervention, to make sense of school governors as objects over the state as a market-maker. Wilkins explained the characteristics of an ideal school governor by the perspective of the central government. He stated that 'ideal school governors are people who view problems as challenges and opportunities, people who actively work on themselves through training and upskilling, people who adopt a positive attitude to change and risk taking, and people who relate to themselves and others as a business' (p. 73). According to Wilkins, it is also expected from the school governors to engage with a battery of bureaucratic and administrative activities. Through the reforms, the central government increase school

autonomy and schools found themselves outside of the control of local government. However, it means that schools have to meet new criteria and performative demands decided by the central government. Thus, the central government established Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) to assess, sort, and rank schools. In this chapter Wilkins discussed the evaluation of Ofsted on how well school governors hold senior school leaders to account for the financial and educational performance of the school. Wilkins also investigated the effects of this evaluation operated by Ofsted on the daily practices of school governors by providing some governors' opinions.

In the previous chapters, Wilkins explained the process of diminishing local governments power on school governance and producing greater school autonomy through several reforms related to education. As a result of these reforms, school governors gained autonomy, extensive responsibility and they no longer monitored by local authorities. However, they have been monitored by new legal and professional authorizes from the central government. Thus, these gained autonomy, responsibility, and new metric-style monitoring required new type of school governance, which Wilkins proposed modernized school governance. In Chapter 5, Wilkins explained what modernized school governance is. Wilkins postulated that modernized school governance is not a radical break from the old one, but it is 'specifically engineered to support the new legal and financial responsibilities of school autonomy, the requirements of site-based management and the adoption of New Public Management (NPM) techniques' (p.97). Wilkins explained in this chapter that the changing role of school governors from hiring-firing of teaching staff, liaising with contractors and suppliers, and implementing the curriculum to supplant the formal authority of local government as the primary overseers, supervisors and superintendents of schools. Wilkins also mentioned the democratic and technical role function of school governance. Wilkins focused on the widespread citizen involvement on school governance. At the end of the chapter Wilkins emphasized the importance of expertise and skills, which are necessities of autonomy.

In the final chapter, Wilkins provided detailed information of the dispersion of power to the governing bodies. Wilkins stated the development of academy trust and explained three types of cluster arrangements model: multi-academy trust, collaborative

trust, and umbrella trust. According to Wilkins, the reforms caused an unexpected result, shift from state monopoly to private oligopoly. Thus, Wilkins criticized the growth of oligopoly and equated academy chains to a form of de-democratization. Wilkins also focused on the complex nature of accountability under the current structure.

In short, *Modernising School Governance* is a readable and stimulating book that documenting the impact of recent educational reform on the role of school governors in English states educational system. In the light of current politic and market realities, Wilkins showed that the world of school governance is not just complying requirements or generating incomes but it is beyond all of these. I believe that this book is a valuable resource for anyone who wants to understand the world of school governors and relationship between education, politics, and markets.