

'Silly us! Of course the grid doesn't work': reading methodologies and policy texts on principals' work

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Researching principal supply: a policy disruption

Teacher and principal supply in 2002 has become a major policy issue, together with issues of teacher professional standards and teacher quality facing Departments of Education. Witness the numerous media articles focusing on their short supply (Thomson, Blackmore, Sachs & Tregenza 2002), yet another national review on Teaching and Teacher Education, as well as state and national working parties eg. MCEETYA Working Party on Teacher Quality and Professional Standards and a Victorian Working Party on Teacher Demand Supply (Macmillan, 2002). Why now? Is it merely a consequence of the changing demographics of teacher and student populations, the 'natural' ebb and flow of demand and supply in which we are now in a downturn with low supply of ageing teachers and high demand as the mass of children of the 'baby boomers' moves slowly through school systems? Or is something different occurring that provides other explanations as to why there is a lack of applicants for what is presumably the 'top job' in schools? The shifting context, both material and discursive, is shaping up new principal identities, about how the work is perceived and done.

In our study, a Discovery grant funded by the Australian Research Council (2002-4), we have posed a range of factors we consider could be contributing to this dearth of leaders. These included the bad press and negative representations of, the principalship 'putting off' newcomers; the changing nature of professionalism under new public administration regimes; the changing social relations of gender and how men and women are making different lifestyle decisions about the balance between family and work; the changing nature of the principalship itself, with most research agreeing that recent restructuring towards more self-managing schools means principals do more and more administrative and marketing work and less and less educational leadership work; the high stress levels associated with the intensification of the labour process and the emotional labour of middle management; the increasing range of alternative and more lucrative careers that exist that are particularly attractive to qualified women, the greatest pool of potential applicants given they constitute 70% of the teachers; and the failure of the job to attract a wider range of applicants that are not Anglo, male and middle class. All of this makes up to the principalship being perceived as a high-risk job (Blackmore, 1999; Sachs, 2002). These were the wider ranging factors that impact on demand-supply issues that cannot be explained by the convergent demographics of retirements of an ageing teacher workforce and the children of the baby boomer bulge in student populations. In terms of policy analysis, the literature is still more about 'description of the problem' rather than discussion of competing policy solutions, considerations of an implementation problem or evaluation of policies (Scheurich, 1997 p.). In that sense, it is a relatively 'new' policy problem.

In an initial content analysis of the most recent literature on demand and supply factors, other themes emerged as explanations for why teachers were disenchanted with the principalship. These included the high level of responsibilities and hours for the compensation compared to other jobs (Archer, 2002; Chaika 2000; NAESP/NASSP 1998; Hopkins, 1998, 1999; Radar 2001; Sinatra, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Jones, 2001; d'Arbon, 2001), the lack of leader recruitment programs and lack of research about recruitment, the irrelevance of training programs for administrative work, and the lack of induction programs

(Yettick, 2002; Dunn, 2002a; Ford, 2001; Goldstein, 2002; Bell, 2001; Williams, 2001; Richard, 2001). Women in particular did not apply because of familial responsibilities, the masculinist images of leadership; discrimination, exclusion by and from the old boys network, women's concentration in difficult schools, the lack of continuity between leading positions and the principalship, and the androcentricity of training. Non-Anglo teachers referred to the lack of minority representation and cultural diversity (Dunn, 2002b; Cooley, 2000; Jones, 2001; McLay, 1999). Other explanations focused on the changed nature of the principals' work with its focus on accountability, testing and paperwork producing increased regulation, the multiple system demands and reforms, additional responsibilities of care and personnel, the focus on administration, financing, personnel, entrepreneurship and marketing and not education, the budgetary and policy constraints with bureaucratic mandates, lack of opportunities to develop, grow and change things and difficult relations with communities (Berggoetz, 2002; NAESP/NASSP, 1998; Hopkins, 1998, 1999; Archer, 2002; White, 2002; Radar, 2001; Bowser, 2001; Kimball, 2000). Most referred to the excessive time and demands (Berggoetz, 2002; NAESP/NASSP, 1998; Hopkins, 1998, 1999; Johnson, 2002; Sinatra, 2002; Bowser, 2001; Cooley, 2000; d'Arbon, 2001), while not being seen to be valued by the community or bureaucracy (Stricherz, 2001; White, 2002). Many teachers were reluctant to put themselves into such a strenuous position with retirement close (Graham, 2002).

The literature on the principalship fell into four categories: the changing nature of work, career, understandings of professionalism, and identity that we decided to use as a heuristic in our analysis. This paper is about us sorting through the methodological issues. We are still in the first stages of creating a policy archive to undertake discourse analysis of policy texts, extending the bibliography to produce a literature review, and interviewing key stakeholder groups (Education Departments, principal associations and teacher unions) in preparation for developing a large national survey.

The study is about the identity work associated with being a principal but also how principals' identities are constituted through wider discourses and material conditions outside education, schools and in the public and individual psyche through the various modes of representation—the media, professional discourses and official policies. Spivak, (1988) identifies two dimensions of the act of representation—one is the perceived representation as 'speaking for', the other is to comprehend it as re-representation i.e. involving interpretation. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2001, p. xxii) adds to this a third dimension, that of 'self presentation'. This is 'operationalised to distinguish between how one represents oneself through interpretation as opposed to how one is represented by another'. We are interested, for example, as to whether there is dissonance between 'representations' of the job in the media and policy texts and how principals 'self present' in their own professional and personal terms. We will focus on perceptions of the principalship held by potential applicants i.e. reading of available representations as well as how existing principals understand and do the job or self-presentation. To do so, we will be using individual interviews and focus groups with early career and mid career teachers as well as those in middle and senior management positions. To get a sense of other representations, we also consider how visual and verbal images portray the principalship, how potential candidates read these images and with what effects i.e. representation (Prosser, 1998).

It was our plan to begin our policy analysis by reading the policy documents relating to the principalship as texts from different theoretical perspectives around the literature themes of work, career, profession and identity as a heuristic. In this way we would, by developing partial representations, gain a more complex understanding of the job. Rhodes, (2000), drawing on Cherryholmes, (1993) argues that in reading and writing organisational lives it is useful to break out from the hegemony of the paradigm. In organization theory, both in education and management, contestation between multiple paradigms in the post Kuhnian

period challenged the hegemony of structuralist functionalism, but in turn produced a new hegemony of the paradigm where each paradigm lacked the desire and language to speak with each other because of different understandings about knowledge (Rhodes, 2000, p. 8). Cherryholmes suggests that a 'reading' rather than a 'researching' approach takes us outside the paradigms that lock us into mutually exclusive ways of viewing a research issue (Cherryholmes, 1999, p. 8). All research reports can be read differently, depending upon your theoretical perspectives, and this paper is about exploring about how we might do that.

So how do we know about the principalship and what accounts should we take into account? Cherryholmes suggests that organizations have linguistic and social practices that are ordered through writing. Organisational life as social practice also has narratives (Czarniawska, 1998; Casey, 1995-96; Cathro, 1995). Dorothy Smith (1993) refers to the textual production of organisational life where texts mediate social practices in highly differentiating ways depending upon ones location within the organization ie. outsiders and insiders. While organisational narratives produced by researchers are interesting stories that do not have privileged truth claims, but that still can provide insights into the principalship.

How one 'reads' the organisational narrative of schools in general, and any school in particular as the site of the principalship, therefore is pertinent to how one understands the principalship. Schools are the primary sites of principal identity formation (Thomson, 2001a), with strong discursive and highly public associations between successful school stories and successful principal stories, school failures and principal failures (Thomson, 1999, *The Age*). Biographical narratives () constructed from interviews can have multiple dimensions, depending on the time, context and focus of the interview (Blackmore, 1999). The storyline produced from one interview can contradict the storyline of a repeated interview with the same individual on another day at another time. Such contradictions arise from the focus of interviews, the triggers used to jolt responses and the nature of the conversation, but flesh out fuller readings of what happens on the job.

But schools are also part of a wider set of systemic dispositions that both constrain and enable the activities of those who work in and lead them. These systemic dispositions emerge out of the multiple texts that seek to inform the practices of teachers and principals. They are displayed most visibly in policy texts about teachers and principals, and the ways in which positions are advertised and described, the processes of selection, and the emphasis in position descriptions. These texts indicate what is seen to 'count' and what doesn't in the work of the principalship. Teachers, in imaging what it might be to be a principal, not only have their daily experiences to inform their perceptions, also are informed by representations in policy texts that contradict and intersect with public media representations and the self-presentations of principals in their daily work and in their own professional discourses.

This paper focuses on the set of practices embodied within systemic policy texts that represent the work of the principalship in terms of their careers, their lives and their professional identities. Again, any reading of policy texts is partial and incomplete. Any account is a representation and there can be multiple representations of 'reality'. Presenting more than one interpretation of the nature of principal's work from the position of official policy texts therefore recognises the partiality of any one account of these official texts.

Methodological moves

We began with considering how to create a way of thinking about the different dimensions (within and outside schools) that shaped principals lives that was also supported by the literature but also our particular theoretical perspectives. This produced an emerging matrix of analysis. The grid or matrix we thought could be used as a tool strongly tied to utility for

the analysis, a 'matrix of contemplation' (Harwood, 2001,p.149) used to avoid particular methodological traps of each paradigm-or so we thought.

Move 1: Creating the Grid

The horizontal axis was based upon the contextual and individual factors impinging on the principalship. The 'categories' that captured most of the issues and relationships shaping the structure-agency dimensions of the principalship were work, career, profession and identity. A number of general questions were posed under these headings. These questions would be the touchstones for the protocol that could be developed later to 'collect data' through unstructured interviews and focus groups, as well as provide a framework for discourse analysis by considering the assumptions embedded in the policy texts (principal job descriptions, advertisements for positions, school charters, principal professional development documents etc.) about each of these dimensions.

Horizontal axis

Work

What do people do?

What don't people do?

What is the site/unit of work?

Who do they work with?

Who do they work for?

What are the skills assumed or specified?

What are the knowledges assumed or specified?

What experiences are assumed or specified?

How do they measure success / failure?

Career

How to people get in?

What rewards or incentives are there?

How to get on?

What is required for improvement?

What does career look like?

Who/what mechanisms control the career path?

Is there a systemic disposition towards a preferred career?

Profession

What is the knowledge/skill basis?

What ethics are required?

What disciplining/empowering structures are there?

Where is advocacy?

What are the processes of inclusion and exclusion people?

Who controls this?

Identity

Who are these people?

How do they understand themselves in relation to the principalship (aspirants, incumbents, early and late career)?

How have they changed in seeking and/or doing the job?

Horizontal axis displayed the multiple theoretical readings-mainstream (positivist/constructivist?), critical, feminist and post structuralist. We anticipated that the grid would provide some coherence and consistency by providing us with a set of questions from each perspective that would highlight the different assumptions underpinning the text. There was an assumption of commensurability in terms of what framed key sociological concerns of structure, agency, materiality, relations etc. In undertaking these different readings we hoped to understand the complexity of the job, its multidimensionality and how different people or groups would perceive job. It is imperative that we understand the complexity so that the principalship does not reduce to a set of technical skills and/or personal attributes. It was also presumed that something fundamental is happening with regard to the nature of educational work, the role of education, the shape of careers and the professional identities in recent times that required us to take this multifaceted approach.

Move Two: Playing with official texts (NSW DET)

The next move was to ask these questions of the policy texts that shape the principalship. Largely as a result of the completeness of the documentation, but also because it has a majority of Australian principals, we selected NSW DET.

Mainstream reading

As with many deconstructions, we commenced with reading the mainstream by asking 'what's the dominant story about the principalship'? This reading presents itself as a neutral reading of events and other research around unproblematic categories of career, work and professionalism (Blackmore, 1996). This was quite an easy read. Pruijt, (2000) refers to how writers in the organization of work are based on a formula of 'best practice' or 'models of top performance'. The dominant literature of school effectiveness and school improvement tells us that schools are relatively discrete organizations, and yet that schools must be responsible and responsive to a range of new societal demands (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998; Ceemers & Reetzig). These include increased demands for parental choice, the needs of

diverse student populations, industry needs for flexible workforces, and the trend towards lifelong learning.

Our first 'tryout' of the grid began with a reading of the available NSW Department of Education and Training policies. This selection of policy documents supplied on request were depicted in the covering letter as 'relating to the work and employment conditions of principals'. The package included information on :

- Merit Selection Procedures.
- Promotion and transfer procedures.
- Leading and Managing the School -'a statement of key accountabilities for principals I effective leadership and management'.
- Teacher assessment and Review Schedule: 'key aspects of the annual assessment and review process for principals'.
- Procedures for Managing Teachers who Experience Difficulties with their Teaching Performance: indicates 'procedures implemented for principals identified as experience difficulty with their performance'.
- Employee Assistance Program for Principals which 'supports the welfare of principals'.
- Principals Support Package-outlines the departments strategies to improve the welfare of principals.
- Rural school Leadership Program: attract excellent leaders to rural and isolated schools in and to staff areas targeting small and isolated schools.

Using the four sets of questions under the heading of work, career, profession and identity, it was evident that most of these texts focused on the notion of the principalship as a career. Principal's work was clearly located within the unit of the school and school community. The focus was on student learning outcomes and this was to be achieved through planning, communicating and coordinating resources, constructing a sense of well-being and safety. It was also evident that responsibility rested with the principal, and that accountability was to the bureaucracy and not the community. The community was something to be nurtured. Principals were expected to promote collegiality, create teams and encourage a culture conducive to learning. But they were seen to work largely alone, with support from the system. The skills they were expected to possess were largely that of planning, vision and communication. Their knowledge of curriculum was assumed and not made explicit, and there were few suggestions about how they were expected these planning etc other than through previous experience.

Most of these texts focused on access to, and retention in, the principalship as career. There were clear and explicit guidelines as to what was required in order to become a principal and the procedures under which principals were selected. Access was through the accrual of points which built upon a reward system eg. being in a rural school. Progress was achieved through gaining specific expertise that could be categorised and then confirmed. At all times, what 'counted' towards being eligible had to be validated by the immediate supervisor. There is a clear line management structure, both in terms of responsibilities and also what counts as knowledge and appropriate experience. The assumption is that the principalship is a direct linear path from teaching, but the gate-keeping role is definitely held by your 'supervisor' ie. principal.

Departmental support works in two ways. Either maintaining principal well being or removing principals who do not under-performing. Two texts illustrate these points. On the one hand there is the 'individual welfare' focus of the Employee Assistance Program: Assistance for Principals. This program works from the position that:

The department recognises that principals face specific managerial dilemmas and conflicts in their position as leaders and managers of schools. The Employees Assistance Program can assist principals to manage difficult situations in the workplace by providing advice and counselling (p 1).

The principal is assured the processes are confidential, that advice is by external and registered psychologists including those experienced in managerial issues, it is free, work related or personal problems and operates through self referral or supervisor referral. Eg 24-hour toll free crisis service, individual or face to face counselling, incident counselling, consultation group counselling and home and work visits. EAP is used for work related problems that are defined as:

- Interpersonal conflict;
- Harassment and discrimination, including management of h and D;
- Personal and work trauma;
- Relationship difficulties;
- Alcohol or drug problems;
- Financial and gambling difficulties;
- Child and family issues;
- Grief and bereavement;
- Emotional problems.

The support offered to the principal here is focusing on mental, emotional and physical well-being as well as sound personal relationships, both public and private. There is significant overlap between public and private spheres of the individual's life. It focuses on the individual as the repository of stress, and is framed as a psychological problem. The individual principal can be referred to expert by the immediate supervisor or through self-referral. In turn, the principal can mobilise these supports for any of their staff.

On the other hand, there are procedures that come into play when individual principals do not deal with stress or are not seen to adhere to departmental needs to be instigated by the immediate supervisor. The text, *Procedures for Managing Teachers who Experience Difficulties with their Teaching Performance* focuses on teachers and principals identified as experiencing difficulty with their performance'. These procedures sought first to assist improvement in performance by training, and then support for a process of exclusion if improvement did not occur. The rationale given is that all students have a right to be taught by competent teachers (and led by competent principals) and all teachers and principals are responsible for performing their duties efficiently and competently. Principal responsibilities were to deal promptly and fairly with teachers, and the school was seen to be the most effective environment in which to foster teacher improvement. Clearly, the discourse of responsibility rested with the principal on both counts-for teachers and for their own competence and performance. The DET responsibility was to provide support to both principals and teachers. Again the emphasis was on procedural fairness.

Interestingly, the notion of competency is dropped later in the text and efficiency takes over. According to the text, teacher (principal) efficiency is defined as a level of performance that is required for the position held. Inefficiency is seen 'to impact on the education and welfare of students and the workload and morale of colleagues'. There is recognition that teacher/principal efficiency can be affected by professional problems, school management, organisation and system shortcomings, personal difficulties within and outside the school and health problems. Principals are expected to be both sympathetic and take care of their staff. This text vacillates between care and accountability.

The fourth text, *Leading and Managing the School-a statement of key accountabilities for principals effective leadership and management*' specifies the role of the principal as clearly that of accountability.

In this policy text, as in other policy texts referring to the principalship in Australia, there were a number of dominant and subordinate discourses. The dominant discourse in *Leading and Managing* was **corporate**, positioning the principal's role in accord with policies and priorities of NSW government and curriculum of Board of Studies This was closely associated with discourses about **Audits** in the form of evaluations to align assessment policy and practice. These evaluations were data driven and teachers were data collectors, The third dominant theme was that of risk management-financial, occupational health and safety and child protection, learning, collaboration, collegial work and the professional growth of staff.

In terms of identity and the kind of attributes that would be required-communication was essential for the principal and the capacity to persuade, articulate vision and inform. There was little mention of the principal in relation to other principals or indeed as mentor of future principals.

Overall, there was a strong focus on the educational issues of outcomes and the focus on meeting the needs of students and making curriculum relevant so they can produce learning outcomes. This required principals to identify individual needs to maximise outcomes. A second theme of safety operationalised individually and collectively through welfare and discipline policy; focusing on protection, safety and self-esteem. Safety was closely tied to learning, with connections made between safe, responsive and harmonious learning environments.

Finally, we considered the text *Merit Selection: Procedures Manual*. This specifies that all positions not filled by transfer, special fitness appointment, resumption of duty and recruitment or employment will be advertised. In this document, the principal notifies the School staffing duty of a teacher vacancy, and they notify the principal on what basis the position is to be filled. Selection panels are formed classroom teachers by the principal, principals vacancies by the District Superintendent. All panel members must be trained. They should meet out of hours and be given the responsibilities of Section Panel Members information. Principals in this scenario, select, convene and chair the panel. Panels must include a parent representative nominated and endorsed by president of school council, and a teacher representative nominated by the Teacher Federation. In all instances, selection panels are expected to appoint on merit. Merit is throughout assumed to be 'the extent to which each applicant satisfies the selection criteria'.

For principals, the district superintendent convenes and chairs, includes another principals nominated by Director staffing in consultation with State Secondary or Primary Principal's Associations, a parent representative, and a teacher representative nominated by the union There must be a female and male. In schools with significant NESB students (60% minimum) and Aboriginal (40% or more or 25 students) enrolments can have an additional panel member. The panel must maintain confidentiality, each member should be involved through all stages of the process, and all applicants be treated with respect and observe the principals of EEO. The principal is the main source of EEO information if there is no other training. Each panel members if an equal participant in discussion, assessment and decision-making, and a report must be made regarding reasons for suitability.

All selection panels must adhere to EEO and also have an representative of an EEO group. The panel members have to declare and conflict or interest or prior personal knowledge or involvement with any applicants, and them the panel needs to decide whether this will unduly influence positive to negative views of applicant.

The criteria for selection had to be concise and unambiguous, without any source of bias and that allows distinctions to be made on the merit of each applicant. They were to be broad enough to allow good applicants to demonstrate their skills and experiences. There must be no discrimination directly or indirectly eg. 'length or extensive experience' that can be readily translated unto seniority. Recognition of work external to school eg. voluntary work, community involvement and other forms of employment. They must adhere to EEO principles. Any applicant must have served two years and be performing satisfactorily at current position, For principals the panel can choose between lateral or advertised appointments as the earlier procedure speeds up the process, allows those already with demonstrated skills at that level to apply and provides then five applicants. Advertisement is seen to produce a broader base of applicants. Interview techniques had to adhere to EEO principals of not asking about a partner, partners employment or salary, children, dependants or child care arrangement, credit status, age, home ownership, marital status, sexuality, pregnancy race, ethnic or ethno religious background, political or union affiliation.

These foci were echoed in the Application Form for an Advertised Principal Position. As with teachers, there was required a listing of areas of responsibility in subject /teaching areas currently taught and special aptitudes, details of current and previous substantive position and tertiary qualifications. The general selection criteria indicated the different assumptions about the nature of the job. The criteria, not in order of priority, included:

- Provision of quality education students and improvement in student outcomes;
- Effective management and implementation of programs for child protection and student welfare;
- Effective management and implementation of curriculum;
- Ability to establish effective decision-making and communication procedures within the school and the community;
- Ability to plan collaboratively on a whole school basis and manage resources effectively and equitably;
- Ability to develop strategies to enhance the performance and welfare for staff, and to implement equal employment opportunity principles;
- Capacity to promote the participation of the school community and developing and achievement of the school's goals and purposes.

In addition to the capacity to improve learning and promote student and staff welfare through planning, this text highlighted the role of the principal in promoting parental and student participation in the school community in line with the schools goals.

Specific selection criteria were laid down as identified in the individual school's advertisement. The maximum of two A4 pages were allowed. This was a tightly constructed text, with strict boundaries and a clear genre. Again, there was a privileging of contemporary governmental concerns about outcomes, quality and efficiency, but tempered by discourses about equity, with a strong focus on curriculum, pedagogy, communication and community, as well as staff and student welfare. In both the Application Form and Leading and Managing there was a direct link made between school effects and principals. Evidence that this was achieved was drawn from performance management and appraisal procedures.

The *Promotion and Transfer Procedures* treated the principalship as a separate category from teachers, although the grounds for eligibility were the same-priority transfers (eg. school closures, change in school size), special fitness appointments, returning from leave and merit selection from lateral appointment or advertisement. Incentive schemes focused

on filling difficult positions to staff-rural and isolated schools. These were premised upon a range of benefits seen to provide incentives for teachers to become principals in rural schools (eg relocation assistance, accommodation subsidies, rental subsidies, additional training and development), and to stay there. Eg. *Rural School Leadership Program* that offered an additional \$30,000 through additional salary loading, motor vehicle and rental costs and flexible working-conditions. Transfer points are accrued through time and working in rural or isolated or special schools. In return, the point system gave clear priority in transfer and promotion to those who had 'done their turn'. The emphasis throughout was on procedural fairness.

A number of factors were taken into account in promotion of teachers and other executive levels (eg. Assistant principals). Applicants were required to list their subject and teaching area codes (accredited and non accredited eg. maths, English etc.), position level (eg. teacher, teacher in charge) and areas of responsibility (eg. assistant principal in charge of special education, learning difficulties etc.). There were also designated areas of expertise (Braille, distance education, early intervention, isolated rural schools, performing arts, technology, sport and signing for deaf students in primary schools with multicultural education, sport, student welfare, tertiary/industry links and vocational education for secondary schools).

Finally, teachers could also indicate Special Aptitudes that were confirmed by their supervisor (principal). These included:

- understanding of and sensitivity to the needs ATSI and NESB students, understanding of needs of gifted and talented students;
- understanding of educational implications for schools in meeting needs of students from low socio-economic communities;
- awareness of gender equity issues including strategies for both girls and boys, capacity to integrate technology in effective classroom practice.

Applications to secondary school position included two additional:

- 'aptitudes' capacity to contribute to effective performing arts programs;
- capacity to contribute to effective sports programs.

These aptitudes have to be 'confirmed by their principal district superintendent or director'.

This mainstream reading indicates that there is a clear specification of roles and responsibilities, that career paths were made transparent and clear, that a clear set of personal and professional attributes were not only necessary but desirable. There was also incentives for individuals encouraging them to meet system-wide needs (eg rural, isolated schools) while at the same time issues of special needs and diversity were met.

The Principal's Support Package seeks to help them in their key roles in:

- leading and managing the school;
- supporting quality teachers and teaching;
- ensuring quality educational outcomes for students.

This package was produced with the principal's associations, who were represented on a Principal's Support Taskforce that would monitor the implementation.

It was evident from the above that the final responsibility rested with the principalship. The departmental role was one of support for those under stress, but that stress was an

individual principal's problem. For example, the Principal's Support Package meant experienced principals offered 'personalised service to meet their particular needs'. Principal wellbeing was seen to be critical for their success—a healthy principal was more able to meet the demands of the job. This support will be up to date and also relevant. Here the text argues that 'analysis of national and international research and an assessment of principal's support needs will ensure contemporary support, based on best practice, is available to principals. ...Increased support for principals in the management of difficult issues, associated with school security in particular, will also contribute to the well being of principals'. That is, if there is a sense of school wellbeing, read safe, then the principal's well-being is assured.

The package also included things to support principals in their day by day management roles—this support focused on leave for teachers, planning processes by provision of a Master Calendar, support for using ICT, and greater system responsiveness to issues which impact on schools. Leadership programs, the pivotal role of the principalship, will increase school leadership preparation programs, development of principals mentoring and shadowing models, improved principal induction, research into best practice in school leadership. The dedicated support service will assist principals to manage workplace issues re management of complaints, difficult workplace issues and management of staff efficiency and conduct.

This is the context in which the principal's work is defined. Good leadership from this perspective is critical to school success in terms of student outcomes as evident in academic results. To do so they must manage themselves better, be more efficient and entrepreneurial, forge partnerships with communities and business, meet with parental expectations and provide innovative (read use ICT) and high quality education that meets the individual needs of their particular student populations. Principals are expected to be good financial managers (efficient use of limited resources), image managers (both promoting the school through community relations and risk management). and people managers (change agents and damping down any dissent of industrial relations). Principals are expected to be able to read the culture of their school, create visions and convince others to accept and work towards these understandings. They are expected to form and develop leading teams and to delegate responsibilities eg curriculum, student welfare. They are expected to undertake succession planning, induct beginning teachers, and supervise staff through performance appraisal, while providing professional development for all teachers in line with system demands and school needs.

Teacher (and therefore principal) careers in the mainstream 'modernist' view are based upon an organisational hierarchy, a clear specification of tasks (eg leading teachers). As 'merit' has taken over from seniority, there is increased capacity for more rapid promotion. Individuals, it is assumed, are motivated to improve their performance out of a desire for rewards eg bonuses, new pay level, or formal position. Succession planning and mentoring are seen to be critical to facilitating the move from teaching into the principalship, which is, despite recent theories of dispersed leadership, still where final responsibility (and therefore power) lies. Principal wellbeing is seen to be critical in handling stress, addressed by providing system support, advice and networks as well as counselling.

The mainstream literature on teacher professionalism assumes that there is a close connection between professional standards, quality and the status of teaching. Professionalism is defined increasingly through meeting the requirements of external standards determined outside the profession, and in meeting minimal levels of competence that emphasise technical expertise. Professionalism is treated as being distinct from industrial relations and HRM.

Principal power, and therefore their own and their schools individual failure or success, is invested in the principalship.

Move 4: Matrix Collapse

It was easy to matrix the mainstream because the categories are theoretically treated as discrete 'boxes'-work, career, profession and identity. There tends to be a dominant and coherent storyline. When we tried these categories as heuristics from other standpoints it didn't work as well, the layers got muddled, we couldn't separate things out (eg. career, work and professionalism when it came to labour process theory), feminist perspectives considered the categories were premised upon a false public/private divide that ignored other responsibilities and realities, and post structuralism had no regard for the 'heuristics' at all.

Both the critical and feminist readings tending to develop around particular themes that could have developed out of more general questions such as in whose interest does this position work? Who gets to decide what schools are for? When we got to the post structuralist reading the categories collapsed. The problem was that we were attempting to do alternative readings to the mainstream we found we were providing the answers before we collected the data. Doing the readings of the mainstream was actually doing a form of textual analysis in itself as there was no neutral reading.

We therefore determined to develop sets of questions at a level of generality that could be typified as feminist, critical and post structuralist but then gave us access to the 'data'. This provided us with a more open-ended way of proceeding in the analysis rather than the imposition of a set of preconceived understandings about the effects of adopting each perspective. While we knew it was silly from the start to consider that a grid would work methodologically, the process of constructing and deconstructing the grid turned out to be a strategy that produced what we think are pertinent questions that will provide multiple readings of the data and flesh out more fully the nature of principals' work as represented in policy texts.

Critical reading

A critical reading of the texts would indicate how embedded in these descriptors are evidence of the nature of how schools sort and select and the various power inequalities embedded in this work. Critical researchers, according to Popkewitz, (1999, p. 2) are interested in 'how existing social relations can be interrogated to understand issues of power and institutional contradictions'. Neo Marxist labour process theory, Habermasian critical theory and critical literacy frameworks focus on relations of power /culture/ knowledge.

The questions that would be asked are:

What are the labor markets/industrial relations like?

Does the text recognise power?

In whose interests is this work being undertaken?

How is the work context dealt with?

How is the market conceived and how does it operate?

What distribution of resources are involved here?

Whose voices count in the school?

What is purpose of schooling here?

Who takes all the risks and responsibilities?

What counts as quality work? Who decides?

How is flexibility?

What is the role of the profession in the new work order?

What of professional knowledge and autonomy?

Who determines professional knowledge?

What about loyalty, trust and ethics?

While power is not mentioned, power is clearly located most immediately in the principal who has control over all aspects of staff careers. It is less overtly located at the centre as the principal has to conform to a range of technicalities and legalities in terms of utilising their power in any situation. Principal power is therefore highly constrained, although more through new accountabilities than direct administrative supervision. There is a clear line management structure, highly bureaucratised. Despite the discourses of new management theory, there is little sense here of 'a new work order' characterised by of flexibility, teams, multi-skilling or job sharing.

There is a clear divide between teachers and principals. Principal teacher relations are governed by sets of procedures and clearly designated responsibilities. There is no mention of collegial work either amongst principals or teachers and little sense of spaces for professional autonomy, with low levels of trust and ethics.

Career is highly individualised and the only knowledge that counts is that authorised by the system and authenticated by the supervisor. Principals have distinct power advantages in these arrangements in terms of career progress in a one-on-one supervisory model. To seek promotion without principal verification of your 'individual attributes' and how they conform to departmental definitions of those attributes was not possible. There is no sense of peer review in terms of individuals capabilities even as referees, which tended to be those in positions of authority. It is about individuals conforming to system needs.

The texts were framed by dominant discourses of positivist educational administration and managerialism, focusing on the audit, with subtexts of corporate risk management, regulatory aspects of principal's work, equity issues and democratic processes, although with a surprising 'educational' orientation compared to its ACT counterpart (where curriculum is mentioned only once in the entire text)' (Thomson 2001). But this would be swamped overall by the more bureaucratic overtones of the remaining texts.

The data collection activities of teacher and principals, indicates the performative aspect of the risk society (Ball, 2000).

While these have largely been depicted as bureaucratic and modernist concerns, there were also softer discourses about the management of school culture that values care and relationships. But these were countered by the hard managerialist tendencies towards positivist educational administrative practices and values marked by a desire for promoting vision, setting priorities and targets, making explicit connections between policies and practices, a stress on accountability and of course effectiveness.

There was little sense of principals being members of a profession, or of a sense of their obligations to a professional community (Sachs, 2002). The knowledge or skills base was assumed to be inherent in the individual, and gained through experience or the acquisition of other qualifications. There was little mention of ethics or what ethical behaviour constituted other than the legalistic requirements of the position with respect to child protection and staff welfare. Control of principal's knowledge and expertise was premised around certification, which was authorised by universities and authorities. Knowledge and expertise recognised was only that which was confirmed by the supervisor, the district supervisor in line with departmental policy.

Feminist questions

This comes from the position that feminists foreground gender as shaping social practices in gender differentiated ways in particular contexts. Catherine Marshall (1999, p.2) argues that 'Integrating feminist and critical theory into policy analysis will add critical issues and ways of framing questions about power, justice and the state. ...Feminist critical policy analysis is research that conducts analysis for women while focusing on policy and politics'.

Feminist approaches, according to Arnot, David & Weiner (1997, p.92) are also 'strategic-concerned with social justice social change and reflexivity', public private dichotomies, access and equity issues.

Feminists would ask whether the policy texts take account of:

What types of knowledge are valued?

How are careers structured?

What aspects of leadership and/or management are privileged?

What images of leaderships are presented?

How is the public/private addressed?

What was the nature of the workplace and the work?

Whose knowledge is valued?

How are issues of equity addressed?

What role does community play?

Where equity was mentioned, it either called upon the language of diversity when it referred to the students, and on equal opportunity when it referred to teachers. The emphasis was that of liberal feminism, on natural justice and procedural fairness and recognition of special needs. In particular, feminists would note how special aptitudes categorised for recognition

for promotion dealt with difference. Here, expertise in equity issues, were designated as aptitudes and not value positions, and sporting and arts skills were listed as equivalent to expertise in gender equity and awareness of how to develop programs in low socio-economic situations. These were weak understandings of equity, where individuals only had to indicate their awareness of gender or multicultural issues, without having to indicate previous actions or strategies. The expectation that strategies for boys as well as girls within the gender equity, most feminists would read, signals the political power of the 'what about the boys' movement and feminist backlash. Feminists would want to ask applicants whether they views gender equity as being about the social relations of gender, and whether masculinity is also seen to produce particular advantages as well as disadvantages. Overall, the discourse was liberal feminist, mobilising notions of equal opportunity, merit, needs and procedural fairness.

Indeed, the aptitudes listed tended to fit more with the systemic dispositions towards selective and specialist schools as they operate within the NSW system. Equity requires more than just awareness and sensitivity that can be readily addressed by symbolic action without practical and therefore political action.

There were contradictions for women in terms of access to promotion. On the one hand the transfer point system gave priority in the lateral promotion system to those with mobility and therefore an enhanced capacity to gain career experience. Yet women with familial responsibilities are less likely to move for promotion. The career structure assumed that individuals were relatively self-interested ie. motivated by money, and not motivated by altruism eg particular values systems, care of children, and that formal leadership positions and not teaching are the desired aim. There was no mention of job sharing.

Feminists would be critical of the location of power being solely in the principalship, where the principal is in the position of power over the teacher, and there is no mention of the importance of relationships with colleagues and students. In particular, community was seen as something principals needed to consult and nurture, but there was no sense of participation.

Post structuralist reading

As all good poststructuralists we focused on ambiguity, contradiction and dilemmas, on identity, subjectivity rather than structures. Questions would include:

What are the contradictions in this story?

Who is the norm and who is othered?

What grand story is being told here?

What kinds of identities are being created here-fixed, unitary?

What knowledges count-universal and cause and effect as opposed to situated and partial?

What kind of agency is possible?

Are the ends fixed or is there unpredictability of outcomes?

Where are risks assumed?

What is assumed about power?

Post structuralism was more concerned with the relations rather than structures of power, localised resistances rather than meta-narratives. Gough (1994, p.8) suggests that:

Whereas structuralist ladders and nets lead us towards closure and a semblance of 'order in the universe', post structuralist ladders and nets tend to be temporary markets of ongoing processes of reconfiguration, leading not to closure but to new openings.

Postmodernism is a 'reading practice-a way of making sense of a discursive formation'. In that sense it adopts a critical reading of mainstream, feminist and critical readings while also appropriating from them.

A poststructuralist account would focus on the disciplinary regimes that are regulating principals' work, professional life and absorbed in particular with the internalisation of these regimes in the identity of the principal. Discourses about work, career and profession all formed a web of power that was not centred other than within the individual's positioning, within conditions of constraint and possibility. The discourse of the principalship and leadership more generally is, about meaning making and meaning shifting, about changing the relations and conditions of work in schools. Discourses about the principal ship could also be seen to be central to the policy hysteria that surrounded the educational restructuring in the UK, NZ and Australia, most particularly around self managing schools where apparent power was located in the school leader-the principal-from which vision and direction emanated.

Post-structuralists would point to how principal identity is constituted as fixed, the rigidities of the organisational structures and how individuals are located within it, and the paradox of increased regulatory processes intending to produce responsiveness to diversity in communities and amongst students. Post-structuralists would point to the lack of space or time for pleasure as a motivator in these policy accounts, on how the categorisation of knowledge that is valued is skills based; that there is an entrenchment of old disciplinary boundaries of subjects rather than a valuing of cross disciplinarity.

In particular, the focus of a post-structuralist account would be on the strong audit culture, one in which the practices of principals and applicants, as that of teachers and students, were highly regulated in what they did and how they were embodied. This move from the micro-politics and genre of the application form eg limited to a half page per criteria to the macro power / knowledge relations clearly manifest in how professional knowledge was defined, validated and legitimated. There was a strong need to measure and indicate effect. Power () refers to how other side of a risk society is an audit society, as organizations and management seeks to create mechanisms by which they can control the volatility of their environments while maintaining legitimacy as effective managers.

Diversity and equity, as that of sporting prowess, took on symbolic value as part of a wider range of performativities that principals or applicants were expected to adhere.

The grand story is that the system is fair, supportive and caring, but that ultimately the buck stops with the individual principal. There was symbolic concern for welfare and well being of staff, but little was said about the capacity of the principals to constrain their workload.

Move 6: Having a rest with a moment of reflexivity

Rhodes argues that multiple readings of research do not mean we know less or more, but that each reading 'produces different effects' that are not mutually exclusive but that may be contradictory and indeed lack coherence (p. 24). We also realised, although we already knew it, that the critical, feminist and post structuralist perspectives always worked against the mainstream norm, which itself is by no means theoretically benign. Nor can a grid provide coherence or consistency, when the categories do not make sense when it comes to the data or indeed when the epistemological position (post-structuralism) listed in the grid make the grid unworkable as the categories themselves collapsed.

So what value did we get out of this exercise? Did it 'trim up the tone' of our explanatory framework, or merely give us a 'one off workout' with little effect? In a sense we have done what many organisational theorists do- set up an ideal model and assert that this is best practice but we found that lived practice did not match up to the ideal (Pruijt, 2000).

This process has in utilising multiple perspectives for analysing policy texts of the principals work in NSW takes us back to our original questions we posed as being possible explanations for why the principalship is not popular. Our desire taking from Stronach & McLure, (1997, p.85), is to 'articulate an instance or account of a disappointment seeking to unsettle a polarisation of critique and deconstruction while still resisting the accommodationist reconciliation of modernism and postmodernism that make the latter into a kind of modernist baroque.' Policy critique is useful, but deconstruction, 'is a necessary part of reading the relations and shift of meaning that produce critical discourse, a way of re-conceptualising what we mean as critique. It is not an exposure of error as much as an opening'.

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