Reading the work of school administrators with the help of Bourdieu: getting a 'feel for the game'

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John sighs.

'There are weeks when I would spend a dozen or fifteen hours on the new building. Especially if we've got night meetings. Recently I was down in Adelaide, we actually took a full day for the Design Audit meeting. Now that was terrific, and it was a learning experience, I had a wonderful time, I learnt lots, met some really good people - came away thinking that's great, everything's on track, only to end up in another financial arm wrestle. And maybe my expectations are unreasonable. I keep wanting the Department to plug the gap, to fund the extra. Our community believe we're entitled to that sort of consideration I guess, because when we agreed to amalgamate, at the time when the then Minister was really looking for schools to amalgamate, we offered. We volunteered. We said "Hey look we'll do it for you. We'll get our communities together. We'll get them on side, we'll manage the process. We'll close both sites. We'll rename one of them, we'll have new letterhead , new uniform, names, colours whatever." And we did all that. And my belief is that the government and the Department and the town and the kids are a lot better off as a result of that. But it really has been a tooth pulling exercise to get what we believed we were given an understanding we would get at the outset. And we just feel like we're the drivers, we're the managers, we're responsible. And its being driven by formula, rather than being given just that little bit extra.'

This is an exploratory paper. My aim is to see how it is that Bourdieu's theory of practice might inform a reading and a representation of principal's work. My desire to do this arises from my own frustrations with management and leadership texts. As a school administrator, I attended conferences and read widely about school administration, but failed to find much resonance between my sense of what the job was about, with what was on the pages and at the podium. This is not to say that the literature and speeches were not helpful or stimulating, but it is to say that I always felt that something substantive was missing. Now I am in a university and responsible for teaching educational administrators, some of my work is directed towards this missing piece of the action. This paper is merely one more attempt to see if I can get a lead on what it is I 'feel' to be gaps in the field.

To that end, I sit three sources of data and three kinds of representations of principals' work together at this table - extracts from six interviews I conducted with country and city secondary school principals at their annual conference in mid 1998, current South Australian state system documentation relating to principal's work, and ten issues of The Practising Administrator, a practitioner oriented journal published by the Australian Council for Education Administration. I will leave the brief explication of Bourdieu's theorisations of 'field ' and habitus' to later in this paper, and begin by looking at how principals' work appears in the pages of The Practising Administrator. But I ask that you hold in mind John's words about his building program, together with those of his colleague Max. Max also has a building program in train.

> *Max sniffs.*
>
> *'A building that was closed at the end of Term 1 1997 and was due to be handed back to us in Term 3 1997 was **actually** handed back to us last week (mid 1998). There have been limited Home Economics spaces available to kids for the last twelve months, so there are courses that have been up the creek for, in the order of, twelve months. Managing that has been an issue in itself and maintaining teacher morale when they've not been able to teach their real subjects, keeping teacher morale up, keeping parent morale up and keeping kid morale up has all been my responsibility and I felt responsible for it. So a lot of my energy's gone into that. So we got the handover last week, we walked back into the refurbished building to find that there was a space where they hadn't painted at all, they didn't laminate all the tops that they were supposed to so there were some laminated and some un-laminated tops, there were some bench tops which weren't going to be upgraded that were in a worse state than when we handed them over because the workmen had been using them to put things on and they had scratched them, stood on them... there were mirrors that were scratched that weren't scratched when we handed over, there were spitballs that were painted over on the wall, there was sticky tape that was painted over. So... I just left that building feeling like bursting into tears because so much of my emotional energy had been put into managing this for a year and then finding that it was all fucked up when we got there.... It just sort of made me think, well what's the point.'*

Principals' work - a 'professional' representation

In order to get a view of how it is that the 'profession' of educational administrators might represent their work I chose to examine a magazine style publication produced by the Australian Council of Educational Administration. This is the organisation that could be seen to speak for educational administrators and for educational administration as a discipline. It has 'chapters' in each state, offers professional credentialling for administrators, and holds national conferences as well as meeting in the various states on trends and issues in administration. It publishes both the magazine, The Practising Administrator, and a more

scholarly journal, Leading and Managing. I have looked at the practitioner oriented magazine.

I examined ten issues looking at the content of each article and sorted them into categories that best described their primary focus and I take this to be a representation of the kinds of issues that are considered to be of interest to the 'practising adminstrator' readers. Each issue has several regular columns and I also took these into account in the overall weighting of categories of information in each issue. The greater proportion of the overall content of each issue is produced by consultants and academics, although a creditable half of the of feature articles are attributed to practitioners (school and system). This 'professional' representation might therefore be said to be one which is shared by both at least some of those who study and those who practice educational administration.

My categorisation shows that the feature articles in 'The Practising Administrator' are clustered around what I have called operational and technical matters. The practitioner is expected to be mainly interested in everyday processes, such as risk management, school management, human relations, and the tools of school reform. They are also assumed to have 'professional' concerns, such as those to do with managing stress and time, and learning how to do the job. They are expected to engage with more philosophical and cultural questions, of the kind that some educational administration literatures might call 'transformational leadership' . They are also assumed to have an interest in ethics, and a smattering of moral/family metaphors underpins the articles and columns in several issues.

Operational and technical		Professional		Philosophical, cultural, and transforming	
Risk management • General • Tricky policies e.g.uniform truancy, disability Regular column on the law TOTAL	6 3 1 0 **1 9**	*Principal welfare* • Stress • Time management • Everyday work • Redundancy • Alternative career TOTAL	2 2 1 1 1 **7**	*Leadership:* • General • Moral • And the learning organisation • And school reform TOTAL	2 4 3 1 **1 0**
School management • Finance • Accountability Regular column on marketing TOTAL	2 2 1 0 **1 4**	*Principal learning* • Induction • Skills and knowledge TOTAL	1 3 **4**	*School organisation* • Commun-ication • As a family TOTAL	1 2 **3**
Human relations	2			*Curriculum*	**2**

• Performance management	1				
• Accountability	1				
• Teaming	3				
• Teacher professional development	1				
• Morale					
TOTAL	**8**				
Tools of school reform	2			*School - community relations*	3
• Devolution/self management	2				
• Effective schools	2				
• Using IT	1				
• Futures planning					
Regular column on IT	10				
TOTAL	**21**				
Students	3			*Ethics*	1
• Testing				• Access and equity	
TOTALS	*64*		*11*		*19*

I have presented these as a table. I have also indicated the impact of three of the regular columns on the categories. Even if they are removed from the first column, the balance is still skewed to the operational and technical.

Administrative work is thus represented as mostly consisting of a series of activities such as supervising, auditing, planning, managing money, introducing information technologies and people, working on structural issues and watching backs. A lesser aspect, but nevertheless still significant is taken up with 'leadership'. What is highly significant is what is left out. The practising administrator who reads this publication is not expected to be interested in policy analysis and current policy debates, in curriculum practices and discussions, nor in keeping up with the very considerable and varied body of research into school reform and renewal. Questions of pedagogy are pretty well off the agenda altogether.

The content of the magazine presents a picture of an administrator as a technical operator, preoccupied with questions of implementation, control, accountability and image maintenance, but a professional with some set of ethics at work to guide these managerial actions. This is not an proactive professional educator, who systematically scans and

monitors the broad social, political and economic context in order to intervene in policy matters . This is not an educational administrator who is able to weigh up proliferating and diverse views on curriculum and pedagogical questions to ensure that the needs and interests of students in their local site are best met .

I will now pause to let Alan have a word about his school's information technology program.

> *Alan clears his throat.*
>
> *'It does mean setting up the structures. Through the Curriculum Committee there's a curriculum mapping exercise that looks at the eight areas of study, where we are now, what we do well and could do better , where they go to in the future... a whole series of conversations with programme leaders both collectively and individually about what we mean by quality learning through technology and what are the sorts of learning processes that students should be developing that will mean quality. How do you give kids the tools of analysis and critical reflection, of interrogating information? And to do that consistently across curriculum areas so that you can look at how they've communicated and presented that information effectively. So it's a dialogue and it's really about how you get to work them together as a leadership team in the school and share curriculum understandings and support each other's understandings and get some coherence across the school. And then it's about how you work with individual teachers who, the more you talk about this, the more the barriers come up about losing control of your class, your room, your definition, and the more you push that, the more you find the resistance, and that's the really interesting part. A lot of the issues about technology and quality learning are issues about teachers letting go of control and finding out other ways of structuring learning for those kids that are still purposeful, and are still hard edged and where you're still clear about what your outcomes are. So it's not about being woolly around the edges, like having a good time or playing low level games. Now that ties into a whole lot of issues about middle schooling, it's about how you structure learning opportunities for kids individually, in groups and as a whole class or cohort and how you know it's making a difference. And that's our interest in the student voice project because if you want to know about quality learning in the school then you ask the students.'*

Principals' work: an employer representation

In order to get some picture of how employers see the work of educational administration, I have selected a draft document produced in 1998 by the Department for Education and Children's Services (DECS). The purpose of this document is to establish criteria for the effective performance of principals and it delineates what constitutes under-performance. (The original is attached to this paper as an Appendix, as are some of my deconstructive workings.) This document is the product both of specific local events and also general changes in the public sector. I will deal briefly with both.

- **Local issues**

In the recent past there have been some occasions in my home state when principals have been investigated by their line managers for 'poor performance'. The Departmental policy framework (called 'Managing Poor Performance') for such investigations was developed jointly with the teacher union and is specifically directed towards teachers. It details actions that school principals must take in order to support the under-performing teacher to change their behaviour. There is no equivalent document for principals and so the recent investigations used the teacher policy, which was sadly wanting. The state principals' associations have been lobbying for a clear statement of what constitutes principal

underperformance, an explicit procedure that is based on principles of natural justice, and a set of procedure standards for Superintendents, the line managers, when carrying out the process. It is this latter point on which all negotiations have foundered and the reason for this document still being in draft.

- **New Public Management**

The notion of 'performance', in which this document is based, is part of an overall shift in bureaucratic technologies. New Public Management (NPM) involves the processes of corporatisation - the adoption of business practices such as strategic planning; divisional structures, hands-on top management, merit-based selection procedures and quality assurance and review processes that enable a focus on results not (diminishing) resources . The second overlapping phase of NPM is sometimes described as 'market bureaucratisation' because of the emphasis on competition and privatisation, 'accountingisation' because of the introduction of new tools of accrual accounting and audit, and 'contractualisation' because of the reliance on specified individual, unit and institutional *performance* for which people are held accountable. NPM enables increased scrutiny of the work of professionals in the public sector and it does have negative effects, such as the creation of low trust working environments, increased documentation of plans and performance, intensification of work, and the intrusion of generically skilled managers into previously autonomous professional arenas .

'Managing for Effective Performance' embodies NPM in action, and as such, could be expected to re-present what counts in, and as, principals' work.

The under-performing principal

Employers, if the South Australian example is anything to go by, want principals to be primarily concerned with technical and operational matters. My deconstruction of the document suggests that system designates the *prime* responsibility of principals as the regulation and control of the views and actions of parents, staff and students. Principals must also manage themselves, and meet the needs of the market and the system (Fig 2).

Regulate and control parents by:

- o Channelling their views
- o Enlisting them in education work

Regulate and control staff through:

- o Performance management
- o Tying professional development to the school plan
- o Managing morale (using human relations theory)
- o Managing conflict
- o Establishing "norms " of good practice by which performance can be judged

Regulate and control students through:

- o Discipline

- o Surveillance of learning performance - data collection, categorisation and monitoring
- o Reporting on achievement

- o Manage moral and safety - pastoral
- o Manage conflict

<u>Self management</u> through:

- o Wanting change, being flexible
- o Keeping up with the literature
- o Seeking feedback

<u>Comply with DETE</u> and:

- o Manage risks
- o Channel conflicts and opinions - keep them at the local level
- o Promulgate Priorities

<u>Meet needs of market</u> by:

- o Collecting information from community to which curriculum is matched
- o Offering more than a core curriculum as the basis of choice
- o Offering parents management responsibilities

<u>Meet needs of system</u>

- o Submit plans with targeted areas for improvement
- o Demonstrate resources have gone to areas of system priority
- o Implement system priorities
- o Collect data
- o Manage risks

<u>Adopt "new corporate management" practices at the local level</u>:

- o Use team work and collaboration
- o Involve staff in decision-making
- o Show allegiance to corporate values through management of school culture and meanings
- o Have a professional development plan and individual growth plans
- o Parent participation should have a focus on service provided

Fig 2

Not surprisingly for a policy document, there is more than one discourse at work. In addition to managing, controlling and implementing, the principal also must be democratic and inclusive, use the latest organisational theorisations, and ensure that some degree of distributive justice in both curriculum and resources is effected (Fig 3).

<u>Distributive justice</u>:

- o Ensure that there are a range of teaching strategies in use
- o Ensure that there is data collection and monitoring
- o Run a 'core plus' curriculum

<u>Be democratic and inclusive</u>:

- o Ensure the curriculum caters for difference, and is negotiated with parents and staff.
- o Use democratic practices with staff students and parents
- o Adopt an anti authoritarian ethos.
- o Encourage debate, keep up with the literature and research, engage in professional development and joint planning

Fig 3.

There are significant tensions and paradoxes in this document: processes of performance management do not necessarily sit easily with fast capitalism organisational practices such as teaming, nor with improved morale; a market curriculum and an inclusive curriculum are far from the same thing; student testing and student affiliation to the school are in conflict for many students; shared vision and democratic processes with staff and parents at the local level may not match system priorities. But, overwhelmingly, this is a document which positions principals as technical mediators and managers, able to *be* 'corporate' and 'professional' and to be seen to be so.

What is omitted from this document is any involvement in curriculum, pedagogy and policy *making*. There is no mention of innovation, cooperation across sites, nor advocacy for the community. Nor is there a significant requirement for a commitment to ethical principles, including those of justice and equity, to underpin actions, nor any notion of stewardship of a public education that creates our social world. It is a resolutely empty document, with neither an educational nor an axiological principal at its heart.

Before I go on to discuss the homologies between the documents, and consider how the notion of habitus might differently allow representations of principals' work, Dave will have a say.

Dave grins.

'I still get pissed off that I'm expected to be totally democratic and consult with everybody, listen to - you don't mind me using words like bullshit, because that's what it is, from staff who've got a closed view. They don't see the whole picture and never will because they're not interested in the whole picture, but I've got to consult with all of them, they vote and make decisions on emotion because they don't bother to do the research or work. I'm expected to do all that and be democratic and the system talks about consultation and democracy and doesn't consult with me at all, it doesn't ask me what I want to do, it doesn't ask whether this is reasonable or not, it just issues these directives. Any system can be turned back on itself and I just want to analyse the system so I can see how to turn it back on itself. Because at the moment they've got the upper hand quite clearly. They are giving us the responsibility, they are controlling the resources we get and to a very large extent dictating how we will use those resources while blaming us if they don't produce the results. So that pisses me off non end and I'm sure there's a way round it so I just need to study the system carefully to find a way round it. And its not just the system. I also get pissed off with some of my colleagues, its not their fault, it's the fact that they are on tenure and they're nervous about their own future, and therefore don't question, they accept things at face value and then that puts pressure on the rest of us because if you resist - "Oh well your colleagues are, they think its alright." The reality is that they don't, but they're not game to question, they're not game to speak up. And I'm being seen as curmudgeonly... I was taken out to lunch by one of the Superintendents and advised that my image, he put it very nicely but basically it meant I'm a shit stirrer and it doesn't do me any good in the long term. I think a

*system that cannot accept from its own members, from within the system, what's
intended to be constructive criticism then the system is in danger.*

*But by and large I'm still having enough fun and I enjoy it. And as somebody said,
where else would you get highly paid to keep your adrenaline levels up and have a
regular fight?*

An inter-textual reading: little boxes

Both the systemic criteria for the effective principal and the articles that practitioners need to
read share a particular kind of view of the school principal. This is perhaps not surprising.
System documents draw on educational administration literatures. Educational
administration literatures determine what is of interest to administrators because of the
workings of systemic documents and their effects. The two have more than homologous
workings, they are inter-relational and intertextual. The common representation they
construct is of an administrator who must be, and is predominantly concerned with getting
things done - the 'how' of the everyday running of their school. 'How' concerns keeping the
money, time and school structures together, making sure the teachers do their best, 'keeping
sweet' with the system and parents and making sure the paperwork gets done properly.

But there are further commonalities. Firstly, each representation of the school principal
distinguishes between particular aspects of principal 'performance' or principals' work,
creating distinct categories of activity. The DECS document uses the categories of :
improving student performance, teaching and learning, leadership, personnel management,
learning environment and interacting with the school community. The articles in the
Practising Administrator also use similar divisions, separating leadership from questions of
school reform, managing staff, school-community relations and risk management. Principals'
work as an everyday practice clearly does not fall into neat little boxes. It is both messy and
ecological. While the writers of articles and the document might agree with the view that
these categorisations are artificial, they perhaps would suggest that they have foregrounded
aspects of the holistic picture for the sake of analysis. I suggest however, that the discrete
category columns and boxes and dot points, obscure the ***most*** important aspects of
principal's work - it is holistic, unpredictable. consuming and contradictory, pulling in all
directions at once.

Secondly, the omission in both representations of curriculum, policy and its contexts,
pedagogy - and of axiological concerns in the systemic performance document - is highly
significant. Focussing only on the operational leaves discussion, debates, and the framing of
these educational, social and cultural matters to others. In the case of the system document,
the deconstruction makes the intention transparent - principals implement, modify only as
much as is absolutely necessary, and manage. In the case of The Practising Administrator,
what appears to be at work is some version of a theory/practice binary, where a concern for
an imaginary reader and their 'practice', the 'real world' of principals , sends the point of the
educational game to the sidelines.

Now I am not going to argue that this is a false picture and that school principals do not need
and are not concerned with operational matters. As Leithwood and his colleagues recently
argued in a discussion of some of the school change literature, a focus on 'transformation'
does not mean that the everyday organisation can be forgotten because it is absolutely
necessary for everybody in it - but it is hardly sufficient. I go further than this and argue that
the everyday routine and a long term school change agenda cannot be, and *are* not
separate, in a school. The educational is often at the heart of the most resolutely mundane
matters. Dealing with vandalism in the toilets raises questions not just about discipline
procedures and supervision, but also about student alienation from school, social contexts,

the relevance of the curriculum, the connection between the school and youth cultures, and the modes of pedagogy used. Buying new school furniture involves thinking pedagogically, dealing with the micro-political power circuits at work in the school and considering furniture against other school priorities.

The separation of the school as an *educational* and social institution from operational issues, as in the case of the DECS document and the Practising Administrator articles, or the separation of the operational into a lesser necessary but routine category as Leithwood et al have it, are not representations that ring true to me. I now want to explore the use Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', in conjunction with principal interviews, to re-present a view of the holistic and messy work of principals.

But first of all, Bert has something to say.

> *Bert frowns.*
>
> *'I guess the thing that concerns me more than anything else is to do with the funding for the programs we're involved with and what evidence is there that we're making any difference. We've been a literacy focus school for three years and this is our fourth year. I'm not sure... I don't have anyone that's got the time to do the research to produce the evidence that we've made any difference. And similarly with the plethora of VET programs that we've got going on - has that made any difference? We've done a little bit of research on a few specific issues... on our behaviour management processes last year and we introduced a Saturday school, and we did some research to show that was having an impact on improving kids' behaviour and their learning in the classroom... but there are a whole range of things you'd really like to know whether you're making a difference or not and I just don't have the time to do it, and I think that's been bothering me more than anything.'*

Bourdieu and the 'feel for the game'

According to Bourdieu, education can be thought of as a 'field'. Bourdieu describes a field as a network of relations, a social space and topology of power, in which both struggle and differentiation occur . Fields, as succintly summarised by Swartz , are 'structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of capital'. 'Capital' is either economic, symbolic (e.g. credentials), cultural (e.g. knowledges) and/or social (e.g. social networks). Bourdieu uses the metaphor of a 'game' and 'players' to describe the ways in which fields work. In order to participate, players must subscribe to the raison d'etre and 'truths' (the 'doxa') of the operations of the game a. k. a the field . Through their engagement in the game, players consolidate the space as a legitimate site of play, that is, practice .

Bourdieu suggests that a field or game can therefore be thought of as a socially constructed artefact, even though it is not the result of a deliberate act of creation. Furthermore, the field or game is not fixed, but is dynamic, under constant production and reproduction as a result of the strategic moves of those players 'invested', that is with 'interests', in the game . Thus players, according to their position in the field, determined by how much 'capital ' they both possess and desire, adopt 'strategies' of 'conservation, succession and subversion' as they engage in the game .

Bourdieu attempts to encapsulate the meaning of participation in a field through the clarifying metaphor of 'getting a feel for the game' . He indicates that getting a feel for the game not only requires that players lose sight of the constructed nature of the game and take its internal logics for granted, but it also relies on players having a bodily 'sense' of and 'orientation' towards the practice that is required for participation in the game, and

advancement in the field. This feel for the game, or the 'habitus', is embodied. It is how one stands; how one knows without having to consciously think about what action to take; it is a tone of voice, a deep emotional identification with the game. Bourdieu says,

> What is learned by the body is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is.

Becoming a school principal according to Bourdieu is then a slow and lengthy process of acquiring not only the symbolic and cultural capitals necessary for participation in the field, but also the processes of investing in the game, accepting its doxa and its ways of being, learning the strategies of participation, and acquiring the habitus, that embodied sense of *being* an administrator.

Despite criticisms that Bourdieu's sociological metaphor inadequately considers the micro-politics of cognition involved in the acquisition of habitus, that is Bourdieu does not fully consider how knowledge associated with practice is learnt , I now consider how this (partial) theorisation might nevertheless still be helpful in considering principal's work. But first I would like to give Jane a say.

> *Jane pauses.*
>
> *'People are beginning to understand what a learning community can mean, in terms of their learning, students' learning, and in community working groups. Still, there's an issue with resisters , a small core of resisters. That is always something that's there in the background and people don't know what they don't know and they don't want to talk about it, or read about it, or engage in a professional dialogue about it. An ongoing issue is the impact that we're still feeling from the dramatic cut in ancillary staff time hours two years ago. I think that's been very destructive. We all acknowledge that the work is changing for us continually and we are working differently, but I think that that was a very retrograde move and the impact of that sudden change two years ago and the ripple effect is still being felt. I don't want to focus on negative things, because I'm trying to turn everything into a positive, but you can only do so much of that without looking like an idiot and people thinking you're seeing everything through rose tinted glasses.'*

Habitus at work in the principal's office: a further representation.

I now go back to the principals I have introduced through this paper to see how their words give clues about the game and the playing. Using the notion of habitus I now read for the strategic moves that are being made by these principals, and for the embodied habits, dispositions and emotions at work. .

- **John**

John has been involved in acquiring new buildings for his country school, a feat he accomplished by volunteering to engineer an amalgamation between two smaller high schools. It is not going as or quickly as he had hoped, and it is taking up a lot of his time.

The game, as John is playing it, involves:

- Anticipating a policy direction and acting on it ahead of time in order to secure an advantage
- Manoevring to seek further advantages not in the original 'deal'
- consistent reassurance to the locals that there will be a big payoff in the end.

In order to play this game, John needs to be

- Determined to redress a disadvantage in his country school and community
- Committed to and able to advocate for his school and wider community
- Persistent, because he heeds to nag central office staff to keep them going until they produce the desired outcomes
- Cool headed, because he needs to deal with bureaucratic inanities and ongoing setbacks
- 'Multilingual' , able to communicate with a significant number of language communities
- Prepared to work out of hours and as many hours as are required on and for the task
- Able to play catch up with other work demands and make judgements about what can wait or be left altogether

The 'distinction' gained by playing the game is the positive regard in which John will be held by the school community, country town and the system. In addition he will have achieved one of the secret hidden treasures of principal-ling, leaving behind a school concretely better off than it was before.

- **Max**

Max also is involved in a building program, but his is an upgrade of an old facility. The Home Economics centre has been out of action for much longer then expected and has caused considerable disruption in the school. The job when done is not up to scratch.

The game as Max is playing it involves:

- Convincing staff and students that the wait will be worth it, by using a continuous process of 'jollying along'
- Moving quickly to rectify the faults in the building when he finally gets to see them so that there is not another morale sapping delay

In order to do play this game Max needs to

- Work out how the school program can keep going with a building out of action
- Deal with a diverse range of emotional demands from staff, students and parents and keep them smiling
- Be able to mask his own feelings of frustration, disappointment and rage
- Productively demonstrate dissatisfaction with the contractors

The payoff for Max is approval from the school community and some personal sense of satisfaction

- **Alan**

Alan has an ambitious information technology program in train. It involves building modification, staff learning, curriculum change and finding ways to see what improvements there are for students.

In order to play this game Alan must work on and through existing school structures to:

- 'Talk up' IT by engaging in ongoing conversations with groups and individual staff members about the educational importance and the implications of IT

- Develop a document that will give the appearance of rational planning
- Grow a cadre of staff leaders, giving them time and space for learning, encouragement and subtle teaching in how not to overwhelm the less enthused
- Coerce the unwilling into participating in the program
- Manage the budget and technical support infrastructure so that it does not get in the way of the educational program
- Initiate and get funds for new projects that will enhance and accelerate the program

In order to play this game, Alan must be:

- Convinced enough of the importance of IT to stake his credibility and large proportions of the school budget on it
- Knowledgeable enough about IT to keep watch on the whole process and not be steered off course by IT zealots and IT phobics
- Well read on the educational issues and willing to talk/share his readings

- Unafraid of IT, have largely taught himself, and be able to demonstrate that he can 'do IT' so that the resisters can't use 'him' as an excuse
- Able to find the key to connect with each individual resister
- Keep the long term goal at the front of his mind at all times while managing short term hiccups

The payoffs of this game for Alan are considerable. Because IT is a high priority in the system he stands to gain considerable kudos from being principal of a school that is a 'lighthouse'. If he documents the school program carefully and engages in good 'image management' he may find himself in national and international conferences talking about 'how to do it'. His rewards in the school may be more mixed, as the sheer expense of IT often leaves other areas under-funded and as staff resistance often never really goes away even if they comply.

- **Dave**

Dave is living the strain of mediating system policies.

The game as he is playing it involves:

- Asking hard questions in awkward places
- Doing enough of what is required not to get overtly penalised
- Ensuring that the school does not suffer because of his views

In order to play this game Dave must:

- Have a strong set of beliefs about what is 'right'

- Deal with being the odd one among his colleagues
- Be prepared to speak up in circumstances where he knows it will be frowned upon
- Be constantly on the look out for the underlying agendas
- Work on developing a coherent critique
- Gracefully accept being 'told off'
- Look after his own health and maintain a sense of humour
- Know when he could go too far and jeopardise his own position and/or that of his school

The payoffs for Dave are small. He may get the approval of other similar minded colleagues, but ultimately his is a balancing act since refusal to play for 'advancement' in the game as it is currently organised can lead to loss of status and position.

- **Bert**

Bert has been actively initiating a range of priority programs in his school. He can meet system accountability measures but is still worried. He wants more information about what differences are being made. Despite actively participating in the school improvement game, he needs to 'know', to 'have evidence'.

In order to keep playing the game, Bert must

- Hide his anxieties and doubts from both the school community and the system
- Live with the uncertainty while presenting himself to the wider community, school community and the system as absolutely certain
- Be on the look out for opportunities to find some time and expertise to do something to alleviate his worries
- Keep thinking about what counts as making an educational difference

There is a potential negative payoff for Bert if he shows his concerns. Staff and the community will lose confidence in him and he will undoubtedly incur an unwanted 'gaze' from above if he voices these concerns to anyone but a colleague researcher promising anonymity.

- **Jane**

Jane has been working on the notion of a learning community. Her school has a number of 'resisters', and recent cuts to ancillary staff time have left a scar that they are able to point at, as evidence of the system's pernicious workings.

The game that Jane plays requires her to

- Identify opportunities to engage all staff in professional learning activities
- Allocate time and space for staff learning
- Manage democratic processes - staff discussions and debates must be run so that opinions can be voiced but there is not an undue focus on the negative

In order to do this Jane must

- Monitor her own behaviour so that she appears to staff to be realistically optimistic
- Be persistent about working towards her imaginary of a learning community, and not show her anger when the resisters start performing - again
- Not whinge about the lack of ancillary time and pick up more work herself

The payoff for Jane is a more smoothly functioning school, better able to take on reform agendas. Her performance will thus appear competent.

Reading across the interviews: more questions

I am hesitant to engage in too much generalisation through a reading across all six transcripts. These are after all only extracts of longer conversations and I have sampled only

six. However, I think that there are some possibilities that I should explore further on the basis of such a reading.

I note in particular the following:

- Four of the principals spoke to the emotional and intellectual *responsibility* they felt for the school - John and Max with their buildings, Alan with his ambitious IT project, and Bert with his concern for evidence of change. Their status and position was also dependent on the success of these particular programs. Perhaps it is the case that, in order to play the game of educational administration, principals must not only take on responsibility for the school as an entity, but also identify with the school. What happens to the school is something that happens to them. If the school is 'successful' they are 'successful' and vice versa.

  If this is the case, then it demonstrates how principals are particularly vulnerable in the 'game', it goes some way to explaining how it is that official requirements to control and manage meet the 'interests' of principals, and it also explains why it might be that principals may find it difficult to adopt democratic organisational practices, since not only do they not count for much, they also potentially can count against them. Democratic practice is actually a Catch 22 for principals, because being undemocratic is considered 'ineffective', as is being responsible for a school in which democracy works against demonstrations of 'corporate loyalty'. Principals are continually torn in different directions, and their 'game plan' may vary significantly as the balance of control and participation shifts.

- Three out of the six principals spoke about staff resistance. This is certainly related to the identity - control aspects of school administration habitus, but it also goes further. Perhaps there is a sense in which failure to convince staff of the merits of a particular project or position, and failure to have a 'happy family', is a personal failure. Perhaps it is similar to a parent with a rebellious child; the parent suffers from a residual guilt that if only they did or could do something else, then the child also would do something else. In the case of the principal, perhaps there is some magic trick that they do not yet know that could produce the imaginary of collegial reform. If this is the case, then it is this guilt, responsibility and nagging doubt about their own lack of knowledge and practice, that could lead school administrators to adopt performance management policies, thus also meeting the requirements of the game.

I emphasise that this is speculation on my part and it requires considerable further investigation of 'habitus'. My initial exploration has however given me some evidence that such an exploration is worthwhile.

My own experience as a principal has also in part produced this representation of educational work as a practice that requires physical, intellectual and emotional stamina, perseverance, high degrees of self management, strategic thinking and continued juggling of issues, things, concerns, risks and other people's agendas, prejudices and feelings. Perhaps another step for me then, is to check out whether other principals also feel that my Bourdieu supported readings have some resonance with their own experiences, and whether these representations have 'verisimilitude' .

Reading with habitus in mind

I conclude by considering some implications of my reading of principals' work with the help of Bourdieu, in the light of the representations of school administration in a employer document and in an educational administration publication.

I suggest that the notion of habitus allows for a view of principal's work in which the interconnectedness of context, knowledge, 'identity' and organisation can all come into the foreground of the picture at once. The actions of the principal are not presented as decontextualised abstractions, but rather are represented as moves of an active agent who is multiply positioned with diverse pushes and pulls that she/he must balance. My experiment with readings from habitus illustrates:

- The principal as an embodied self with emotions as well as knowledge and 'competencies'
- The possibility of considering the complex interpersonal issues that sit underneath words such as 'professional development is planned' or 'systematically plan and manage change'
- The opportunity to 'see' the holistic and inter-relatedness of the material and cultural, reform and maintenance, leadership and management rather than having binaries and/or discrete categories

As for the other two representations, which already have a place in the 'big tent' that is educational administration... My concerns are not simply about decontextualised and utopian readings devoid of mess and conflict, not simply that the operational and the technical are foregrounded above curriculum, pedagogy, policy and axiology, but also that the deconstruction and reading that I have presented in this paper show the congruence between current public sector corporate managerialism as applied in a default principal job description, and professional reading materials that are intended to both inform and support principals' practice. The mutuality and reciprocity between the two ought, in my view, to give some pause for thought.

As principal associations continue to argue that they are locked out of important curriculum and policy decision-making and left to wear the responsibility for an escalating raft of management matters, those of us working in academic educational administration courses need to consider the most useful places in which to work. My own sense of the game is that now, more than ever, education systems need to be confronted with stories of principals' work that are faithful to the everyday life worlds of schools, rather than be supported with ever more technical 'wishful rationalism' . As Fairclough says,

> any reduction of discourse to skills is complicit with efforts on the part of those who have power to impose social practices they favour by getting people to see them as mere techniques

It seems to me that readings inspired by Bourdieu may have some place in a venture to disrupt the 'will' to technique and conformity.

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