Women Primary Principals: leadership between the flags

The purpose of this paper is to outline my research project and share some of the perspectives that have emerged during the process of analysis and reflexivity. This is a case study of twelve female primary school principals in the independent sector in Victoria. Independent schools are generally referred to as the private sector or non-government schools to distinguish them from the government sector. Also the reference to primary principals’ is generally used to refer to a ‘Junior School Head’ position within a K – 12 School. Many schools often combine the role of the Junior Head’s position and / or the Deputy Principal or Assistant Principal’s position.

This paper introduces the work narratives of successful professional women in senior leadership positions in independent schools. The analysis of the narrative process itself and how these women shape and are shaped by their cultural discourses about leadership provides the focus for this study. In particular how the context and discursive strategies they use to tell their stories are instrumental in their construction of professional identity and its relationship to subjectivity. Thus professional work narratives offer insights into subjectivity and identity as the women tell their leadership stories. Initially Clandinin and Connelly’s (1994) ‘narrative inquiry’ approach provided a useful conceptual basis from which to gather the written responses to a questionnaire collected during 2004, interviews (tape-recorded and transcribed) and my reflexive journal maintained during and after the interview process.

Inquiry into leadership leads to questioning the conceptual frames that have produced the plethora of leadership meta-narratives. The current leadership models have largely ignored the role of gender, subjectivity, context and time as a changing discursive process. My inquiry investigates how professional women shape their self-understandings and how they make sense of their contradictory experiences of power and subjection. In order to bring a more discursive and reflexive perspective to the conceptual terrain of leadership I draw on poststructural theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, (1987); Michael Foucault, (1997) and Elizabeth St Pierre, (2000). Her comments further elaborate my intention:

I have become increasingly interested in how women construct their subjectivities within the limits and possibilities of the discourses and cultural practices available to them. I have become intrigued with Foucault’s (1984, 1985/1984, 1986/1984) ethical analysis, care of the self, that focuses on the arts of existence, or technologies of the self, that people use to create themselves as the ethical subjects of their actions. (St Pierre 2000, p. 258)

Independent schools and leadership:

Independent Schools in Australia are subject to complex and sometimes overlapping, state and federal government regulation and legislation. They have traditionally been responsible for much of their own marketing, finance, staffing and professional development. The State Registration Boards have ensured compliance with strict and wide-ranging regulations. Non-government schools have traditionally been highly scrutinized in the past and these controls remain.

In this context independent schools have both prospered and struggled depending on their location, status, affiliations and markets. Marketing campaigns and public profiling has been a serious business for a sector that differentiates itself from other schools on the basis of religious, cultural and historical foundations. Traditionally they have had a mixed reception
from the general public that tends to stereotype schools. Many of the established high status independent schools are viewed not only as elitist but also as exemplars of good practice and offering successful educational outcomes for students.

During the 1990s Victoria experienced a rapid expansion of independent schools, particularly the low-fee paying schools in around Melbourne’s fringe suburbs and semi-rural centres. Much of this expansion was due to federal funding policies and new legislation that encouraged the increase in the number of private schools. In addition many government schools were closed and amalgamated during this period. As a result there has been a steady movement of students from the state system to the independent sector particularly in the new population growth corridors in Victoria.

The government reform and restructuring agendas of the 1990s to promote self-managed government schools has simultaneously promoted an image of independent schools as stable, consistent and offering parents’ choice. The Independent Schools’ Council of Australia (I.S.C.A) report, released in June, 2006 shows an increase in enrolments in non-government, non-Catholic schools from 9.7 percent of all Australian students in 1996 to 12.8 percent in 2005. This trend continues as the Education Department’s annual report, 2006 shows student enrolment at state schools dropped for the second year in a row, by 0.4 per cent to 539,343. The independent sector has risen 0.2 per cent to 111,413 students. Twenty per cent of all Australian students currently attend Catholic schools. Islamic schools are experiencing the fastest growth of any group within the independent sector, with a 14.5 percent a year increase. Australia currently has 29 Islamic schools, which cater for 14,415 primary and secondary school students, or three per cent of all independent school enrolments.

What is not as obvious is the flow on effects of these government reforms in the independent sector which has steadily adopted a more corporate business model. Consequently there has been an increase in competitive marketing, a more strategic human resource focus on staffing combined with a corporate line management, business practice. The experience of workplace changes for leaders and executive leadership teams has been shaped by the dominant discourses such as, performativity, entrepreneurial leadership and economic and corporate strategic management measures. These workplace changes have meant the independent sector is more vulnerable to political, cultural and economic pressures than in the past.

Independent schools’ are not so independent – financially or in terms of curriculum provision. There is a deepening anxiety to preserve their ideals, commitment to their ethos, religious and philosophical foundations whilst responding to the demands of ‘performativity’. Blackmore et al. (2000, p. 348) comments: “One side of performativity is the bottom line of efficiency; the other is about image and ‘being seen to be doing something’”. In this instance, schools are being compared against each other in terms of student outcomes, behaviours, appearance and reputation. Additionally state and commonwealth governments are increasing pressure on them to be accountable for outcomes such as assessment and reporting, in return for funds. In this context the independent sector has been compliant and at times complicit in its negotiations with various governments over the years. It now faces a complex and demanding situation not experienced in the past to this degree or intensity.

Independent schools today are obliged to generate a successful image or ‘fabricate’ it, if necessary. As Ball (2000, p. 9), states “to paraphrase Foucault, fabrications are versions of an organization (or person) which does not exist …they are produced purposefully in order ‘to be accountable’. The fabrication becomes embedded in and is reproduced by systems of recording and reporting on practice. It excludes other things which do not ‘fit’ into what is
intended to be represented or conveyed”. In such a climate many schools experience duplicity and compromise in order to rationalize their organizational structures, circular administrative procedures and mask any inefficient management practices. These new accountabilities are intended to authorize, legitimize and represent the school to the public for recognition and validation. As a marketing exercise it requires leaders with different attributes. As Blackmore, (cited in Collard & Reynolds 2005, p. 351) explains the ramifications of these trends:

Entrepreneurial leadership in the performing school is about being opportunistic, managing risk and producing not the best, but the right representations according to the norms laid down by management and markets about what constitutes a good school, effective leadership and educational success in which the identity of the principal as a success or failure is linked to that of the performing school. (See also Gleeson and Husbands 2001; Thompson 2001).

Current leadership discourses have centred on oppositional stances with conflicting ideologies. These discourses have inflated the corporate meta-narratives of performance, accountability and ‘entrepreneurial leadership’, focusing on ‘instructional’ and ‘transformational’ practices. At the same time they have undermined the learning organizational model with a focus on collaborative leadership, ethical values and ‘distributed’ leadership practices. Consequently an array of theoretical positions ranging from the postmodern, poststructural and feminist theories have emerged, including critical social theorists (Blackmore, 1993, 1996, 1999; Ball, 1995, 2000; Grace, 1995 and Smyth, 1989) more humanist / interpretive stances (Gronn, 1999; Ribbins, 1997; Southworth, 1995) and the instrumental and technical approaches (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992, 1996, 1998; Leithwood et al. 1996, 1999).

Independent Schools in Victoria:

Many independent schools comprise systemic schools, which are groups of schools administered by a central organization such as, Catholic parish schools and Anglican independent schools. The A.I.S.V is the Victorian section of the national organization representing independent schools in Australia and approximately 98 per cent of Independent Schools in Victoria are member schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation or Guiding Philosophy</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Affiliation or Guiding Philosophy</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Lutheran</td>
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<td>Baptist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greek Orthodox</td>
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<td>Uniting</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-denominational</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Seventh Day Adventist</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Steiner</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1.1  A.I.S.V Member Schools (2006)*

It is important to highlight the different aspects associated with the role of a Junior School Head compared to the primary principal’s role in a P-6 government school. The former incorporates a more extensive and culturally embedded practice in terms of senior

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management experience and leadership expertise. The term ‘senior management’ is used to encompass the roles that have a whole school focus and is reliant on the principal for its conception and the delegation of responsibilities. Many private schools are K-12 and have multiple campuses – Senior and Junior Schools. Thus the role of leadership responsibilities can cover students ranging from 3 years to 18 years with specific responsibilities for Junior School students ranging from 3 years to 12 years of age.

The positioning of leadership roles at a senior level in K-12 schools requires role clarity, particularly with the growth of senior management teams. As Gunter (2001, p.119) states “…researchers have raised the point that, while senior management teams are important, the delegation of decisions has to be tempered by a head-teacher’s accountability”. These contexts are often sites of struggle as both leadership capacity and line manager frustration confuse the distribution of control and authority. When these factors are combined with an intensification of work and a shift to a performative culture the result is a growing concern amongst senior leaders in relation to professional identity and organizational values. Gunter, (ibid) reminds us that the “…dialogue within senior management teams may increasingly be less about values, pedagogy and children’s needs and more about information management, spin and damage control”.

It is this current intensification of work and the relationships between the individual, the school and the principal that is being eroded. In particular the blurring of professional identity and alignment with the organizational culture is of concern. Thus questions of loyalty and service have moved away from the ethos and core values in order to facilitate the corporate management expectations and as a result senior leaders experience a range of tensions, contestations and conflicting allegiances within their work place.

Leadership is a pressure point within the school system. During the past decade the leadership terrain has expanded dramatically in an effort to define the capacities, attributes and qualities of leadership today. However the result has been a 1950s discourse about authority and control: how to regulate, categorize and broaden leadership boundaries to encompass the expanding complexity of leading and managing schools. The question is what are we missing… who benefits, how do leaders differentiate priorities, how relevant is context, discourse and subjectivity and what is leadership in action?

**What is missing from the debate?**

Certainly in Australia the independent sector in general, is under-researched. In particular, the significance of women leaders’ as Junior School Heads’ and / or Deputy Heads’ has been overlooked. In addition their lack of representation at the principal level is not mentioned even though there is a predominance of women in classrooms and at various senior management levels in schools. Furthermore research that exists is silent on the complexity of situated leadership in diverse contexts, professional identity, gender, subjectivity, organizational and relationship issues.

Inquiry into the significance of the ‘senior management team’ is currently under investigated and as Gunter, 2001 p.119) acknowledges “…what is written is highly normative and is about determining roles and work in ways that are consistent with educational restructuring”. Moreover as the various management roles are divided up the Junior Head / Deputy’s position is problematic as “a place where professional and executive functions struggle for primacy. Harvey (1994) shows how deputy principals in Western Australia have been put in the ‘ambiguous position of moving work down the line’ and also ‘retaining work that cannot be delegated because of resource constraints’.
Male dominance of many fields of inquiry has challenged and marginalized feminist knowledge claims. Similarly educational leadership reflects this marginalizing with its neo-conservative politics surrounding educational reforms. For women in leadership it is a time of renewed constraint. As Blackmore (2006, p. 354) explains the corporate leader “…is still modelled on particular hegemonic male images of being strong, able to make the hard decisions, being independent and taking unilateral action, and so on.” Indeed a leadership designed for the white, middle class, male. For women already in leadership, it has meant even more prioritizing of administrative demands and a diminishing sense of professional identity.

The current climate surrounding the profession is being scrutinized and women representing the minority in educational leadership are at greater risk of losing their foothold, a pattern already evident in state schools where the numbers of women principals is now in decline. It is increasingly obvious that women in leadership need to consider their position, to better understand why and how they came to be in that position, and how they can use that position to create capacity, agency and encourage younger women to take on leadership roles.

**Women in Leadership: Talking Heads’**

By selecting women as participants (regardless of their individual stand in relation to various feminisms) I am examining how gendered subjectivity is informed and informs leadership debates. I have chosen to select all women leaders because of their varying embodiments of difference and a pragmatic anticipation that the future of school leadership may rest with this predominately female workforce. I also consider that my contributions to, and experiences of, independent leadership will supplement their voices. These women may or may not have various feminist views but by including my narrative with theirs it will lend strength and discriminatory critique to further understandings of leadership in schools.

My interest and background experience as a former Junior School Head in an independent school in Melbourne situates me within the research, as both an insider and now researcher. As a female researcher, studying women leaders, of a predominately female workforce, the layering of a gendered cultural context, is both its strength and its limitation. Blackmore (1999, p. 222) states “we need to theorize gender change better – to consider both its textual nuances and the power of discourse in meaning making…the material and cultural conditions that produce particular leadership discourses that constrain women”. The process of conducting and reflecting on the research revealed how I am discursively constituted as were my participants, in ways that were both outside my control and inherent in the situation.

**Design of the Study:**

This study was conducted from July 2004 to June 2005, in three stages:

1. The first stage involved using the AISV Member Schools Directory to send 107 Questionnaires to female Junior School Heads’ in K-12 independent schools and K-6 independent schools across Victoria.
2. Stage two involved analysing 17 completed responses received from a diverse range of schools and for conducting in-depth interviews. These leaders were invited to participate and twelve leaders’ volunteered to be interviewed. Interviews were tape-recorded.
3. Stage three transcripts were sent to participants to be edited and approved and my reflexive journal was used throughout the study.
Two of the twelve participating leaders’ interviewed were primary principals in Early Learning to Year 6 Schools. One leader was from a non-affiliated school and the other from a Montessori school. (See Figure 1.2) All participants shared a collective, leadership experience of more than 130 years in leadership. The following table summarizes the 12 schools that contextualize the leaders’ narratives and indicates the extent of this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Single sex / Co ed</th>
<th>Preparatory to Year 12</th>
<th>Early Learning &amp; Kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>All girls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Co ed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>All girls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>All girls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non-denominational</td>
<td>All girls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non-denominational</td>
<td>Co ed</td>
<td>P – 6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non-denominational</td>
<td>Co ed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Co ed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Montessori</td>
<td>Co ed</td>
<td>P – 6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Steiner</td>
<td>Co ed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Co ed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1.2 Representative Schools*

The decision to use a questionnaire provided the most precise means to identify the diversity of school settings and opinions, outside of my experience and offer insight into the current thinking about the parameters and intensities operating across the sector. The seventeen responses provided a useful background from which to gauge the collective, assumptions concerning “institutional talk”. As a consequence this ‘talk’ tended towards reductionism and standardization. Management/administrative issues dominated and practical aspects took precedence. A number of familiar issues such as time constraints, red-tape, autonomy, workload, hierarchical authority, gender and age issues were themes that emerged. Anonymity and confidentiality played an important role by offering an opportunity to safely raise politically sensitive issues.

**Stage 2: Analysis of the questionnaire**

Question four for example, elicited strong opinions and exposed the tenor of some of the responses:

4. What factors stifle or support your talents, or innovations and why?

*Meredith* “Male domination and power seeking of senior male leaders”

*Elaine* “In some ways being Vice Principal and Junior School Head means one never experiences total autonomy and total Junior School responsibilities are exacerbated when the Principal is Senior School focused.”

*Pam* “I am the only female on the whole school Administration Team K – 12 so I sometimes feel left out of the loop, because of ‘blokesy’, ‘mateship’ or ‘old school ties’ to which I do not belong.

*Karen* “No systemic training, questionable pay and conditions and I have only had male principals in my career and no female role models.”

Overall, there were six questions designed to illicit information about leader’s perceptions of leadership quality, capacity, constraints, influences and inspirations. The majority of leader statements were dot pointed; three wrote additional information on the back of the questionnaire. All respondents wrote passionately about their commitment and many shaped their statements using a reporting style genre. Pam’s response “I am the only female on the whole school Administration Team K – 12 so I sometimes feel left out of the loop,
because of ‘blokesy’, ‘mateship’ or ‘old school ties’ to which I do not belong” echoes a
gendered politc of difference emphasised by using the personal pronoun “I’ three times.
She polarizes her feelings of alienation and links them to a somewhat clichéd reference to
her male peers. Pam subjectively situates herself and discursively tends to reinforce
categories and closure. The questionnaire provided a glimpse into situated leadership
experiences. This tension was taken up during the interview.

Of the twelve interviews conducted very few corrections were made to the originals and if
changes were made they tended to clarify and incorporate some educational comment to
professionalize the transcript. The semi-structured in-depth interviews offered a far richer
and more diverse discourse and owed much to the questionnaire that provided an important
reflective process and cleared the way for a more confessional, open and spontaneous
dialogue. The process of analysis involved a close reading of the transcripts, listening to
their original voices on tape whilst noting their correlated gestures that were coded at the
time of the interview and reviewing my reflexive journal.

As a researcher the insider now outsider positioning played a substantial role in building
trust, confidence and assuring confidentiality. Their discourses and my communication
processes revealed how the construction of subjectivity theirs and mine influenced the
discursive strategies operating between how these women constituted themselves and their
professional identity. Volunteering to be part of this inquiry opens a forum to question
intentions, perceptions and the reciprocal process generated between researcher and
interviewee. Volunteers are themselves a self-selecting group adding to the layering of
intent.

This study is positioned at the borders and between the flags of theory, questioning the
discourses of subjugation through analysis of the multiple, partial and contradictory
processes within the narratives and questioning how discursive strategies are used to shape
professional identity and subjectivity. As Susan Chase (1995) states, “I attend to what
researchers usually take for granted when they gather women’s accounts: the narrative
process itself; how women tell their stories... I treat narration as a form of social action that
is itself worthy of study.” (p. 5). The analysis of the interviews was approached as a series
of vignettes in order to convey a sense of ‘situated’ leadership.

**Stage 3: Analysis of the vignette**

It was a late afternoon meeting at a high status girls’ Catholic School in Melbourne. The
lawns and gardens were manicured the staff members were abrupt but courteous. When the
Junior School Head arrived a little late and out of breath, we quickly departed to her
classroom as this doubled as her office. Her business like approach screened a sense of
urgency, stress and general exhaustion as she reflected on her situation and how she had got
there.

**Q:** What does leadership mean to you?

**Julie:** It’s a mixed blessing – a chance to be a leader – but it’s an oxymoron as you
struggle against the odds. The biggest difficulty, I believe, occurs in the K – 12 School
where there is elitism with anybody or anything to do with VCE. Secondary staff and
leaders are limited in their understanding and support of the primary components of the
school and leadership in primary suffers accordingly.

These opening statements in relationship to leadership foreground not only the contextual
hegemonic class distinctions within the culture of the school but the politics in relation to
Junior School leadership, professional identity and the effect of senior management teams
and the subjective questioning of the exercise of power. In this sense “struggle and suffers” represents her deeper conflict with a subjugated experience combined with the politics of preference within the school’s leadership executive. The subjective identification between her self and the primary school exposes the fault lines undermining her leadership. As a consequence her professional identity and subjectivity appear to be under review. The institutional biases that are part of the school’s culture are accentuated by ignoring or trivializing primary school issues. This is one of the only times in the interview that she uses the personal pronoun “I” and reflects a conviction in her statement referring to secondary versus primary issue.

She continues…there is a bureaucratic paper trail here that passes for control and efficient management practices. We have repetitive communications, no time to explain, or remedy situations through consultation, even though consultation occurs at all levels of the system it is without any resolution or responsive action.

Her frustration with the circular management practices and poor communication depict an alienation and isolation from any strategic control and exacerbates the derailing of the administration of the role. Detailing time, context and power relationships she experiences constraint and compromise. She uses the third person plural “we” to distance herself from the experiences and implicate the leadership team as responsible for this situation. Her final comment here supports my prior argument surrounding current school leadership practices when she states…This is a survival or crisis management approach where autonomy is expected but not permitted. There is isolation that continues to increase as every team leader or area level coordinator is busy being accountable.”

This small section of narrative frames a leadership perspective frustrated by the minutiae that impedes communication and the higher status given to secondary over primary. It is interesting to note her reference to “autonomy” relates to authority and accountability and is maintained through isolation. Isolation is not only a practice but suggests a cultural discourse of control. She maintains her distance protected from the full account of her disclosure by discursive strategies, particularly third person pronouns and generic statements as she submits herself to the cultural regime of her workplace. Her decision to participate in the interview and tell her story of dislocation and self-regulation suggests a need to shape a narrative identity that views conflicts as problematic and systemic. Further her self-discipline and commitment suggests a contradictory ‘sub-narrative’ related to a subjectivity tempered through self-surveillance, compromise, sacrifice but also a desire to be a leader:
“… It’s a mixed blessing…a chance to be a leader”.

**Reflexive Aside:**
Elizabeth St Pierre (2000, p. 265) employs an ‘aside’ as a literary device, to explore other dimensions that are embedded in her research. I am using this strategy to open the conceptual landscape to further scrutiny. It offers a space to share my reflexive journal.

**Julie** raises concerns and issues that highlight the cultural terrain within organizations. In this instance power relations and accountability intersect and yet the place of discourse in constituting experiences of power and subjection remain undeveloped in many studies. Although contrary to the poststructural argument concerning the ‘dispersion of the subject’ I agree with Lois McNay (2000, p. 115) as she sheds light on the complexity of subjectivity, its positioning in theory and how it is positioned by poststructural theorists. In this respect she argues: “The idea of a narrative structure to identity supplements the poststructural dispersion of the subject with the account of the formation of a more coherent sense of self”.
Drawing on Foucault (1997), who views power and knowledge as inseparable and how ‘truth’ claims privilege one form of knowledge over another, it is Beasley (2001, p. 78) who reiterates the power relationships and the “different ways of producing the ‘self’ that have a Foucauldian basis and orientation.” She continues to expand on Foucault’s (1980a) notion of ‘subjugated knowledges’: “… one constitutes previously established, erudite knowledges that have been buried, hidden, disguised, masked, removed or written out by revisionist histories; another involves local, popular or indigenous knowledges that are marginalized or denied space to perform adequately”.

While Foucault is interested in how discursive fields structure institutions, I am interested in how discursive strategies influence and organize institutional stories about leadership experience. It is my understanding that professional women’s work narratives shape and are shaped by their individual narrative strategies. Furthermore their situated stories (contexts, time) reveal leader’s subjectivity under review and accentuated through narrative patterns of ‘institutional discourse’ that connects work narratives. These leaders’ shape their discursive strategies through self-reflection and self-regulation often partial and contested as the women confront the contradictions within their situated experience of leadership and their positioning by others. It appears to be a biographical process, constantly reviewing, modifying and retelling, as the women shape and are shaped by their discourses of knowledge, power, professional identity and subjectivity.

**Conclusion:**

By scrutinizing women’s stories of leadership as historically positioned, contextually situated and partial I have focused on particular discursive strategies that link discourses and makes sense of difference through experiences and real practices. This underpins and often overrides formal authority and operates at the micro-level of institutional structures. It lends perspective to the senior management role and suggests how discursive strategies assist in the processes of identity and subjectivity through the narrative process.

A number of productive effects are created by disrupting the narratives of subjectivity and the gendered assumptions operating at the leadership level. These ‘technologies of the self’ interpenetrate professional identity and correlate to the relationships of power within the school. Discursive strategies were used by these leaders’ to connect and disconnect with their organizational culture. This study suggests that these leaders’ stories reflect a ‘differentiating’ discursive practice that is subjugated and constituted daily through leadership experiences. It also that pays attention to the processes of subjectivity as a changing discursive medium.

Professional identity emerges from this research as a negotiated alignment or disjunction between the culture within the school and the subjugated processes of the self. Leadership practices that have been shaped and are shaped by such discourses may be improved by refocusing on the dynamic potential of narrative. Leadership tensions, at the senior management level in schools, might be better explored in terms of enabling discursive strategies through attention to professional narratives that however partial, challenge the culturally produced discourses that constrain women.
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