Educational Leadership Theory
Series Editors: Scott Eacott · Richard Niesche

Amanda Heffernan

The Principal and School Improvement

Theorising Discourse, Policy, and Practice

Springer

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Series editors

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The Educational Leadership Theory book series provides a forum for internationally renowned and emerging scholars whose ongoing scholarship is seriously and consequentially engaged in theoretical and methodological developments in educational leadership, management and administration. Its primary aim is to deliver an innovative and provocative dialogue whose coherence comes not from the adoption of a single paradigmatic lens but rather in an engagement with the theoretical and methodological preliminaries of scholarship. Importantly, Educational Leadership Theory is not a critique of the field—something that is already too frequent—instead, attention is devoted to sketching possible alternatives for advancing scholarship. The choice of the plural ‘alternatives’ is deliberate, and its use is to evoke the message that there is more than one way to advance knowledge. The books published in Educational Leadership Theory come from scholars working at the forefront of contemporary thought and analysis in educational leadership, management and administration. In doing so, the contributions stimulate dialogue and debate in the interest of advancing scholarship.

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The Principal and School Improvement

Theorising Discourse, Policy, and Practice

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Series Editors' Foreword

Discussions of educational leadership research are always discussions about theory. Sometimes, matters of ontology, epistemological, and axiology are made explicit, other times they are not, but we cannot undertake, dialogue, and debate research without theory. What counts as theory and/or quality research in educational leadership has changed over time. From the influence of sociology and behavioural science in the establishment of university departments of educational administration (as it was known then) through to the rise of the Theory Movement in the mid-twentieth century and subsequent interventions such as Thomas Barr Greenfield's humanistic science, the Critical Theory of Richard Bates and William Foster, and Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski's naturalistic coherentism, tensions in educational leadership theory have shaped what work is conducted, legitimised, published, and ultimately advanced. This is all set in a field of inquiry where questions of relevance and/or practical significance remain dominant and enduring. The desire for immediacy and direct translation of research into practice, especially for the improvement of outcomes, means that matters of theory are often seen as peripheral at best and more often marginalised or silenced. Theory, that which can unsettle assumptions, ask questions of the status quo, recast our ways of thinking, seeing and doing, is perceived as getting in the way of instrumentalist and/or functional prescriptions of how things ought to be.

The *Educational Leadership Theory* book series is explicitly designed to address what we see happening in educational leadership scholarship. That is, an aversion to rigorous, robust, and, most importantly, enduring dialogue and debate on matters of theoretical and methodological advancement. To that end, this series provides a forum for internationally renowned and emerging scholars whose ongoing scholarship is seriously and consequentially engaged in theoretical and methodological developments in educational leadership, management, and administration. Its primary aim is to deliver an innovative and provocative dialogue whose coherence comes not from the adoption of a single paradigmatic lens but rather in an engagement with the theoretical and methodological preliminaries of scholarship. Importantly, *Educational Leadership Theory* is not simply a critique of the field—something that is already too frequent—instead, attention is devoted to sketching possible alternatives for advancing scholarship. The choice of the plural 'alternatives' is deliberate, and its use is to evoke the message that there is more than one way to advance knowledge. The books published in *Educational Leadership Theory* come from scholars working at the forefront of contemporary thought and analysis in educational leadership, management, and administration. In doing so, the contributions stimulate dialogue and debate in the interest of advancing scholarship. Specifically, we aim to:

- Foreground the theoretical/methodological preliminaries of educational leadership research; and
- Sketch areas of relevance and possible theoretical/methodological developments that serve to extend current debates on leadership in education.

We interpret these aims widely, consistent with our goal of promoting dialogue and debate in the field. Importantly, we ask our contributors to respond to the following guiding questions:

1. What are the theoretical/methodological problems from which educational leadership is based and/or have implications for educational leadership? and
2. How can we engage them?

These questions, we believe, are vital as the field of educational leadership faces increasing questions of its relevance and status within educational research, and as educational research itself faces increasing challenges from beyond in the audit culture of the contemporary academy. Our goal is not to bring a series of like-minded contributors together to outline the virtues of a particular research tradition. Such an undertaking would do little more than provide legitimation of existing theorisations and negate theoretical pluralism. Instead, we seek to bring a diverse group of scholars together to engage in rigorous dialogue and debate around important matters for educational leadership research and practice. This is a significant move, as instead of surrendering our thoughts to a singular, stable, and standardised knowledge base we explicitly seek to interrogate the dynamism of contradictions, multiplicities, and antinomies of a vibrant field of theories and practices.

Most importantly, we want the *Educational Leadership Theory* book series to stimulate dialogue and debate. We are broad in our meaning of the label 'theory'. The analytical dualism of explanation and description is a poor and weak distinction between what is and is not theory. We too are not against the absence of practical application. However, what we seek are contributions that take matters of theory and methodology (as in theory as method) serious. In short, we are more inclusive than exclusive. This also goes for what is meant by 'educational leadership'. We do not limit our interpretation to schools or higher education but are instead open to work discussing education in its broadest possible sense. A focus on theory travels well across geographic and disciplinary boundaries. In taking matters of theory serious, we see the *Educational Leadership Theory* book series as a key outlet for stimulating dialogue and debate by recognising the problems and possibilities of existing knowledge in the field and pushing that further. This is an undertaking that we hope you will join us on—be that as a contributor, reader, or critique—all in the interests of advancing knowledge.

Scott Eacott
Richard Niesche

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Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ARD	Assistant Regional Director
C2C	Curriculum into the Classroom
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio Economic Advantage
IPS	Independent Public Schools
LNP	Liberal-National Coalition Party
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QDET	Queensland Department of Education and Training
QELI	Queensland Education Leadership Institute
QSA	Queensland Studies Authority
QTU	Queensland Teachers' Union
TEMAG	Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group

Chapter 1
Introducing a ‘United’ Agenda for Principals

Early in 2011, all public school principals in Queensland, Australia, including myself, were invited to a statewide conference in Brisbane with the conference theme ‘United in our Pursuit of Excellence’. The intention of the two-day conference was to align leadership practices and goals across all schools within the Department of Education and make principals aware of the future direction of education in Queensland. Over 1200 principals received messages directly from system leaders and consulting experts. These messages focused on ensuring we were all on the ‘same page’ with regard to leadership of our schools, including the targeted use of school data to inform school improvement and implementation of the system’s reform agenda *United in our Pursuit of Excellence* (which would be formalised and officially released in June/July of 2011). This was an historic conference for a number of reasons, including the fact that it was the first time in recent memory that all principals were brought together in one location. Instead, we usually met in our local geographical regions and focused on localised issues that were specifically relevant to our needs.

Throughout that two-day conference, I sat in the room with over a thousand colleagues from vastly different contexts and considered the logistics that must have been involved to gather us all in one location. I could not help but wonder to what extent our individual contexts and school needs would be taken into account within this new ‘United’ focus. I realised the significance of the conference in its aim of demonstrating that we were at a turning point regarding the direction in which the system, schools, and school leaders were moving. Speaking with my colleagues at the time, we commented on the sense of urgency we felt coming through in these messages, as well as the focus on leadership. Many of our discussions during and after the conference centred on the notion that things were going to be different for principals and leadership practices, as well as for the Department’s expectations for how we would work. At the same time, it sparked an immediate interest for me in better understanding how this change would impact upon us as leaders and on our schools.

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Not only did this conference mark the start of a new era for principals in Queensland, it was also the beginning of this research journey, exploring the ways these new requirements and messages from the system would shape leaders, and leadership practices, in Queensland over the coming years. This journey culminates (as much as research ever 'ends') in this book, where I explore the ways principals' work is changing within a wider, global, climate of 'school improvement' reforms.

To set the scene in a little more detail, this conference and new agenda for schools was a response to the introduction of annual National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing in 2008, where Queensland was perceived to have performed poorly in contrast to other Australian states and territories. *United in our Pursuit of Excellence*, the Queensland state schooling system's improvement agenda, was developed through recommendations resulting from reports commissioned from researchers who were engaged as school improvement consultants (Queensland Department of Education and Training (QDET), 2012a, b). *United in our Pursuit of Excellence* explicitly required principals to act as instructional leaders. According to this agenda, teachers and school leaders were required to use school and system data to guide their goals for school improvement under the notion of an 'unrelenting focus on improved student achievement' (QDET, 2011a, p. 1), which became an explicit priority for all schools upon the release of *United in our Pursuit of Excellence*.

The school improvement movement serves as a global context for these reform stories. The stories and case studies in this book can illuminate the shared challenges—and possibilities—facing principals in a multitude of contexts and locations. The systemic policies and associated discourses that govern principals' work in Queensland schools establish that principals are expected to be working towards school improvement. For example, the Department's 2014–2018 strategic agenda, *Every Student Succeeding,* requires principals to deliver 'extraordinary and sustained improvement and achievement' (QDET, 2014a, p. 1). Not only does the hyperbole of this requirement become nonsensical on further consideration, it also provides an example of the sense of pressure and urgency that can be found within school improvement policy discourses. If all principals delivered 'extraordinary and sustained improvement and achievement', the bar for measuring 'extraordinary' improvement would continue to increase until it became an impossible task. As Ball (2003) highlighted, teachers and school leaders in performative cultures are encouraged to be 'outstanding, successful, above the average' (p. 219), reflective of these goals from the Department's strategic agenda. This study contributes to the field of educational leadership, management, and administration by undertaking an in-depth exploration of the impact of school improvement discourses on the principalship.

It could be suggested that educational leadership is an ever-changing field, so the question might be asked why this research is significant at this point in time—why this research, and why now? Commencing this study at the same time as the Department was introducing these changes meant that at the same time as principals have been enacting significant system-wide reform initiatives, I have been able to examine the way these policies and initiatives impacted upon leaders and leadership practices over the first six years of the changes taking place. In the second half of 2011, *United* *in our Pursuit of Excellence* (Queensland Department of Education and Training (QDET), 2011a) was launched and thereafter formed the basis of much of the work being undertaken by and with principals during this period.

Performance management by principals' supervisors was driven by the agenda outlined within the document (Bloxham, Ehrich, & Iyer, 2015), and targeted capability development and support for principals was also drawn from the system's improvement agenda. In addition, the document explicitly highlighted the shift in expectations for principals to become instructional leaders (QDET, 2011b), marking a significant change in leadership expectations. From there, policies from the system explicitly required principals to act as instructional leaders, and to focus on specific aspects of education in a bid towards school improvement. This is an important shift to note because over twenty years ago, Murphy (1994) found that expectations were being added to the role of the principal but little was being removed. Principals have therefore had to find a balance between external and internal demands for their time, and many found that previously vital elements of their role (such as instructional leadership) fell by the wayside as a result. Now, however, Departmental policies explicitly requiring principals to focus on instructional leadership present another challenge for principals' balance of leadership and management.

These policies serve as discourses surrounding and constituting the field of educational leadership, management, and administration. The enactment of these policies—through conversations, supervisory practices, and the unwritten rules of leadership within the system—serve to reinforce policy discourses and create further discourses. Ball (1999, p. 14) vividly illustrated the influence of these reforms on educators, commenting that 'a complex of overlapping, agonistic and antagonistic discourses swarm and seethe around the teacher in this scenario of reform'. Further illustrating the sense of turbulence felt by leaders in a period of rapid reform, Cooley and Shen (2003, p. 10) noted that principals have been 'placed in the eye of the storm' of accountabilities. To frame the way educators respond to these reform scenarios, Ball, Braun, and Maguire (2012) proposed the notion of policy *enactment* rather than policy *implementation*. Inherent in the study of policy enactment is the belief that there is more at a school level than reading and implementing policies. Policy enactment acknowledges that the negotiation that really happens in schools enacting policy is a more 'ambiguous, messy' process (Maguire, Braun, & Ball, 2015, p. 485).

Principals *enacting* policy must understand the policy (the way 'implementation' suggests), but in doing so they *decode* policy, taking into account the complex layers of discourse, context, and resulting myriad of possible interpretations of 'ensembles' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 5) formed of multiple competing or complementary policies. This way of thinking about policy also acknowledges the work that happens in schools in terms of relationship building and negotiating the enactment of policies (Maguire et al., 2015). In this book, I adopt these notions of policy enactment rather than more traditional implementation studies, agreeing with the argument that proper recognition is needed of the 'various cultures, histories, traditions, and communities of practice that exist in schools' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 5). The things that make a school unique must be taken into account when considering the enactment of policy, as well as the impact of the complex discourses surrounding leadership and school improvement. Hallinger (2003) commented that successful instructional leaders need to adjust their performance to meet the 'needs, opportunities, and constraints imposed by school context' (p. 334). Similarly, Wildy and Clarke (2012) noted the importance of 'contextual literacy' (p. 71), emphasising the need for school leaders to understand the complexities of their contexts, including their school and wider community, when making decisions.

Ball (1993, p. 11) discussed the layers of complexity surrounding policy enactment as 'policy as text' and as 'policy as discourse'. Policy as text focuses on 'official' policies and the way they are encoded and decoded, the intentions with which they were written, and the contexts in which they are understood and enacted. It refers to the way they are not static documents that are simply implemented, but instead are shaped, interpreted, and adjusted to fit the local school's context. Policy as discourse focuses on the wider discourses that influence and constitute the people within the system—in this case, principals in Queensland's state schooling system. Ball et al. (2012) expanded upon these notions of policy as text and policy as discourse and established that policy is 'texts and things' (such as national strategies and legislation—for example, *United in our Pursuit of Excellence*), but emphasised that policies are also discursive practices that constitute and influence the people within the system. They noted that 'policy is done by and done to teachers; they are actors and subjects, subject to and objects of policy' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3). These policies and discourses construct principals' subjectivities, and their identities, in various ways that result in specific leadership practices and approaches being undertaken in schools.

About the Study: Theoretical Framework

This book shows the myriad ways the principalship has been shaped by a period of urgent and ongoing reform. I argue that the principalship has been significantly influenced by discourses of educational leadership and school improvement within a broader reform policy landscape. In this book, I explore the way principals have had to negotiate this rapidly changing reform landscape while manoeuvring around and within the policies and discourses that continue to influence their work. To do this, I undertook diachronic parallel case studies focusing on three principals, Max, Judy, and Scott, within the wider case study of Queensland's state schooling system over a fieldwork period spanning three school years from 2013 to 2015. I have known these three dedicated educators for many years and was lucky enough to be able to work closely with them while developing the ideas within this book. Although I have used pseudonyms to describe their names and school locations, this was more about research protocols than about their preference to remain anonymous. They were exceptionally generous with their time and thoughts, and I am indebted to them for their willingness to spend a number of years as part of this project. This is especially important to acknowledge when considering just how much principals' workloads have increased and the sense of pressures that they feel.

To theorise the data within this study, I developed a toolbox approach, suggested by Ball (1993) as an appropriate approach to research policy and its impacts. Given the focus of this book series on the use of theory in educational leadership, it seems appropriate to explain the design of my theoretical framework here to frame the study from the outset. In the pages that follow, I provide a primer on some key concepts being used within this book. I hope I have found a comfortable balance between detail and introducing what may be new concepts to some readers, but I must also acknowledge my own limitations in being able to adequately convey the deep complexities involved with these theories in a relatively brief overview.

I write here from a critical perspective (Anyon, 2009), which means that I understand and acknowledge that participants were constructing and being constructed by discourses as they spoke and that their words were 'the effects of a range of discourses operating within society' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). This is reminiscent of Foucault's (1972, p. 27) discussion of moving beyond a speaker's statements, trying to rediscover the unconscious activity, the 'silent murmuring', and the 'tiny, invisible text' that runs between what is said and what informs that speech. This invisible text and silent murmuring in the shape of discourses are forms of the power relationships and influences that constitute principals in their working lives.

When discussing Foucault's notions of power, Anyon (2009) stated, 'we produce power and are produced by it' (p. 7), indicating the centrality of power in our lives—in this case, in the form of 'prescriptive educational policies' (Anyon, 2009, p. 13) in principals' working lives. As such, in trying to answer the research question of how the principalship has been shaped by a push for 'school improvement', I undertook to better understand the ways principals' responses might have been representative of some of the discourses surrounding educational leadership that were being emphasised within the system at the time.

Anyon (2009) described theory as the element that brings data to life; that without theory, 'data lie rather uselessly on the ground, without breath or heartbeat' (p. 8). As she went on to note, it is not possible to gather data without theory, because theory has, in fact, already informed our research through past reading and experiences.

When conceptualising this study, I spent what felt like a significant amount of time trying to find 'the' theory that best applied to my research, before coming to realise that a single approach or theory would not necessarily be the solution. Indeed, Anyon (2009) warned against making use of a single idea or concept for the sake of it and instead suggested that theories might need to be combined in novel ways. Foucault (1994; see Niesche, 2015; Peters & Besley, 2007 for further discussion) posited that his work should be thought of as a toolbox where researchers can use concepts in ways that work for them, rather than feeling bound by a single fixed approach. Drawing upon Foucault's notions, Ball (2006) further suggested that researchers need to be cautious about theories or frameworks that offer a simple solution and encouraged the use of different theories for different aspects of analysis, particularly in relation to the analysis of policy and its effects.

I decided upon the notion of a research toolbox, specifically suggested by Ball (1993) as an appropriate method of researching policy and the impacts of policy, given the scope involved in this field of research. As Ball went on to note, Ozga (1990) also emphasised the need for research in this area to examine the big picture of policy right down to the local level. In the case of this study, I achieve this by initially exploring the overarching policies and discourses that guided principals' work at a global and systemic level, then delving deeper into principals' enactment of policies at a local or individual level. This provides the multi-layered research emphasised by Ball and Ozga and also takes into account Ball's (1993) argument that the effect of policy varies within different contexts. By exploring the impact of policies in three different school contexts, and the way they shaped principals' conceptualisation and enactment of their roles, I can analyse the big-picture effects of policy as well as the localised effects.

In order to do this, I adopted Ball's (2006) notion that theory offers 'a set of possibilities for thinking with' (p. 1), rather than a restrictive framework. He acknowledged that not all theories work effectively together to guide research and that there ought to be some coherence in the theories chosen to guide researchers' thinking and analysis.

In using the toolbox approach of selecting theory or concepts where appropriate for the research aims, I made use of theory at a system level to better understand the cultures, environments, and policy conditions in which principals were working. This macro-level theory works in conjunction with theory at a more-micro (individual)-level, to better understand the impacts of these policy conditions on the participants in this study: Max, Judy, and Scott.

At a macro-level, I theorise the data through notions of performativity and the sociology of numbers, to better understand the way discourses of school improvement and school reform influenced the principalship in government schools in Queensland. At a micro-level, I take a Foucauldian-informed approach and make use of his 'gadgets' (Foucault, 1980) of discourse, discipline, subjectivity, and surveillance to explore the ways these performative cultures, and the sociology of numbers (Porter, 1995) impacted upon participants in the study.

Macro-level: Theories About the System

Performativity

In 1984, Lyotard produced *The Postmodern Condition*, wherein he examined the notion of performativity and made predictions about the way efficiency would trump the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Ball (2003, 2006) drew upon Lyotard's work to discuss the impact of the constant monitoring and measuring of outputs related to the work of educators. Performativity is a means of regulating individuals and systems through the use of judgments and comparisons, as well as measuring their performance and identifying moments of 'quality' (Ball, 2003). This notion of quality is entrenched in educational leadership discourse (Moore, 2004), and questions must be asked about who defines the targets and benchmarks against which principals are being measured.

In a climate of performativity, complex work undertaken in schools is reduced to quantifiable or measurable data sets, and judgments are made about the quality or worth of the educator based on these data. The importance of measuring, quantifying, and (ostensibly) objectively qualifying the work undertaken by educators links clearly to the other key means of theorising the data within this book which is that of the sociology of numbers, in particular, the trust placed in numbers when assessing the quality of work undertaken in schools. Theories of performativity informed collection of data within this research by providing an initial guide for the development of interview questions.

Previous research had highlighted the presence of performative cultures in the Queensland state schooling system (e.g., see Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Singh, Heimans, & Glasswell, 2014), and Chaps. 2 and 3 of this book detail the complexities that were influencing participants' work in schools. Influences included the proliferation of data; the impact of high-stakes testing; the nature of relationships with principals' supervisors; and the expectation for principals to align with system imperatives and discourses of school improvement. Theories of performativity were also used in the analysis of data, helping to identify relevant themes from the interviews within the key concepts noted above. These same notions have also been used to theorise current research that focuses on similar contexts as this book. For example, analysis of performative cultures and the quantification of education, particularly in Queensland schools in the current climate of education reform, is evident in the literature from Hardy (2013, 2014, 2015), Hardy and Boyle (2011), Keddie, Mills, and Pendergast (2011), Lingard and Sellar (2013) and Niesche (2011), among others. As such, the use of these theories complements the work already being undertaken in these contexts and expands upon notions of principals' enactment of educational reform within this particular policy ensemble.

Sociology of Numbers and the Quantification of Education

The sociology of numbers and the related critical analysis of the way numbers in the form of measurable data are driving the work of principals is an important element of theorising the data presented in this book. Porter (1995) discussed the power given to numbers and the notion of objectivity—a contested notion pertaining to education in particular. Objectivity is implied by the presentation of numbers, facts, and figures in standardised forms that do not take local contexts or complexities into account.

This presents the idea that these numbers are fair and rigorous representations of the work undertaken in schools and indeed may be adopted as a means of making this work measurable or accessible to those with little knowledge of the field, providing licence to make judgments without having expertise to support these judgments. This was echoed by Gorur (2016, p. 33) who commented on the way these data create informed publics, providing ‘previously distant’ groups with the means of holding public institutions to account. It leads, in part, to the minimising of complexities and a suggestion that it is possible to provide standardised understandings of large-scale concepts, such as schooling. This theory provides a lens for exploring the issues that can arise with reference to the government’s commitment to public and transparent school data. In this book, I highlight the way this focus on narrow measures of data guided the practices of case study participants Max, Judy, and Scott.

Porter drew upon work from Foucault as well as Rose (1990), who suggested that these measures work in a cycle to construct the behaviours they are intended to measure—evidence of Foucault’s notion of governmentality at work (Foucault, 1988, 2001, 2007). Porter (1995) commented further that these numbers create norms, which are one of the most effective ways of controlling behaviour from a distance—a concept again elaborated upon further by Niesche (2011). This notion of steering principals’ work from a distance can be linked to Lingard and Sellar’s (2013) suggestion that Queensland’s education system has not changed so much as it has been reconstituted around certain ways of working, many of which are driven by numbers and data. This theory helped to inform the data collection process in the same ways described earlier, by providing a starting point for the development of initial questions, with a particular focus on the proliferation of data in the case study context. Principals were asked about their experiences with the use of data, their understanding of expectations from the system with reference to data, and their personal beliefs relating to the notion of how data influenced their work as school leaders.

Micro-level: Theories About the Individual

The aforementioned theories help to understand policy and its impacts at a system or macro-level, but it is vital also to understand how individual subjects are constituted and impacted by these policies and discourses. To do so, I make use of a number of Michel Foucault’s concepts. Foucault himself suggested that his theories could be used as ‘gadgets’ and should be used in the ways that suit individual researchers and their projects (Foucault, 1980). The use of Foucault’s theories in educational leadership research is an established approach and has been suggested as a way of troubling discourses about educational leadership (Gillies, 2013; Niesche, 2015; Niesche & Keddie, 2016). Niesche (2013b, 2016) suggested that although the use of Foucault’s theories to analyse leadership is well established, his theories and their relation to educational leadership in the current climate of accountability could benefit from further exploration—an area to which this book contributes.

The use of Foucault’s theories helps to drive the structure of this book and also contributes to the development of the research process, and collection and analysis of data. A number of Foucault’s theories are used in the toolbox approach described previously, including notions of discourses, governmentality, subjectivity, discipline and surveillance, and technologies of the self. Each of these works together within this study to help understand the way participants’ identities, their practices, and their beliefs were shaped by the system. Much of Foucault's work relates to knowledge and power, and there are direct connections to notions of performativity and the measurement of principals' work outlined earlier, due to the concept of power being used to control, approve or promote certain actions, and reject others (Gillies, 2013). Specific to the focus of this book, it has been suggested that these power relationships and constructs, and the approval or rejection of certain practices or people, serve to form the unwritten rules by which principals are expected to abide (Gillies, 2013). These unwritten rules are often constructed and regulated through dominant discourses.

Discourse

The exploration of the principalship within the current discourses of educational leadership is an appropriate connection with this aspect of Foucault's work. 'Discourse' is a cornerstone of Foucault's work, and in relation to this study, discourses specific to the field of educational leadership (Foucault, 1972) encompass the influences on a principal's formation of their self—the explicit and implicit expectations that influence their world. This notion of competing or complementing discourses in policy and actions is one way of exploring principals' work, in particular the idea of explicit discourse as text or policy, and the more implicit discourse as conversation, which can be formed and expressed through relationships and unspoken rules (Doherty, 2007; Foucault, 1977; Gillies, 2013).

Foucault's notions of discourse can help us to better understand the wider context in which the principalship is constituted. This includes the policies and processes that explicitly impact upon principals' work, as well as the more implicit expectations borne through unspoken expectations and relationships with principals' supervisors, staff, students, and community members. Ball's (1993, p. 11) reference to this as 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse' provides an understanding of the world in which principals are working, and the elements that are influencing their work as school leaders. Within this study, discourses of school improvement and educational leadership (including accountability, autonomy, and instructional leadership) were used to drive the data collection and analysis process and link very closely to the notion of the subject.

Subjectivity

The concept of subjectivity provides a way of understanding how discourses shape the subject, or an individual's construction of their self (Foucault, 2000). The 'subject' in this case is the individual principal, as well as the principalship as a whole. It is important to note that the subject, or the individual self, is constructed via their interactions with people and systems, and will therefore be different depending on the situation or circumstance. Weedon (1996) noted that subjectivity is produced in a range of discursive practices, identifying that social relations and the inherent power structures between people will determine the range of forms of subjectivity available to a person. Gillies (2013) specifically discussed the ways that certain discourses work to shape 'good' teachers, which directly influences my exploration of the way policies and discourses shaped participants as school leaders. Ball (2015) noted the way policy as discourse results in the various ways principals (in this case) speak, act, think, and behave. Some of the modes of subjectivation discussed by Gillies (2013) concerning educators included explicit policy as text in the form of teacher standards (and, I would add, systemic policy requirements) as well as the more implicit policy as discourse in the form of parental, student, and societal expectations.

It is vital to note that there is no one 'true' self or subject. Due to complex power relations and shifting expectations for principals, their subjectivities vary in different circumstances and at different times. In this book, I explore the ways this was evident over a three-year period through multiple shifting expectations of principals via policy as text and policy as discourse through expectations from the system, students, staff, and communities, as well as those from the principals themselves.

Discipline, Surveillance, and Governmentality

Discipline, surveillance, and governmentality are all inherently complex concepts in their own rights, and by working them together here I do not intend to imply that they are easily aligned. Instead, they are used in tandem within this book to better understand the way principals' subjectivities were shaped by dominant discourses surrounding educational leadership. In this book, I use Foucault's notion of 'discipline' to better understand the ways individual principals, as well as principals as a wider group, are managed and constructed by the wider system (Foucault, 1977). This is complemented by his concepts of 'surveillance' (Foucault, 2003) in reference to the ways principals are monitored and judged. One example of a tool of surveillance is the proliferation of data ostensibly being used to measure quality and effectiveness in schools—and, by extension, school leaders—at this time.

Foucault's (1988, 2001, 2007) notions of 'governmentality' are also useful ways to understand what he calls the 'conduct of conduct' (see Doherty, 2007; Niesche, 2013b), or the methods and procedures that control and guide principals' conduct in the course of their work. This is further complemented by Foucault's (1988) theories of technologies of the self, wherein he explores the practices individuals undertake to shape themselves in particular ways in response to discourses. This might be acts of compliance or resistance, and Niesche (2013b), in particular, has explored notions of subjectivity and counter-conduct in educational leadership. The notion of technologies of the self is linked closely to Foucault's (1977) notion of discipline.

Whereas discipline is often about power being exercised over a subject, technologies of the self are about a subject governing themselves. As suggested by Gillies (2013), the ultimate aim in a modern neoliberal society, such as that in which the principals in this study work, is for self-governing individuals who embody the ideals of the system. This book explores the way principals in these case studies have become self-governing and identifies the way some of their initial, critical attitudes towards initiatives such as NAPLAN have completely reversed to now align with the system's imperatives.

Gillies (2013) commented that subjectivation—the construction of principals' identities and enactment of their roles—can be achieved through discipline and technologies of the self, either separately or when combined. I suggest that surveillance and governmentality play an important role here as well. All of these aspects of monitoring and shaping individuals and groups work together to form powerful norms and expectations that provide clear expectations for principals' behaviour (Porter, 1995). Combined with macro-theories of performativity and the sociology of numbers, these theories enable a deeper understanding of the disciplining of the principals in this study. Through the introduction of policies and related discourses, these principals were being disciplined to work in certain ways to meet the Department's expectations, created through these policies and discourses.

The use of Foucauldian theory within this book aligns closely with Niesche's work (2011, 2013a, b, 2015) and his use of notions of discipline, surveillance, governmentality, and subjectivation in his explorations of the principalship in similar contexts, in the current climate of urgent reform. These same key notions were used by Gillies (2013) and Niesche and Keddie (2016) to better understand the construction of principals' identities, a focus which has clear links to this book and advances the use of these theories within the field of educational leadership studies. The use of poststructuralist ideas, including Foucault's theories, to investigate educational leadership has been described as a way of opening up the space of educational leadership and administration for further investigation (Eacott & Evers, 2015).

Within these case studies, I explored the context of public education in Queensland, identifying the key discourses influencing principals' work. I analysed the ways these discourses influenced principals' subjectivities, not only as individual principals but also the principalship as a 'collective'. I found commonalities as well as contradictions in the ways these subjectivities constructed individual principals in response, as part of a process of rearticulating dominant discourses about educational leadership. I am interested in the ways some of these responses aligned across participants, and I offer possible explanations of the times principals' responses diverged.

I focused on primary school principals in government schools, all of whom shared an ostensibly 'common' wider policy and discursive context, and shared experiences of working in primary schools. Thus, the impact of this context could be better understood, rather than introducing further complexities and factors that might have altered the shared context such as those faced by secondary principals, or school leaders in the non-government schooling sector. In addition, it must be acknowledged that I did not set out to critique the current educational climate by asking whether these reforms are necessary or effective, or by exploring the impact of these reforms on students [for examples of studies that do this, see Bousfield (2014) and Freeman (2013)]. Instead, I sought to better understand the impact of these reform policies and initiatives on the principals within these case studies.

About the Study: Research Design

Foucault (1972) discussed the importance of identifying the individual who is speaking because the positions they occupy can be representative of the institutions from which they speak. When I began this study, I was working as a principal in a public primary school and then moved into a new Departmental role at a more senior level, coaching and mentoring principals in their ‘school improvement journeys’, so I was fully immersed in the practices and approaches that I was going to be researching.[1] After some time in those roles, I took up a position as an academic at a university, which then shifted my work focus into the area of teacher education and educational leadership. Fox and Allan (2014) noted that when doing social research, our selves—in this case, my experiences as a principal working within the state schooling system—are ‘inextricably involved’ (p. 102) and these experiences inform our interpretation of events.

Writing about her research in a different field, Taylor (2011) discussed the notion of friendship and relationships in insider research and made a final comment that particularly resonated with me regarding how I approached this aspect of my research. She noted:

> As researchers, we have no handbook or manual to follow, no precise way of orchestrating such engagements to ensure a mutually beneficial outcome. To guide us in our research, we must equally value and rely upon our strength of character, goodwill, our gut instincts and emotional intelligence as we do our formal training. (Taylor, 2011, p. 19)

This conclusion helped to guide my reflections throughout the research process and emphasised the importance of professional judgment when working in pre-existing relationships. This professional judgment ensured that I reflected upon what might be appropriate topics for discussion with my participants, ensuring not to bring in potentially problematic information that I may have been made aware of through my prior relationships with these colleagues or our mutual acquaintances.

My own changes in employment also posed an interesting dilemma as a researcher; in particular, I began to focus on the shift from traditional notions of insider researcher to outsider researcher and the rapidity with which systemic expectations and priorities changed. As I progressed through writing this book, I became familiar with the body of research that moves beyond the insider/outsider researcher binary and found myself connecting with Thompson and Gunter’s (2011) theorising of Bauman’s notion of liquid identities. Researcher identity and experiences are messy, complex, and not easily categorised, particularly for those of us early in our research journeys and still finding our feet. With that said, some aspects of the traditional insider/outsider binary did feel more relevant to my situation at the time. For example, I quickly discovered how much more challenging it could be to research from outside the system without automatically having access to information about the new systemic priorities, documents disseminated to all employees, or even the proverbial Departmental grapevine to alert me to when new changes were going to be introduced. I was often offered access to non-public documents intended only for employees by well-meaning former colleagues but declined because of ethical concerns.

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[1] This term was a colloquialism used consistently by participants and forms part of the vernacular surrounding school improvement within the Department. It is evident in some documents from the Department including the 2015 School Performance Assessment Framework (QDET, 2015b). I elected to adopt this phrase to maintain consistency within my analysis of interview data.

The most significant benefit of my more-insider-researcher status was highlighted as a benefit of insider-researcher conducting case studies; an 'established intimacy which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth' (Unluer, 2012, p. 1). In transcribing and analysing my interview data, this trust was evident through jokes, 'off the record' comments, and the intimacy identifiable through unspoken communication and the shared understanding described above. This, coupled with my own knowledge of and experiences with the Department, led to a richness of the data that may not have otherwise been as easily achievable. Finally, I am cognisant about and respectful of, the trust participants placed in me as someone who was known to them, in addition to my ethical responsibilities as a researcher, and I have endeavoured to ensure that their comments and insights are represented fairly and accurately.

Methodology

Long-term case studies of three principals (Max, Judy, and Scott) were chosen as the methodology in order to obtain a rich picture about the subject, allowing for a range of methods of data collection during the fieldwork stage. The fieldwork period spanning three school years allowed for a more in-depth analysis of principals' experiences during the introduction of these policies, rather than a single point in time snapshot. This was vital due to the phenomenon of short-term successes, followed by the likelihood of an implementation dip where results will fall again, as has been discussed by Pendergast et al. (2005). A single point in time study could provide skewed data, given that it may be taken during the initial success period, the implementation dip, or after the school has recovered from the dip. The long-term approach to the case studies enabled me to see the evolution of participants' ideas and approaches. For example, during the time I spent with Scott, I was able to observe some of his approaches develop from initial big-picture ideas into the formulation of specific approaches, to finally being implemented and then reflected upon and refined or rejected.

The parallel diachronic case studies during which I followed the evolution of the principalship, participants' roles, and the school's improvement journey over a period of three school years, were undertaken via regular school visits and in-depth interviews. These visits were undertaken approximately every six months, allowing time for progression of ideas and approaches to be implemented and reflected upon by participants between interviews. The length of studies enabled me to observe the disciplining of the principalship over time, as participants' practices and viewpoints adjusted to meet system norms and expectations.

Observations

During the research design process for data collection, I elected to include the option for observation where it might have been relevant or provided further insights into the cases, such as at staff meetings or similar meetings. Researching principals' perspectives, my key focus was thus on the principals themselves, so I did not seek to observe anything unless the principal invited me because they felt it would complement our conversations. This eventuated organically only twice, with Max and Judy, enabling me to see their interactions with staff at staff meetings and further understand some of the approaches we had been discussing in interviews about working with data, as well as school-wide planning and communication processes. In the end, observations were a minor aspect of the data collection for this book, but they did serve to inform some further questions or points of discussion during interviews.

Document Interrogation

A recurring element in the discussion of current pressures on each of the principals was the increase in planning and documentation required. Throughout the case studies, I consulted documents that were publicly available on each school's website such as annual reporting and school strategic planning information, or documents provided by the participants themselves. Document interrogation (or analysis) involves finding, selecting, appraising, and synthesising data found within documents (Rapley, 2007). Through analysing these planning and reporting documents, I was able to gather information such as school priorities and data trends. Like the observations detailed above, this method of data collection was used primarily to inform interviews.

Interviews

Semi-structured individual interviews were undertaken with each of the participants, or as Alvesson (2011) described them, 'loosely structured' interviews. In these interviews, some initial questions were prepared, but the interviews were flexible and able to follow departures from the initial topic. The loosely structured interviews were scheduled at various points throughout the case study, with all three key participants being asked some of the same questions to determine any commonalities. The data collection and analysis process was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) theoretically informed thematic analysis process, reflective of Anyon's (2009) emphasis on the importance of theory when working with data. Within this approach, engagement with theory and the literature prior to data collection helped to determine the initial structured questions.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews then enabled the conversation to shift to other areas when the opportunity arose. The initial shared, semi-structured questions were developed as part of the initial research design and were heavily informed by the literature. As such, some of these questions were discarded when interviews began, because it became evident that they did not apply to the participants' contexts or experiences. Initial questions took the form of questions designed to better understand the demographics and dynamics of each school, and questions developed with an aim towards finding out more about each participant's professional journey. Other questions, informed by the literature, focused on school improvement, school culture, and some of the key discourses that had arisen within the literature such as instructional leadership, data, accountability, and autonomy. Unstructured interview questions then arose from any points of interest noted during previous interviews, observations, and document analysis. Field notes from document interrogations also provided a guide for further loosely structured interview questions that arose. Each interview with the principals lasted between sixty and ninety minutes, and interviews were conducted at approximately six-month intervals which enabled me to work with participants over a long period and see the disciplining of the principalship over time, as well as through changing contexts such as changes in government and changes in the system's leadership. Two additional interviews were undertaken with Richard and Tracy, both of which lasted approximately two hours, and provided further perspectives on some of the insights gained from interviews with Max, Judy, and Scott.

Bourdieu (1996) discussed the importance of non-violent interactions pertaining to undertaking interviews, describing them as a social exchange. He emphasised the importance of active and methodical listening and minimising the imposition of a traditional question-and-answer interview. He also discussed the impact of working with people personally known to the interviewer, and the way verbal and non-verbal interactions could be undertaken more effectively due to these pre-existing relationships. In addition, due to my pre-existing relationships with each of the participants, as noted earlier in this chapter, I was fortunate that these interviews were all very easy to secure and that participants were supportive of the work I was trying to do. I understand that the process of engaging with participants is not always as straightforward and, as Bourdieu (1996) noted, these difficulties can be imposing upon the interviewee. I acknowledge that I may have gathered richer data due to these longstanding relationships than had I been interviewing strangers and spending valuable time developing trust and establishing relationships. Although this factor enabled me to take advantage of my chosen research methods, it did raise a number of considerations that had to be incorporated in the research design in terms of presenting and analysing the data and working with participants.

Data Analysis

I undertook a theoretically informed thematic analysis of the data, which meant that the literature and theorising on performativity, accountability, and the principalship informed the initial identification of themes relating to key discourses about educational leadership. As Braun and Clarke (2006) noted, this means that the development of themes involves interpretation and, being driven by theory, the resulting analysis is ‘not just description, but is already theorised’ (p. 84). The theoretically informed thematic analysis approach used relevant theorising and the literature to inform the development of interview questions, as well as the analysis of data. Aligning with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) description of thematic analysis, the processes for thematic analysis within this study draws upon a constructionist position, critically analysing the way participants’ realities and perceptions reflect wider discourses within the society or system being examined.

To analyse the data, I followed the phases of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87). This involved familiarising myself with the data and constructing an orthographic transcript, which included verbal and non-verbal utterances such as laughter, pauses, and gestures (such as shrugging or shaking or nodding of heads). I then generated codes and identified themes, relating to repeated patterns (such as discussion of school data, school improvement, or school context) pertaining to the broad conceptual resources of performativity, sociology of numbers, and discourses relating to leadership and school improvement that informed the research. Individual extracts of data were coded multiple times where relevant. In the next phase, key themes were manually coded for identification within each participant’s transcripts, and then across each of the participants where commonalities were identified, using visual representations via colour-coded tabulation. This thematic analysis further guided my approach to discussing the data within this book by highlighting participants’ responses to key discourses. Common themes and approaches shared by participants were easily contrasted with their differing viewpoints and thoughts about their core business, or their conceptualisations of the principalship. The semi-structured nature of the interviews further enabled this approach, with each of the participants being asked a selection of questions to elicit various perspectives on key themes including the pressures they saw as influencing the principalship, and the ways schools were working with school data. In phases four and five, a thematic map was created manually to collate the data across participants and themes, and to provide a clear picture of the shared and recurring themes, as well as where themes may have been related to only a smaller subset of participants.

The loosely structured elements of the interviews and the resulting analysis of related data work to bookend the exploration of each participant’s compelling stories of working in accountability-heavy environments, and how that influenced their enactment of the principalship. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are constructed to represent some of the key discourses relating to the principalship and explore participants’ responses and discussion about these discourses and constructs of the principalship. These chapters serve to theorise notions of performativity and the quantification of education, as well as principals' subjectivities and the disciplining of the principalship. Together, the chapters present a big picture of the work participants were undertaking in schools and the way these policy ensembles and discourses influenced the principalship.

Contributions to the Field of Educational Leadership

We do not yet know enough about the impact of these ongoing policy changes and discourses on principals' subjectivities, and this book contributes towards these understandings. A brief overview of the call for research in this area is provided here and elaborated upon further in Chaps. 2 and 3. Some time ago now, Harris (2001) highlighted the need for a greater understanding of the role of the principal in a climate where school improvement is emphasised so heavily. School improvement, as a key imperative within the Queensland state schooling system, was an explicit expectation of focus for principals in this study. More recently, Hardy (2014) suggested that little research has been undertaken into the nature of how teachers and principals make sense of their work and learning in these conditions. Hardy (2015) also found that more research was needed to further explore the challenges inherent within balancing an educative disposition with performative logics. Further, Moore (2004) illustrated the divergence of reform discourses positioning 'good' teaching (aligned with performativity and 'delivery' of curriculum) at odds with many educators' personal preferences of holistic education.

In relation to the use of theory, Niesche (2013b) commented that Foucault's ideas (which inform the analysis of data in this research) have been used to understand school leadership, but that leadership practices under current forms of accountability are yet to be explored in depth. In addition, Thompson (2016, p. 58) highlighted a call for research that monitors 'the effects of testing, both intended and unintended'. The study provides a contribution to this area of the field by exploring how the principalship has been impacted by the introduction of NAPLAN testing and the range of associated policies resulting from the introduction of the testing programme.

The specific focus on the principalship, rather than also encompassing teacher leaders, deputies, or other school leaders, stemmed initially from my work as a principal and later as a Departmental leadership coach for principals. I first experienced the introduction of these changes myself and then saw the impact of these initiatives while I coached principals working towards the school improvement that the Department required. Harris (2012) discussed the influence of these environments on principals when she noted that at a school level, all change flows through the principal's office. A breadth of research in the literature establishes the impact of reform initiatives on principals, identifying the work principals must undertake in a quest towards the improvement sought by the system (Finnigan, 2010; Fullan, 2007; Hopkins, 2013; Minarechová, 2012; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010).

As more changes are implemented across education systems, so too the role of the principal is evolving to meet these new needs (Brown, 2005; Sahid, 2004; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Stronge et al. (2008) suggested that while researchers can identify the major elements of principals’ work, we do not know a great deal yet about how these elements get carried out in practice. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) also identified some time ago that research is needed urgently into how successful instructional leaders create the conditions in their schools which promote student learning. This book does not serve as a victory narrative or ‘how to’ guide by providing these answers, but this call for further research is important to note, given that a key task of the principal in Queensland schools is defined in their role description as being to improve outcomes for students (QDET, 2014b). This also means that more research is needed about the pressure on principals to deliver upon this requirement for school improvement; this is a gap to which this book contributes by exploring one system in depth over a period of time, identifying the changes in expectations for principals under policy conditions that explicitly required principals to ‘deliver school performance’ and improvement (QDET, 2015a, para. 4).

In exploring how the principalship has been shaped in response to the policies and discourses surrounding educational leadership, this study seeks to better understand participants’ conceptualisations of their role in a climate of sustained rapid reforms. Little research has been undertaken in the specific area of understandings of the principalship in the current climate of global education reform, as expressed in the Australian context. McGinley (2008) focused on conceptualisations of the role as seen by aspiring principals in the USA. The study included a particular emphasis on the principal preparation programmes that are not currently requirements in Australia but are available in some states as Departmental initiatives. Another American study by Browne-Ferrigno (2003) focused on conceptualisations of the principalship by aspiring principals. However, Max, Judy, and Scott, the participants in these case studies, were very much established in the role, being in the mid- and later phases of their careers. Further studies by Nix (2001) and Qian San (2011) both focused on assistant principals’ conceptualisation of their roles, providing some interesting commentary around the history of the role of the principal, while still leaving a gap in the field’s understanding of principals’ own conceptualisations of their work under current policy conditions.

In this book, then, I extend upon our current understandings by exploring how these more experienced principals conceptualise their roles and enact policy during a particularly tumultuous period in which improvement has been so heavily equated with numbers, particularly in the form of national test results.

Structure of Forthcoming Chapters

Chapter 2 situates the book within a wider, global, push for school improvement. I explore global influences on educational leadership and education policies, and discourses of school improvement. Chapter 3 then delves more deeply into the context for this study. In particular, it focuses on the literature relating to three of the key discourses influencing the principalship: constructs of autonomy, instructional leadership, and accountability.

With the context for the study established, Chap. 4 introduces the participants and their specific research contexts. In Chap. 5, I illustrate how the principalship is being shaped by a complex ensemble of school improvement policies and discourses by highlighting the sense of pressure felt by Max, Judy, and Scott when working in environments where principals were expected to be agile in responding quickly to systemic requirements and initiatives. The chapter examines the impact of school improvement discourses and policies, and explicit expectations of certain types of leadership approaches desired by the system, including leading with a focus on school data as a driver for improvement. By exploring the context in which participants were working, I build upon current research relating to expectations for principals in systems focused on reform. I highlight pressures revealed by participants as influencing the principalship, with a particular focus on the way they saw the role as having changed over time.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore the way particular aspects of school improvement policies and discourses have influenced the principalship. Chapter 6 investigates the way participants maintained focus on what mattered to them, while manoeuvring within and around these policy ensembles and discourses. While the Departmental agenda required principals to focus on school improvement, each participant negotiated the balance of this with their own beliefs about what matters in schooling. Alignment could be seen in their overarching goal of school improvement and adoption of mandated practices (such as the use of data to drive this agenda), but the balance between this and their personal beliefs about schooling in relation to students' learning meant their practices and philosophies differed considerably at times.

Chapter 7 explores the way participants were shaped by one of the key constructs within the principalship at this time—an expectation for principals to be data-literate and data-focused in their efforts towards improvement. Using the requirement to focus on data in the pursuit of school improvement, this chapter identifies the complex influences of the overwhelming availability of school performance data and explores the way participants responded to these data—either by complying with more performative uses of data, or by exercising counter-conduct and adopting more educative approaches. The chapter identifies the way principals positioned themselves and their schools among these discourses of data, quality, and school improvement. Chapter 8 then draws final conclusions and reflects upon the research project. I conclude by exploring the implications of this research for school leaders, researchers, and policymakers.

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Chapter 2
School Improvement Discourses: Autonomy, 'Instructional' Leadership, and Accountability

The spread of the school improvement movement can be traced via Sahlberg's (2011) notions of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) and is evident in policies that seem eerily similar, though in vastly different contexts. These global reform movements can be seen in the initiatives we readily recognise, and one can see connections between them without having to delve too deeply—America's *No Child Left Behind*, and its more recent *Race to the Top* contained themes of standardisation of curriculum, high-stakes testing, and discourses of teacher quality, and reflect Australia's government's focus in their 2008 Education Revolution and subsequent policies. Similarly, England's Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) is known for its school inspections, once touting the notion of 'Improvement through Inspection' (Courtney, 2013). Research has shown mixed evidence about the effectiveness of the OFSTED inspection regime (Plowright, 2007) including potentially negative effects on educators (Case, Case, & Catling, 2000; Fielding, 2001; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996) and possibly even school outcomes in some cases (Rosenthal, 2004). It holds parallels with the American interest in classroom inspections and ranking and evaluation of teachers, and it is being taken up with vigour by the Australian state of New South Wales where the then Education Minister Adrian Piccoli launched the Education Standards Authority which would conduct random and unannounced audits, and suggested that its powers to close schools 'ought to make schools […] and teachers nervous around teaching standards', though in the same statement, the Education Minister went on to suggest that the process was not intended to be punitive (Munro, 2016).

Across many of these countries, we can also see the siren song discourse positioning Finland as a point of comparison and a system to strive for, with politicians and the media referring to Finland's schooling system as one to emulate. While initially this was about repeating their chart-topping success on PISA rankings, discussions in recent years have shifted more to their focus on well-being and student engagement. Countries eschewing the GERM movement influences are increasing, with Thrupp (2017) discussing the (very long) journey that took place in New Zealand and their relentless fight against reductive standards and emphasis on measurement of students

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and teachers, culminating in eventual success with an incoming government removing these measures. The country's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, posted a video on her Facebook page announcing the change and stating that the standards [and associated measurement and ranking] were 'a distraction' and that teachers could now 'go back to teaching and doing the things that [they] do best'.

The intent of this chapter is to ground this book in a wider, global, context of school improvement reforms. While local context is a central aspect of policy enactment, principals' responses to these shared policy conditions can be considered as part of the wider reform and school improvement environment and campaign. To examine the school improvement movement, I have structured this chapter as an exploration of the key discourses associated with these policies. I begin by providing a background to the global climate of school improvement reforms and then shift into an exploration of key discourses influencing the work of leaders under these policy conditions. Recurring discourses include greater school autonomy alongside the explicit expectation of certain leadership practices in the pursuit of school improvement, accompanied by an increase in external accountabilities, all of which work to steer principals' conduct from a distance by emphasising or even requiring certain behaviours. These discourses were evident within the literature and later in the data gathered within this project. This chapter will review the literature relating to these discourses which, alongside the systemic and contextual demands discussed in the next chapter, provide an insight into the expectations and constraints that governed the work of leaders in this study.

The Influence of Global Education Reforms on Australian Policy

Leading research in this area (Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Sellar & Lingard, 2013) has highlighted the globalisation of education policy. It has explored the intricately linked facets of education policy under neoliberal policies that emphasise the use of data to make judgments about success, the urgency of reforms, and the borrowing of policy from other nations which results in policies that span nations or, at the least, are very similar between different nations, rather than policies that are 'owned' by the country in question and therefore may be more tailored to their specific needs. This research has highlighted the increasing role played in globalised education policy since the 1990s by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). The current demands of data-driven policies align closely with the OECD's international testing regime, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). First implemented in 2000, the triennial test measures fifteen-year-old students' achievement in reading, mathematics, and science and result in a ranking of participating nations, with 72 nations participating in the 2015 round of testing (OECD, 2016) with over half a million students taking the test. The scope of the test will also be expanded from 2018, with a view to testing a wider range of skills within students (Lewis & Lingard, 2015).

Researchers (Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, & Sellar, 2016; Sellar & Lingard, 2013; Sellar, Thompson, & Rutkowski, 2017) have emphasised the cycle of policy influence that the OECD holds globally, partly as a result of PISA. They have argued that the OECD's work is influenced by current understandings of education that are, in turn, shaped by the work that the OECD is undertaking globally. These understandings and this work, as well as the data gathered through the PISA testing program, influence policy-makers as they seek to emulate the results, policies, and work being undertaken regarding education in high-ranking countries. However, as will be seen in the following exploration of global reforms, many of the most commonly adopted policies including standardised high-stakes testing and heavy external accountabilities diverge significantly from successful approaches like those found within high-ranking nations such as Finland, which is frequently described somewhat uncritically in the media and professional literature as an effective schooling system. Policy-makers have looked towards their approaches as possible solutions to their own rankings within PISA (Chung, 2010). Thomson, Gunter, and Blackmore (2013) highlighted the incorporation of policy prescriptions by countries across the globe, based on what is seen as 'best practice' from countries like Finland due to their success in PISA testing. With that said, the release of 2015s PISA results in December 2016 challenged Finland's primacy in world rankings and reinforced the dominance of comparison of school systems, an ongoing trend to which those systems that are deemed to be successful and less successful continue to be subjected. In an interview, Pasi Sahlberg indicated that Finland's ranking in the results was not surprising and that no education reforms would be triggered by the results. Further, he reinforced the importance of taking a wider view of schooling systems than that afforded by measurable data alone (Heim, 2016).

Given the immense amount of work undertake in this area by educational researchers and experts around the world, a significant body of research focuses on systems and schools that have successfully implemented reform initiatives, or specific programs or approaches that were deemed to be successful (for some, see Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Copland, 2003; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; O'Day, 2002). As such, within the scope of this book, it is necessary to focus more specifically on the reform agenda that governs the case studies within this book. To contextualise the study more effectively, I will draw explicit links to the Queensland context where relevant throughout the remainder of this chapter.

To further understand different perspectives of current global school improvement reforms, I reviewed academic and professional education literature, including accounts about large-scale school reform from a range of countries (see for example Lee & Park, 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006), critiques of current policy practices (Ravitch, 2010), and accounts of the enactment of these policy practices such as the biography of former Chancellor of Schools in Washington DC, Michelle Rhee (Whitmire, 2011) which explores the sweeping reforms she implemented with the intention of effecting urgent improvement, the success of which remains contested by researchers (for discussion see Peterson, 2011; Ravitch, 2010). This literature, a range of genres aimed at different audiences, encompassed similar themes, including the current global culture of school reform, the urgency of these reforms, and the importance of leadership at all levels.

Fullan (2007) described his work across many countries that are all working towards school reform, praising the efforts of school systems, school leaders, and staff who are trying to change their education systems in positive ways. He emphasised that a global approach based on research from around the world will provide practitioners and change agents with clear pathways forward. This was in direct contrast to Sahlberg's (2011) observation that over the past two decades education reforms have been demonstrating what he called Einstein's definition of madness, doing the same thing again and again while hoping for different results. Sahlberg's opinion was that these same ineffective reform strategies are being implemented across many nations, each time with greater determination from education system leaders and politicians.

It would be difficult to argue with Sahlberg's assertion, given that Australia is contemplating the implementation of performance pay and has endorsed standardised testing and league tables and emphasises public professional accountability through the release of testing results and similar data (Preiss, 2012). All of these methods have proven ineffective in raising student performance and engagement during their implementation in other countries, yet Australia's state and federal governments are following the trend with similar strategies and hoping for a different result. This sentiment was echoed by Lingard (2011) who noted that Australia is going down a pathway of schooling reform from which other countries seem to be removing themselves.

Much of the literature includes discussion of the importance of centring student equity as a focus in global reform efforts. Recurring themes in the literature on how to make this happen globally include the importance of teacher quality, quality curriculum innovations, and a focus on social justice and equity in education (Costante, 2010; Keddie & Lingard, 2015; Mills et al., 2014; Wilkins, 2015). Discourses of 'quality' that have arisen here can be linked to performative cultures (Ball, 2003, 2006) wherein the work of teachers is measured according to outputs and the discourse is often shaped around snapshots or moments of 'quality'. Mockler (2013) noted that these discussions of *teacher* quality rather than *teaching* quality are a means of focusing on outputs by measuring and judging teachers' work, and blaming teachers when students' results 'fail to measure up' (p. 37). Maguire, Hoskins, Ball, and Braun (2011) maintained that within discourses of 'good' schools, students, teachers, (and principals), those who meet the description of quality are those who achieve well on defined metrics. These notions of performativity provide much of the grounding for theorising the data presented in this book. Of particular, importance in understanding Max, Judy, and Scott's working context is developing an understanding of the literature relating to the complex work being undertaken by principals, and how 'quality' is emphasised and measured under contemporary policy and discursive conditions.

Part of the complexity of the principalship since the introduction of these new policy ensembles in Queensland stems from the lack of clarity surrounding what is expected of and from principals. The evolving nature of the role itself adds to this complexity and has been addressed over many years by researchers seeking to better understand how the principalship is constituted and what it entails (see Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010; Murphy, 1994; Rousmaniere, 2013; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008; Thomson, 2011; Thomson & Blackmore, 2006). Leithwood described the principal's role as shifting from administration or management of a school, towards being directly responsible for student achievement. He suggested that this involved making fewer assumptions that what is happening in classrooms is all good work, and focusing specifically on what is or is not helping students achieve success (Costante, 2010).

The changing nature of the principalship has been mapped in international scholarship. Research has documented the evolution of the principalship in schools, although Mulford, Cranston, and Ehrich (2009) suggested that there have been limited opportunities for researchers to learn more about school leadership in the past, which has resulted in research about school leadership that is point-in-time, rather than longitudinal.

A more concentrated reform effort across Australia from the 1980s onwards (Caldwell, 1992; Starr, 2009; Whitaker, 2003) provided scope for more detailed research to be undertaken into the role of the principal. Since the 1980s, the principalship has seen increased demands from a systemic level, heavier focus on policies and accountability, and more specific guidance or directives from district or regional offices (Brown, 2005; Rousmaniere, 2013). Leaders have navigated changing expectations in the principalship, shifting from a bureaucratic model of school leadership to the consultative, community-focused leadership of the late 1970s (Jones, 1987). In Australia, reform movements in the 1980s focused on the value of school-based management, with schools still having to adhere to centralised policies and procedures but being given more control at a local level about the allocation of resources and administrative decisions (Whitaker, 2003). School-based management and autonomy in the principalship was an emerging theme in Australia from the 1980s onwards, with increasing influence throughout the 1990s (Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000) but, arguably, in Queensland it reached something of an apotheosis in 2012 with the introduction of Independent Public Schools, an initiative which offered more formalised autonomy for public school principals. Shifting towards the current era of the principalship, key discourses that have arisen in the 2000s and beyond have resulted in complexities within the principalship, particularly in relation to the tensions accompanying higher levels of accountability and autonomy.

It was identified in the 1990s that expectations were being added to the role of the principal but little was being removed (Murphy, 1994). Since this time, principals have had to find a balance between external and internal demands for their time, with many stating that previously vital elements of their role such as instructional leadership had fallen by the wayside as a result (Murphy, 1994). In the light of these findings that instructional leadership fell by the wayside in the face of ongoing reforms, it is interesting to note that a particularly influential discourse shaping the principalship in the case study context of Queensland was that of instructional leadership; evident through explicit expectations from the Department that principals would work first and foremost as instructional leaders.

At the same time as principals are expected to be instructional leaders in ways the Department requires, and alongside these discourses of autonomy, are multiple forms of increased external accountabilities. There are tensions in the explicit expectations that principals will work in certain ways, particularly when considered alongside discourses and policies emphasising principals' autonomy to work in ways needed for local contexts.

Discourses of Autonomy for Principals and Schools

Autonomy for principals and schools features heavily in reform efforts around the globe and is a key discourse shaping the principalship in the current climate. There are clear links between this discourse of autonomy and notions of school-based management previously discussed, but the discourses currently influencing the principalship often explicitly refer to the concept as autonomy.

Researchers have worked to define autonomy and detail what it means for schools, school communities, and for the work of principals. These definitions have included principals and schools having more power to make decisions in consultation with their local communities, recruitment, and management of staffing processes, and having more flexibility regarding allocating resources and budgets (Gobby, 2013; Gray et al., 2013). Lingard, Hayes, and Mills (2002) noted that the definition of autonomy is not static and actually changes according to current political, social, and cultural practices and discourses. Therefore, the concept of principal autonomy is heavily influenced by both the local context and the broader educational context, so the specific context in which Max, Judy, and Scott were working positions the study within the wider discursive context.

Eacott (2015, p. 415) noted the widespread adoption of reforms associated with autonomy in almost all western education systems since at least the 1960s. Indeed, Queensland, like many other Australian school systems, has been moving towards greater autonomy for principals since the early 1970s with the commission of the Karmel Report in 1973 by the federal government. The literature notes that the Karmel Report called for schools to be able to meet local contextual needs and have greater powers to allocate resources and make decisions in collaboration with their school communities (Apelt & Lingard, 1993; Caldwell, 2008; Lingard et al., 2002). The aim of these proposed changes included providing more funding to schools to support them in improving student academic outcomes as well as promoting social justice, and Lingard et al. (2002) noted that this was a high point for funding in Australian education, with schools being asked to do more with comparatively less funding in the years since then.

Over the years since 1973, changes in government have also signalled changes in education policy, reflecting the idea that the political and cultural discourse of the time shapes the meaning of autonomy for schools and principals. With the introduction of a conservative federal government in the mid-1970s, a shift in paradigm saw neoliberal approaches influencing the concept of autonomy in schools. Whereas the initial Karmel report in 1973 included a focus on equity and social justice, the new phase of school leadership aligned more clearly with the New public management concepts from the UK, wherein private sector management strategies heavily influenced leadership roles in the public sector. As a result, principals required a more corporate, managerial style of leadership.

In Australia, reform movements in the 1980s focused on the value of school-based management, with schools still having to adhere to centralised policies and procedures but being given more control at a local level about the allocation of resources and administrative decisions (Whitaker, 2003). Lingard et al. (2002) worked to explore the evolution of school-based management in Queensland schools and noted that when political parties in power changed over the years, so too did education policies. They identified that although the details may have changed due to differing political philosophies, autonomy has consistently been a focus of governments since the Karmel Report, regardless of which party was in power. This is reflective of ‘policy as palimpsest’ (Carter, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) wherein policies are re-written over partially erased past policies, the essence of which remains visible in the new policy. Indeed, Moore (2004, p. 42) reflected on the ‘Terminator-like’ recurrence of discourses relating to education reforms. The recurrence of specific elements such as autonomy, whether in its current form or previous iterations such as school-based management, within the policy landscape in Queensland, serves as an example.

Autonomy in its current form in Australia includes rhetoric that government schools opting to take on more autonomy through programmes like the Independent Public Schools programme are making positive steps, becoming empowered to address their local needs better, and breaking free from bureaucratic systems (Gobby, 2013; Gray et al., 2013). The rhetoric surrounding autonomy is not limited to the IPS programme, however, with rhetoric in systemic strategic documents and policies espousing higher levels of autonomy and community involvement (Queensland Department of Education and Training (QDET), 2014a). In the GERM climate, a major focus for reform is student achievement data. In contrast to the government rhetoric espousing the positive impact of autonomy, research suggests that more autonomy for schools does not necessarily result in improvements in the types of student achievement data currently valued by governments and school systems (Gobby, 2013).

There is a small amount of research that supports the rhetoric that autonomy results in improved academic outcomes, with much of the literature citing Newmann (1996) as the major study to draw these conclusions and Bandur’s (2012) review of school-based management literature which suggested that the focus on local needs afforded by this approach does improve outcomes for students as a result. Caldwell (2008) indicated that only recently has an impact on learning been identified. However, he acknowledged that this could be due in part to a shift in research focus more sharply towards learning outcomes, meaning that researchers are now looking for these outcomes rather than for managerial impacts of autonomy.

With little detail available about the autonomy policies currently being enacted in Queensland state schools, there is a body of research worth considering which can inform an understanding of the context for the principals in these case studies. It questions how autonomous a school can really be within a government system, funded with public money and governed by a wider system such as Education Queensland (Gray et al., 2013). The divide between the rhetoric of autonomy and the reality of schools in these positions was described by Adamowski, Bowles Therriault, and Cavanna (2007) as the 'autonomy gap'. This refers to the gap between what principals have identified that they need to do in order to produce the types of data being sought by school systems, and their power to actually implement these changes. Keddie (2014) explored the same notion, identifying that freedom and flexibility inherent in rhetoric about autonomy are hindered by the performative demands of an audit culture (Power, 1994; Strathern, 1997). She commented that increasing surveillance and, I would add, steering of principals' work from a distance (Kickert, 1995), lead to questions about the reality of autonomy.

Adamowski et al. (2007) commented upon the starkness of the autonomy gap for public school leaders, highlighting that it is 'striking how little true authority these principals enjoy in key areas' (p. 31), including budgeting, curriculum, and staffing. Principals who are working to balance autonomy and accountability in the current climate of global reform have accepted the limitations of the system and have learnt to work within the limitations of neoliberal policy conditions (Adamowski et al., 2007) that can result in limited funding, uncertainty, and higher pressures on principals and teachers (Gobby, 2013). Principals, including those within these case studies, have developed strategies for working within the parameters set for their schools and their positions as school leaders. Adamowski et al. (2007) suggested that principals who are more experienced or have been in a district for longer periods of time feel more confident to bend rules without breaking them, allowing them to succeed within the wider system. These principals have also often developed effective working relationships with their supervisors and other stakeholders and are more comfortable in developing tactics to achieve their goals while meeting systemic requirements. This will be explored in depth in Chap. 6 in relation to the strategies that Judy, in particular, has developed to meet her own school's needs and follow her vision of a holistic education at Merriwald while still working effectively in the wider system.

Principals working in environments with higher levels of autonomy report that the complexities of their roles have increased significantly (Gobby, 2013; Trimmer, 2013). Although their workload has increased and many of the changes are synonymous with those pressures that often lead to burnout, including heavy workloads, increased external demands, and complying with a wider range of organisational rules and policies (Tomic & Tomic, 2008), principals have reported higher levels of job satisfaction at the same time (Caldwell, 2008; Trimmer, 2013). This is an important factor to note because there is the potential for these research findings to be used to justify the increased external pressures and systemic expectations of principals.

If autonomy in the current climate is indeed more rhetoric than reality, and if there is a stark gap between what principals can do as opposed to what they need to do to meet systemic expectations of learning outcomes, the question must be asked about whether principals in this context are really enjoying more power at a local level. Instead, it is possible that principals are simply more effective at working within the parameters set by the school system and global climate of education reform, as the research above has intimated.

Principals may feel that they have higher levels of autonomy, but the literature identifies that this devolution of power from centralised education offices has evolved into a different form of external control, through accountability measures and 'technologies of performance' (Dean, 1999) that steer principals' work from a distance (Caldwell, 2008; Lingard et al., 2002; Niesche, 2011). Kickert (1995) discussed the evolution of this style of government, describing his time in the Dutch Ministry of Education, accurately predicting that after its beginnings in higher education it would spread to primary and secondary education. This mode of governance enables governments or systems to control the work undertaken by principals from a distance, while still espousing the rhetoric that principals have been provided with increased levels of autonomy in their schools. Such technologies of control include approaches such as *MySchool*, transparent publication of school data sets, and external curriculum and financial audits.

Successful principals in such environments are not only able to see the limitations of their context, but can work around these limitations (Adamowski et al., 2007). Further tensions have been identified for principals such as Max, Judy, and Scott, who are working in a climate of high accountability and espoused autonomy or school-based management under neoliberal policies. Principals in these environments are expected to not only meet the demands described above, but also to be 'multi-lingual' in a variety of managerial and instructional language and approaches (Lingard et al., 2002). This also means principals need to be able to balance increased managerial tasks and a focus on teaching and learning with an intention of improving student outcomes, including through various forms of instructional leadership.

Discourses of Instructional Leadership

The literature surrounding instructional leadership falls into two overarching categories. The first explores the effectiveness of focusing on teachers and pedagogy, and the second includes the literature providing specific instructions on how to turn the theory into practice (often based more on practice than on theory). These 'how-to' guides could be viewed within the frame of the Transnational Leadership Packages spoken about by Thomson et al. (2013), consisting of the packaging of (formerly localised) concepts and practices into 'saleable' generalised formats that do not take local contexts or school needs into account. Thomson et al. (2013) spoke about this in a wider framework referring to policy, generalised studies, and practices being sold to governments by consultants, but the principles remain the same for these decontextualised 'how-to' guides.

One contribution of this book towards an understanding of instructional leadership is to add a more complex, contextualised perspective to the literature which emphasises the nature of specific practices that were enacted in schools under these policy conditions. It will further add to our understanding of the way discourses of instructional leadership impact upon principals and how they constitute school leaders in these conditions. I do not intend to share their stories as 'how-to' success stories of instructional leadership, but rather to identify the practices that are taking place in schools in an effort to better understand how principals' subjectivities are shaped by discourses of instructional leadership.

Some time ago, Harris (2001) called for further case studies on leadership in school improvement. The case studies within this book focus on the actions and leadership skills demonstrated by three principals in Queensland schools as they led improvement in their schools. Fullan and Levin (QDET, 2012) noted in their system review that while Education Queensland 'correctly' defined instructional leadership as a necessary driver for improvement, more clarity was needed around what this looked like within schools. I use the phrase 'instructional leadership' because this is the nomenclature adopted by the Department and thus inherent in the discourses of educational leadership in Queensland.

The phenomenon described by Lingard et al. (2002) wherein autonomy is framed differently under different political parties and contexts is also evident when examining a systemic focus of expectations on principals around instructional leadership. This can be seen in the Queensland context, where under former Premier Anna Bligh's ALP government (2007–2012), instructional leadership with an unrelenting focus on improvement was defined as one of the four pillars of improvement in *United in our Pursuit of Excellence* (QDET, 2011). It indicated six areas for principals to focus on as instructional leaders, including core learning priorities, quality curriculum, student achievement and improvement, pedagogical practice, teacher feedback, and quality assessment.

After a change of state government in 2012, the conservative LNP Newman government's *Great Teachers = Great Results* action plan (introduced in 2013) included a focus on improving outcomes. However, the rhetoric contained within the document shifted away from explicitly describing instructional leadership as a means of doing so. This was echoed in the Department's *2014–2018 Strategic Plan*, which superseded *United in our Pursuit of Excellence* (although the dates included in each document's title overlap, an example of incoming governments introducing palimpsest policies that reflect much of the previous policy). Instead, emphasis was placed on aspects such as teacher performance, through performance reviews, rating teacher effectiveness, and promoting or paying teachers accordingly. Principal instructional leadership is certainly still evident within these documents, but performative measures are included to a higher extent. As discussed previously, the focus for principals on continuous improvement is presented in such a way that insinuates that principals were not previously aiming for continued school improvement, so the solution provided is performance-based contracts. The focus in this document for principals is on outcomes and measurable achievement. Instructional leadership or 'leading learning' (Lingard, 2010, p. 140) is a means to achieving this improvement and thus provides further context for Judy, Max, and Scott's work.

The case studies in this book provide further information for researchers about how principals seek out, interpret, and make sense of instructional and pedagogical practices. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) suggested that research is urgently needed about how successful instructional leaders create the conditions in their schools which promote student learning. These case studies contribute to the literature in this field by critically examining the ways principals responded to the school improvement discourses shaping the principalship. Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (2012) stated that principals alone cannot fulfil the instructional leadership needs of a school. I further expand upon this proposition by investigating how the principals of the three focus schools responded to discourses of instructional leadership and how those discourses shaped the subjectivities of individual principals, as well as influencing the principalship as a wider construct.

The information currently available to principals about effective instructional leadership encompasses general descriptions of effective instructional leadership, but also involves lists of specific tasks and actions to undertake in order to promote student learning. DeBevoise (1984, p. 15) described instructional leadership as 'those actions a principal takes or delegates to others to promote growth in student learning'. According to DuFour (2002), for over thirty years, research has described the importance of principals serving as instructional leaders. During DuFour's time as a principal, he ascribed to the most common interpretation of instructional leadership and focused on the teaching that was taking place in his school, conducting regular observations and meetings with teachers and leading discussions about pedagogy. At some point, however, he decided that student learning, rather than teaching, should be the focus for an instructional leader. He claimed that when student learning was at the forefront of the school's focus, the resulting culture shift was significant and extremely effective.

I would suggest that some of the confusion for principals in the area of instructional leadership lies in the different interpretations of what exactly instructional leadership is and what the system expects it to look like in action. There appears to be two major schools of thought surrounding instructional leadership in the literature, the most pervasive being that principals should focus on the actions of teachers and quality of pedagogy in their schools to promote student learning (as indicated in Queensland through the *Great Teachers = Great Results* action plan and the *2014–2018 Strategic Plan*), with the other approach being to focus on student learning itself (as described by DuFour, 2002).

Inherent Elements of Instructional Leadership—Focusing on Teachers and Teaching

According to Leithwood et al. (2012), instructional leadership has regularly been depicted as being heavily classroom focused with practices recommended to influence classroom curriculum and instruction directly. They described a model of instructional leadership developed by Philip Hallinger that had three broad goals (define the school mission, manage the instructional programme, and promote the school climate) as well as twenty-one specific actions (including supervising instruction). Hattie (2002) suggested that the main focus of instructional leadership was to have indirect influence over what happens in the classroom by valuing, identifying, and esteeming accomplished teaching.

There is a body of publications that outline specific actions for principals aiming towards improving their instructional leadership capabilities. These books are representative of the 'how to' versions of Thomson et al.'s (2013) transnational leadership package, wherein 'solutions' are bundled into packages to be sold. A common element of this 'how to' type of literature is that it focuses more on effective practices rather than on building theoretical knowledge and emphasises the importance of having a presence in classrooms and encouraging best practice in teachers around planning, pedagogy, assessment, and understanding student data. It provides practical advice about the process of teacher observation, feedback, and modelling exemplary teaching practices within the school.

The main drawback to much of the 'how to' literature about instructional leadership is that it assumes that principals have the time to devote to these activities. This requires principals to make instructional leadership the major focus of their time rather than being distracted by the minutiae of administrative tasks that arise throughout the school day. This is admirable in theory, but in an average school setting demands of a range of complexities from parents or community members, regional and central offices, staff and students can easily shift to the forefront of a principal's priorities. It is not uncommon for principals to find that their plans for classroom observations, curriculum leadership, or working with students can be interrupted by administrative tasks that have no immediate influence on student outcomes (Leonard, 2010). This was reinforced by Hallinger (2003) who noted that managerial elements of leadership are still important for principals. Thus, instructional leadership is just one element of a complex balance of leading and managing for principals; a notion that was evident in the case studies in this book and will be explored in more depth in Chap. 5 in relation to specific experiences shared by Max, Judy, and Scott.

Indeed, according to Elmore (2000), direct instructional leadership is among the least frequent activities performed by administrators. Whitaker (2003) emphasised the potential for this to become a regular issue, encouraging principals to spend time in the classrooms with teachers and students, and stating that it is not possible to lead a school from within the office. Elmore advised principals to form strong networks and to work with teachers and ensure that instruction is at the forefront of the agenda, including blocking off calendars to ensure principals are devoting three mornings per week to classrooms (Costante, 2010).

The requirement for a focus on instructional leadership was reflected in *United in Our Pursuit of Excellence* which required Queensland's public school principals to focus directly on areas including curriculum, student learning and achievement, and pedagogy (QDET, 2011). As described previously, the *Great Teachers = Great Results* action plan introduced in 2013 and the *2014–2018 Strategic Plan* added another level of complexity to this requirement, with a heavier focus on discourses of teacher and principal performativity with respect to improving student outcomes. Moore (2004) highlighted the difficulty for some educators in balancing their personal philosophies of education with current reform scenarios of performativity, measurement, and 'delivery' of curriculum. This balance will be explored in more depth from Max, Judy, and Scott's perspectives as instructional leaders in one such reform climate.

Educative Dispositions in Performative Cultures

Recent research has explored the intertwined nature of principals' educative dispositions, or educative 'logics' (Hardy, 2015b) and performative cultures. This research has included a focus on the ways some practices in the current climate have dual purposes of meeting performative requirements and enhancing educational outcomes for students, such as the collection and use of student data (Hardy, 2015b), appointment of staff such as literacy and numeracy coaches (Lewis & Hardy, 2015), and even the way performative influences such as NAPLAN were viewed by teachers (Hardy, 2014). Hardy (2015a) did note that the initial appropriation of NAPLAN as an educative element of performative cultures may have shifted as the effects of NAPLAN have become clearer and that these impacts may have become increasingly more significant over time. He commented upon the complex nature of the performative and educative applications of the national testing regime and suggested that while teachers have made efforts to resist the perverse or more performative effects of these practices, the overwhelming scale of NAPLAN could potentially put these more educative logics at risk (Hardy, 2015a).

As such, Hardy (2015b) suggested that careful consideration should be given to whether educative logics can dominate performative logics in the current climate of education, and that it is an area for 'much-needed attention' (p. 483). This book contributes further to this area of research by exploring the intertwined nature of the educative and performative elements of Max, Judy, and Scott's practices and beliefs and how they shaped participants' subjectivities.

Discourses of Accountability

A key discourse frequently recurring throughout the literature relates to increases in accountability for principals. This increase in accountabilities and related discourses is one of the more significant changes to the principalship in recent years; an element representative of neoliberal reform agendas and managerialism. Keddie (2013) drew upon Apple's (2005) research to identify the way the current culture of reform draws upon business-based concepts of measurement and evaluation, requiring schools to meet external standards and accountabilities. Brown (2005) noted that the theme of external accountability first surfaced globally in the 1970s, as public scrutiny of education increased.

Aligning with this accountability agenda, principals in these case studies were faced with high-stakes testing, an increasing audit culture, public dissemination of data (which is not always contextualised), and a potentially narrow focus on 'outcomes'. As a result of many years of ongoing reform, some researchers (Cranston, 2013; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Niesche, 2015) have suggested that this accountability culture is in danger of becoming unquestioned and that stakeholders need to be more critical of the current climate. This suggestion aligns with findings discussed earlier in this chapter relating to autonomy, wherein some principals are aware of the limitations of the environments in which they work and have found strategies to work around these limitations rather than trying to change the environment or expectations.

Global Increases in Accountability

A US study (Whitaker, 2003) found that principals identified an increase in accountability as the biggest change in the role to date. Globally, accountability reforms in their current incarnation have been more visibly on the rise since the rise of neoliberal policies in education, as well as the new public management reforms of the 1980s that were based on business philosophies. Cranston (2013), Lingard et al. (2013), and Finnigan (2010) are among researchers who have highlighted the elevated levels of accountability facing principals within GERM regimes at this time. In the past decade, educational policies have called for enhanced accountability, including but certainly not limited to the US government's *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* policies (Finnigan, 2010), as well as Australia's Education Revolution proposals (Rudd & Smith, 2007) and Queensland's *Great Teachers = Great Results* (QDET, 2013) and *Every Student Succeeding* (QDET, 2014a). These government initiatives then filter down to education systems, districts, and schools themselves, who have to enact these policies.

One benefit of neoliberal policies in education for governments is the ability to shift focus or responsibility for many of society's troubles back to schools (Hursh, 2013; Lingard et al., 2013). This does, of course, discount the significant amount of research showing that students' backgrounds have a very real impact on their school performance (Hattie, 2011; Lingard et al., 2000). Interestingly, Lingard et al. (2013) commented upon the disconnect between Hattie's work on effects on student learning, which is front-ended by an acknowledgement of the vast impact of socioeconomic factors, students' backgrounds, and the effects of poverty, and the fact that Hattie's work is used by systems and schools to suggest that teachers and teaching have the largest impact on student performance. In fact, they noted that the Queensland Government is using this assumption as the main driver for their policy, *Great Teachers = Great Results*. They suggested that this misalignment between the research and the rhetoric is potentially about fiscal requirements, with history showing that governments are increasingly asking schools and school leaders to do comparatively more with less funding (Lingard et al., 2002).

Governments selectively choosing which research from the field supports their chosen position are not a new phenomenon. In fact, school reforms are rarely driven by teachers or experts, with Lingard et al. (2002) noting that reforms and restructuring are generally done ‘to’, rather than ‘with’ teachers. Cranston (2013) noted that school leaders are sometimes invited to comment on policies after they have been developed, and Lingard (2011) pointed out that the ACARA board does not contain any practicing teachers. This theme continued through the literature, which included comments that stakeholders do not drive policy reform (Goodlad, 2004; Lingard et al., 2002; Puckeridge, 2011) and highlighting that the top-down governmental reform described by Lingard (2011), Lingard et al. (2002), and Cranston (2013) has not been effective in creating long-term, sustainable school improvement (Fullan, 1994; Hopkins & Fraser, 2011).

The current climate of accountability in Western schooling systems, particularly Australia, the USA, and England, is described best by Sahlberg’s GERM. As has been discussed, it encompasses high-stakes testing and a standardisation and narrowing of focus in education, alongside a push for business-based models in education (Sahlberg, 2011). In Queensland and wider Australia, this is often a focus specifically on literacy and numeracy—the main focus areas of NAPLAN testing. This aligns with neoliberal education policies encouraging similar approaches and a push towards school privatisation and competition between government schools (Hursh, 2013; Lingard et al., 2000; Niesche, 2015).

In Queensland, in particular, the conservative LNP Newman government’s *Strategic Plan 2014–2018* consisted of strong neoliberal language including referring to students, parents, and communities as ‘customers’, and referring to business models and notions of performativity throughout the document (QDET, 2014b). Hursh (2013) noted that the past three decades of neoliberal reforms in education have had dubious effects upon student outcomes, including a growing achievement gap between students from wealthy and disadvantaged backgrounds, educational practices that focus heavily on preparing students for high-stakes testing, and manipulation of testing scores and benchmarks by school systems and schools themselves. He suggested that educational outcomes have not improved for students in the USA during this time, regardless of the aforementioned policies such as *Race to the Top* and *No Child Left Behind*. However, these policies and their associated practices such as high-stakes testing and external accountabilities have reconstituted what could be defined as ‘achievement’, with a strong focus on achieving high results on standardised testing. This is a logical extension of these policies in the USA, where teachers’ performance is evaluated based in part on these test scores. This notion that high-stakes testing has redefined student achievement was echoed by Gorur (2016, p. 41) who suggested that NAPLAN and *MySchool* have changed the nature of Australian schooling so much that it now resembles the abstract version of education presented through these data mechanisms.

Although the majority of the literature explored the negative impact of policies and practices associated with high-stakes accountabilities, some of the literature does present alternative interpretations. Hamilton et al. (2007) and Rutledge (2010) reported that a positive effect of these accountability discourses is that teachers are required to focus more closely on the relationship between their teaching and student learning. This aligns with research from Thompson and Mockler (2016) which discussed some affordances of high-stakes testing climates, wherein principals felt that NAPLAN, in particular, had positive effects on their schools' abilities to focus on literacy and numeracy and that the availability of data enabled them to measure school improvement more effectively.

With that said, researchers and practitioners have expressed their concerns about the current climate, characterised in particular by high-stakes testing among other previously discussed elements of neoliberal policy features, having the potential to narrow curriculum foci and reduce teachers' opportunities to apply professional judgments (Luke & Woods, 2008), result in a wider achievement gap for disadvantaged students, present additional challenges for complex school settings (Hardy, 2013b; Lingard et al., 2000), and potentially result in schools and systems manipulating data and related variables due to the public nature of the data (Lingard, 2011; Lingard & Sellar, 2013).

Part of the rhetoric around the school improvement movement is that schools are in crisis. This is present in the public discourse about schooling in the Queensland context, where Thomas (2003) has explored the media construction of discourses of crisis relating to Queensland public schools, and Garrick (2011) highlighted the use of crisis discourses to promote a sense of urgency in the Rudd government's education policies. Researchers have analysed the myriad ways that discourses of crisis have been used to drive education reforms in recent years, including to speed up the pace and increase urgency because 'business as usual is not an option' (Nordin, 2014, p. 118); stirring public support for education reforms (Cohen, 2010); and advocating for a 'back to basics' approach, while positioning teachers in a negative light and attributing blame to them for the perceived failures of education (Thomas, 2003). Cranston (2013) suggested that increased accountability and high-stakes testing is seen as a solution for the 'public mistrust' of educators. This notion was also supported by other researchers (Brown, 2005; Hursh, 2013; Lingard et al., 2013). Hursh (2013) identified the 1983 publication *A Nation at Risk* as the initial move from the US government to shift the blame for wider issues onto schools. He noted that the report placed the burden of the USA's 1980s economic recession on schools, beginning a trend that would see future governments take praise for improvements, while blaming schools for negative results or policy failures. As a result, teachers are often portrayed negatively in the USA, a fact which mirrors Australia's changing circumstances for teachers.

Hardy (2013a) noted the negative media depiction of Queensland's schools (and by extension, educators) after the 2008 NAPLAN results were released. This public mistrust and negative portrayal were seen through intensively focused media pressure on schools in Queensland, particularly in *The Courier Mail*, Queensland's major newspaper, from 2008 and continuing today (Niesche, 2015). Political responses also mimicked those from the 1980s and beyond in the USA, with then Queensland Premier Anna Bligh acknowledging the myriad reasons behind Queensland's comparatively poor performance, but stating that she was still 'obligated to respond urgently' to the perceived crisis (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 647). Across Australia, the implementation of NAPLAN in 2008 was one element of a renewed focus on national schooling reforms, many of which have resulted in a higher level of accountability for Australian principals.

Effects of the Current Climate—Narrowed Focus of Schooling

High-stakes testing, public accountability in the form of advocacy for 'transparent data', and external audits or inspections that have the potential for goal displacement (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) mean that schools are balancing increasingly complex agendas. Researchers have commented upon the potential for high-stakes testing, in particular, to narrow the focus of education down to those elements that will impact upon student test results, while neglecting other elements that constitute a holistic education (Bhattacharyya, Junot & Clark, 2013; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Lingard et al., 2000; Minarechová, 2012). Cranston (2013) described this as a double-edged sword, wherein teachers and principals are expected to improve student results significantly and with urgency in very limited areas of the curriculum, while associated government policies, including the Australian government's Melbourne Declaration, espouse the importance of holistic education for all students (MCEETYA, 2008).

Keddie (2014) noted that a standards-driven culture has narrowed curriculum and pedagogy to focus on the range of subjects tested in schools. Similarly, Cranston (2013) suggested that outsiders could potentially be forgiven for thinking that schooling today was mainly about achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics, as these elements of teaching and learning are dominating the popular discourse. A common theme within the literature identifies that globalised education policies position one of the purposes of schooling as being about gaining greater social and economic advantage through creating future citizens who are literate and numerate and will contribute to a strong economy (Goodlad, 2004; Hursh, 2013; Lingard et al., 2013; Sparzo, Bruning, Vargas, & Gilman, 1998). There is resulting concern that other elements of a holistic education such as critical thinking, personal and social development, and celebrations of personal and cultural diversity are potentially being sidelined due to a heavier focus on literacy and numeracy (Agostino & Harcourt, 2010; Keddie, Mills, & Pendergast, 2011; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Minarechová, 2012). Mills and Niesche (2014) described 'academic outcomes being 'valorised' over social outcomes' (p. 2), which supports concerns about certain types of data or achievements being privileged over others.

Lingard et al. (2002) issued a warning about the need for caution about external testing in terms of having a negative flow-on effect upon pedagogy and curriculum and potentially de-skilling teachers. Luke and Woods (2008) echoed the concerns about a heavy focus on 'mandating content and method' (p. 17) potentially de-skilling teachers.

Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2012) discussed a practice wherein some teachers and schools focus their resources and attention on students who will make a difference to their overall scores on NAPLAN (those students close to the next band or minimum standard) and, in the process, may neglect other students until the test is over. This practice is reminiscent of emergency medical practices of selectively prioritising treatment for those who will benefit from it most, and has been labelled 'educational triage' (Saltmarsh & Youdell, 2004). Researchers have criticised this practice as maintaining the status quo for many students and even increasing attainment gaps, as well as ensuring that schools are complicit in furthering the marginalisation of groups of students including those mentioned previously, who will not necessarily gain from a learning environment which is shaped in response to these external pressures (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Marks, 2012; Saltmarsh & Youdell, 2004; Youdell, 2004). This practice has become formally entrenched in policy in some parts of Australia, with the New South Wales government's *Bump it Up* strategy utilising this approach with an explicit goal of improving NAPLAN results (New South Wales Department of Education, n.d.).

The influence of the climate of accountability and high-stakes testing can be seen in these practices, as well as other practices described above that circumvent productive interventions for teaching and learning. Lingard and Sellar (2013) found an uncritical acceptance of current accountability practices from some practitioners and researchers which led to these types of approaches and which needs to be challenged. This, again, links to literature related to autonomy wherein principals may accept the pressures and context of the system and adjust their work within those parameters (Adamowski et al., 2007; Caldwell, 2008).

A particular challenge for schools in these case studies is finding the balance and negotiating the roles in a climate where autonomy and accountability, two premises with different meanings and implications, are both increasingly present. Indeed, Caldwell (2008) noted that as autonomy increases for principals, external accountabilities will often increase at the same time. This serves to steer or govern principals' work in other ways, through specific targets and frameworks. These competing discourses of accountability and autonomy were acknowledged by Queensland's Education Department in 1990, which acknowledged that principals needed to 'live with the tension of being both autonomous and accountable' (Lingard et al., 2002 p. 17).

Conclusion

Queensland's principals are under 'increased accountability surveillance' (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 651) and face unprecedented levels of public scrutiny, particularly as a result of the response to the state's performance on the 2008 NAPLAN tests. Discourses of accountability in performative cultures bring about discussions relating to job security for principals deemed to be underperforming, and debates about sanctions and rewards for principals based on measurements of quality and effectiveness. These discourses are compounded by public perceptions of schooling, often constructed through discourses of crisis derived from media coverage of school reform issues. Indeed, policy is driven by this crisis narrative at times, with politicians feeling obligated to respond to these public concerns. The resulting public scrutiny of teachers can be linked to the 'tyranny of transparency' (Strathern, 2000) and further contributes to the pressure on teachers and principals in Queensland. In a sense, the actions undertaken by principals to meet performative requirements are highly visible as a result of public availability of data and the perpetual surveillance of school leaders.

This chapter has shown that public and transparent data (a pillar of the government's education reforms) are one means of controlling what happens in classrooms, making the data and its public nature a technology of surveillance (Foucault, 2003). Publicly available data, often decontextualised, provide the public with the means of making judgments about the complex work undertaken in schools. This is particularly damaging for schools deemed to be underperforming, because it perpetuates the cycle of deficit discourses surrounding these schools (Niesche, 2013, p. 9). These deficit discourses lead to the question of what data are privileged and marginalised in a climate of heavy external accountability such as that in which the principals in these case studies work. The nature of public accountabilities can have 'perverse' (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) effects including educational triage, overt and covert manipulation of data, and a narrowed focus of curriculum.

At the same time, as principals are working in these contexts of heavy external accountabilities and scrutiny, the rhetoric surrounding the principalship is that leaders have more autonomy to make the decisions needed for their school communities. This chapter highlighted the elements of policy as palimpsest (Carter, 2012), noting the 'terminator-like' recurrence of reform discourses including school autonomy (Moore, 2004, p. 42). Considering Lingard et al.'s (2002) finding that autonomy is influenced by the current 'political, social and cultural practices and discourses' of the climate, the enactment of autonomy discourses can change depending on the context or climate of the system in which principals work. As such, this chapter questioned how autonomous a school can really be within the wider system. Using research findings relating to the notion of the autonomy gap, it highlighted that principals are working within the parameters set by the climate of reform. While successful principals are said to be able to bend a rule without breaking it, this still means they are being disciplined to work in the ways the system wants, because rules can only really be bent so far. Thus, these accountability measures and technologies of performance steer their 'autonomous' work from a distance.

One such technology of performance (Dean, 1999) was the discourse and associated expectations related to explicit expectations to act as an instructional leader. Principals must balance the explicit requirement for them to act as instructional leaders alongside demands created by a heightened culture of accountability and a perceived climate of more autonomy for principals, two paradigms which demonstrate a tension in and of themselves when linked together in such a manner. In this chapter, I explored the ways principals might constitute themselves as school leaders in these positions and highlighted an emerging area of research showing that school leaders are seeking to find a balance between more educative logics and requirements inherent in performative cultures. Principals' instructional leadership practices can serve dual purposes, at the same time meeting performance requirements and providing students with enhanced educational outcomes.

In the next chapter, I shift into a focus on the case study context, with an in-depth exploration of the policy conditions that influenced the principalship in these schools. The forthcoming chapters will investigate how the principals in three schools balance these competing paradigms of accountability and autonomy with system requirements to focus on instructional leadership for school improvement at the forefront of their agenda.

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Chapter 3
The Queensland Context: A Site of Rapid and Urgent Reform

This chapter examines the broader policy conditions governing the case study context. In it, I establish that the work of principals is influenced by global, national, and local policies, as well as government and systemic expectations. The wider shared context in which Max, Judy, and Scott worked was also influenced by each school's local context and needs, as well as national and international policies and reform discourses. To provide an understanding of the wider school improvement policy context in which Max, Judy, and Scott were undertaking their work as principals, I explore the context surrounding the current climate of reform at a global, national, and local levels in Queensland, including discourses found within performative cultures and the ways these impact upon principals in this context. This provides vital background for understanding how these discourses and policies have impacted upon the principalship and establishes that participants were working in a rapidly shifting policy and discourse landscape, which required them to be able to cope with ongoing changes in expectations for school leaders.

Queensland's Government was praised by Michael Fullan for looking towards global education trends in order to make decisions about their reform agenda (Queensland Department of Education and Training [QDET], 2012). It is important to acknowledge here that Fullan was engaged as a consultant by the Queensland Government at the time he made this finding, and that his finding contrasts with other research described in the previous chapter that praised Finland for eschewing these GERM trends, rather than looking towards them as Queensland has. In addition, the work surrounding globalisation of education policy from Lingard and associates (Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Sellar & Lingard, 2013) means that policy-borrowing is rampant in many education systems and does not always take local contexts or needs into account, an issue also noted by Thomson, Gunter, and Blackmore (2013). The reform agenda at a national level, as well as the state level, impacted upon these principals.

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Australian Reforms: A Shifting Policy Landscape

Australia's federal and state governments have shared a renewed focus on education since 2008. Although public education has traditionally been the responsibility of state governments in Australia, the federal government has played an increasingly significant role in the direction of education since John Howard's conservative Liberal–National Coalition Party [LNP] came to power in 1996. This shift has most recently been carried out through the Australian Labor Party's [ALP] federal 'Education Revolution' initiatives including funding with caveats for achievement or targets to be attained, as well as through NAPLAN testing, the development of a national curriculum (the Australian Curriculum), and the launch of the national *MySchool* school data reporting website (Cranston, Mulford, Reid, & Keating, 2010; Harris-Hart, 2010; Lingard, 2011). Previous approaches where federalism can be seen in Australian education policy include through the National Partnerships programme, an approach wherein the ALP government targeted specific focus areas including disadvantage, teacher and leadership quality, and literacy and numeracy (Lingard, 2010). The federal government provided over $2.5 billion worth of funding between 2008 and 2013 against set targets in each of the focus areas, thereby increasing their role in governing education from a distance, through financial incentives. Performative cultures were also evident here because those targets guided principals' behaviours in certain ways by requiring them to focus on specific areas and thus be governed by measurable outcomes against the aforementioned targets, by which the quality of their work was measured (Ball, 2006).

The National Partnerships programme was pervasive, with the government reporting that over one quarter of all Australian schools participated in two focus areas alone (National Partnerships for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities, and Literacy and Numeracy National Partnerships), as well as indicating that the National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality influenced all teachers and school leaders in Australia (Australian Government Department of Education, 2013). These influences and the shift towards federalism of education were most visible with the development of a national set of Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, a move towards national registration procedures to enable teachers to move within states more easily, and a national focus on teacher education programmes. The latter was evident in the creation of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group [TEMAG], which proffered 38 recommendations for teacher education, invoking discourses of 'quality' 163 times in the 118-page report (TEMAG, 2014). Nationalisation or federalism of education is increasing, due in part to programmes and policies such as those described above. Another pervasive way of encouraging a federal approach to education has been through the nomenclature adopted by the government's use of the phrase 'national' in their reforms (Lingard & Sellar, 2013), national testing (NAPLAN), national curriculum (later renamed the Australian Curriculum), and National Partnerships.

In 2008, the then ALP Prime Minister Kevin Rudd chaired a summit looking forward to Australia's future in 2020. Education was a major theme running through the summit, interwoven between all other areas of focus (Caldwell & Harris, 2008). Further evidence of the Rudd government's commitment to reforming education systems was the 2008 document *Quality Education: The Case for an Education Revolution in our Schools* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) which reinforced the notion that education played a central role in Australia's 'economic and social strength as a nation' (p. 5). This document further called for 'substantial reform' (p. 11) in Australia's education systems and invoked messages of school improvement and accountability (p. 19). In order to meet the future demands on the education system, a number of significant education reforms were implemented in 2008 by Rudd's federal government, with the agreement of state and territory governments.

There has been criticism of these reforms as 'coercive federalism' of education (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 304) having started with the LNP Howard government (1996–2007), continuing with the ALP's Rudd/Gillard/Rudd governments (2007–2013), and then with Abbott/Turnbull's LNP governments (2013–present). It is worth noting that with these shifts in political power, the federalism agenda has continued for education. The major focus of these reforms was on improving performance outcomes for all students (particularly in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and science) and on 'closing the gap'. While this phrase mainly focuses on reducing the gap for Indigenous students in attendance and achievement when compared to non-Indigenous students, the reform agenda also includes reducing the 'tail of underperformance' from students from low socio-economic backgrounds and improving educational equity for all students in Australia (Australian Government, 2008). Ensuring a quality education for all students is a vital point of order for change not just in Australian schools, but also as a worldwide shift as the disparity of achievement and engagement between students of high and low socio-economic circumstances becomes more obvious (Costante, 2010).

Key Areas of Education Reform in Australia

A substantial amount of literature exists about educational equity in Australian schools, and much of the government rhetoric about school improvement has included a focus on improving outcomes for all students regardless of their backgrounds. Apelt and Lingard (1993) analysed Australian public schooling reforms of the early 1990s and emphasised the importance of keeping equity for students at the forefront of educational reform blueprints. Equity in education for students is a contentious issue, with levels of achievement and engagement varying significantly for students throughout the nation. Indigenous students are, on average, over two years behind their non-Indigenous counterparts, and there is a major gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students with regards to attendance, retention, and achievement (Koutsogergopoulou, 2009).

The Australian Government's education reforms aim to address this, having set 'ambitious targets' to halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing, and numeracy achievement within a decade (by 2018) and at least halve the gap for

Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment by 2020 (ADFHCSI, 2010). Attendance was also a focus within Queensland, with three targets being set for closing the gap—to halve the gap in Year 3 reading and numeracy by 2012, close the gap in Year 12 retention by 2013, and close the gap in student attendance by 2013 (QDET, 2009). Queensland's shorter timeframes (2013 instead of 2018 or 2020) were intended to create a sense of urgency around these issues and maintain the focus on these improvement targets.

It is difficult to find specific data about the outcomes of these targets and approaches. The federal government released a report in 2014 reflecting on closing the gap across the nation and, emphasising in the introduction that this was a bipartisan issue, indicated that results were 'disappointing' (Australian Government, 2014). The report noted that attendance had not increased over the past five years, as well as identifying that improvement goals in literacy and numeracy were not met. Another report was released in 2016 (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016) which indicated that success in progress towards the targets was mixed. While there is no specific data about whether Queensland's goal of increased retention was met by 2013, the report suggests that retention goals are on track to be met by 2020, which indicates that there is still significant work to be done in this area.

Fullan (2007) suggested that many systems have had some initial success in implementing reform policies (generally measured by student achievement on system-defined metrics) but that progress had plateaued, the majority needing to take the next step. He said this next step may include system-wide reflection upon successes and challenges so far in the reform effort, with some systems having been too prescriptive and others having been too loose in their expectations or targets. He used two Australian states to illustrate these common problems, South Australia and New South Wales. He indicated that South Australia has been too permissive within a broad framework for improvement, leading to a loss of focus and urgency of the reform efforts, whereas New South Wales has been too prescriptive, leading educators to feel constrained.

Lingard, Hayes, and Mills (2002) discussed the concept of 'reform fatigue' among teachers after a significant time of ongoing reform. This is evidenced from the 1990s right up until the current day, with 'reform fatigue' potentially impacting upon teachers during times of rapid and significant reform efforts. Discussed over a decade ago by Lingard et al. (2002), schools in Australia have seen even more of an increase in external reforms and a sense of urgency around reform efforts (Buchanan, Holmes, Preston, & Shaw, 2012; Caldwell, 2009; Reynolds, 2005; Sahlberg, 2011), particularly since the 2007 introduction of the ALP government's Education Revolution. This was also referred to by Carter (2012) as 'initiativitis'; the ongoing introduction of new reforms and the 'persistent rebranding of previous initiatives' (Asato, 2010, p. 177).

A result of initiativitis, illustrated by Carter (2012) is that educators would likely be working in environments characterised by uncertainty and contradictory discourses. The reform fatigue concept can be seen in action today with researchers indicating that many schools and systems in Australia and elsewhere have either reached an improvement plateau or still have a significant amount of work to do regarding improving student achievement (Fullan, 2007; Hopkins, 2013; Sahlberg, 2011). To contribute to our understanding of the effects of ongoing reforms, Chap. 5 in particular explores the impact of this set of policy conditions and ongoing reform on Max, Judy, and Scott's shifting conceptualisations of the principalship.

The Introduction of NAPLAN

As one of the major reforms of the past decade, high-stakes standardised testing, specifically NAPLAN in the Australian context, is an issue of great significance to educators (for more, see Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Morris, 2011; Rapple, 2004; Shine & O'Donoghue, 2013; Thompson & Cook, 2012). NAPLAN testing was introduced in 2008 as a means of enabling comparability of student achievement in literacy and numeracy across the nation. Each state had previously undertaken testing individually, with results relatively incomparable due to the difference in testing style and content. NAPLAN tests were introduced by the government as a response to the joint declaration of Australian Education Ministers' Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (generally referred to as the Melbourne Declaration) goal of promoting excellence and equity in Australian education.

The development and use of standardised testing as a driver for school improvement is a practice which has been echoed globally by other countries (Connolly, Klenowski, & Wyatt-Smith, 2012), and its introduction in Australia has sparked debate within academia, the media,[1] the wider community, and the teaching profession itself about the value of these tests (Davidson, 2009; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). Those who argue for this type of testing support the standards-driven accountability environment that can result from external standardised testing while those who argue against it cite concerns including those about the potential it has for disadvantaging students with diverse needs or backgrounds, and the potential the tests have for narrowing the focus of the curriculum (Rice, Dulfer, Polesel, & O'Hanlon, 2016; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). The impacts of NAPLAN testing in Queensland and the resulting focus on school data in policy ensembles were introduced in relation to principal accountability in Chap. 2 and are explored in more detail in this chapter as a way of exploring the specific challenges facing Max, Judy, and Scott. Nationally, this focus on data has manifested in a push for transparency and availability of school performance data.

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[1] Media reports included: 'NAPLAN is Driving our Students Backwards' (Peter Job, The Age, 15/5/13); 'Tests "must bring change, not teacher bashing"' (Anna Patty, Sydney Morning Herald, 14/5/13); 'Fight for Schools' (The Advertiser [Canberra], 23/5/2012); 'Excessive Testing Minus Fairness Equals Failure' (Alexandra Smith, Sun Herald, 15/6/2014); 'Public Schools Pass The Test' (Kim Arlington, Sun Herald, 3/7/2011).

MySchool—The Impact of Public and Transparent National Data

Part of school reform rhetoric in GERM countries includes discourses about transparency with respect to school data. This can be seen particularly in Australia through the 2010 introduction of *MySchool,* a website developed to publish a range of school data (initially focusing mainly on NAPLAN results) and to allow schools to be compared and contrasted with 60 similar schools across the nation. The notion of transparent school data is not a new one, with George W. Bush telling parents in 2003 in the guide to *No Child Left Behind* that teachers 'often failed to give parents objective data about how their children performed' (Hursh, 2013, p. 579). Taking a similar political approach, Kevin Rudd's 2007 election campaign was based on the Education Revolution, one element of which was a promise of increased transparency around school operations and results. Julia Gillard then followed this up during the 2010 election campaign by emphasising the development and launch of the *MySchool* website as an example of her government's commitment to transparency (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). This transparency of data displaces trust in schools and teachers, transferring trust instead to impersonal, ostensibly objective, data (Gorur, 2016, p. 37). *MySchool* was a means of presenting these data to a wider public.

The website's introduction 'officially signalled the open message of high-stakes testing as the prime steering mechanism of school systems in Australia' (Niesche, 2015, p. 136). Taking a similar position, Lingard (2010) indicated that while the Department and government's rhetoric around NAPLAN testing is that they are not high-stakes, their presence underpinning the *MySchool* website indicates otherwise. Lingard and Sellar (2013) noted that NAPLAN can be considered high-stakes due to the potential for reputational damage caused by low performance at a local (school) level, as well as a system level. Polesel, Rice, and Dulfer (2014) synthesised the debate about whether NAPLAN could be considered high-stakes and surmised that it has become high-stakes, although they clarified that there are differences between Australia's high-stakes testing and those tests found in the USA and England. These differences included the effects of the results of the tests on student progression through grade levels (students in the USA being held back depending on performance in the testing) and the approach from governments towards the results of standardised testing. In Australia, unlike other nations where high-stakes testing exists, they argued that the response from the government is to support and develop educational outcomes at these schools, whereas in other nations schools have been sanctioned and restructured due to their performance on standardised testing. Polesel et al. (2014) went on to discuss the differences in reporting results of the testing, one of which is the *MySchool* website and its use.

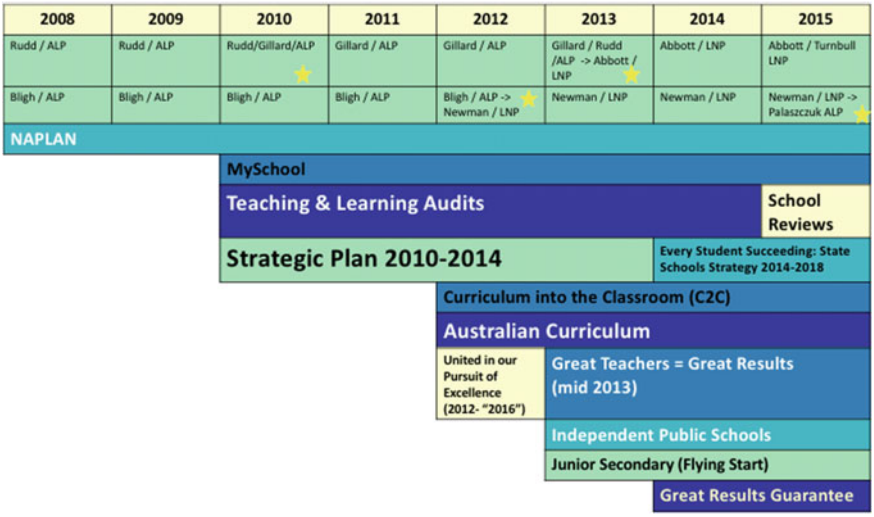
The *MySchool* website was created to publicly display school performance data (most significantly, NAPLAN data) in connection with benchmarks and targets, allowing for comparison of the school data against 60 statistically similar schools across the nation, enabling the enactment of the high-stakes nature of the testing (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Niesche, 2015). Similar schools are identified through the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage [henceforth referred to as ICSEA] score system which takes socio-economic community factors into account and provides a list of statistically similar schools for comparison. NAPLAN data are presented in a range of modes, including what appears to be a 'data for dummies' approach, wherein school averages above the national benchmarks and similar schools are coloured in shades of green, while averages below benchmarks are coloured shades of red.

Researchers argue that the ability to compare schools across the nation is another way the government is constituting a national or federal agenda for education, eschewing the previous boundaries of state jurisdictions. This is part of the previously discussed wider national agenda, also including NAPLAN testing and a national curriculum (Hardy, 2013b; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Niesche, 2015). Researchers have questioned the legitimacy of these comparisons (Cobbold, 2010; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Miller & Voon, 2011), but Thompson and Mockler (2016) found that principals do appreciate some of the opportunities offered by the existence of these types of data.

A significant challenge facing schools is that data are being published in a bid for transparency, but initially without contextualising information to give a holistic picture about the school and its students. After schools raised concerns about public perception and the resulting impact upon their reputation as a direct result of *MySchool*, they were provided with the opportunity to include some contextualising information in the form of a short paragraph at the beginning of the school's profile page. The effectiveness of this additional paragraph must be questioned, given the limited opportunity to provide a clear picture about the intricacies of a school within a short passage of writing. Principals and schools are now 'perpetually assessable subjects' (Niesche, 2015, p. 138) due to the value placed on, as well as the amount and quantitative nature of data readily available to the media as well as to the general public. Researchers (Hardy & Boyle, 2011; Mockler, 2013) have, however, identified that neither the media nor the general public are necessarily trained in data analysis or understand educational concepts and constructs. In Queensland, these external accountabilities and assessments of principals' work are heavily represented in education reform policy ensembles.

Queensland Reforms: The Research Context

To better understand the shared context of these case studies, it is necessary to explore recent reforms affecting state education in Queensland. Figure 1 provides an overview of some the ongoing reforms introduced in Queensland after the introduction of NAPLAN in 2008. The visual representation highlights the increasing expectations after 2008, with a particular intensification from 2010 onwards. The top two rows indicate the government at federal and then state levels, with stars indicating a change in government. This is highlighted because changes of government, as well as disparate parties at a state level and federal level, have been noted



2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rudd / ALP	Rudd / ALP	Rudd/Gillard/ALP ★	Gillard / ALP	Gillard / ALP	Gillard / Rudd /ALP -> Abbott / LNP ★	Abbott / LNP	Abbott / Turnbull LNP
Bligh / ALP	Bligh / ALP	Bligh / ALP	Bligh / ALP	Bligh / ALP -> Newman / LNP ★	Newman / LNP	Newman / LNP	Newman / LNP -> Palaszczuk ALP ★

NAPLAN

MySchool

Teaching & Learning Audits

School Reviews

Strategic Plan 2010-2014

Every Student Succeeding: State Schools Strategy 2014-2018

Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C)

Australian Curriculum

United in our Pursuit of Excellence (2012- "2016")

Great Teachers = Great Results (mid 2013)

Independent Public Schools

Junior Secondary (Flying Start)

Great Results Guarantee

Fig. 1 Reforms and Initiatives in Queensland during the case studies period

as an added level of complexity in reforms (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). Reforms up until 2015 are included in the figure as they influenced the case study schools during the fieldwork period. The visual representation illustrates the ongoing nature of the changes principals in Queensland faced in the years prior to and including the case study period. Where policies or initiatives have been updated, they remain on the same row (e.g. the shift in School Improvement policies from *United in our Pursuit of Excellence*, which was superseded by *Great Teachers = Great Results* upon the election of the new state government). Some of the many reforms that were found to have most closely governed the work of participants in these case studies can be seen in Fig. 1 below.

Major reforms implemented by the federal and state governments impacting upon the work of principals in these case studies have been identified as accountability practices including the introduction of high-stakes testing, a government commitment to transparency of data and the resulting *MySchool* website, an increase in principal autonomy including the introduction of Independent Public Schools, and Queensland-specific external Teaching and Learning Audits.

Pieces of Queensland's Policy Ensemble—NAPLAN Testing as a Catalyst for Major Reform in Queensland

Lingard et al. (2013) noted that testing has become a 'meta-policy' (p. 540), with governments and systems arguing that high-stakes testing will drive up student achievement standards; the rationale being that this will therefore lead to a stronger future economy. At a state level in Queensland, the major impetus for the current reform policy ensemble was Queensland's performance in the inaugural national standardised NAPLAN testing programme in 2008. Queensland's performance on these tests ranked it sixth in the nation, outperforming only the Northern Territory. As a reaction to these results and the ensuing media attention on the issue, Queensland's Government and education authorities implemented a number of responses. The Queensland Studies Authority [QSA],[2] responsible for curriculum and assessment support to both government and independent schools, analysed the NAPLAN results (particularly in regard to Queensland's performance) and indicated that there would need to be an immediate response that would result in short-term improvement to test preparedness and curriculum awareness for students, but also recommended long-term systemic reform (QSA, 2008). The report also indicated that the required systemic reform would have implications for school leadership and curriculum planning and delivery.

The Queensland Government responded to the 2008 NAPLAN results by commissioning Geoff Masters from the Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER] to review Queensland's state primary education system. The purpose of the review was to highlight opportunities to improve educational achievement within the areas of Literacy, Numeracy, and Science. Masters' final report (known colloquially as the Masters Report) included recommendations for testing primary teachers to ensure that they met minimum requirements for Literacy, Numeracy, and Science knowledge, which have been implemented for Literacy and Numeracy from 2016 in part as a response to recommendations from the aforementioned TEMAG report (AITSL, 2014). Other recommendations included targeted professional development for teachers; more funding for specialist teachers in the three focus areas; and an expert review of international best practice in school improvement and leadership development (QDET, 2012).

As a result of the recommendation for an expert review, the Queensland Government engaged school reform consultant Michael Fullan to undertake a system review of Queensland schooling's improvement agenda (QDET, 2012). This school improvement agenda began as a response to the 2008 NAPLAN results, incorporating initiatives focused on lifting student achievement in the Department's schools. Fullan spent a year conducting workshops with key leaders and interviewing principals of Queensland state schools, analysing the effectiveness of the reforms and providing feedback as well as recommending areas for further improvement.

Queensland's school improvement agenda underpins the work currently being undertaken in state schools and forms the basis of these case studies. Much of Education Queensland's improvement agenda has been based on select international research, particularly the work of Michael Fullan. Fullan presented a workshop to Education Queensland employees in 2011 about choosing the 'right' drivers for school reform, indicating during the presentation that the Department was focusing on the right drivers (QDET, 2011), as outlined in *United in our Pursuit*

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[2] The Queensland Studies Authority was rebranded the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority [QCAA] in 2014.

of Excellence, Education Queensland's improvement agenda for state schools. As mentioned, the document explicitly describes school leadership with 'an unrelenting focus on improvement' as one of the main drivers for improvement (QDET, 2011). Whereas Fullan praised the Queensland Government's drivers for reform while engaged as a consultant for the system, other research suggests that the strategies adopted by the Queensland Government, including external audits and an increase in external accountabilities, do not necessarily result in improved outcomes for students (cf. Luginbuhl & Webbink, 2009). This book will focus in part on the ways these discourses of improvement impacted upon school leaders' work under the conditions created by these reform efforts from state and federal governments.

Across Australia, but particularly in Queensland, NAPLAN testing has had a substantial impact upon the climate of accountability and urgency about school improvement. The heavy focus on NAPLAN as an accountability measure led to a constant focus for principals and teachers on managing performance (Hardy, 2014). There are a number of criticisms of NAPLAN (and similar standardised tests) as single point in time ('snapshot'), external tests (Bhattacharyya, Junot, & Clark, 2013; Davidson, 2009), but criticisms of NAPLAN also exist from principals, teachers, and education academics that the tests do not cater for diverse student needs (Dempsey & Davies, 2013; Hardy & Boyle, 2011), and that using the results as a measure of school success may be unfair to those schools and their students who do not fit the 'dominant cultural setting' (Hardy, 2013b, p. 67). Another challenge presented by the use of NAPLAN as the main factor in external accountability is the fact that a student with a disability who is exempt from taking the test will automatically be 'deemed to be below the minimum expected standard for the Year level' (Cumming & Dickson, 2013, p. 228), impacting on the school's overall results. Challenges would also present for students for whom English is an additional language or dialect, including Indigenous students (Lingard, 2013; Wigglesworth, Simpson, & Loakes, 2011). The minimum expected standard and other national benchmarks are not made public to schools until after the testing is complete, causing teachers to be unable to accurately predict how their students might achieve on the tests (Hempenstall, 2009; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012).

These data are still published (without this additional contextualising information included) publicly and in school data sets, which does not reflect a concern with ideologies or rhetoric about inclusive education and can alter perceptions about schools with large numbers of students who have disabilities. Discussions have also been raised about the 'leafy green' schools—a phrase describing schools with high ICSEA scores and few students with additional learning needs or challenges. There is an assumption that these schools would fare better on standardised testing and, indeed, this phrase has made its way into the public vernacular when discussing NAPLAN results (Cormack & Comber, 2013).

Judy's school, Merriwald State School, had a high number of students who fall into the category of students who might be disadvantaged by high-stakes testing practices. A high percentage of students enrolled at Merriwald had complex learning needs, and the school serviced a large number of students with families for whom English is an additional dialect. Hardy (2014) conducted research in a complex school setting and found beliefs from its teachers that NAPLAN was not seen as an accurate measure of their students' true abilities. Like Judy's school, Max's and Scott's schools were both complex settings—Max's school being a low socio-economic status school (transitioning from being a 'leafy green' highly advantaged school) and Scott's being a low socio-economic status rural school.

A very real challenge facing schools—and indeed, school systems—is to keep those disadvantaged or at-risk students, such as those with disabilities (Cumming & Dickson, 2013) or from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ford, 2013; Klenowski, 2009; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012) at the forefront of their planning, pedagogies, and core business in order to ensure equity in education, when high-stakes testing disadvantages these students. The implementation of such high-stakes testing should be undertaken cautiously for this very reason.

One major challenge of using high-stakes testing as a major method of accountability is the integrity of the resulting data. I have previously discussed the disadvantages posed by NAPLAN for students with diverse learning needs, as well as schools with large enrolments of students who do not fit the 'dominant cultural setting' as described by Hardy (2013a, p. 67). Two other major challenges exist to the integrity of NAPLAN data—firstly, challenges presented by schools manipulating results and secondly, a wider challenge presented by systems manipulating their targets and goals to ensure perceived success. As discussed previously, there was significant pressure placed upon the state government of Queensland to improve student outcomes after the 2008 NAPLAN tests.

Lingard and Sellar (2013) commented upon the way NAPLAN tests have become high-stakes for systems as well as schools, outlining the fact that systems are beginning to manipulate these data and their targets or goal settings in order to ensure that they can claim to have achieved success. This is likely due to the political pressures created by high-stakes testing (Hursh, 2013) and the intense media scrutiny of the NAPLAN tests each year (Cumming & Dickson, 2013; Gonzales & Firestone, 2013; Lingard & McGregor, 2013). NAPLAN data (and high-stakes testing data in other countries) can be manipulated at a systemic level but is also manipulated at a school level at times.

Impact of High-Stakes Testing Regimes—The Manipulation of Data

Luke and Woods (2008) described responses to high-stakes testing in the USA where schools were inflating their test scores by excluding students who they predicted would perform poorly. A similar trend has occurred in Australia, where numbers of students sitting the test allegedly dropped after the results began to be published (Topsfield, 2012). A review of media reports related to this issue shows the media reporting that a number of schools excused or exempted students who would potentially lower their overall results. This is also supported by reports from the Australian

Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], the body overseeing the implementation of NAPLAN testing (ACARA, 2012). This manipulation of the data is seen as a covert form of cheating, yet there are just as many reports of schools, and teachers, breaking the rules more overtly. These tactics have included opening the tests early (noted as a 'security breach'), providing extra assistance to students (which might include scribes, extra time, guidance in answering questions, leaving posters up around the room), or even changing student answers after the test (ACARA, 2011, 2012, 2013). The high-stakes nature of NAPLAN no doubt contributes to these breaches of testing guidelines. The issue also potentially becomes one of financial fraud when funding is attached to the data, and there have been reported incidents of school teachers and leaders being disciplined or even charged as a result (ACARA, 2011, 2012, 2013).

Scholars have also explored the manipulation of data as a response to high-stakes testing, including Cumming and Mawdesley (2013), Shine and O'Donoghue (2013), and Thompson and Cook (2012) who highlighted the ways NAPLAN data can be manipulated. Aligning with the overt rule-breaking described above, strategies included actual manipulation of answers and changes to the classroom to ensure 'useful information is available' (Thompson & Cook, 2012, p. 135) to students taking the tests (in the forms of posters, charts, or maps), as well as more covert approaches such as targeted teaching to prepare for the test and the manipulation of student population through student withdrawal, encouragement of parental withdrawal from the tests, or even disciplining students to ensure they are unable to sit the tests.

Responses to the high-stakes nature of NAPLAN testing from schools also takes the form of 'unintended consequences' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012), including narrowing of pedagogies or curriculum to secure better results on the test, or changing of organisational cultures at a systemic or school level. The narrowing of pedagogies and curriculum can occur in high-stakes accountability climates and includes a lack of attention being paid to key learning areas outside of those tested, more focus on rote learning and, as a result, less on higher order thinking and vital social skills, and a change in the way schools approach student support. These, among other 'perverse effects' of high-stakes testing (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) including a narrowed focus on education, are particularly evident in the case studies in this book.

Shifts in organisational cultures are more imperceptible when compared to some of the more overt methods of manipulating the test data described above, but these shifts have included a climate of fear and pressure for principals and teachers to lift results (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). This culminated in reports of alleged stress caused by district or regional office and a resulting fear that principals could lose their jobs if their results did not improve (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). These issues, at a school level and at a system level, impact upon the validity of the data used in NAPLAN testing. The concerns raised by practitioners in Lingard and Sellar's study (2013) about 'gaming' the process could easily be applied to schools as well as systems.

The relationship between high-stakes testing and its impact upon student results is inconclusive. Therefore, lowering the stakes attached to NAPLAN and following the lead from successful systems such as Finland and Ontario, as suggested by Luke and

Woods (2008) in implementing functional diagnostic testing, would provide far more useful data sets that could be used by teachers to quickly diagnose student learning needs or areas of focus. This would contrast with the current circumstance of waiting for data that were collected in May and not provided to schools until September each year. In this sense, some schools (and certainly each of the three schools in this research project) already claim to be framing NAPLAN this way—as another piece of information in a bigger data picture, rather than relying on it entirely to provide information about their students (Hardy, 2013b; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2011). During the time in which this research was undertaken in Queensland, this practice of wider data collection was one expectation being measured through external Teaching and Learning Audits to ensure that schools were complying with assessment and reporting framework policies.

Pieces of Queensland's Policy Ensemble—External Teaching and Learning Audits

The Queensland Government implemented Teaching and Learning Audits in 2010 as a response to the Masters Report, discussed earlier in this chapter. This audit process was developed to align with ACER's improvement framework, the *Teaching and Learning School Improvement Framework* (ACER, 2013). Experienced principals travelled to each school in Queensland completing Teaching and Learning Audits of the school's practices in 2010 and have continued to do so on a planned four-year schedule since then, with audits also undertaken outside of this four-year schedule when a new principal is appointed or when a school requests an audit. The audit is intended to provide a picture of the school's position in a number of areas seen as being valuable for school improvement, including curriculum delivery, expertise of the teaching staff, a clear improvement agenda, differentiation for student needs, and the effective analysis and use of data. Schools are rated on a continuum ranging from Low, Medium or High to Outstanding for each criterion.[3]

The literature presents mixed positions with reference to these types of external audits. While some researchers have argued that an internal self-evaluation would be more effective (Mårtsin, Singh, & Glasswell, 2012), others have suggested that this type of external evaluation provides a clearer picture of the school's position (Vanhoof & Van Petegem, 2007). External evaluations such as this have been ongoing for many years, previously taking the form of school inspectors in Queensland (Logan & Clarke, 1984) and now being undertaken as part of the Queensland Government's improvement agenda. Researchers have challenged the assumption that inspection or external evaluation is an effective method towards achieving school improvement goals (Hargreaves, 1997; Mårtsin et al., 2012; Thrupp, 1998). Indeed, Luginbuhl and Webbink (2009) found that inspections undertaken in the Netherlands in a similar manner did not have much, if any, impact upon improving student outcomes. However, recent research (Mills et al., 2014) has highlighted the potential for these external audits, as part of a wider audit culture (Power, 1994; Strathern, 1997), to open up dialogue about effective practices. Although Mills et al.'s (2014) discussion pertained to differentiated learning, the principle lends itself to the possibility of opening up a dialogue about any of the domains within the audit tool.

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[3] Teaching and Learning Audits have since been renamed to 'School Reviews', although the process uses the same auditing tool, is undertaken at the same interval, and by the same groups of auditors (now termed 'reviewers'). I maintain the use of the 'Teaching and Learning Audit' nomenclature to align with the data collected, as the process was still in place during the fieldwork phase of this study.

One argument for the continuation of external audits such as those described in the previous chapter is linked directly to accountability—the public's right to know about the effectiveness of public schools (Nevo, 2001), which aligns with the government's stated commitment to transparency about schools and school data (Zanderigo, Dowd, & Turner, 2012). However, it is vital to note that this transparency can and, indeed, has resulted in the compilation and publication of league tables ranking schools in order of their results on these external audits (Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Mills et al., 2014). As a result of the publication of these league tables by Queensland's major newspaper, the *Courier Mail*, in 2012, the Queensland Teachers' Union [QTU] placed a moratorium on participating in the Teaching and Learning Audits until they could be guaranteed that data would not be presented in such a way that it would be easy to produce league tables in the future. The compromise reached between the union and the Department was that schools would no longer be given overall rankings in each category. However, examination of the public documents (required to be uploaded to schools' websites) shows that schools are still ranked against the same ratings in each domain, just not awarded an official overall rating.

Lingard and Sellar (2013) noted the potential that these audits have for 'goal displacement', away from improved NAPLAN results, by which they meant that schools could potentially focus more on achieving well on the audits rather than continuing with the initial specific focus on student achievement on external or standardised testing. After analysing the audit domains, one region found that only three of the audit domains would have a direct impact upon student achievement in NAPLAN (Lingard & Sellar, 2013), although Mills et al. (2014) highlighted other possible positive outcomes of the audit regime, including opening up a dialogue aimed towards socially just education. While I contend that NAPLAN should not be the main measure of school success, the fact remains that NAPLAN is high-stakes for Queensland schools, as well as the Queensland system, with a significant amount of accountability and funding attached to it. Thus, Lingard and Sellar's (2013) comments about goal displacement are worth noting as a possible challenge for schools and the system as a whole, particularly with the added pressure of accountability-driven publicly reported audit results for each school, alongside publicly reported NAPLAN results.

One important element of a successful external evaluation scheme is taking the local context into account (Nevo 2001). This might take the form of incorporating school-based data into the audit process, or of allowing schools to develop their own intervention plans. Much of the school improvement literature emphasises the importance of considering the local context when making decisions. Each school's improvement agenda is drawn from an analysis of their own data (including NAPLAN results, annual School Opinion Surveys of students, parents and staff, and internal monitoring data) as well as school community consultation and the results of the teaching and learning audits undertaken in each school. The improvement agenda outlines the priorities for each school's focus on improvement as well as specific targets and timelines. These are localised to school contexts and should reflect each individual school's areas of need.

Reynolds's (2005) argument that school improvement must be tailored to school contexts, and Harris's argument (2001) that there is no 'one size fits all' blueprint for school improvement link directly to Education Queensland's requirement for all schools to participate in a Teaching and Learning Audit and develop an explicit improvement agenda localised to their own school context. This focus on each school's context and needs can also be linked to a heavier focus on autonomy for principals. Despite the fact that autonomy has been a focus of school reforms for many years in Queensland, more recently it has become even more explicit in policy documents and implementation, with the introduction of the Independent Public Schools [IPS] programme, in which Scott's school participated.

Pieces of Queensland's Policy Ensemble—Independent Public Schools

In June 2012, the Queensland Government announced that it would be introducing 124 Independent Public Schools over the next four years, with an intention to introduce 30 schools in 2013 (Australian Associated Press, 2012) and increasing those numbers in the following years. The government's intentions, broadcast to the media, were that the introduction of Independent Public Schools would provide schools with more localised control over budgeting and staffing; cut through red tape (which echoed much of that government's rhetoric about the Queensland public service and bureaucracy); and provide principals with more autonomy to make decisions about their schools (Chilcott, 2012; Kane, Nancarrow, & Bavas, 2012). Claims about removing bureaucracy from schools were also made by the Western Australian Government when promoting their IPS programme (Gray, Campbell-Evans, & Leggett, 2013). These claims were further supported by the government's comments in the media that the programme would allow schools to attract 'better' teachers (although no clarification was provided about what this meant or how teachers were being rated, prompting recollections to earlier discussions of 'teacher quality' instead of 'teaching quality') and to create 'innovative educational programmes' which would lead to school improvement (Ironside, 2012, para. 3).

However, the argument that Independent Public Schools would lead to school improvement has been challenged by researchers who suggest that the programme would lead to increased workloads for principals and teachers, a shift in the dynamics of teaching and learning as well as school culture (not necessarily for the better), and also to more challenges in terms of staffing, budgeting, and maintenance (Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2011; Ironside, 2012; Trimmer, 2013). The QTU as well as the ALP's Queensland shadow education minister (then in Opposition to the LNP government) argued that schools could potentially preserve budgets by hiring younger, less experienced teachers and outsourcing maintenance of school facilities and IT support (Ironside, 2012).

The Independent Public Schools programme is an example of the enactment of neoliberal policies in state schooling. By emulating the private schooling system, there is also an implication that the private sector way of working is more effective than government-controlled schooling. Trimmer (2013) described Independent Public Schools as being similar to Charter schools in America and Academy Schools in England due to their higher levels of autonomy, the practice of modifying pre-existing public schools, and the external accountabilities these schools are required to meet. Neoliberal discourses of choice and private enterprise models surrounding programmes like Independent Public Schools are troubling for researchers, who have raised concerns about privatising education, that there are few positive impacts for student learning outcomes through these approaches, and that market-driven approaches serve advantaged schools well but further disadvantage schools already in disadvantaged positions (Caldwell, 2008; Gobby, 2013; Lingard et al., 2002). However, alternative viewpoints about the potentially positive impacts of higher levels of school autonomy have also been posed by researchers, suggesting that the ability to focus on local needs is a key element in improving teaching and learning practices (Keddie, 2014).

Those opposing Queensland's adoption of the programme have referred to the government of Western Australia's introduction of a similar programme in 2009, which resulted in over one-third of schools operating as Independent Public Schools by 2013 (Department of Education, Western Australia, 2013; ABC News, 2013). Queensland's then Premier, the LNP's Campbell Newman, indicated that Queensland's Independent Public Schools initiative would be modelled on that of Western Australia's programme (Australian Education Union, 2012). Newman's government, however, highlighted key differences between the IPS programme in Queensland and Western Australia.

The programme was criticised in Western Australia for leading to a breakdown in their teacher transfer system (Ironside, 2012). This is important to note because the QTU launched a media campaign against the IPS programme, citing teacher transfers as being an area that has suffered from the programme; union representatives note that it is more difficult for teachers to transfer within the existing system due to IPS schools being able to recruit staff directly (Bousen, 2014). However, the evaluation of the IPS programme undertaken by the Western Australian Government highlighted positive feedback from schools about being able to decide whether to accept transfer teachers (Melbourne Graduate School of Education, 2013).

Queensland's state school system, however, relies heavily on the transfer system to engage teachers to undertake 'country service' in areas that are more difficult to staff due to rurality or remoteness. The QTU argued in the mainstream media that 'many, many teachers' want to return to Queensland's desirable Sunshine Coast (Chilcott, 2012, para. 4) but with six large Independent Public Schools being situated in the area, this would become much more difficult. The LNP Newman government's Minister for Education was quoted in 2012 as assuring Queensland teachers that transfers would not be an issue under the programme, a contradiction from the assertions made by the QTU in 2014 (Ironside, 2012).

The QTU argued that the Western Australian programme has been a failure (Ironside, 2012), but results of research undertaken about the programme have varied. It is important to acknowledge that two of the main reports to be focused on here, which outline the negative impacts of Independent Public Schools, were commissioned by unions, who could be perceived as having an interest in ensuring that schools remain more tightly under government control. Indeed, in 2012 the Queensland Premier, the LNP's Campbell Newman dismissed the *Putting the Public First* report because it was commissioned by unions (Australian Education Union, 2012) and it has been noted that his LNP government had a contentious relationship with unions (Bailey, 2012, 2013; Brace, 2013).

This report, undertaken by the Curtin Graduate School of Business on behalf of UnionsWA (Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2011) focuses specifically on the impacts of the Western Australian IPS programme. The second report, prepared by the Australian Education Union (Australian Education Union, 2012), focuses more on compiling a range of literature surrounding the general themes of school-based decision making and principal autonomy, which aligns with the IPS programme. Major themes to emerge from the two reports include a lack of evidence that the programme in various incarnations has led to improved student outcomes, and that school autonomy has often led to a wider gap between high- and low-performing schools (Australian Education Union, 2012; Fitzgerald & Rainnie, 2011). This echoes previous comments that this form of autonomy can potentially lead to increased disadvantage for already disadvantaged schools.

Conversely, and representative of the complex and layered nature of education reform initiatives, other research has shown positive impacts of the Independent Public Schools programme. Trimmer (2013) argued that principals felt more committed in self-managed schools and demonstrated higher levels of job satisfaction. This was echoed by the report evaluating the programme in Western Australia, which indicated that motivation among teachers and principals rose in Independent Public Schools (ABC News, 2013; Melbourne Graduate School of Education, 2013). Trimmer (2013) found that the IPS programme worked best for schools whose needs did not align with central office policies and strategic plans. This is reflective of the Queensland Government's aim of allowing Independent Public Schools to cater more closely to the needs of their individual contexts.

The report's findings also aligned with research showing that principals in self-managed schools acknowledged increased workloads, but that it did not impact upon their satisfaction with programmes providing more autonomy (Caldwell, 2008; Melbourne Graduate School of Education, 2013). This increased workload reflects a major theme of this book, which is how principals see their role in balancing the workload of 'administrivia' with the espoused focus of being an instructional leader in their schools. As will be seen in these case studies, Queensland's IPS principals are required to participate in an independent review every four years, develop a performance plan with the Director General of Education Queensland, and undertake an annual performance review. Principals are also expected to align with the same systemic data monitoring and reporting requirements as their non-Independent colleagues (QDET, 2013). Such management structures are technologies of performance that steer the work of principals at a distance (Dean, 1999) because they serve to guide or govern principals' work.

There is an emerging body of research on the IPS programme in the Western Australian context but given that the implementation of the IPS programme in Queensland commenced in 2013, little research is currently available on the impact of this particular programme regarding principals' interpretation of their roles. This book therefore contributes to this area of the literature by providing an understanding of how a focus on autonomy impacted upon the principalship in the Queensland context, as well as how Scott worked within the Independent Public Schools programme.

Conclusion

The current pressures of globalised urgent reform policies, and expectations of principals from governments and school systems demonstrate that today's principals need to be able to cope with rapid and ongoing changes in discourses about leadership, including a current focus on providing instructional leadership for improved student outcomes against the metrics valued by the system. Cooley and Shen's (2003, p. 10) comment that principals in reform climates have been placed 'in the eye of the storm' vividly illustrates the complexities faced by principals in these rapidly changing environments.

This chapter has established that since 2008, Queensland state school principals have encountered sweeping reforms and the ongoing introduction of multiple policies and initiatives measuring and governing their work. Initiatives particularly influencing participants have included the launch of the Independent Public Schools programme and the introduction of external audits. These policies often replace or update previous policies, but rarely are these initiatives removed; rather, the number of policies and initiatives governing principals' work seems to be continually increasing. This means that principals are frequently responding to requirements from the Department that have public consequences to their schools, with the proliferation of policies and initiatives seeking to measure the work undertaken in schools. This commitment to public and transparent school data serves as a feature of many reform initiatives. The public nature of the measurement of quality and effectiveness leads to heightened public pressure and accountability for principals as a result.

As noted in the previous chapter, key discourses currently influencing the role of the principal include accountability, autonomy, and instructional leadership, all of which emerged strongly from the literature as shaping the current role of the principal. Gaps within the literature in this chapter include a limited understanding of the impact of the Independent Public Schools programme in regard to autonomy and accountability, and how principals are constructed under these conditions. This book offers contemporary and contextualised contributions to this area of research.

We shift now into the stories that emerged from the case studies. In the next chapter, I will introduce Max, Judy, and Scott, and provide some contextual information about their schools and their work as principals. This grounds the forthcoming chapters which delve into the different ways they enact the Principalship and related school improvement policy ensembles that were introduced in Chap. 2 and 3.

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Chapter 4
Max, Judy, and Scott

In this chapter, we will get to know the case study principals Max, Judy, and Scott. In addition to the three principals, I interviewed Richard and Tracy. Richard, an Assistant Regional Director (ARD), had worked closely with each of these principals for a decade, and Tracy, a Regional Project Officer whose role focused mainly on working with school leadership teams towards school improvement, had also worked with these principals over many years. Their perspectives provided further information about the contexts (both local and systemic) in which Max, Judy, and Scott worked.

These case studies focused on Max, Judy, and Scott, three experienced principals from Queensland public primary schools. I followed these principals for an 18-month period spanning three school years, interviewing and observing them in their schools, as well as performing document analysis on relevant school documents such as school operational plans, annual reports, and school data. Due to my previous role as a state school principal in the same region, I already had varying levels of contact and relationships with each of the three principals, ranging from 'knowing about' Judy through the proverbial grapevine, to working alongside Max in a range of roles and locations, and working closely with Scott over a number of years. This enabled me to enter into the research partnership already having established relationships and a shared background or context with all three case study principals.

I drew upon my existing networks to recruit participants and aimed to work with principals from a range of school contexts but soon realised the importance of a shared local policy and discourse context for this particular study, so I decided to restrict my recruitment to a single geographical region. Max, as a former senior leader, would bring a different perspective to the principalship and had previously offered his participation in the project. Scott had also previously offered to participate and had recently returned to his school after secondment into a principal mentoring role. Soon after that, his school was accepted into the IPS programme, so I was aware that he would bring a unique perspective to his work due to these combined factors. Judy was the final key participant I recruited and she was less known to me; however, I was aware of her deep commitment to a holistic education and believed this would bring another perspective to the case studies. Due in part to her commitment to

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developing leaders, she saw an opportunity to influence the principalship through her participation and was very open to joining the study when I approached her.

Richard and Tracy were invited to participate due to their work with each of the three principals. Richard was one of the longest standing ARDs in the region and had worked extensively with each of the participants for a number of years. Due to our pre-existing working relationship, Richard was supportive of the project, and Tracy was approached as she had been seconded to work with each of the schools in a school improvement capacity and was completing her Ph.D. at the time, which may have positively influenced her willingness to participate as a fellow researcher.

Shared Context—The Region

Max, Judy, and Scott shared a wider context of working as public school primary school principals and they also shared a more localised context, working within the same region. This means that many of the initiatives within the region impacted upon all three of them, such as the region's required focus on certain areas. These specific expectations were set out in a formal regional policy document, the *Charter of Expectations,*[1] and included the adoption of explicit instruction as a school-wide approach, a requirement for principals to make 'purposeful use of data', and a micro-level of school management which included a focus on bookwork and classroom displays.

The region was characterised by a large number of small rural, remote, or isolated schools, as well as many beginning principals, the majority of whom were in their early years of their career and had taught for only a few years prior to taking on the principalship. A large number of small schools and beginning principals have resulted in frequent movement of staff and leadership among schools, and Richard characterised the region as having a significant and regular turnover of leadership in schools. This meant that Max, Judy, and Scott were in relatively rare positions, having been in their schools for comparably longer periods than many of their colleagues, as well as having had many years of experience in the principalship. Research (Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna, 2007) indicates that principals who have been in their schools for a longer period of time (such as the participants in these case studies) feel more autonomy than other principals as a result. Schools within the region ranged from those with very wealthy and traditional communities where a number of generations have attended the same school; to relatively newer schools in recently established planned communities in regional centres; to schools in isolated towns that once may have been thriving but boasted empty buildings and very small populations at the time of this research.

In our initial interviews, I asked Scott, Judy, and Max to describe their school and the factors that made their school community unique. Interestingly, each principal referred regularly to their ICSEA score when describing their schools and their school communities. With this in mind, an explanation of the ICSEA score system is first necessary to contextualise the principals' comments in forthcoming chapters.

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[1] The *Charter of Expectations* is a policy document created by the region that is not publicly accessible. I was provided with access to the Charter during my interview with Richard.

ICSEA Scores

ICSEA scores were introduced briefly in Chap. 3. Each school is allocated a number based on a scale of educational advantage, with the allocated number representing the average student within the school. The index was designed to enable comparisons of schools across the nation, providing schools with 60 similar (or 'like') schools, based on commonalities measured by the rating system. The intention of the score was to enable a less 'crude' comparison of data than merely comparing schools using NAPLAN performance (Gorur, 2016, p. 32). These commonalities incorporate aspects from school demographic data as well as census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics such as the school's location, the socio-economic background of students at the school, their parents' occupation and education, and the percentage of Indigenous students enrolled in the school (ACARA, 2011b).

Questions have been raised regarding the effectiveness of these ratings, offering the contested nature of the influence of some of the aspects included in the formula, as well as variations between schools in terms of pedagogy, leadership, and school resourcing (Miller & Voon, 2011) as reasons that comparison may not be entirely effective. Indeed, Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2012) drew upon previous research to determine that the level of certainty in relation to public confidence in the measures published on *MySchool* was 'ill-founded' (p. 72) due to reliability issues with these comparisons. Interestingly, however, while the scale was designed to enable comparison of schools, it appears to have been appropriated by participants as one means of representing the complexities faced by their students and the school as a whole. Each principal referred to their ICSEA score to explain some of the complexities of their school and school community, using it as a means of contextualising the information they provided.

Max—Ironcliff State School

Max was principal at Ironcliff State School, a school in the same regional city as Merriwald, servicing approximately 900 students from Prep to Year 7. Max had been principal at Ironcliff since 2012, previously holding a wide range of senior leadership positions within the organisation and returning to Ironcliff to spend the final years of his career in a school, to 'practice what [he] had been preaching.' Ironcliff is the oldest of the case study schools (and, indeed, one of the oldest schools in the region) and brings with it a significant amount of tradition and history. During the case study period, the school community was experiencing a state of flux as the clientele shifted from primarily wealthy families to a lower socio-economic community with a lower ICSEA score, bringing a new range of challenges and complexities with it. Max described the school, commenting that:

> [Ironcliff is] unique in as much as it's struggling to deal with the transition for moving from a truly leafy green school in 2007 for example – from 2005 to 2007, when there were a high number of BMWs arriving to pick kids up every afternoon, and when the residents in the community were long term residents, moving to a transition towards a lower ICSEA rating underpinned by an absolute surge in the increase in the number of rentals in the area. And so therefore we are becoming lower in socioeconomic status and there are aspects of our school community – parents **and** some staff who are finding that a difficult transition to manage.

Max described the shift as being something that more established members of the school community were slowly coming to terms with, as well as many of the teachers at Ironcliff. The complexities Max described included a higher number of children with custody orders, further learning support needs, and higher level Department of Child Safety notifications, which 'would not have happened in [the] school prior to 2008'. Max wanted to clarify that this was not seen as him 'making excuses', but rather acknowledging that it was a feature of the school community that meant the school was working on enhancing its inclusive education strategies to cater for more varied student learning and emotional needs.

Max added that while these complexities did exist for the school and its community, the school still had a very high level of family and community support, due in part to the traditional heritage and Ironcliff's long history within the city.

Judy—Merriwald State School

Judy was principal at Merriwald State School, a school that services approximately 550 students from Prep to Year 6. Located in a large regional city, Merriwald is a more recently established school, having been built in the mid-1990s, but it has developed an extremely strong school culture and school community, initially through participation in a project run by a group of university researchers consulting and working with schools to develop shared visions and school-wide pedagogy and planning processes. Since Judy arrived at Merriwald in 2007, developing and embedding this school culture was a major focus of her work. Judy described the school as being an anomaly, because the relatively new (and impeccably maintained) grounds and facilities made visitors assume that the school serviced what she described as a 'higher bracket' of clientele. In actuality, she emphasised that the school's ICSEA score was in the 26th percentile, meaning that, according to the ICSEA algorithm, 74% of school communities in Australia were more privileged than Merriwald's school community.

The school serviced a large number of students with families for whom English is a second language, as well as:

> a lot of children in care, […] a lot of children from some really difficult backgrounds, and some blended families that create a lot of complexities within the school, and then on top of

> that we have the large Special Education Program and that creates a lot of complexity there too, and a high percentage – we're way above the percentage that would normally be in a school. We've got 10% [of students with special needs] and they say it would normally only be about 4-5% in a school.

In addition, Merriwald's strengths in celebrating diversity and catering for the needs of diverse learners resulted in a reputation that meant they had actually been attracting students from further afield who presented with varied needs. Students passed by other schools within the city to attend Merriwald, and some families even moved from more urban centres in order to attend Merriwald due to positive recommendations or referrals from current and past students and families or carers.

Judy and the Merriwald community placed significant importance on the concept of holistic education and on providing students with the opportunity to participate in a range of cultural activities including musicals, Opti-Minds,[2] and annual Eisteddfods. Judy indicated that she had received positive feedback from students and parents on their participation in these types of activities over the years and she felt strongly that these types of endeavours should still be included in the curriculum, so much so that the school explored alternative or 'creative' ways of working with what she described as a crowded curriculum to ensure students were able to access these learning experiences.

Scott—Mount Pleasant State School

Scott has been the principal of Mount Pleasant State School, a regional Queensland school with an enrolment of approximately 170 students from Prep to Year 7, since 2003. ICSEA data for Mount Pleasant indicates that the majority of students come from a low socio-economic background, with the school receiving a lower than average ICSEA score. The town and surrounding area of Mount Pleasant experienced a mining boom in 2011/12 and this had a significant impact on the school, which experienced declining enrolments for the first time in many years as families moved away from the town in order to take advantage of the high sale prices of local houses, and an influx of miners and mining companies took over the available accommodation. This also had a negative impact upon staffing at the school, with teacher numbers decreasing each year since 2010 based on declining student enrolments.

This decline in enrolments was compounded in 2015 when Queensland's schools changed their structure, and Year 7 (traditionally undertaken at primary school) was moved to high school. This resulted in the school losing two cohorts of students (approximately 50 students) at once. It was the only primary school available to students living in Mount Pleasant and worked in partnership with Mount Pleasant State High School to enable positive transitions for students moving from primary to high school. Both the primary school and high school have won statewide awards for excellence in schooling and in leadership for positive initiatives aimed to increase student achievement and engagement. Not only did Mount Pleasant work to provide students with positive transitions from primary to secondary schooling, they were also involved with one of the local kindergartens in developing a pre-prep programme designed to prepare students with basic schooling routines as well as literacy and numeracy skills for their entry to prep so that students were ‘ready to learn’ (in Scott’s words) when they arrive.

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[2] Opti-Minds is an annual competition focused on critical and creative thinking. Judy has volunteered and played a significant role in facilitating this competition at a regional level for a number of years.

Mount Pleasant, under Scott’s leadership, was an early participant in the Independent Public Schools (IPS) project. Mount Pleasant was one of the few schools accepted to participate in the early stages of the IPS project, which provided Scott with a higher level of formalised autonomy than his local colleagues and the other principals in this book. Scott exercised this higher level of autonomy in a range of ways, including minimising what he saw as a crowded curriculum so that his school focused primarily on teaching English, Maths, and Science. Other subjects such as History, Studies of Society and Environment, and Art were incorporated sparingly where they were deemed appropriate but were not assessed or reported on. This provided another level of complexity to the case study, where Queensland principals were working in an environment where they were encouraged to do ‘whatever they need’, according to Scott, in order to increase student achievement.

Additional Participants: Richard and Tracy

Richard—Assistant Regional Director

During the research design process, I sought out other participants who could provide a bigger picture of the context in which principals were working, affording a deeper understanding of the issues and pressures facing principals that could potentially have influenced their conceptualisation of the principalship. Given that the focus was on principals’ conceptualisations of their roles, the key data were drawn from Max, Judy, and Scott themselves; however, I also interviewed Richard, an Assistant Regional Director (ARD) within the region, and supervisor to two of the principals in the case study. Richard’s insights provided further detail about the systemic context and expectations surrounding principals at the time in question.

narrowed at timesAs with the other participants, I had a pre-existing working relationship with Richard for a number of years and this was beneficial, as I was more easily able to secure an interview with him. During the time that we spoke, I was able to engage in deeper conversation than I may have had with someone else, given that our shared background negated the need to work through the usual establishing questions during the interview. One very minor drawback to this was that our shared experience was mainly about small schools, and so the focus of our conversation narrowed at times on these schools and principals. Richard had been an ARD in the region for over ten years during the case study period and was a principal for many years before taking up the ARD position, so he was able to describe the changes he had seen regarding expectations on principals, as well as the changes he had seen in systemic priorities.

Tracy—Regional Project Officer

In addition to working with Richard, I conducted an interview with Tracy, a Regional Project Officer, who worked with schools to support their school improvement journeys. Substantively a principal on secondment herself, Tracy's work differed significantly depending on the school with which she was working. At some schools, she worked solely with principals; at others with leadership teams; at others still she worked with the entire staff. Her focus was primarily on the purposeful use of data (one of the key regional 'pillars'), coaching, and leadership development.

At the time of our interview, Tracy was at the very beginning of her own Ph.D. journey, focusing on principals' strategic decision-making about school improvement, which is important to note here because this framed her responses and her work in this space. Her responses were very much grounded in theory and research. While other participants referred to literature or research confidently sometimes, at other times these references were vague and the principal was unsure about who exactly they were talking about (e.g., Scott was discussing a theory and concluded that 'I think it was maybe Hattie?' who had developed said theory). Tracy's comments, however, were heavily grounded in contemporary research due to her immersion in relevant literature. Tracy used educational research to inform her practice and had done so for many years. Working closely with Richard and the other ARDs in the region, she also engaged in regular discussions with them about theory and the literature that related to relevant aspects of their work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced participants and provided contextualising details that are intended to enable readers to develop a bigger picture understanding of the environments in which Max, Judy, and Scott worked. The next chapters shift now to the case studies themselves, analysing key themes arising from the study using the theoretical framework described in Chap. 1, with a particular focus on performativity and the sociology of numbers.

In the next chapter, I present an analysis of the data that arose about the current influences on the principalship within the wider case context of the shared region in Queensland. In particular, I focus on the pressures identified by participants as influencing their work at that point in time. Key issues include the discourses discussed in the previous chapter including accountability and autonomy, an emphasis on data, and shifts in expectations of leadership approaches and focus for principals.

The data also highlighted that there was a lack of clarity for principals about how to actually enact some of these requirements. I discuss the impact this lack of clarity has had on constructs of the principalship and how this heightened pressure influenced participants' beliefs and practices as school leaders.

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Chapter 5
The Evolving Nature of the Principalship: Pressures Created by Rapid School Improvement Reforms

> *It has all changed completely. There's a lot of demands, and we've found that there's more and more where they demand so much.*
>
> —Judy

As is evidenced by the analysis undertaken thus far about the global, national, and local policy influences on the principalship, principals are working within a context of rapidly shifting expectations and external pressures. Researchers have argued that there is a need for a deeper understanding of the role of the principal in times of rapid or immense reform (Cranston, 2013; Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010; Hardy, 2014; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Murphy noted in 1994 that the jobs of principals who were seriously attending to school reform initiatives were becoming increasingly complicated between expanding workloads, a more diverse range of skills expected of principals, and a significant change expected in behaviours and routines for principals. Given that school reform initiatives have only intensified since Murphy made this statement, I contend that the role has become even more complicated and unclear for principals today. This chapter contributes to contemporary understandings of educational leadership by exploring the significant influences on the principalship under current policy conditions.

The Impact of Policy Reforms on the Principalship

Harris (2012) noted that at a school level, all change flows through the principal's office. Finnigan (2010) and Fullan (2007) echoed this notion, and principals are significantly affected by the range of initiatives being implemented in many coun-

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tries in the current global climate of reform (Hopkins, 2013; Minarechová, 2012; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010). As argued at the time by Murphy (1994) and Bradley (1992), principals in the USA had experienced more change by the 1990s under school reform initiatives than any other group involved in education. As a result, the role of the principal expanded, shifted focus, and was reshaped in response to these ongoing changes. Although this referred to principals in the USA, Australian school reform movements were also experiencing significant changes and Caldwell (1992) expressed concerns at the time that principals who tried to take on the frequent reform initiatives could become overwhelmed, providing insight into the level of change experienced by Australian principals as well. Murphy and Bradley's comments about the centrality of the principal in school reform efforts, now over 20 years old, have been echoed by findings from more recent research (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Niesche, 2011; Whitaker, 2003).

As more changes are implemented across education systems, so too the principalship is evolving to meet these new needs (Brown, 2005; Sahid, 2004; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Stronge et al. (2008) suggested that while researchers can identify the major elements of principals' work, not a great deal is known about how this is carried out in practice. In addition, Hardy (2014) found that little research had been conducted into how principals made sense of their work under current policy conditions. This book provides a clearer understanding of the principalship in the light of reform discourses and policies and explores some of the practices through which these policies and discourses are enacted.

Having established in earlier chapters that the role of the principal is not clearly defined in the current period of sustained rapid reforms, I now shift towards an exploration of how school improvement and leadership discourses influenced the principalship in each of these case studies. The data provided insights into participants' conceptualisations of the principalship and the ways discourses of educational leadership shaped their subjectivities. The sense of pressure felt by participants is explored in this chapter in particular, because it influenced their perceptions and behaviours when they enacted the ensemble of policies governing their work. Foregrounding this exploration of the principalship in this chapter enables a more nuanced analysis of specific discourses and aspects of the principalship in the forthcoming chapters.

Given that the participants' policy landscape was constituted through a shared context of being principals in state schools with similar demographics in the same Queensland region, it was not entirely surprising that these pressures were consistently evident in responses from the three key participants, as well as in responses from additional participants Richard and Tracy (currently working as an ARD and project officer in the same region, respectively). Max, Judy, and Scott had all been working as principals for many years, and Tracy and Richard had also previously worked as principals, giving all participants a strong insight into the evolving nature of the role over time. Interestingly, although the literature noted a move towards greater autonomy for principals as one of the fundamental changes to the role (Caldwell, 2008; Queensland Department of Education and Training [QDET], 2013), it was not an area described by participants as being particularly challenging in and of itself. Rather, increases in autonomy were seen as presenting opportunities for participants to achieve their professional goals or enact the vision they held for their schools; such responses were reminiscent of Thompson and Mockler's (2016) findings of affordances for principals within the focus on school data.

More noticeable, however, and seemingly seen as a separate issue by participants was the increase in accountabilities—specifically since the introduction of NAPLAN in 2008—and the resulting increase in workload (Gobby, 2013; Trimmer, 2013); and alterations to the way principals received supervision and support (Bloxham, Ehrich, & Iyer, 2015). The other central shift identified by participants as increasing the pressure on principals in the current climate was the move from managing their schools to leading instruction within their schools (QDET, 2011). A perceived increase in workload was also discussed in relation to this adjustment to their ways of working. These increased accountabilities, discourses of school improvement, and the shift to instructional leadership have changed the nature of the principalship. This changing nature is theorised in this chapter through Foucault's (1977) notions of discipline, with an emphasis on how participants' work changed during the period of these case studies. The chapter will examine the shift in expectations for principals after 2008's inaugural NAPLAN testing, which was highlighted by participants as a source of complexity. The positioning of the Department as a source of external pressure will also be examined, as well as pressure related to performativity and the quantification of education through an increased focus on school data.

Max, Judy, and Scott's Conceptualisations of the Principalship

Each participant's conceptualisation of the principalship is explored in more depth here, to provide a better understanding of their beliefs and practices as school leaders. The analysis of these conceptualisations has been augmented by literature relating to the most significant challenges or pressures that were noted as influencing the principalship. Max, Judy, and Scott each held very different conceptualisations of their roles as principals, while discourses of school improvement formed the primary focus for their work according to Departmental documentation (QDET, 2011, 2014b, 2014c).

Max's instructional leadership work at Ironcliff centred on a strong leadership presence of his own, supported by his leadership team. He emphasised the importance of developing a strong presence upon his appointment as principal at Ironcliff, also attributing the utmost importance to principals being able to build 'indecently fast relationships' with staff, students, parents, and the wider community. He described his belief that it takes approximately eighteen months to deeply understand the culture of a school and begin to be able to see changes, and that the need to build strong relationships was fundamental to this. He commented that this process continued to form a large part of his work at the outset of these case studies, observing that 'building those relationships has to be first and foremost what it's all about. […] Gotta do it. It's critical. So I spend an enormous amount of time doing that'. He did this by establishing a presence, being seen at the school gate, at school events, and out and about in the school grounds regularly. When discussing the pressures on principals from the system, one aspect he was particularly passionate about was an issue that could take principals away from this work—the large number of meetings principals was expected to attend. He exercised his autonomy by refusing to attend many of these meetings, preferring instead to stay at Ironcliff:

> I did a little bit of data gathering as soon as I got to this school and in the first nine months of last year, there were 32 occasions where I could legitimately and should have been out of this school. So in my previous role, I was always saying to principals 'check exactly what time you need to be out of your school', because if your community thinks you're not putting in what you should be then you're going to battle. So 32 occasions I could have been out of this school which is just ridiculous as a new principal in a big school, my job was to get my profile out there as much as possible, and people need to see me as much as possible.

Evident here is Max's belief in the importance of a strong leader or figurehead. He mentioned this lack of participation in meetings a number of times throughout our interviews, noting that the only meetings he attended were the local school cluster meetings where he agreed with the agenda and direction of the meetings. This exemplifies the notion that schools (or principals, in this case) who already enjoy advantageous positions are likely to take up autonomy in more confident ways (Keddie, 2014). In this sense, Max was more vocal about his disinterest in the plethora of meetings than Scott and Judy were, both of whom also commented on the large number of meetings they were expected to attend. When asked, they both acknowledged that while it would be acceptable to miss the meetings if pressing issues were keeping them at the school, they were still strongly encouraged to attend.

This was somewhat of a point of difference for Max. He demonstrated a very sharp focus on Ironcliff and less interest in other schools or regional initiatives. This may have been due, in part, to his previous senior leadership positions. He made it very clear in our interviews that he considered that element of his career very much in the past, as was evident when I asked him about the importance he placed on the targets as set by the region. He noted that he was not interested in these targets because they were often set in an attempt to improve regional data as a whole, rather than being useful for individual schools:

> When I look back through my role statement, I'm the principal of this school and my job is to make this school the very best it can be […] and that's where my energy goes. I know what the regional data has been for a very long time, and I know what the trends are […] so that's not a great concern to me, somebody else gets paid to look at that now and my job is to do the very best I can in this school, and that's where my head is at.

This reflects comments from the literature suggesting that to have global targets for data is 'ridiculous' (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 650) and reinforces the importance of centring the local context in school improvement and reforms.

Presenting an almost opposite view of leadership, Scott used a metaphor positioning himself as a member of 'the band', one of the teams. Elaborating, this meant that he saw his work not as being the 'heroic leader' or lead singer of the band, but rather that his job as principal was to stand behind his teachers, supporting them as they did their work. As principal, or metaphorical rhythm guitarist, he needed to be able to:

> stand behind other people, and push them along. But the rhythm guitarist has to be able to work with all of these other things, and if they stop, then it all stops. So, a couple of things there. You need a fair bit of stamina, you've got to know where you're going, and all of that. [...] So it's a relational thing, and a listening thing, and a judging the crowd, what's happening, let's play this song, we're going this way now. We spend our energy in the right spots, that sort of thing.

An important element of this vision, the final point he made, was that he did not want just to be the guitarist for 'any old rock band [...] playing Doug's 60th down at the Bowls Club', he wanted his band to be 'the best rock band in the entire world'. Scott's metaphor of leading from behind has connotations that differ somewhat from Max's approach as having a strong leadership figurehead presence within the school, although both share the notion of working in teams.

Judy's position aligned more with Scott's than with Max's but continued the theme of strong teams and partnerships from both of their visions regarding instructional leadership. What was notable about Judy's discussion of leadership was the lack of 'self'. Judy's image of leadership involved more of a focus on how she related to others. When talking about the influences from early in her career, the ways other people impacted upon her also came through as a way of shaping her identity as a leader. This brings to mind Thomson's (2009) suggestion that aspiring principals can be influenced to apply for leadership positions by positive and negative leadership experiences they had as teachers. Judy noted that her passion for collaboration, shared leadership, and strong teamwork arose from her own previous negative experiences as a beginning teacher in schools with a lack of strong leadership and positive approaches towards teamwork and collaboration or sharing of resources. She explained when reflecting upon some negative experiences with her early colleagues and principals:

> I thought, I am never going to be like that, I will **always** share what I have, and I will **never** treat people badly, and I will be **far** better than that, I would always help people, I would always support them, I would always be there for them. So that's where I sort of built my philosophy that the teaching profession, the principalship, it's all about relationships and sharing knowledge [...]. So that's the core of my philosophy, my ability to build sustainable schools and build a leadership team.

The notions of teams and strong collaboration, which were evident in each of the participants' approaches to instructional leadership, work towards the development and maintenance of cultures working towards improvement. In all three instances, principals' overarching aim was improved student outcomes. Sometimes, this was reflective of the culture of quantification of education, where the key driver within the system was an increase in measurable student outcomes. However, it is also reflective of participants' educative dispositions in wanting positive outcomes for their students (Hardy, 2015). This is an example of the complex nature of these performative environments where a focus on these discourses of student achievement can be seen as positive steps towards socially just education (Mills et al., 2014), or providing affordances for principals and teachers to focus more sharply on student outcomes (Thompson & Mockler, 2016). The disciplining of the principalship was evident here because school improvement policies and accountabilities influenced their work so strongly. Participants' educative dispositions were being driven by system metrics and accountabilities in the form of these new ways of measuring student achievement (including NAPLAN testing).

Participants' Perceptions of Autonomy, Accountability, and the Principalship

Although participants' work was ostensibly being undertaken in autonomous environments, the nature of performative cultures meant this work was actually being directed or steered from a distance by external accountabilities and targets (Kickert, 1995). In these environments, autonomy manifests in ways that enable principals to work in the ways that achieve the results desired by the system. Max, Judy, and Scott reported feeling freedom to work in ways resulting in improvement on the metrics being used to quantify the work being undertaken in schools. Each principal discussed the ways that meeting system expectations for improvement afforded them the freedom to work in ways they deemed appropriate, whereas schools and, by extension, principals who did not meet the system's expectations for improved results were subject to closer monitoring and less autonomy in their approaches or choice of direction at their schools. As Caldwell (2008) commented: as autonomy increases, so do external accountabilities.

Here, the tension for participants was evident. They were able to 'exercise' their professional judgment because they were being disciplined to work in ways that were steered at a distance by the Department's policies and associated school improvement discourses. Accountability and autonomy are inextricably linked discourses and represent a contradiction in the rhetoric from performative systems—principals are allegedly able to exercise more judgment, work outside of the system, and are therefore more responsible for the accountabilities being used to measure their effectiveness as school leaders. This could be seen as an extension of Hursh's (2013) comments about governments placing the blame for the perceived crises in education at the feet of educators.

Systems, under incredible public pressure from recurring crisis discourses of failure, have now been able to shift the responsibility to individual schools. One comment from Richard, the ARD, illustrated this when he mentioned that as a result of the government's push for autonomy and 'transparent' accountability (cf. *MySchool*), principals and schools were more answerable directly to their communities than to the Department. This could be interpreted as placing the responsibility for improvement directly onto principals and teachers and removing, it in a sense, from the Department. Interestingly, this is somewhat at odds with Lingard, Martino, and Rezai-Rashti's (2013) comments that with increased test-based accountability, community accountability can be lost at times. Autonomy rhetoric is also evident here where community partnerships are often emphasised in the literature (Caldwell, 2008; Gray, Campbell-Evans, & Leggett, 2013) and certainly in the Department's policies and documents including strategic agendas and position descriptions for principals (QDET, 2014a, 2014b).

Micro-theories of discipline (Foucault, 1977) and governmentality (Foucault, 1994) provide a lens to better understand how participants' subjectivities have been shaped by these performative constraints and norms (Porter, 1995). While rhetoric indicated that principals held more autonomy, their freedom to exercise professional judgment was limited by the features inherent in performative cultures, including the requirement to meet external accountabilities. This disciplined and governed participants' behaviours, requiring them to work in certain ways and within certain constraints.

Max, Judy, and Scott all expressed that they were confident in their ability to be autonomous, to a certain extent. Of the three principals, Max and Scott appeared to feel the most confidence in their ability to work outside of the system. Scott likely felt this because of his more 'official' autonomy as principal of an Independent Public School, and we must remember that Max had recently re-joined the principalship after many years in senior leadership positions within the Department. This experience had a significant impact upon the way he saw his work as a principal, as well as the ways he felt freer to exercise his own autonomy as a principal, using his insider knowledge of the system to his advantage. In addition, this confidence could also be partly attributed to Max's lack of career aspirations—he acknowledged himself that as someone nearing retirement and thus not actively seeking promotion, he tended to have a different approach at times than principals who were trying to 'move up the ladder'. The literature supports these interpretations of Max's perceptions of autonomy, with Keddie (2014) noting that schools who enjoy advantageous positions within the system are more likely to take up autonomy confidently. I contend that this extends to principals as well, with principals who are seen as effective or demonstrating 'quality' work in their roles being given more freedom in their work, provided they met these external accountabilities and targets.

Increased Accountabilities and Pressures on the Principalship

Accountabilities presented by participants aligned closely with high-stakes testing, involving the government steering conduct from a distance through an increase in external accountabilities, setting of targets and benchmarks, and comparison of schools (Ball, 2006; Singh, 2014). There was a strong consensus from all participants that the introduction of NAPLAN in 2008 was the catalyst for a rapidly changing landscape. Accountabilities in the principalship certainly existed prior to the introduction of NAPLAN and the resulting intense focus on data, but all participants highlighted a significant increase in accountabilities since the national testing began in 2008. Key themes that arose within the overarching discourse of accountability were an increase in demands from the system in the form of central or regional office expectations and an increased focus on the use of data. The recognition of NAPLAN as a catalyst for the change in accountabilities was closely tied to an increased focus on data and quantification of performance by all participants. This was also highlighted by Lingard and Sellar (2013) at a system level when they discussed the way certain data could be seen as the spark of questions and reflection upon systems and their effectiveness. Throughout Chap. 7, I will explore more deeply the influence of data on participants' leadership practices as a result of increased external accountabilities and measures of effectiveness.

Evident in the responses from the participants was a sense of pressure accompanying these increases in accountabilities. Maguire, Braun, and Ball (2015) suggested that in a changing policy environment, there is an assumption that schools will respond quickly to changing demands. This was evident in interview data for this book, with phrases such as 'agility' and 'responsiveness' being used frequently to describe expectations of how principals would respond to Departmental imperatives and to changes in their school data. This discourse of agility or responsiveness served as a further source of pressure for the principalship in the wider case study context. Interestingly, while it was evident in all responses, the *levels* of the sense of pressure seemed to vary between participants. Judy's responses indicated a strong feeling of pressure and urgency when discussing the increase in external accountabilities. She suggested that accountability requirements existed in areas 'never there' before. Her comments focused on increases in demands from Central and Regional Offices, and her language conveyed the sense of pressure she felt in the current climate:

> they demand a lot of stuff from you now, they demand data-based stuff, they demand that you've got to have your [Teaching and Learning Audit], they demand that you've got to have your Annual Implementation Plan [the school's annual strategic plan] – there's a lot of demands and we've found that there's more and more where they demand so much.

Judy mentioned an increase in pressure from within the system, noting that with the advent of email and mobile phones, another shift in pressure had been the ease with which principals could be contacted. Going home at the end of the day was no longer a chance to decompress from work life because, Judy said, 'they will be after you. They will constantly be after you'. This sense of pressure and the seeming need to be available at all times could certainly compound pressures already being experienced by principals. At a number of points throughout our interviews, Judy commented upon a sense of urgency and pressure for fast responses and increased demands on principals' time from the system. In this sense, not only are principals perpetually *assessable* as observed by Niesche (2015), they are also perpetually *surveillable*.

Foucault (2003) used the term 'surveillance' to refer to the way people are monitored and judged. This monitoring of principals could be from a distance (through surveillance technologies such as school data) or it could potentially be more direct, through expectations of accessibility or availability. This requirement to be easily accessible was evident a number of times during our interviews. Each of the participants made a point at the beginning of our interview sessions to close their office doors, signalling that they were unavailable for that period of time. However, this did not stop the expectations of availability facilitated by email and mobile phones being a source of further pressure for the participants. For example, one of the principals was interrupted by a phone call at one point from the regional office, following up on an email that had been sent to the participant during our meeting and had not yet been responded to. The meeting had been in progress for less than an hour at that point, providing some indication of the level of expectations around availability and the response time expected by the sender.

Similarly, the mobile phone availability spoken about by Judy was evident during our interviews with a number of phone calls coming in during our relatively short times together, resulting in Judy eventually turning her phone off. There was a clear sense of expectation that responses to inquiries would come swiftly and that principals would be accessible during these times. This does raise an interesting point which I explore in more depth later in this chapter about the need for principals to be able to manage the increasingly explicit expectations around how school leaders spend their time. This could potentially serve as another source of external pressure for principals while they try to balance competing priorities.

At the other end of the spectrum, Scott was quite accepting of the pressures and seemed almost to appreciate the increased external accountabilities, to an extent. While he did acknowledge the increase in accountability, he commented a number of times throughout our interviews that these accountabilities were a positive change. Scott correlated the increase in accountabilities with a more rigorous approach to education, noting that, ‘you need to be externally accountable to something, otherwise we end up like when we were doing outcomes and that sort of crap years ago, and marking everybody off as “great” because they were nice kids’. While some researchers (Hamilton et al., 2007; Rutledge, 2010) have argued that these external accountabilities are beneficial in improving student outcomes, Scott’s comments were reflective of his approach to education, which focused on providing measurable or quantifiable outcomes for students. It is therefore not entirely surprising that he had embraced the external accountabilities that were described by all participants. As Porter (1995) discussed, an element of the ‘trust’ placed in numbers and the alleged objectivity they provide is that it can lend an air of gravitas to decisions and approaches that could otherwise be questioned. Porter acknowledged this as part of the reasons that bureaucracies tend to place faith in numbers, noting that it ‘lends authority to officials who have very little of their own’ (p. 8).

Not only does this work at a system level—and Porter’s theory can go some way to explaining the reverence of school data from the Department on the whole—I contend that this translates to school-based decisions, in that it provides the decision-maker with a mandate for their choices. In a world where external accountabilities are more demanding than ever and public and transparent data policies leave schools—and principals—under the microscope, principals can use school data to justify the decisions they are making. Their school data almost shared some of the responsibility brought by higher levels of autonomy. The comments from Scott about a more rigorous approach to education coming hand-in-hand with an increase in the use of data are not surprising when considering the sociology of numbers and the argument that they lend objectivity to a field, with objectivity most commonly aligned in the public's mind to scientific ('trustworthy') notions including rigour. Scott's comments almost echoed Porter's (1995) word for word, when Porter discussed the belief permeating society that quantification (Scott's data) leads to rigour and removes subjectivity (marking students on their 'niceness').

Max was more moderate in his responses and attitude towards increased external accountabilities (which he acknowledged were present 'to a higher level than ever before'). This could be attributed to a number of factors including his previous experiences in senior leadership positions within the Department, or his self-acknowledged lack of promotional aspirations which led, in his view, to less concern about accountability and performance-driven compliance than principals who may have been seeking future promotion. Max's responses indicated mixed feelings towards the current accountabilities facing principals, when he remarked that 'some of that's justified, some of that's probably not'. His comments about some of the pressures being less justifiable were linked to increased expectations for principals in terms of reporting and planning documentation. In the earlier stages of his career, he recalled, the school's accountabilities and planning mechanisms were much simpler. He described the increased complexities of planning- and reporting-related accountabilities in one interview, noting that the increases have drawn his time away from teaching and learning:

> [You had] a calendar up on the wall, and you wrote on there in terms of report cards going out here, buying a new lawnmower there, Year 5 excursion here, [community] meeting dates, and, oh yeah, we're going re-write the policy on so-and-so. So that moved to a thing called School Development Plans, then Annual Operational Plans, then Annual Implementation Plans, and call it what you want, but they've tended to get larger and larger, and now they're populated by more and more governmental and Department expectations – benchmarks, targets, you virtually need a PhD to be able to understand all of that stuff nowadays. I'm all for accountability but we're challenged in terms of how much time we can actually get out into classrooms by some of this stuff that we're tied down with. And that, I think you'll find, will be pretty widely felt amongst the other principals.

The evolution of expectations for principals is evident in Max's descriptions of the transition from the initial strategic planning of writing key dates on the school calendar to the inclusion of managerial approaches and neoliberal ideologies incorporating the adoption of business-based managerial terms ('benchmarks, targets') that has proliferated in education over the past few decades (Murphy, 1994; Ravitch, 2010; Thomson, 2011). In addition, Max's opinion towards the levels of paperwork and time it took to address these elements of heavier accountabilities could be deduced from the language he used. Referring to it critically as 'stuff that we're tied down with' provided a picture of his apparent belief that these requirements were taking time away from aspects of his work that he might have found more valuable, such as 'actually get[ting] out into classrooms'.

This is just one way that external accountabilities influenced the work of participants and steered their practice from a distance. If we consider accountability and autonomy as intertwined concepts, we can also see here the connection to Lingard and Sellar's (2013) suggestion that schooling has been reconstituted around these practices and expectations. Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011, p. 629) noted that the contemporary policy environment is one of 'low trust' and that performance reporting such as that described by Max is taking increasing amounts of time, so much so that it can 'divert time and effort away from that which is reported on'. This was illustrated clearly by Max's comments that increasing accountability and reporting documentation prevented him from working in classrooms.

These pressures and shifts in external accountabilities since the introduction of NAPLAN were also acknowledged by Richard and Tracy as being evident in their respective roles as regional office representatives. Richard explicitly noted the shift as occurring due to the results of the inaugural NAPLAN testing, as did Tracy, who commented that 'in 2008, everything changed'. The fact that all five participants identified this as the catalyst for the shift in culture and climate for principals is significant. Richard's remarks about the influence of NAPLAN were very direct, identifying it as the catalyst for change, but also discussing the place it held as part of the wider culture of improvement in Queensland schooling.

Responding to Increased Senses of Pressure—Discourses of the System as 'They/Them'

A common theme arising through the interviews and explicitly commented upon by Tracy, the principals' regional support officer, was a discourse of positioning the system (regional or central office) as the antagonist or as the overarching epicentre placing demands on participants. Tracy noted this through her comments on the use of 'they' or 'them' to discuss representatives of the system. She suggested that principals perceive these demands to originate from:

> Top-down, and it is very much a language of 'they'. So there is still very much that perception of the big push down, and 'we're made to do this', and those are the terms that I hear them use all the time.

This language, positioning the system as the 'other', was also evident in my interviews with Judy, Max, and Scott, although each of them seemed to feel this way to varying degrees. I would suggest that this could be indicative of variations in perceptions of their own autonomy. Judy, throughout her interviews, seemed to feel the most pressure arising from system expectations. Scott, on the other hand, was more autonomous as an IPS principal, so felt much less pressure from *external* sources. More discussion about Scott's unique perspectives as an IPS principal will be undertaken in the next chapter in relation to Scott's instructional leadership approaches, but he described the biggest pressure as being internal accountabilities from within himself. He noted that the Director General had talked to IPS principals about the importance of internally driven accountabilities, or what could be described as intrinsic accountability (Hassler, 2011; Melville, 1993).

This shift was also advocated by Cranston (2013), who emphasised that the shift from *accountability* to *responsibility* would be a powerful way of reframing school leadership to include the moral purpose of leadership, collaborative approaches, and a shared understanding of what students need. Similarly, in the approach described by Scott, principals were expected to take a critically reflective lens to their own practice and be motivated to meet these accountabilities from personal reflection or commitment rather than from external pressures. Scott suggested that this actually increased the pressure of accountabilities, as he saw more accountabilities 'everywhere [I] look now'. A similar notion was expressed in Gobby's (2013) study of IPS principals in Western Australia; that more autonomy might lead to higher feelings of accountability on a wider range of issues. This is evidence of technologies of performance at work (Dean, 1999), governing principals' work through steering their attention in certain directions as emphasised by targets and external accountabilities.

Finally, Max self-identified as feeling little pressure from the system. A key element of his conceptualisation of his own role was that he held a high level of autonomy. At one point in our interviews, he made the point that '[principals are] as autonomous as we would ever want to be'. I believe that this level of confidence in exercising his autonomy was due in part to Max's own experiences at senior leadership levels within the Department affording him some 'insider knowledge' not only about how these external pressures could sometimes originate (he was very clear about his belief that political decisions impacted upon schools regularly and that these influences should often remain on the 'periphery' of what he did as principal), but also how the power structures inherent in the system actually worked. The relationships he had developed over the years enabled him to work these to his advantage.

Max's autonomous approach, as well as the lack of pressure that he felt from external sources, was also due in part to his own lack of promotional aspirations and a sense of security in his position as mentioned previously in this chapter. This sense of security put him at odds with a culture where measurement of principal quality is rife; principals are 'perpetually assessable subjects' (Niesche, 2015, p. 138), and meeting external accountabilities is apparently seen as a means to promotion by many principals, according to Tracy. This will be explored in more depth later in this chapter in relation to the sense of fear and anxiety that can pervade performative cultures. When discussing his response to regional deadlines for school strategic documentation, Max's sense of security and confidence in exercising his own autonomy, as well as the understanding of power structures discussed earlier—and the likely consequences of not acquiescing to requests from his supervisor—was evident. He recalled:

> I looked him in the eye and said, 'The school review that should have been signed off by now isn't finished and I know it's due by the end of the school year but it won't be done. But, I intend to spend time here on the holidays' [finishing it at Max's own discretion]. Even if he had said, 'Oh, jeez, can you submit something?' the answer would still be no. And at the end of the day, what are you going to do? I'm not being defiant, I'm not trying to be difficult,

> I'm simply saying that there are regional and Departmental priorities [that are] not going to happen.

This variation existing among just three principals could potentially be indicative of a wider issue among the principalship in general—how individual principals might be interpreting systemic expectations differently within the current climate, depending on their own contexts and experiences. This is something I address in detail throughout Chap. 7, in respect to the ways participants worked with school data and how they were working in an environment where there was a policy of public and transparent school data leading to the quantification and judgment of principals' work, alongside judgment of the students, staff, and school community.

Some principals, like Judy, may have felt a deeper sense of pressure than others, such as Max and Scott. Gender may play a role in this, and research has explored the concept of emotion work for principals. When discussing the role of the principal in its current incarnation, Hargreaves (1997) raised concerns almost two decades ago that many women in the principalship were working to build caring cultures and enact positive change in environments where policy did not necessarily facilitate such environments. This was more recently expanded upon by Degenhardt and Duignan (2010) and also ties in with the notion of emotion work and its impact upon women in leadership roles in climates such as the one being examined in the research presented here.

These notions have been researched in depth particularly by Jill Blackmore (1996, 1999) and colleagues (Sachs & Blackmore, 1998) in addition to a host of other researchers who have explored the emotional demands of leadership as well as their gendered nature (Boler, 1999; Hargreaves, 2004; Lingard, Hayes, Mills, & Christie, 2003). Blackmore (2004) and Blackmore and Sachs (2005) in particular highlighted the challenge of performative cultures and the emotional toll they can take on leaders who have a personal commitment to socially just education, as Judy did. This was also addressed very recently by Mills and Niesche (2014) in the same wider Queensland public schooling context that Judy shared at Merriwald. In Judy's local context, where a large percentage of her students could be considered to be vulnerable either due to disability, higher levels of learning support needs, disadvantaged backgrounds, or difficult home lives, this emotional labour could certainly have served as another point of pressure on her work as principal. This could be particularly influential in a climate where narrow measures of achievement are valorised (Mills & Niesche, 2014).

In contrast, Richard and Tracy indicated that they were actively trying to remove these pressures and create a more supportive environment for principals in the region. With what seemed to be a sense of frustration, Tracy pointed out that while principals told her that regional office as an entity added pressure to principals' work, the Director General had emphasised in 2014 that the work of regions was to support principals. Tracy indicated that their work became about 'empowerment and less bureaucratic control' (echoing government rhetoric about cutting bureaucracy as discussed in Chap. 3 in relation to the IPS initiative). She noted that the ARDs within their region were attempting to build a culture of learners, where they would be seen by principals as sources of support.

According to Richard, the approach being adopted by the Department was that of ‘professional companioning’, which focused on the holistic development and support of principals in both a professional and personal sense. This approach was originated by Degenhardt (2013) as a proposed model for supervisors (ARDs, in this case) to support principals in their work and has been supported by the Queensland Education Leadership Institute [QELI][1] with Richard noting that ARDs were encouraged to use this approach. The focus within this holistic model is intended to be not only on the professional development and support of a principal but also on the personal development and well-being of the principal. This seems to be almost the complete opposite of the previous incarnation of the ARD role, which was a top-down data-focused supervisory position. Degenhardt (2013) emphasised that this is a shift from ‘telling how’ to ‘walking with’, as is evidenced by the use of the term ‘companioning’ (p. 20). This shift towards support and capability development for principals as individual leaders, with a focus on personal development and well-being, has been accompanied by a reduction in the number of schools Richard supervised, moving from 80 schools to 40, and he predicted that this would eventually be reduced again. This professional companioning model was intended to enable Richard and his fellow ARDs to work more closely and in more depth with fewer principals on capability and personal development than they could with a larger group of schools and principals under their care.

However, there seemed to be some challenges related to these moves by the ARDs to shift the focus of their work to this notion of professional companioning, possibly because of the nature of rapid changes to their role. It was only as recently as 2012–2013 that ARDs had, in Richard’s words, ‘a very narrow focus purely on supervision of performance, and not capability development’. While this shifted again to include capability development and personal support for principals, participants commented that some of their principal colleagues remained in the previous mindset of regarding the ARDs as purely supervisory and did not feel comfortable in seeking support from them. In addition, the nature of a performative culture works against this notion of developing more supportive relationships with supervisors. In fact, Tracy said that principals had, in informal conversations with her, expressed a lack of willingness to seek support for fear of looking incompetent—in performative cultures, competence or successful practice and behaviours are a cornerstone of being seen to be a quality leader. One of Tracy’s strategies was to engage in ‘corridor conversations’ with principals after meetings, where she believed she would hear authentic responses that may not have been raised in the meeting for various reasons; a suggestion supported by literature about organisational communication (Boden, 1994; Hubner, 2007). One such conversation highlighted the level of disconnect between the region’s perception of their role and that held by principals towards their work with ARDs:

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[1] QELI, the Queensland Education Leadership Institute is jointly owned by the major Queensland education systems and provides leadership programs including, as Richard identified, the development of ARD leadership.

> [The ARDs have said] we aren’t going to tell you what to do, but if you need advice or strategies, let us know. And the principals in their corridor conversations have said, ‘Well, as if you’re going to ask, because that will show that you’re incompetent and if you’re going for promotion…’

This was also reflected in Max’s comments as discussed earlier about not being on the ‘promotion trail’ and therefore feeling less pressure to perform in certain ways that conform to system expectations. Tracy also suggested that due to this sense of concern from principals about wanting to be seen as knowledgeable, she believed, school leaders often did not acknowledge that they sought out regional support staff for assistance in school improvement ventures, stating that ‘a lot of [principals] don’t want the people above them to know that we have been part of the process.’ Interestingly, she explained that Judy is one of the few higher-banded principals (principals of larger schools, generally with more experience) who regularly acknowledged the role that regional support staff played in their work.

This sense of wanting to look competent and, I would argue, potentially be seen as a leader who is capable of achieving the system goals without requiring ‘outside’ support, is directly linked to notions of performativity, where principals are expected to perform highly to measurable outputs that represent their worth or value as a leader (Ball, 2003; Keddie, 2013; Singh, 2014). In Tracy’s opinion, a result of principals feeling the need to act as the heroic leader was a pervasive sense of fear within the region where she worked. She suggested that this would likely have been system-wide, but that it was difficult to speak for other regions with certainty. When asked what she saw as a commonality among the wide range of principals with whom she worked, Tracy replied that ‘generally, I see panic’. She noted that this was evident in a desperation for fast solutions to issues, which led to superficial change rather than deeper, long-lasting change. This notion of potentially superficial, ‘quick-fix’ approaches to improvement will be explored in depth further on in this chapter in relation to instructional leadership, although it is important to note here as well, as it is indicative of the pressures on the principalship.

When asked what she believed led to this sense of panic, Tracy was quick to respond that a pressing issue was that the system itself made a number of assumptions about what principals knew and could do. Commenting that ‘I just see leaders who aren’t sure how to be the leader that the system expects them to be’, Tracy noted that these assumptions were wide-ranging, and they aligned explicitly with the other pressures discussed within this chapter—expectations around working with data, and expectations about being instructional leaders. Indeed, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Keddie (2013) suggested that performativity and audit cultures generate ‘a sociality of anxiety’ (p. 752), which supports Tracy’s observations.

‘An Unholy Emphasis on Data’: How Performativity and Quantification Add Pressure to the Principalship

Performativity, aligned closely with neoliberal ideologies, is a method of steering conduct from a distance, controlling the work of principals with ‘target setting, accountability, and comparison’ (Ball, 2006, p. 71) and is closely linked in the Queensland landscape with notions of an audit culture (Power, 1994; Strathern, 1997) and quantification of education. The audit culture approach of measuring and evaluating complex work results in a high pressure environment where schools are required to ‘perform according to imposed and often reductive standards’ (Apple, 2005, p. 14) which are aligned with the quantification of education, wherein complex work is reduced to easily measurable outputs and targets (Ball, 2006; Hardy & Boyle, 2011; Keddie, 2013; Singh, 2014). While the specific ways participants work with school data will be explored in more depth in Chap. 7, it is important to discuss here more generally as an influence that all participants identified as further contributing to pressures on the principalship.

These notions were evident in the themes arising from the interviews, with all participants focusing heavily on their use of data or the system’s expectations about how they made use of data to inform their school improvement agendas. Participants were generally positive when speaking about the culture of data-driven decision-making, which seemed to hold an unquestioned position in the landscape of education. Indeed, Lingard and Sellar (2013, p. 652) acknowledged the ‘naturalisation’ of data as the logical medium for thinking about teaching and learning in schools. This could be attributed in part to the trust placed in numbers and data, as discussed throughout this chapter, and the way numbers and data can lend a sense of authority and rigour, more easily justifying certain decisions and approaches (Porter 1995). It could also be that each of these participants was experienced and had seen multiple incarnations of the principalship and the system itself—could it be that they understood that the system’s approaches to education would continue to evolve?

An alternative viewpoint was posited in Chap. 2, which is that the current landscape of accountabilities and performative cultures has become unquestioned, with researchers advocating for principals to be more critical and questioning of these practices (Cranston, 2013; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Niesche, 2013). Thompson and Mockler (2016) also found that alongside some of the more challenging aspects, the audit culture in which principals are working can be seen to offer some affordances of opportunities to focus on positive, more educative, aspects of schooling. At any rate, the acceptance of data as part of the landscape was unquestioned among the participants in these case studies, as was evidenced by the interview data.

An example of the reverence associated with measurable data in the current climate was the collective response from participants when asked to define school improvement. As school improvement discourses formed such a key element of the principalship, I asked all participants to define school improvement in their own words to obtain an understanding of whether there were different approaches to the overarching concept of improvement. Interestingly, Max, Judy, and Scott were very clear: school improvement took the form of improved measurable outcomes in the 'ten-page data set', a system-generated School Performance Data Profile. This document is sent to all Departmental schools and updated throughout the year, encompassing a range of data such as academic data including NAPLAN results presented in various graphs and tables, student reporting data, and attendance and retention data. The data profile also includes more managerial data such as financial information, workplace health and safety claims, and annual school opinion survey data.

The data profile itself privileges certain types of data over others (NAPLAN data, in particular, being presented in multiple ways and holding pride of place within the document at over 45% of the document alone during the case study period), and the graphs and tables worked to influence principals' behaviour even when interpreting data within these narrow sets. By explicitly including the benchmarks and targets alongside school data, as well as the positioning of this document as the key foundation for discussion between principals and their supervisors, the data profile re-emphasised the importance of focusing on these areas potentially to the detriment of other priorities. The emphasis placed on the data profile as part of these performance conversations with supervisors and in the broader picture of school improvement worked to position principals in certain ways and guided their behaviours, regardless of the value they themselves placed on NAPLAN data or the other data privileged by the system. Indeed, this data set, according to the participants, was the very measure of school improvement. According to Max:

> School improvement is very clearly defined in terms of what they call the ten page data set – that's your school's data profile […] and school improvement talks about the actual effect size improvement for individual students. So we're very clear in our mind around that.

Each school is provided with a representation of the effect size to show how students progressed between sitting NAPLAN testing—thus, progression between Years 3 and 5, or Years 5 and 7. To use this as the measure of improvement, therefore, encompasses a very narrow concept of achievement in education, yet it provided Max—an extremely experienced educator—with a 'very clear' picture of how to measure school improvement. This, again, echoes Porter's (1995) comments about the trust placed in numbers and data and shows how data can be used to supersede professional judgment with objective measurements. The data profile in particular is discussed in more depth in Chap. 7, with respect to how participants responded to the proliferation of discourses about school data.

When asked about this, Max elaborated that they used NAPLAN data as part of a bigger data picture in their school. This was reflected in comments from all other participants, in response to my questions about the potential challenges of using such a contested measure of education as the driver for improvement. When asked about concerns surrounding equity and NAPLAN, each of the principals acknowledged that it held challenges for their complex school settings.

All participants discussed the importance placed on NAPLAN by the system as a whole and their choices of language in describing NAPLAN data were telling in and of themselves. Judy commented that 'we've got to be beholden to it all the time', while Richard observed in his role as ARD that there was an ‘unholy emphasis’ placed on these data, although he encouraged his schools to see NAPLAN as just one part of a wider data picture. Overwhelmingly, participants commented on the availability of data as a catalyst for the changing role of the principal. This was, of course, compounded by the sheer amount of data available to schools. Between the system-collected data and additional data which schools chose to collect to inform the ‘bigger picture’, a term used by each of the participants, data abounded in the case study landscape. Judy said that the availability of a wide range of data at a school level (and the ease of accessibility of these data for regional and system representatives) resulted in more focus and higher expectations being placed upon principals. Whereas all participants identified School Opinion Survey data as the key measure of whether they were working successfully in the past, the role of the principal was no longer primarily about keeping the community, staff, and students happy in ways measurable by annual School Opinion Surveys. All principal participants noted this shift from the major focus of monitoring data being School Opinion Surveys, to the wider data surveillance landscape that exists at this point in time.

This was also supported by comments from Tracy and particularly Richard, who acknowledged that as an ARD the increasing prevalence of data afforded him a ‘greater degree of precision’ in assessing or being aware of what was happening in schools than he had in the past. This enabled the system to analyse each school’s data sets (a task which Tracy had recently undertaken) and, as a result, direct supervision and support where they felt it was needed. Interesting parallels can be drawn between Richard’s use of the phrase ‘precision’ (which he later used again, noting that the prevalence of data allowed schools to become ‘incredibly precise’ in targeting their attention in certain areas), and Porter’s (1995) discussion about the privileging of precision over accuracy. He suggested that precision, like the earlier discussion about objectivity, is valued for its ability to provide a clear picture of ‘honest and careful work’ (p. 201), removing any question about potential bias or subjectivity in decision-making, in this case. Here, again, we see data being used to provide support for decisions almost in the form of a mandate which lends weight to the choices about where people target their energies.

With that said, Richard emphasised that the use of school data was not intended to be punitive; rather, he noted that the availability of data should be used by principals as an opportunity to reflect upon school practices. This notion of school data being used as a tool for reflection rather than in a punitive manner (punishing or sanctioning schools who are underperforming) was echoed by Tracy and this educative potential for the use of data is reflected in the literature (Hargreaves & Braun, 2013; Polesel, Rice, & Dulfer, 2014). However, it was not consistently reflected in comments from the principal participants; possibly indicating a source of pressure on the principalship. It does stand to reason that principal participants might have been more concerned about punitive responses to data that the system deemed to be poor, given the emphasis evident in interviews from many of the participants about the importance of principals ‘owning’ their own data.

Richard emphasised that ‘it’s clearer that the principal is responsible for the success of every student’, and Scott maintained that principals were encouraged to ‘do whatever [they] need to do to improve the data'. The proliferation of data measuring a variety of forms of student achievement and outcomes would potentially be overwhelming for principals, who were being reminded that they were responsible at the end of the day for measurably improving these vast arrays of data. Thus, notions of performativity and the enactment of these ideologies formed part of the increasing pressures on the principalship.

Indeed, Tracy shared her belief that the focus on data had contributed significantly to pressures on principals, because of the assumptions that system policies made relating to principals' data literacies. She extended the climate of fear or sense of panic to principals' work with data, noting that the system's policies and directives assumed that principals have a high level of data literacy to help them cope with these demands. Tracy posited that principals were feeling anxious because they did not, in fact, know how to deeply interrogate data, or how to incorporate data into an authentic teaching and learning cycle, which echoed similar findings about principals' data literacy from Klenowski (2016).

Tracy observed that principals had the skills only to undertake what she referred to as superficial analysis of the data sets with which they were provided, but that they felt some unease about discussions and working with data beyond initial observations about easily measurable trends over time. This led to some questionable practices including the search for short-term, quick-fix solutions and a narrowing of education at some schools, both of which will be discussed in depth in Chap. 7, which focuses on the ways Max, Judy, and Scott worked with data and how school data drove their work as leaders. However, it is also important to acknowledge here as another potential source of pressure on the work being undertaken in the principalship.

Another aspect contributing to the sense of pressure described by Max, Judy, and Scott is intrinsically linked to the data-driven landscape. As Richard remarked, it has been made very clear in the current climate of education that the principal is responsible for the success of every student in their school. It is therefore important to explore what this means for principals in terms of their leadership practices, where the biggest shift described by participants about the principalship itself was a shifting focus from manager to that of instructional leader.

Instructional Leadership and Shifting Expectations in the Principalship

A key discourse influencing the principalship is a requirement for principals to be the instructional leader in their schools. Even though, as I discussed previously, the definition of instructional leadership is contested and at times unclear, all of the participants commented upon the challenges resulting from such a significant shift in the key focus of their role.

Richard and Tracy noted this shift as one that had been challenging for some principals in the region, while embraced at the same time by others. Richard remarked that 'for some principals, that has been a natural transition, they have always wanted to be educational leaders, that's where their interest lies and that's where their strength is'. Other principals, according to Richard, 'have been consummate managers, and tended to delegate the curriculum leadership and pedagogical leadership side of things to other people […] they haven't been instructional leaders, but they've been very good managers'. He noted that principals in the case study period, however, were being told that '[their] first responsibility is around [their] moral purpose, it's around every student succeeding'. Tracy also referred a number of times to the 'moral purpose' of schooling for principals, possibly because she and Richard tended towards research-based practice and often shared literature, some of which focused on moral purpose in leadership (Fullan, 2003, 2011).

Keddie (2014) discussed the moral purpose of schooling, including a focus on deep learning and real achievement, rather than a focus on test scores. Principals' moral instructional leadership would thus include efforts in this vein. The shift towards instructional leadership was commented upon by Max, Judy, and Scott as well. Scott, in particular, illustrated the move from managing to leading when he described the influence of NAPLAN; 'then in 2008, NAPLAN came along and we all got our arses kicked, because we had never focused on curriculum'. He elaborated in further detail:

> for the first few years here, all I was doing was managing behaviour, managing budget, managing teachers. I wasn't really doing much with curriculum because it wasn't the focus. The main focus was school opinion surveys – just making sure they were under control.

The shift of key focus of the principalship, accompanied by rapid reforms at a system and school level, could be seen as a source of pressure on principals—particularly experienced principals who had been working in the role, arguably successfully, for a number of years. The change in focus has been challenging for some principals, as discussed by Richard, which has resulted in some principals retiring or moving on to other ventures. Max, Judy, and Scott continued through the changes and spoke about the pressures they experienced as a result of the Department's expectation for them to be instructional leaders.

One such pressure was the increased workload that occurred as a result of this shift. Richard acknowledged this as well, voicing concerns about the increased workload for principals who had once been seen as managers, commenting in particular on the cultural shifts that had to happen in schools for principals to be able to delegate some of their previous management duties in order to take on instructional leadership duties. These shifts had not been entirely successful, as Richard noted:

> The ways that principals have worked became habitual and cultural and became expected, and the people around the principal mitigate against changing that role, or changing the way of working. If the principal is seen as the person who manages behaviour […] and people keep sending them issues to manage, they can't just say, 'I'm not doing that anymore.', so there is a bit of work involved in changing foci, and cultures, and the whole way the school works.

Scott underscored this as a particular challenge—partly, he said, due to his own ways of working in the past. He had previously been the 'fixer' at his school. Teachers who were having difficulties with some parents would seek his intervention, and he tended to acquiesce to their requests and intervene, solving the problems on behalf of the teachers. This was also evident in his earlier comment that in his first few years at Mount Pleasant, he 'managed parents'. Over time, and more recently in particular, he worked to devolve the management of those issues back to the teachers, finding varying levels of success and willingness of his teachers. This evolution in Scott's ways of working throughout the period of these case studies can be viewed through Foucault's (1977) notion of discipline. His practices as a leader evolved to meet expectations and discourses; both policy as text, such as policies espousing instructional leadership, and policy as discourse, such as the expectations evident in Richard's comments above (Ball, 1993).

Richard's approach to this was to emphasise to his teachers that their role was to manage their own classroom communities, telling them:

> you know what, the 25 kids you've got are the 25 you're going to work on, but you've also got the parents to work on. That's your work. Sending them to me, and me having a good relationship with Mum and Dad won't help you. You've got to do that, you've got to make the phone calls, you've got to talk hard sometimes, you've got to call them when the kids are being good, and all of that.

He noted that this approach worked for some teachers, but not others. He reflected that some teachers felt that 'I used to do all of that for them, but I don't anymore, and it's really unfair because [I] used to deal with that and come back and say "I've solved it"… so that has been a big change'. However, he added, removing this element of his work in the school 'created […] space [and] I can actually get on and do other things', such as devoting more time to the instructional aspects of his role. Scott saw this as a natural evolution of his long-term work at the school. Interview data with all of the key participants indicated that instructional leadership practices were more about providing the space, or creating opportunities, for 'good teaching and learning to happen', as described by Judy. The enactment of this varied between the three principals. For Max, it was about supporting his leadership team, who he frequently emphasised held more expertise in curriculum than he did. Similarly, Scott—who joked 'I suck at teaching, that's why I became a principal!'—discussed the importance of instructional *coaching* (Knight, 2007) rather than instructional *leadership,* the latter of which might involve approaches such as himself modelling lessons or teaching approaches for his staff members as the expert. He appeared to prefer the idea of using coaching methods to bring out the strengths of his staff members and support them to develop their capacities and celebrate the strengths in teaching inherent within his staff as a whole, developing instructional leadership in each of his teachers. This aligns with literature (DeBevoise, 1984) emphasising instructional leadership as being about taking or delegating tasks to promote growth in student learning. It also aligns with policies which require principals to work with staff to develop 'quality' teaching practices (QDET, 2011, 2014a).

Max also commented on the increased workload resulting from the shift in focus to instructional leadership, and the expectations from the region and the system that accompanied this shift. As part of the expectations laid out by the region, principals were required to spend a certain amount of time in classrooms observing teaching and learning practices and giving feedback to teachers. Richard, in his role as ARD, described the expectation that principals would spend time in the classroom focusing on aspects that would work towards achieving the school's priorities as well as those stemming from the regional expectations—e.g., observing or even modelling explicit instruction techniques. An example of Foucault's (2007) counter-conduct is evident in Max's comments against these expectations. He felt that this expectation has taken things 'too far' in micro-managing school leaders, and as a principal in a larger school, he established a skilled leadership team for this purpose:

> I have highly, highly skilled and better-placed people to provide that sort of feedback, and they're not the sort of people who are going to get called back to the office because there's been some drama with facilities or because there's an issue with a student.

In a stark coincidence, our interview was interrupted not long after Max made this statement in order for us to search for a student who had run away from the classroom. We found the student approximately ten minutes later; however later that afternoon the student absconded from the school grounds and the local police ended up joining the search, taking a number of hours. This is indicative of the type of urgent issue for many principals that can take them away from these instructional leadership duties.

We know that managerial tasks often take precedence for principals in terms of their time and focus (Murphy, 1994; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Thomson & Blackmore, 2006), and the data from these case studies certainly support these findings. For example, Scott had been scheduled on the day before one of our interviews to model the teaching of a new strategy for his Year 6 teacher. However, another teacher was ill that day and with no relief teacher available, Scott ended up teaching Prep for the day, and the scheduled lesson demonstration was postponed. He found that while the teacher was understanding about the change, it slowed the momentum of the planned introduction of the strategy across the school, the first stage of which was Scott's demonstration.

Some tension is evident here between Scott's aforementioned approach of instructional coaching where he mentioned that he was not particularly fond of modelling lessons or strategies, and this later approach requiring him to demonstrate a strategy. This is potentially a result of changing leadership practices over time through the disciplining of principals, where Scott's outlook changed in relation to discourses of instructional leadership and the region's explicit expectation that principals would model strategies for their teachers. Rather than engage in counter-conduct (Foucault, 2007) like Max did, Scott's practices shifted to comply with these discourses and expectations. The discussion about difficulties in modelling the new strategy was held early in our case study, and over time Scott's confidence in his instructional coaching approach evidently developed and became his primary approach of instructional leadership. This was also evident in the evolution of his comments about instructional leadership. Initially, he was more moderate in his comments, using phrases such as that he was 'unsure' whether he agreed with the system's approach to instructional leadership requirements. By the end of our time together, he was forthright that his practice did not align with system expectations or 'what the ARDs would say'. The importance of balancing instructional leadership and effective or efficient management of the school was one reason for this divergence from expectations regarding instructional leadership practices. It also shows the messiness of policy enactment in action. Scott was very compliant with Departmental requirements in some ways, while still resisting the steering effects of policies in other ways.

Similarly, Max commented that as part of his leadership team, he was allocated the Year 5 and 6 classes to observe. However, by our final interview he was yet to find the time to undertake this observation process to a level he deemed satisfactory because his time was regularly spent attending to management issues that arose unexpectedly. This also aligns with comments earlier in this chapter about the expectations of availability for principals, through mobile phones and emails, and raises questions about how principals balance these dichotomous expectations of availability and accessibility, and spending more time in classrooms. These types of issues—those that require principals' urgent attention, or require them to reschedule their plans at short notice—did not seem to be uncommon, with Max, Judy, and Scott all relaying experiences of their own where 'managing' overrode 'leading'. This was another source of pressure for principals who were trying to balance the pre-existing demands of the role and still follow strategic agendas espousing the role of the principal in observing, mentoring, and providing feedback to teachers. Hallinger (2003) reinforced this balance when he noted that managerial tasks still need to be addressed as part of school leadership even where instructional leadership is the espoused focus for the system.

Aligning with this viewpoint, Scott, Judy, and Max all commented on the need for principals to retain some of their previous duties and do some managing in order to create the environment needed to achieve their schools' improvement agendas. For example, Max discussed the high level of behavioural needs within his school that required his constant attention over the second year of our interviews, commenting 'we've got eight high flyers [students with high-level behaviour needs] across the school, three of whom are so highly violent that they take turns [out of the school at the regional behaviour centre]. One of them broke a teacher's arm the other day—that's a Grade One kid.'

Much of Max's time was spent focusing on supporting these students, as well as their teachers. He commented that 'I spend a lot of the day circulating back around into the classrooms [because] sooner or later someone's going to trigger [the student who broke the teacher's arm]'. This impacted significantly on the time Max spent as instructional leader in the specific ways that the region was expecting of principals. In a similar theme, Scott shared his thoughts on the issue of principals retaining some aspect of the 'old way' of managing the school. When this shift in focus to instructional leader was first implemented, Scott had himself 'timetabled into classrooms for the whole day', but realised over time that while he was in classrooms, he was also thinking:

> 'Shit, I've got to get back to the office because this thing is due, if I don't get this in the teachers aren't going to get this thing they need, if I haven't signed off on this, we're not going to get the books for the library' – so, someone has to manage that day-to-day stuff.

> Now in a school our size [without a leadership team] or a small school, it's [the principal] as well.

Agreeing with Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach's (2012) assertion that no single person can be effectively responsible for the instructional leadership needs of a school, Scott's solution to this, to be explored in depth in the next chapter, was to create a team of instructional teacher leaders. This was an ongoing process into which Scott invested significant time as well as financial resources. This was in contrast to the sense of urgency often espoused by the Department and school improvement discourses, which logically trickles down to create a sense of pressure on principals to find fast solutions.

The Changing Principalship: Notions of 'Quality' and the Seductiveness of the Quick-Fix

A final element of the pressures placed upon principals at this point in time relates to each of the aspects described thus far in this chapter. Performative cultures result in a search for moments of 'quality' for leaders (Ball, 2003, 2006). Principals are required to take ownership of school and student data, to be responsible for the improvement of student outcomes as measured by the system, and to be (one may argue) a heroic leader, 'delivering' extraordinary improvement in measurable outcomes for students in line with Departmental expectations.

However, Tracy argued that the pressure on principals (as 'leaders who aren't sure how to be the leader the system expects them to be' in order to achieve these requirements) compounded the pressures on the principalship. As a result, she suggested, the principals she worked with were desperately seeking solutions; engaging in surface-level leadership and focusing on behaviours that provided a quick-fix, or looked effective from outside of the school, without taking the time to engage in longer processes of deeply changing cultures or implementing authentic processes and ways of thinking and working. Indeed, Keddie and Lingard (2015) commented that the search for the quick-fix could be prevalent in these conditions. Principals were looking at these behaviours, argued Tracy, and finding ways to quickly be seen as knowledgeable and effective, showing moments of quality (Ball, 2003, 2006), as discussed earlier in this chapter. She said that principals would:

> pick up something like Potter's model of leading change and creating a sense of urgency, and they'll skip everything – blah blah blah, and go straight to the end point. […] They'll throw the language out there. […] People keep reeling off phrases and it sounds like they get it, but they don't have a deep knowledge of it. They'll say, 'We engage our laggards.' and you think, '[pause] No, you don't.'

She also articulated her belief that principals were engaging in many behaviours of instructional leadership without understanding the reasoning of processes behind them. For example, she observed that 'principals are doing these instructional leadership behaviours but when I ask them why they do that, they can't answer me'. She found that 'they don't know why they're doing these things, they're just doing them [because the system expects it]'. This could also be indicative of the lack of clarity around instructional leadership and what this actually looks like in practice (QDET, 2012b).

A passion of Tracy's seemed to be this deeper aspect of leadership in the current environment. Due to the fact that she was undertaking doctoral research in this particular area, our conversation returned to this issue often. She argued that these behaviours were not creating lasting change in schools and were not benefiting principals in terms of leadership development. In fact, taking on more behaviours and processes without understanding why would potentially add pressure to the principalship. Tracy described the majority of principals in the region as extremely task-oriented, resulting in superficial approaches with little long-term change:

> I don't think our leaders consciously make innovative decisions because they are so 'I've got a teaching and learning audit this term, I've got a disciplinary audit, NAPLAN is coming out, I've got to apply for this job', and it's all 'I, I, I' and I don't hear anything about the student in there, much, when I'm talking with leaders. Actually - now that I'm thinking about it - rarely. And that's scary.

Interestingly, the only principal Tracy named within the region who did take the time to engage in processes deeply and develop cultures within the school across all aspects of the current agenda was Judy. Judy's approach to education and the esteem she held for her school's culture will be discussed further in Chap. 6. Tracy suggested that the majority of principals were so focused on tackling individual tasks as they arose ('they're always thinking "what else is coming, what else is coming? I don't have time, I have to do this and this and this"'), that they were unable to see the bigger picture and engage in meta-strategic leadership (Lewis & Andrews, 2009) to:

> take that helicopter view, and I don't think anybody gets up on that balcony and looks at that big picture. I think they're so stuck from all of those pressures and there's always something new coming along that they just… don't know it's an option.

However, ideologies of quantification may have influenced the culture of the principalship so much that this meta-strategic view could potentially be seen as irrelevant. Tracy theorised that without an obvious benefit in doing so, principals might see this as another aspect adding to their already busy work lives: 'If we said to them "you need to get on the balcony", it would be "I don't give a shit, I've got to do this and this and this" because they're so overwhelmed'. She emphasised that principals were 'reacting rather than responding' to changes or tasks as they arose.

Tracy did have ideas about how to change this situation, believing that the ability to see things from a meta-strategic point of view would actually improve principals' work lives and provide a sense of the big picture of leadership. At what point, Tracy asked 'does the system say, "Oh my god, it's not enough" [for principals to simply be reacting to tasks as they arise]?'. She added that this was not a fault of principals, but rather of the system for ill-preparing principals for the ways of working that were being expected of them. As mentioned before, she believed that principals needed to see a reason to undertake a new approach—evidence that a strategy will have a measurable positive impact upon their schools. Lyotard (1984) described the prevalence in performative cultures for the tendency of myths and narratives to drive practices. Stories of success and failure can dictate what actions can be 'performed' within the criteria of competence. In this case, the criteria of competence were focused upon measurable impact in student achievement. This measurable impact is important in a performative culture, where the quality of work and, in this case, the effectiveness of leadership can ostensibly be measured by improvement in school data.

This was echoed by comments from Max, Judy, and Scott, all of whom talked about the value of seeing strategies or programs having worked at other schools and adopting them for their own contexts. Therefore, Tracy argued, if principals were able to see a case study or success story of a principal who adopted this meta-strategic approach to leadership, 'got up on the balcony and took the helicopter view' and saw measurable results, other principals might then be more willing to consider it as an option. Indeed, Cranston (2008) has previously emphasised the potential of case studies for principals' leadership development and for seeing the successful translation of theory into practice (or in this case as described by Tracy, policy into practice). This phenomenon was also discussed and critiqued by Simons (2015) as the 'power of the example', a way for systems to govern the work undertaken in schools by providing examples of good practice (or 'best practice' as participants referred to it in this book) and potentially manipulate the behaviours and practices of workers within the system.

This need to see measurable outcomes of an approach also aligns closely with notions of performativity, as some principals felt the pressure to improve their school data in an urgent manner and have their performance judged to be effective as a result. This has resulted in some principals seeking quick-fix solutions, as noted by Tracy, who suggested that the principals with whom she worked are 'desperately' seeking these solutions. This aligns with Lyotard's (1984, 1997) argument that in performative cultures, behaviours with outcomes that can be easily judged as being successful or valuable are adopted in favour of more abstract ideas and the generation of new ideas or—in this case—innovative practices without a guaranteed outcome that could be judged as successful in the current regime.

Furthermore, I contend that one result of performative ideologies—the result of measuring and making judgments on the success of practices or ideas based on these measurable outputs and outcomes seems to be particularly obvious in a new generation of principals, whom I have dubbed 'the Accountability Generation' of principals (Heffernan, 2017). Tracy remarked that the principals who began in the principalship in the post-NAPLAN landscape (generally those leading small schools) were heavily task-oriented. Many of these principals, in fact, would not have started their teaching careers until after 2008, when this climate of accountability and performativity became unquestionably part of the system. Tracy found that this was particularly evident in those principals seeking promotion:

> You see the hotshots and those that are just ticking the box, and the questions are just, 'What do I need to do to demonstrate this?' The new generation coming through are so task focused, they're not even worried about being politically correct about doing it, and they are so transparent […] about just ticking the boxes.

Tracy's reference to school leaders being 'politically correct' is a complex notion to unpack and can be interpreted through Fairclough's (2003) exploration of the political implications of the term, in particular the way this language and term is used as a way of distinguishing between the 'new' left and the vanguard left in politics (p. 25). While the term is more commonly used to describe the way language and actions can be policed, when examining the phrase from the perspective of the data here, distinctions can be seen between Tracy's perspective of the 'new' principals who are task and accountability-focused, and how this means they do not even seem aware that they should be working differently, even as these efforts to work differently—actually more progressively in the interests of those marginalised in society—were also not undertaken effectively or appropriately by those simply 'seen' to be politically correct.

As an aside, an example of 'political correctness' (although in a 'knowing' sense) from a more experienced principal was evident in interviews when Max stated that part of the reason he would establish positive relationships with his community members partly as insurance in the event that performance-based contracts came in, making it more difficult for his contract to be terminated. He was quick to emphasise that this was not the *only* reason to cultivate these relationships and that the 'right reasons' also apply. However, I made a connection immediately to Tracy's discussion about politically correct behaviours from newer, less experienced principals when Max made this comment.

On this, Tracy elaborated that these newer principals interacted differently with her and other members of her team than they did with their supervisors. These principals had been clear with Tracy that they were doing what needed to be done to seek promotion (this being Tracy's reference to the 'hotshots' who were keen for promotion to higher banded or more desirable schools and were 'just ticking the boxes' in order to get there). A key element of what needed to be done, in this context, was being able to show a journey of school improvement, quantifiable by data. This theme of success in these metrics linking to promotion was evident in other interviews where Max mentioned his non-acquiescence to some systemic priorities, citing his aforementioned lack of promotional aspiration as an enabling factor in his approach. Judy also mentioned the emphasis placed by principals on being seen by their supervisors as effective leaders as being an important element of the promotional process. Max and Judy not only have the benefit of experience from which to draw their opinions, but this length of experience also means they have worked as principals in times where performative cultures were not necessarily as evident as they are today. Moore (2004) noted that newer teachers who did not have the same 'existing history' as more experienced teachers did not have to make the same adjustments to their beliefs and practices as a result. In contrast, Max, Judy, and Scott have a shared longer history of working in less performative climates of schooling and were able to think more deeply about their work as a result.

Unlike Max, Judy, and Scott, the principals to whom Tracy referred had not experienced leading a school in an environment where their work has not explicitly been seen as quantifiable, or measurable. Therefore, I contend that it is logical for them to be focused on outcomes and outputs, given that these ideologies are emphasised so heavily by the system in which they have been developed. The norms created by the discourse around policies emphasising accountability and governance by numbers or data are so powerful precisely because they work so effectively to govern and shape the practices of those within the system; such as these beginning principals who were discussed by Tracy (Porter, 1995).

With that said, Max, Judy, and Scott were very aware that their work was measurable, was monitored by those working within the Department, and that they were being judged according to the measurable outcomes as defined by the system. Thus, their behaviours had also been modified by these policies. This resulted in them seeking solutions and means of improving their school data, but each of their approaches varied significantly. They did share some common practices, values, and beliefs, but on the whole they worked in very different ways and conceptualised the principalship in different ways. This variation forms much of the analysis in forthcoming chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter provided insight into participants' understanding of the influences on the principalship, providing the background to their ways of working and enacting policies. As the literature has suggested, principals in this context were working in environments of high pressure caused by multiple forms of external accountabilities and methods of steering principals' work from a distance. While the level of pressure felt by each of the principals did vary, each of the participants identified the shift from managing to these performativity-influenced notions of instructional leadership as a key challenge.

Further, this chapter provides an original contribution to current research by expanding upon the notion of the 'sociality of anxiety' (Keddie, 2013, p. 752) relating to the way this shift, including the resounding focus on data, influenced the principalship for some, leading some principals to seek quick fixes that showed improvement in the data in order to be seen as a 'quality' principal as measured through performative notions. The chapter also explored tensions between principals' perceptions of the system and supervisory relationships, and the capability-focused relationship the system was trying to encourage. Tensions were evident between capability-focused, 'companioning' relationships and the explicit expectations of how principals would manage their time, and be accessible, as well as available for meetings that took them out of their schools. This impacted further upon the ways principals responded to initiatives and requirements, as well as the sense of pressure that impacted upon the principalship.

Differences were evident between leadership practices from experienced principals such as Max, Judy, and Scott, and the practices participants observed in early-career principals who had not experienced policy conditions where their work was not as explicitly quantifiable or measurable. The potentially pernicious effects of this involve long-term shifts in leadership practices and a heightened sense of anxiety or pressure being added to the principalship, without the space to more deeply consider where leadership practices might fit within a bigger picture of education. Even still, as more experienced principals, Max, Judy, and Scott felt this sense of pressure to varying degrees.

In their roles as principals, Max, Judy, and Scott worked in a high-pressure environment, where data-driven decision-making was highly prioritised, where long-term managers were expected to suddenly understand and enact instructional leadership discourses even though many principals within the system did not hold a clear definition of what these actually were (QDET, 2012b), and where their work was constantly being measured and judged. Alongside these expectations of instructional leadership, participants identified the challenge of balancing the managerial tasks that remained within the school environment—and remained their responsibility—while additional explicit requirements continued to be added to their roles.

When asked to summarise how they conceptualised the principalship, participants' answers varied significantly. These different conceptualisations of their roles led to a variety of practices as Max, Judy, and Scott enacted school improvement policies through these lenses. The following chapters explore the varied ways that these policies governed participants' behaviours, providing a deeper analysis of how each participant was disciplined by the discourses inherent in this particular climate of reforms. At times, these interpretations and the resulting practices aligned, or shared practices were evident (although sometimes for diverse purposes). Despite each of these principals having viewed their role differently, they all shared a philosophy of improving student outcomes which subsequently translated into focusing on individual student achievement. The sociality of anxiety (Keddie, 2013, p. 752) inherent in these environments led some participants to observe a desperation from others for solutions that would enable school leaders to appear to be effective, or quality leaders in performative environments.

This shared focus also resulted in shared or similar practices towards what Ball (1993) described as policy as text as well as policy as discourse—those policies and expectations that are written, and then the way these documents are constituted through discourses and expectations, which as Porter (1995) suggested, create norms that shape behaviours and govern the work of principals from a distance. Given that each of the participants worked in a shared wider case (state primary schools in the same region, sharing many complexities and working within the same pressurised environment described in this chapter), the exploration of their subjectivities in forthcoming chapters will provide an understanding of the ways school improvement policies and discourses impact on the principalship.

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Chapter 6
'Stick to the Knitting': Principals Identifying and Maintaining a Focus for Their School

> *Schools need to "stick to the knitting" … in other words, stick to what you're really good at.*
>
> —Max

The previous chapter established that Max, Judy, and Scott worked in a climate where principals were under significant pressure to deliver results as desired and determined by the Department. A fundamental element of the principalship in Queensland was an explicit requirement to focus on school improvement. When examining the role description for principals in Max, Judy, and Scott's positions, the very first two points related to school improvement (Queensland Department of Education and Training [QDET], 2014b). Richard's comments also made it clear that at a regional level, school improvement as quantified by system metrics was expected to be the first priority for principals. Additionally, as discussed previously, principals were explicitly required under the Department's *State Schools Strategy 2014–2018* to 'deliver extraordinary and sustained improvement and achievement' (QDET, 2014a, p. 1), leading to a sense of pressure and urgency. These are just some examples of how policy as text and policy as discourse (Ball, 1993) about school improvement have become embedded throughout Queensland's state schooling landscape.

Therefore, the principalship has been disciplined by these policies and discourses to adopt practices that result in this high level of student outcomes as measured by system metrics. Tracy's observations about a desperation for a quick-fix must be considered with reference to principals' search for solutions due to the pressures faced in the climate of reform. Max, Judy, and Scott all discussed their own approaches, each of which varied somewhat from the others. This chapter explores the practices they adopted in response to school improvement policies and discourses.

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'Stick to the Knitting'—A Metaphor for Understanding the Work of Schools

During one of our interviews, Max made a comment that schools need to 'stick to the knitting' (Peters & Waterman, 1982), which was one of his mantras to maintain focus on the school's priorities. The 'stick to the knitting' philosophy was drawn from corporate management literature and consists of organisations identifying and remaining focused on their core business. I acknowledge the often-problematic application of business theory to educational leadership as a field and was hesitant to contribute to this further. However, this is simply a metaphor that Max used to frame his ideas. He returned to it a number of times, and it connected clearly with messages from Judy and Scott as well. Using this metaphor, this chapter suggests that each participant's personal conceptualisation of leadership is what enables them to 'stick to the knitting' at their school. In this case, we know that principals' knitting was not only construed as the improvement of student achievement on system metrics, but also more holistic aims.

Max's vision as a strong leader saw him exercising his autonomy to maintain a sharp and urgent focus, specifically on improving Ironcliff's school data. Judy and Scott represented two very divergent approaches to improvement. Judy focused on a holistic education for all students with a focus on the Arts and creativity, whereas Scott took the opposite approach by eschewing these creative pursuits at Mount Pleasant and focusing on English, Mathematics, and Science. Each principal's approach is deconstructed in more detail in this chapter; these approaches providing insights into the various ways the principals were leading with school improvement at the forefront of their work.

Max's Knitting: Using Autonomy and Instructional Leadership to Pursue School Improvement

As discussed in Chap. 5 concerning the current pressures on the principalship, Max was pragmatic about new initiatives from the system. He expressed his thoughts on 'faddism' pertaining to what he explained was the recurring notion of the 'next big thing' for schools. As instructional leader at Ironcliff, Max tended not to adopt every new initiative or directive that came from the system. This was for a number of reasons. Firstly, Max emphasised the importance of remaining consistent with a specific focus rather than regularly changing approaches or focuses. He attributed this to the need to deeply embed something as part of a school's culture before moving to introduce something new. Secondly, he did not always agree with the principle behind the initiative. I explore this aspect of Max's approach in further depth here, considering the ways he exercised autonomy as instructional leader by making the decision to go against the grain of expectations at times. This could be theorised as Foucault's 'counter-conduct', where Max was actively working against 'the processes implemented for conducting others' (Foucault, 2007, pp. 200–201). As Niesche (2013, p. 149) suggested in the same wider leadership context of Queensland, counter-conduct can be applied to principals' practices that work against particular strategies said to 'work' in school improvement.

One example of this could be seen in Max's response to a Departmental expectation around short-cycle improvement processes. The region asked principals to lead short-cycle improvement processes of between two and three weeks and monitor data before and after the cycle. Max's response to this was that 'it is the biggest load of crap I've ever come across, and you can quote me on that' (so, naturally, I have). Elaborating, he felt that 'it is a complete and utter waste of time' and, as can be surmised from his strong reaction to the initiative, Max elected not to adopt it in his school. His biggest frustration seemed to be around the period of time, noting that his school already did regularly monitor data in a similar approach, but checked in every five or six weeks, or 'at the latest, every term'.[1] He believed that it takes time to set up processes, and also argued that teachers were already feeling pressure without adding a two- to three-week data monitoring cycle into the environment.

Finally, Max felt that the processes already in place at Ironcliff were effective and, at this point, did not need to change. He described an example of focusing on Year 3 students with reference to NAPLAN and the way the school supported these students intensively. His evidence of success here was the shift of NAPLAN data as a result of this focus, which highlights the ways performative measures were disciplining principals (Foucault, 1977) to achieve certain outcomes desired by the system:

> At the end of that we just had a full page of green, in terms of kids we had lifted from here to there [gesturing a continuum]. Now to me, that's short cycle data – to be able to show what we're doing, and there is continuous improvement.

Max was clear in his belief that this approach worked for his school and that therefore the system should support their methods rather than imposing new approaches.

> You know, the Department will have its models and we have our models here […] so we'll continue to do that. If in fact our data was to plateau and start to decline, I would expect the ARD to come in [and require Ironcliff to change things], but if our data is continuing to improve the whole time, then bugger off and leave us alone so we can get on with the job.

Max's comments here highlighted a tension in his response to this particular discourse. At the same time, as he contested certain elements of it (i.e. the prescriptive nature of the short-cycle data requirements from the system), he condoned it on his own terms ('now to me, that's short-cycle data'). He challenged certain aspects of the discourse of the validity of numbers as a measure of effectiveness but indicated that if his school data were declining he would expect to be directed more prescriptively by his supervisor, who would ostensibly be using school data as a tool of surveillance (Foucault, 2003). In this, his compliance with the discourse that numbers are a valid measure of school effectiveness was evident. At the same time, however, he had very clear ideas about how this should be implemented or monitored at his school level. In a sense, at the same time that his leadership practices were being steered at a distance (Kickert, 1995), he was controlling or working against the measures being suggested by the region as an effective school improvement approach—reminiscent of Foucault's counter-conduct (Foucault, 2007; Niesche, 2013).

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[1] Australian school years are broken up into four 'terms' of approximately 10 weeks each.

This was not an approach reserved just for this short-cycle data initiative. When a new initiative or requirement from the system was announced, Max's approach was to reflect upon the processes already in place at the school and see how it might fit. As he expressed his frustration at 'faddism', he noted that the system has a tendency to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. As a result, he tried to minimise this constant ongoing implementation of new ideas or approaches. He said he would ask himself 'what's the thing that isn't going to change, regardless of who is in government, or who is running the school? What is going to make the difference for kids? And we focus on that'. Again, Niesche's (2013) theorising about counter-conduct as a form of political subjectivity (Foucault, 2007) comes to mind here, wherein principals resist the expectations from the system that are designed to conduct others. In this instance, the mandated short-cycle improvements were very much technologies that would steer the work of schools from a distance, and Max's refusal to adopt this initiative can be viewed as resistance to this conduct of conduct.

The discussion now shifts to explore Max's practices with this in mind - how, as the instructional leader, he decided what would make the difference for students; and how he implemented these approaches or strategies at Ironcliff.

Ironcliff's Main Focus—'We Do Whatever It Takes' to Help Children

When asked what the school's main focus was, Max described the mantra that drove their work; 'we do whatever it takes. It's not saying we want more than a pound of flesh out of people but if it takes a little bit extra to help a child in certain circumstances, then that's what we do'. Similar statements from Scott and Judy also emphasised the importance of supporting individual students. The other principle guiding Max's work at Ironcliff was explained as part of his core business as principal:

> Your core business is that you're here for kids, and you're here for teachers. And your core business is absolutely around improving student outcomes, and to do that we have to focus very clearly on what is good and what is right and don't get distracted by the other periphery.

When I asked Max what he considered to be 'good [… and …] right', he referenced the aforementioned 'sticking to the knitting' philosophy taken from the literature he had read about effective business management (illustrative of connections with neoliberal ideologies) and the importance of focusing on this 'core business'. Max elaborated further:

> In other words, you stick to what you're really good at. Some companies need to diversify otherwise they die, but in schools it's about, 'Can these kids bloody read, and how well can they read?' and if a kid can't read by the time they leave here in Year 7 and go to high school, then I'm an abject failure.

The notion that reading was the key element in Max's work—a practice clearly linked to measurable outcome for students under more performative conditions—is worth noting. When asked to describe other aspects of 'the knitting' at Ironcliff, Max responded that the key areas were 'can they read, can they count, can they socialise?' and, once again quantifying the work done in schools, he commented that 'we obviously measure those in various ways, but that's the knitting as far as I'm concerned'. This reflects Hardy's (2015a, b) research about the challenges of balancing an educative disposition when working within the parameters set in a performative culture such as this. Upon being asked about the other aspects, Max's response that they are measured in 'other' ways included a measurable focus on numeracy and social skills. Again, the trust placed in numbers or data (Porter, 1995) was evident.

Max's work as instructional leader at Ironcliff consistently returned to his core focus. He commented a number of times on the ways he worked to maintain a focus and sense of urgency within the school, without overwhelming his staff members. This aligns with findings from Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins, (2011a) who suggested that filtering is an essential element of policy interpretation and enactment, deciding 'what must be done, what can be done, and what cannot' (p. 626). Some of the ways Max did this were discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to filtering out some requests or directives from the system, to avoid distraction by 'the periphery', in Max's words. Lyotard's theorising about language games can be applied here in relation to Max's approach of choosing what information he would give to his staff members. Lyotard (1984, p. 15) suggested that 'one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass'. He emphasised that being in this position is a way of exercising power; in this case by deciding what messages Max received as addressee and would pass on to his staff as sender. When Max elected not to pass on information pertaining to an initiative it could be theorised through Lyotard's language games; moves and counter-moves that as a 'displacement' (p. 16) altered his position in the wider system. The choice to decide what would happen in his school thus positioned him in a powerful way.

Other approaches he took included keeping the school's key priorities at the forefront of any conversations with staff, students, and community members. He suggested that this kept the priorities refreshed in everyone's memories, so he took opportunities to revisit their shared goals at appropriate times:

> We simply say 'we all agreed here at Ironcliff that these are our priorities'. There will always be other stuff we have to look at, but at every staff meeting we come back to our mantra and our philosophy – we talk about the key things we are focusing on.

Max then returned to the 'stick to the knitting' concept described earlier, and elaborated that another philosophy he worked by is the KISS [keep it simple, stupid] philosophy, because he wanted to 'stick to the main things and do them very well, rather than spread yourself too thinly'.

To set this focus, Max used the available data from the school data profiles to identify trends and areas that seemed to require development. In this sense, the performative nature of the principalship was evident, because the very thing driving the practices, leadership choices, and focus of the strategic agenda were these targets and measurable data sets. Indeed, this was the case for each of the principal participants to varying degrees (and will be explored in depth in Chap. 7 regarding the ways principals use the school data profiles) but is also a valuable discussion point here in the context of Max's work as instructional leader at Ironcliff. The 'main things' Max referred to were thus measurable, and being drawn from the school data profile meant they were the elements of schooling deemed important enough by the Department to include in the profile in the first instance. Once again, the disciplining of principals (Foucault, 1977) combined with steering of their work at a distance (Kickert, 1995) was evident here. Max exercised his autonomy by determining the focus for Ironcliff, but the focus itself was drawn from a narrow set of measurable data provided by the Department.

With that said, Max's practices as principal did seem to contradict some of Tracy's comments about what she generally saw in her work as a regional support officer. Whereas Tracy spoke about a sense of fear or desperation for solutions, this was not evident in my discussions with Max. I would argue, again, that there could be a number of potential reasons for this—namely, his experience in various positions throughout his time with the Department, his being in a later career stage than many of the other principals in the region, and of course the influence of each principal's personality cannot be discounted here in terms of their leadership practices (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). When working with data, Tracy noted that many principals had short-term, compliance-driven visions. This was not necessarily the case with Max, who took a long view for many of the initiatives at Ironcliff and emphasised the time it took to implement cultural change or, as is more relevant for this area of discussion, to change trends in school data.

Max did still draw his focus from the data profile, but rather than working in reactive states about specific issues within the data at each release of the profile, Max suggested that he and his team looked at the big picture or the 'balcony' or 'helicopter view' discussed by Tracy (Lewis & Andrews, 2009) and identified ongoing trends or areas of challenge when they become trends over time. Max noted that as a whole school, at staff meetings they 'spend an inordinate amount of time looking at the data'. For example, at a staff meeting I observed, Max's leadership team was leading a discussion unpacking the school's recently released NAPLAN data. They explored the data from a whole school and year level view, and then applied contextual information about each of the areas that may have caused concern. Some of this contextual information included the school's ICSEA score and how it might have influenced trends, but other information was more specific, relating to groups of students within the targeted year levels. The next step was to look at the intervention processes in the school that were happening before and after the NAPLAN testing, and discussing ways forward.

This relates to Lyotard's (1984) comments about narrative knowledge, or 'the story behind the data' (which is how all participants referred to this concept). While the example of the staff meeting discussion did include this narrative knowledge, the 'science' of the data did still drive the action taken in the end. The specific approaches undertaken by Max and his team at Ironcliff relating to working with data will be explored in depth in Chapter 7, but it is evident here that Max's work and his conceptualisation of his role itself were data-driven. In fact, this was highlighted by Max in one of our interviews when he commented 'is it a data-driven world now? Absolutely'. Interestingly, and perhaps contradictorily, this comment was in response to a question about how the school addressed more holistic aspects of education, illustrating the powerful position held by data in the strategic landscape of participants' schools.

One concern of researchers regarding the performative nature of education is the potential for schools to engage in unhealthy practices to satisfy the demands of performativity (Ball, 2003; Keddie, 2013). This was also referred to by Lingard and Sellar (2013) as 'perverse' or 'anti-educational' effects (p. 634), or the norm when test-based accountability is the measure of success in schools. One such practice was identified in relation to a narrowed focus at Mount Pleasant on three key learning areas—English, Maths, and Science, which will be addressed in more detail within this chapter. In contrast, Max contended that as principal of Ironcliff, he was accountable for the implementation of the curriculum as a whole. As noted previously, the concept of accountability-driven behaviours is another element found within performative cultures and was displayed by Max in our interviews. However, Max did comment upon the notion of holistic education when prompted further, although he related this back to accountabilities rather than speaking about it as though it was a key driver in his own educational philosophy. Max's approach aligns with findings from Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011b) that social justice and inclusion issues under standards-focused agendas can sometimes be 'gestured to as asides to the main business of policy' (p. 618). In contrast, Judy's philosophy centred wholly on holistic education and her work at Merriwald was driven by this.

Judy's Knitting: Holistic Education Driven by a Shared School Vision

The Influence of a School Vision—'The Merriwald Family'

Judy initially described Merriwald as being unique due to its shared school vision, which provided guidance for the school community as a whole. The vision of 'Growing and Learning Together'[2] was built around a concept described by Judy and other school community members as the 'Merriwald Family'. This encouraged growth as individuals, with an aim that every member of the school community (students, staff, and parents) would feel valued as individuals. The vision explicitly incorporated the importance of holistic development of students, preparing students for life beyond school, valuing contributions from parents and staff members, and celebrating cultural and individual diversity within the students. In this area, in comparison to Max and Scott, Judy seemed to be more visibly resisting being disciplined by some of the more performative elements of the current culture.

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[2] The vision statement has been rephrased to avoid identification of the school.

The emphasis on the school's vision of a holistic approach to education, and its resulting impact on the uniqueness of the school, can also be examined through theories of performativity. Discussed by Ball (2003) and explored further by Keddie (2013), one aspect of performativity is represented by schools working to create a distinctive identity that is different—and can be seen as better—than other schools. This was particularly evident throughout Judy's interviews, where she often returned to the importance of Merriwald's shared vision as embedded in the school's culture and how it worked as a point of uniqueness, setting Merriwald apart from other schools.

This vision was heavily embedded in the school culture, with dedicated sections on the school website describing the visioning process in depth, visual symbols of the school vision represented regularly around the school grounds and on all school documentation, and even a school song developed from the vision. This promotion of the uniqueness of the school's vision as a point of departure from other schools aligns with research from Maguire, Perryman, Ball, and Braun (2011) and their exploration of how schools might use websites to strategically market themselves in particular ways. The proliferation of information about the vision on Merriwald's website and its position on the front page, accompanied by photos of students engaging in cultural and creative pursuits, positioned Merriwald strategically as a school where the main foundation was their vision of a holistic education. Accompanied by personal testimonials from students, parents, and staff members about why prospective families should choose to enrol at Merriwald, the school used the website to promote themselves as a unique learning environment.

The strength of the school's vision as a guiding principle for all of the work undertaken at Merriwald was also praised by Richard and Tracy, with Tracy commenting on the authenticity of the development and continued maintenance of the vision. At times in other schools, Tracy acknowledged, the development of a vision could be more of a compliance process than a process designed to shift or guide school cultures. In contrast, at Merriwald, the vision was shared and upheld by staff, students, and community members alike. Judy shared a number of anecdotes of staff and parents questioning how new Departmental initiatives might link to the vision, suggesting that this demonstrated that the vision was embedded deeply throughout the school culture.

The vision itself and its subsequent centrality to the school culture at Merriwald has resulted in a very strong emphasis on a wider picture of education that may not necessarily be seen as being promoted by neoliberal ideologies represented through the narrow measures of achievement that are valorised (Mills & Niesche, 2014) by the system as a whole. Judy, in particular, was passionate and vocal about the importance of this wider picture of education and cited it as a strong drawcard for newcomers to the school. She noted that when enrolling new families to the school, 'we always ask them why [they chose Merriwald]—it's because they're looking for a school that actually values their child and will go the extra mile and we do, we pride ourselves on that, that we do that'. She elaborated that she believed the staff was cohesive in their approach, guided by the school vision: '[the vision] is the glue that sticks us together, we do value kids, we do go the extra yard, and we do value difference'. As principal, Judy related that she got a sense of satisfaction from seeing the consistent approach of the school community towards celebrating individuality among their students:

> I love when I see people – kids and parents and staff say 'this is our Merriwald Family' – when I see that happening and people saying that, I can think 'wow, we've made an impact here' when I see people saying those words.

Judy worked to embed the school vision within systemic documents and requirements from central or regional office. She noted in our interviews that when a new requirement came out (such as an official requirement in 2013 to develop a school-based pedagogical framework), rather than starting afresh their school community worked to see how the new requirements would fit into their existing vision and ethos of the school. She referred a number of times to similar approaches of returning to the school's vision and reflecting upon positive practices already happening within the school before moving beyond and looking for new ideas. This was reiterated by Tracy, who regarded Judy as being one of the few principals in the region (the only principal that she could think of at the time, in fact, although she did think of some others later) who took this approach when new requirements arose. This sort of collaborative approach would be made more difficult without the strength of relationships Judy had developed with her staff, her school community, and the students themselves, all of whom provided input into the development of new documents or approaches within the school where possible to ensure a sense of collaboration.

As discussed earlier in this chapter with Max, Judy's approach can be theorised through Lyotard's (1984) notions of language games. When Judy received a directive from the Department, she was placed in a new position and interpreted that directive or suggestion through the lens of what would work for the needs of her school community. Judy was again exercising her power, though in a different way to Max, by taking this collaborative approach to integrating directives rather than serving as a gatekeeper for information or initiatives.

Judy's Instructional Leadership—'It's About Kids and It's About Learning and Teaching and, You Know, Developing Them for Life'

Judy's dedication to collaboration and parallel leadership and the school's shared vision formed the grounding for many of the choices and decisions that Judy made as the person ultimately responsible for teaching and learning at Merriwald. When discussing instructional leadership, Judy's own definition was that she saw it as her role to enable quality teaching and learning in the school: 'Your thing is making sure the teaching is happening and that you've got good teaching happening in your school, and you've got good results for your kids and that the kids are learning'.

When questioned further about this concept of 'good teaching' and what it meant to her, Judy explained she felt that some of the current pressures or expectations on principals to be 'all encompassing' may have resulted in a detrimental shift in focus for principals. In the current climate of performativity and quantification of education, 'quality' teaching is part of the government rhetoric and encompasses a narrowing of curriculum and pedagogy to that which will likely improve test results (Keddie, 2014). Judy referred to the potential for a narrowed education, but also described her belief that quality teaching was more of a holistic enterprise:

> I think they've lost sight of – they're still kids, that's your main focus. It's not like a product at the end that you punch out, it's about kids and it's about learning and teaching and, you know, developing them for life. Lifelong learners, not about… all of those extra-curricular things are essential in being able to make them a good person, or later in life… you can't just have them coming out just knowing all the tables – that's a core, but it's not just about that, it's about the interpersonal, so if you take away the musicals, if you take away all of that sort of stuff, well they're opportunities for kids who mightn't do well in class, to become confident, and they then bring that back into the class to be able to become risk takers. Whereas if you don't have that, they won't be able to become risk takers and have a go.

Judy's core philosophy as an instructional leader is encapsulated in the quote above. She believed that her work was about preparing students for life—encouraging them to see themselves as learners and providing opportunities for them to succeed in areas beyond current narrow definitions of achievement. As Judy's conceptualisation of her role entailed ensuring that holistic and creative elements of education were valued and provided for students in a climate where they were not necessarily emphasised by the system (Keddie, 2014), much of her work as instructional leader of the school was framed around these goals. This reflects research (Cranston, 2013, p. 134) that found that some school leaders have been able to manage competing agendas of performativity and holistic education, and do not allow the narrow measures of achievement to dominate schooling practices. Moore's (2004) discussion of the tension between performative practices and principals' personal commitment to more holistic approaches to education is also paralleled in Judy's approach.

In following this goal, Judy's leadership practices involved choices and approaches designed to provide opportunities for students to explore other facets of education. On the whole, she felt that the school community—teachers, parents or carers, and the wider school community—valued these endeavours equally for the children at Merriwald, a diverse school population with varied student needs:

> In the end, people value that about this school, that we do have those things, and they're looking for that, and when they come in it's not just about the academic stuff, it's about support [and providing] other opportunities for kids to develop.

Some of these opportunities included art classes, chess clubs, musicals, opportunities to participate in outside activities such as Opti-Minds, and providing pastoral care and support to students. Judy noted that parents who came to enrol their children at Merriwald were interested in these opportunities for their children: 'it isn't just about the academia, they're looking for "what are you going to do in order to help my child?" […] and we are a family [at Merriwald] and [parents] are part of that family'.

When discussing the ways she enabled these approaches to be implemented at Merriwald, Judy referred to some other schools (including Mount Pleasant) that had narrowed their focus on education:

> People who do that lose sight of the whole thing and put [a narrowed focus on education] in isolation - so many things can come out of what you're teaching in the other subjects and we've started looking at other creative ways of being able to do that.

These creative ways of being able to incorporate holistic enterprises into what participants described as a crowded curriculum and a climate of high pressure provide an opportunity to explore the ways Judy maintained her own conceptualisation of her role as being to support students in the areas described above. Judy maintained that her positive 'track record' enabled her the freedom to work in ways that may have been outside the general unwritten rules for principals because she had been proven to be a 'quality' leader under performative notions.

Theorising this concept of Judy's 'track record' through a lens of performativity provides an insight into participants' understandings of effective practice. Ball (2006) discussed notions of 'quality' and this was further elaborated upon by Singh (2014) and Keddie (2013). This notion of quality is problematic, given debate about the purpose of education in a climate where a narrowed, quantifiable focus is valued, as has been discussed previously in this book. Questions should be asked about what, exactly, 'quality' looks like in the principalship. From these case studies, it seems that quality—to the extent where principals were seen to be succeeding in their roles—consisted partially of being reliable and consistent. Judy's comments indicated that she met Departmental requirements in various ways including basic compliance, such as ensuring forms or required systemic documents were submitted correctly and on-time. Judy's track record also came from more complex leadership elements including the way she managed her school community and the fact that there were very few complaints from community members or staff due to her nature of focusing on collaboration and relationships (which was confirmed by Richard as one of the ways of monitoring school and principal performance). Her annual survey data showed extremely high student, parent, and staff satisfaction rates. She attributed her 'track record' with her ability to work outside system norms and focus on what her community had decided was important.

Maintaining Focus on 'The Right Stuff' at Merriwald—'You Have to Filter a Lot of Things'

Given the extent to which schools and principals were under surveillance (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) Judy noted that one of her strategies for working within the current system was to be open and honest, communicating proactively with her supervisors. As a result, she said:

> they will respect you and I've found as I've gotten older that I [communicate] more, they give you credence and a wider berth, and they value your opinion and allow you to be able to do more things like that because they know in the end you're not trying to rort anything, you're a hardworking, caring, genuine person who wants to be able to have the best for kids.

The aforementioned notion of emotion work came through strongly in Judy's conceptualisation of her role—being caring and genuine, being passionate and excited were all mentioned at times as being important elements of her work (Blackmore, 2010; Mills & Niesche, 2014). Judy also referred to empathy regularly throughout our interviews, using it almost as a compass for her own decisions at times. She described empathising with parents and carers to understand why they responded in certain ways or why they had specific questions or concerns. She also empathised with students when talking about the potential for a narrowed focus on education and considered how it might impact upon their confidence and enjoyment of school. Particularly important to note here is the high level of diversity of student population in terms of complex social justice issues. Many students at Merriwald came from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, had high levels of emotional or learning needs, or came from disadvantaged backgrounds. The ability to empathise with students provided Judy with a lens to view how her work impacted upon the students in her care. Finally, she empathised heavily with teachers, returning a number of times to her belief that principals must remain 'connected' to the classroom and to teachers' work in order to be realistic and supportive of the challenges and complexities facing teachers in the current climate.

This sense of empathy, I would argue, influenced many of the approaches undertaken at Merriwald, with Judy actively considering the impact of new policies or initiatives from all of these perspectives. In fact, Judy noted that she was conscious of the impact of ongoing reforms on her staff, students, and parents, and worked to minimise this where possible:

> You have to filter a lot of things, because sometimes that earnestness and that feeling of having to get everything done comes from you, you're delivering that, so you have to be discerning and talk about it amongst your admin team and say 'what is the most important?'.

Judy's filtering process returned back to the school's vision, with the leadership team reflecting on the school's values and mission. This then guided the types of initiatives implemented at Merriwald, or the decisions about what was introduced to the school community in order to minimise the potential drawbacks of the ongoing reform process.

This 'filtering' concept was not dissimilar to Max's comments discussed earlier in this chapter as were related to Lyotard's (1984) language games and the power of choosing whether or not to pass on 'messages'. However, the difference in motivation behind these 'moves' (Lyotard, 1984, p. 16) is interesting to consider. Whereas Max exercised his autonomy in this way to maintain focus on school priorities, Judy's 'moves' were more about supporting her staff and shielding them from the sense of pressure that was described in Chap. 5 as influencing participants' work. Judy considered the impact of ongoing reforms or the potential for initiativitis (Carter,

2012) and made decisions on how to minimise the impact of reforms on Merriwald's staff, students, and community.

A quote from Judy earlier in this chapter noted the 'creative' ways the school tried to work around performative expectations and rising workloads, while still enacting their vision of a holistic education. This creativity manifested in a number of ways designed to ensure sufficient time was able to be allocated to the types of ventures valued at Merriwald. Some examples of these approaches included altering break times, encouraging teachers to integrate curriculum areas, and participating in fewer interschool sporting events or carnivals (while not completely withdrawing from these). These shifts enabled the school to retain its focus on the creative extra-curricular elements valued by the school community.

Central to Judy's vision of her role as principal in this environment of rapid reform was this notion of maintaining focus on the 'right' things, as described above, or as Max referred to it, sticking to the knitting. With Judy noting that she saw instructional leadership as enabling effective teaching and learning to happen, she suggested that part of her role was to remove barriers or potential blockers to this end. To do this, she emphasised the importance of organisation on her own part. When Judy was asked to elaborate on her comments about organisation, this included ensuring that aspects of school management were running smoothly such as timetables, specialist teachers' work in classrooms, explicit guidance and support concerning planning requirements for teachers, and resourcing. This is reflective of comments in Chap. 5, where participants discussed the challenges of the shift from manager to instructional leader of their schools. This management side of things—'organising', in Judy's terms—needs to be addressed in order for instruction in the school to be effective, reflective of Hallinger's (2003) comments regarding the balance needed between management and instructional leadership practices.

In Chap. 5, I analysed the ways principals discussed the challenge of balancing these competing requirements, with the managerial or practical side often winning out over the instructional leadership side of things—for example, elements of participants' roles such as coaching and feedback falling by the wayside. I asked Judy to elaborate on the ways that she remained on track with both of these aspects of the principalship, and her response highlighted the importance of a strong administration team. This echoed comments from Max about the importance of his leadership team (which is larger than Judy's), while at the same time highlighting similar comments from Scott about the challenge of being in a smaller school, with no formal leadership team (such as a deputy principal, or a head of department) to rely on. This is where the concept of distributed or parallel leadership becomes particularly useful, and it was adopted in particular by Scott as well as Judy as part of their work.

As alluded to by research from Crowther (2011), one benefit of developing parallel leadership across a group of people and embedding processes in the school (the way Judy had) is that the work of school improvement becomes everybody's business, ensuring that the entire load of driving school improvement does not rest solely on the principal as a heroic leader. Crowther (2011) succinctly described the concept of parallel leadership with the metaphor that a champion team works better than a team of champions. Judy's team shared a focus on their vision of a holistic education, which some might argue was at odds with the approach being implemented at Mount Pleasant, where Scott narrowed the focus of what was taught in an effort to improve measurable outcomes for their students.

Scott's Knitting: Formalised Autonomy Leading to a 'Sharper' or Narrowed Focus of Education

Even as an Independent Public School with a higher level of 'official' autonomy, Scott noted that Mount Pleasant continued to work within the constraints or expectations of the wider system. He commented that 'I don't think you can be fully autonomous within a government structure, because the government wants certain things done'. Here, we can see reference to the autonomy gap (Adamowski, Bowles Therriault, & Cavanna, 2007) as discussed in Chap. 2 as well as to notions of government steering the work of principals at a distance (Niesche, 2011; Porter, 1995). It has been said that rather than becoming more de-regulated (or autonomous), schooling has simply been reframed and re-regulated around certain structures (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) and the work of educators has been shaped as a result of this. Scott's work as instructional leader of Mount Pleasant was demonstrative of an audit culture where performativity was a strong element of the landscape, as he was strongly driven by the pursuit of measurable outcomes for his students.

Interestingly, Scott's thoughts about autonomy echoed those of Max's, who suggested that principals were perhaps already more autonomous than they believed themselves to be. Scott commented that:

> You still have a confined framework of a system to work in, so other schools around us might want to do something but think they're not allowed to. I think they would be allowed to, but they're just thinking and reflecting and saying, 'No, I'm not allowed to do that'. But you need to make decisions and if you've got kids that are failing, you need to do something different. Because they will fail year after year, and doing the same stuff won't help them, so you've got to do something different. So if we had more of that capacity to make localised decisions, we'd be better off.

This quote is particularly important, because many of the initiatives or approaches being implemented at Mount Pleasant were as a result of this belief that 'something different' was needed in order to improve results. Indeed, Scott was trialling these initiatives prior to Mount Pleasant joining the IPS programme, which supports notions from Keddie (2014) that schools (or principals such as Scott) who enjoy advantageous positions in the hierarchy will take up autonomy more confidently. This advantageous position, in this instance, is exemplified by Scott's ability to work outside the perceived bounds of the curriculum with his supervisor's approval. This is also reflective of comments from Lingard, Hayes, and Mills (2002) who noted that schools are sometimes ahead of policy. Scott's work to 'sharpen' the curriculum came some time before the announcement by Queensland's Education Minister in June 2016 that the curriculum would be streamlined to agreed-upon core outcomes.

The above quote also demonstrates the tensions that could potentially be found for principals who are expected to be instructional or educational leaders in performative cultures. As Richard indicated in this context, the principal was deemed to be responsible for the academic success of every child. Scott demonstrated an educative disposition by focusing on student achievement; however, this was still governed by performative tools of surveillance (Foucault, 2003) and measurement. Nevertheless, at times, the approaches trialled at Mount Pleasant, as well as the strategies adopted by Scott in his instructional leadership of the school moved beyond the potential critique of narrowed focuses on education being simply about meeting performative requirements. Scott's comments consistently returned to his goals being about improving student outcomes, helping students who were failing, and ensuring students had the skills they need to succeed in life (including future studies).

Scott and his school's staff trialled a number of initiatives at Mount Pleasant in an effort to improve measurable outcomes for their students. With higher levels of autonomy, Scott said the Director General had encouraged IPS principals to consider the notion of 'intellectual accountability' and being 'emotionally involved' in school improvement as a driver (see prior discussion in Chap. 5 regarding principals' responses to increased pressures), as well as the fact that they were 'directly accountable' for the measurable outcomes for their students (Hassler, 2011; Melville, 1993). This heightened notion of accountability for Scott influenced the approaches he chose to implement at Mount Pleasant, some of which were reflective of a culture of enumeration and performativity, such as incorporating a narrower focus on education, one of the perverse effects of a test-based climate of accountability (Keddie, 2014; Lingard & Sellar, 2013).

Narrowing the Curriculum at Mount Pleasant—'Simplify the Focus and Simply Focus'

Of the approaches being undertaken at Mount Pleasant, one that was the most discussed among participants was the narrowing of focus in respect to the content being taught and assessed. Scott referred to this as the 'sharpening' of focus, rather than the 'narrowing' of focus, but I adopt this nomenclature in order to align with the literature reviewed in Chap. 2 related to the possible impact of external accountabilities. I have previously written about this in relation to the various ways the IPS programme has played out (Heffernan, forthcoming) and write about it here as an example of school improvement policy enactment.

After being seconded for a year to work with a range of schools in a coaching capacity, when it came time to return to Mount Pleasant, Scott brought some ideas of 'different' approaches designed to bolster results. His quote ('if you've got a bunch of kids that are failing, you need to do something different') demonstrated the complexities discussed earlier about Scott's educative disposition and alignment with performative requirements. We can see direct links back to theories of performativity and quantification of education, along with pressures from the system to improve results, with Scott then commenting:

> Our results this year have been really good, and when it comes down to it, that's all they want to see. They're not interested in how I'm doing it, they just want to see this number of kids above this certain point, so it's a very numerical system.

Scott's comments that principals are required to 'do whatever it takes' to lift results echoed Max's comments, including the same phrasing. In these quotes from the principals, we can see evidence of how the quantification of education as well as the emphasis placed on measurable outcomes for students (Ball, 2006; Keddie, 2013; Singh, 2014) permeated the system's culture. Scott reflected that he saw Mount Pleasant's teachers feeling overwhelmed by increasing expectations of what needed to be taught amid an already full curriculum. Concerns about similar issues were echoed by Judy, Max, and Tracy at various points. Scott relayed that the teachers at his school felt unable to focus in depth on key skills in literacy and numeracy, which became a key driver in his approach to school improvement:

> I have learned that if you pick one thing and do it long enough, everyone accepts it […] and I thought it was Covey that said it, it could have been Fullan or someone, that said, 'You simplify the focus and then you simply focus.' So that means taking the curriculum that's [wide hands] that wide, and cutting it and then just focusing.

Scott developed a proposal for how Mount Pleasant would 'simplify' the focus and approached his then supervisor, Richard, who agreed to a twelve-month trial with the caveat that results had to have improved by the end of that period. Scott's comments that improved results were 'all they want to see' reinforces the point Lyotard (1984) made about science (school data, in this case) outweighing narrative (the story about how the data was achieved). At the end of the twelve months, results had not improved at the anticipated rate but Mount Pleasant joined the IPS programme giving them a reprieve on their deadline, along with the autonomy to continue the approach. Scott discussed at a few points throughout our interviews that this was a long-term plan and the results did improve as they had expected, but that it just took longer than the initial twelve months they were given. Here, Scott demonstrated his ability to work outside of system pressures of time as described by Tracy in Chap. 5. She theorised that many principals in the region (and, she believed, the state) felt a sense of urgency and pressure to immediately improve results. In contrast, Scott committed to a longer-term approach and did not abandon that plan when results did not immediately reflect what the staff had expected to see.

The specifics of 'simply focus[ing]', entailed the removal of some subjects from the range taught and assessed at Mount Pleasant. Along with a significant focus on English, Mathematics, and Science, the school offered Music and Physical Education. They no longer offered Health, Social Studies, History or the Arts other than Music (they already had a long-term music teacher on staff). They also embedded a programme focusing on social skilling and values education throughout the culture of the school and had done so for many years.

The approach taken at Mount Pleasant seemed to be a stark difference in schooling, perhaps representative of the 'unhealthy practices' warned about by some researchers

(Ball, 2003; Keddie, 2013), in the pursuit of results, such as manipulating the data covertly or overtly, focusing on specific students to gain immediate increases in results, or narrowing the focus of pedagogy and curriculum to that which is assessed in testing (Keddie, 2014). With that said, Scott argued that it was a logical approach. I viewed these potential interpretations of the approach through Lyotard's (1984) suggestion that measurable outcomes could trump knowledge for its own sake—or in this case, that which cannot be measured. Scott's approach of narrowing the curriculum at Mount Pleasant was a direct effort to improve test scores in areas valorised (Mills & Niesche, 2014) by the Department's tools of measurement and surveillance (Foucault, 2003).

He argued that it was like coaching a sporting team, where students would be given the opportunity to continuously revisit fundamental skills before moving up to the next, higher level, skill:

> If you go outside and look at any netball thing out here – if they can't do something, [the coaches] pull them aside and have them practise that skill more and more until they can do it, and we don't do that – and people are worried that if they don't learn this history thing in Grade 2, they're going to…. what? Fail? [History has only just been introduced as a subject so] if they can't read they're failing it anyway.

Scott conveyed his belief that parents and teachers supported the fundamental skills-based approach:

> So when I have enrolment interviews, I bring that up with people. They're worried about it – 'if my kid doesn't do geography, when will he learn the difference between a mountain and a hill?' But I say, 'We can look that up – that's just facts!' and if they can't read, they can't even do that – they can't look it up. And I haven't met anybody yet who said they don't want their kids to read better.

Scott said that there have been a few parents (whom he suggested were very much in the minority) who had raised concerns about some of the subjects that were removed—for example, the Arts, but the system (first with Richard's approval, and then as part of the IPS programme) has afforded the school the autonomy to take their approach. Scott elaborated that 'when people come along and say, "My kid's an artist in the making." and we're not providing the right whatever – at this school, we do [the narrowed focus], and being Independent has really backed that up.'

This was an important element of practices associated with the IPS programme, in this context, at least, and there is a gap in the research pertaining to parental influence on priorities in these more autonomous public schools. Much of the rhetoric surrounding the IPS programme has included discussion about being able to meet community needs and increased sensitivity to local contexts and consultation with school communities (Gobby, 2013; Trimmer, 2013). From Scott's comments above, it is evident that community consultation did play a part in the narrowing of the focus of education at Mount Pleasant, but the autonomy afforded by the IPS programme also afforded him the confidence to continue with the approach when some parents raised concerns. This can be viewed through Lyotard's (1984) theorising of knowledge and power. Scott had the power as principal to decide what 'knowledge' was valued, and to implement approaches that aligned with these ideas. His formalised autonomy as an IPS principal lent further strength to this power. Theorising this further through the sociology of numbers, the use of school data as the driver for these decisions lent gravitas to these decisions (Porter, 1995).

Scott was firm in his belief that for his context, this shift in focus was an effective solution and that their results have supported this. He did, however, voice his frustration that while his school's data improved, so did that of the state and the nation, making it difficult to effectively judge improvement at a school level against the wider system:

> One thing that frustrates me is that every time we improve, every time our average goes up, so do all the averages. So every time a kid goes up, the average goes up, so it's really difficult to judge yourself against national averages because if all of Queensland rises, then the average goes up too.

In this sense, the goalposts shifted for the school with each new release of data, so the school implemented a number of structures to measure learning achievement for students at Mount Pleasant. The narrowed focus was intended to be temporary, with other subjects being reintroduced as students mastered foundational skills. At the time of writing, however, the narrowed focus is still in place. The approach taken at Mount Pleasant shows the influence of performative cultures within the system. At the very least, quantification of education was evident in the sense that the practices were being driven by a desire to improve the measurable outcomes for students as defined by the system's emphasis on certain aspects of data. Indicative of the complex processes involved in enacting school improvement policies, though, other strategies that may have been perceived to fall into the healthier side of innovation or reform (Ball, 2003) were also adopted at Mount Pleasant in an attempt to improve learning outcomes for students, such as an externally funded project to develop a database of student learning.

Tracking Student Progression and Focusing on 'the 'Right' Stuff'

Scott's use of data to monitor student achievement; his desire for teachers to try 'something different'; and the collaborative nature of his approach of identifying successful practices elsewhere and seeing what might work at Mount Pleasant can be exemplified by an externally funded project he developed. This project, involving tracking and measuring student 'learning journeys', focused on progression through the curriculum. It came about initially as a result of a partnership with a 'like school' in Victoria—'Southwell College'. After meeting the principal of Southwell, 'David', at a meeting, Scott 'worked out that [Southwell] was a like school' on the *MySchool* website. Scott then used *MySchool* website to monitor Southwell's data for some time and discovered that:

> Their school was pretty close to ours in makeup, but every year they were improving and continuously outstripping us in literacy, numeracy, in all of their data. So if you took any graph, and say my graph went up four, his went up six. So, somehow the teaching that was happening there was having more of an impact than the teaching that was happening here.

As a result of this, and of his strategy to seek out solutions that were working in other schools to see how they might be implemented at Mount Pleasant, Scott developed a partnership with David and visited the school on a number of occasions to examine their improvement agenda and strategies. This strategy can be theorised through Lyotard’s (1984) discussion of the importance of success narratives, showing what practices can be performed within the performative climate. It also reflects notions from Simons (2015) about the power of the example as a way of promoting best practice—again, within a performative context. When Southwell performed well on these metrics in a similar context as a ‘non-local local’ (Lingard, Sellar, & Savage, 2014), or, as Gorur (2016, p. 34) noted, competition from ‘far flung’ areas, Scott wanted to better understand why and how they achieved those results. Significantly, Scott also arranged for each of his school’s teachers to travel to Southwell in ‘study groups’, using Mount Pleasant’s professional development budget. As a result of this partnership, staff from Mount Pleasant and Southwell collaborated on shared internal monitoring processes and documents, as well as sharing school improvement strategies. This, Scott predicted, would lead to improved student outcomes and thereby result in an improved profile for Mount Pleasant on *MySchool*.

Scott spent some time explaining the process he went through to encourage teacher interest in the partnership with Southwell. He said he knew early on that he wanted to visit the school, and take Mount Pleasant’s teachers to see the school, to investigate further. He said, ‘I’m thinking I need to go see someone and then he turns up [at the meeting] So I suppose all that stuff is sort of flukey’. However, due to Scott’s philosophy of implementing change at a reasonable pace so as to deeply engage his school’s teachers, it took some time (two years) before they ‘actually got there’ as a staff:

> Across those two years, you start to build people up to it, and you say to them, ‘Look at this, I wonder what’s going on down there?’, and then you say to them, ‘What if I paid for us to go down there?’. Two trips, five days, then we’ll come back here…’.

Our discussion focused on the pace of change, with Scott noting that ‘reviewing and reflecting is really important’, because if the teachers had been directed to board a plane to Southwell without buying into the approach, it would not have been as effective. He commented on the pace of the changes being implemented at Mount Pleasant:

> The change doesn’t happen fast enough for me, at all, but I’m not actually doing it. They’re doing it. And it’s got to go at their pace. I’ll push it along a little bit, and they’ll grumble and gripe, but they’re all better than what they were a few years ago. And they’re all doing things they weren’t doing last year.

This was reflective of Judy’s discussion from earlier about protecting her staff from the impacts of ongoing reform. It highlighted Scott’s awareness of the potential for ‘initiativitis’ (Carter, 2012), and I would propose that it could be theorised as

Scott disciplining the school's teachers over time through suggestions and examples (Simons, 2015). Their opinions and interest gradually grew to the point where they 'bought into' Scott's proposal for a non-local local (Lingard, Sellar, & Savage, 2014) partnership.

The disciplining of teachers at Mount Pleasant was further evident in Scott's comments, that he knew the school was improving and the culture was genuinely changing to focus on teaching and learning, because discussions at the school were focused on this aspect, rather than on 'playground duty, or behaviour management'. Instead, teachers were discussing issues such as:

> 'The spelling is not hard enough, or too hard, or how am I going to do this maths?' We're actually complaining about the right things now. And I've got to remember that, because sometimes I think, 'Get over it!' but it's better than before, it's the right thing to be complaining about. You can be in the best school and people will still complain. When you have that culture [that Mount Pleasant now has], though, it's like… first world problems.

Scott's educative disposition is evident here again, and discussions of complexity can be drawn from his acknowledgement of performative cultures and the 'whatever it takes' improvement mentality within the system. The notion that the culture of the school was changing, as evidenced by the conversations referenced by Scott, is an example of Foucault's (1977) notions of discipline in action. The steering at a distance (Kickert, 1995) through technologies of surveillance (Foucault, 2003) have disciplined staff over time to align with system priorities. The 'right' conversations at the school, representative of the school's cultural focus on teaching and learning, represented staff members discussing the aspects of teaching and learning on which the system wanted schools to focus.

Gillies (2013) drew upon Foucault's notions of subjectivity to discuss the fact that in a modern neoliberal society, the ultimate aim is for the creation of a self-governing individual; someone who embodies the system's ideals and priorities. It could be argued that this has been achieved in Scott. From his comments above, it could potentially be suggested that his school's staff as a whole have also come to embody the system's priorities, but it would be difficult to draw conclusions about other people's subjectivities based on Scott's observations alone.

Aligning with this focus on the 'right' elements of teaching and learning, Scott developed a project directly from this partnership with Southwell College. It initially began as a means of replicating Southwell's paper-based process of tracking progression through the curriculum, but shifted to the development of a database that could record what students 'currently know' and was intended to influence teachers' planning and delivery of the curriculum as a result. Scott discussed a quote he had read in an old publication and how the project was envisaged:

> 'The single most important factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach accordingly.' And that's from 1968! I can't tell you at the moment what my kids know or don't know. I can tell you what units they've experienced, but I don't have a system that says, 'Billy knows exactly this and not that', but this database will take care of that.

The dominance of enumerative discourses (Hardy, 2015a) was evident in Scott's practices and his emphasis on numbers and data within the creation of the database.

He believed this would have a significant influence on the measurable outcomes for students at Mount Pleasant in the future—he commented that they wanted to see proficiency in students in terms of benchmarks and data, but they needed to have a clearer idea about student progression first. The notion Scott discussed was that many of his students were educationally disadvantaged, and therefore, some of the benchmarks set by the system were difficult to meet. This was a sentiment shared by Max and Judy as well and will be discussed in depth in Chap. 7 concerning how principals responded to data discourses. Scott explained his philosophy guiding the database project:

> Do we want to be known for improving progression, or do we want to be known for having kids be proficient? [...] To get kids over the freaking national benchmark is difficult for us [...] and that's proficiency. [...] I want proficiency, but I don't think you can have it unless you have progression. I want something that makes progression as easy to see, and as quick to see, as proficiency. [...] So we can look around, pull up a kid's name, see where he's come from and where he is now, in relation to the class, the grade, the school, the state, the nation.

This could be theorised through Lyotard's (1984) notions of the outweighing of narrative by science. The narrative in this case is progression, and the goal was to make this as 'quick' and 'easy' to measure as the proficiency data already available through the Department's technologies of surveillance (Foucault, 2003), such as the school data profile. Logics of enumeration (Hardy, 2015a) were evident in Scott's desire to ensure that something previously difficult to measure (student progression) was easily and quickly measurable and quantifiable.

The big-picture goal of school improvement was a direct result of this focus on individual students, with Scott finishing with the thought that, 'We'll see if the school improves by improving an individual kid'. This focus on individual students, and the measurable learning journey of individual students, was a key element of Scott, Judy, and Max's work. Scott's project was just one approach designed to improve student outcomes at Mount Pleasant, even as it was undertaken within the parameters of an enumerative, performative system, and even as it clearly reflects the less educative aspects of such foci.

Conclusion

This chapter established that each of the key participants, Max, Judy, and Scott, had different approaches to their common goal of school improvement. All three principals identified their key foci for their schools and developed strategies for meeting system requirements while working in these areas. All participants were working towards improvement and achievement on system-defined metrics. Whereas Max and Scott focused on student achievement and improved school data as the endpoint, Judy focused on students and the development of a holistic approach to education. For Judy, school data, including NAPLAN, was a necessary fact of life but not a key driver in the same way it was for Max and Scott. Judy has found the balance of managing competing agendas of performative and holistic education, not allowing the narrow measures currently defining school achievement to drive her leadership practices in her school. Instead, Judy met these targets as part of maintaining her 'track record', which enabled her to focus on more holistic pursuits with the support of her supervisors. Her behaviour was still being steered at a distance by these targets and measures, but her compliance with Departmental requirements served as a means to make her overarching work towards a holistic education easier.

The disciplining of principals was evident in this chapter in examples of Scott and Max's work in particular. Max and Scott's identification of school data, be they NAPLAN data or the school data profiles, as the measure of achievement and success were evidence of the way system policies and discourses about achievement have disciplined their ideas about school improvement and achievement. Even as Max exercised his autonomy in school priorities and focus, the school data profile provided the set of priorities from which he would choose. This was also evidence of participants' work being steered at a distance. When the school data profile served as the guide for the work being undertaken in the case study schools, this meant that principals were focusing on the areas of education that the system deemed important enough to include in the profile. Scott's approaches provided evidence of this disciplining and steering at a distance as well, because he narrowed the curriculum at Mount Pleasant to focus specifically on areas that would directly improve test results—one of the Department's key measures of school improvement.

Lyotard's (1984) notions of power and language games were evident through the choices made by participants about what information to pass on to their staff, and what initiatives their schools should participate in. Each of the principals exercised their power in determining which 'messages' would be passed on, though for different reasons. Max described focusing on the messages that would help maintain school priorities, while disregarding the 'periphery'. Judy and Scott discussed their strategy for minimising the impact of ongoing reforms on their staff and avoiding 'initiativitis' (Carter, 2012) where possible, by exercising their power to only pass on certain information and requirements as they saw fit.

The balance between participants' educative dispositions and performative cultures was also evident in the data analysed in this chapter. While participants had indeed been disciplined to work in certain ways, focusing on actions that would result in improvement on system metrics, their educative dispositions were also evident in instances of overarching goals of improving student learning outcomes. The disciplining of the principalship over time resulted in the two notions—an educative disposition and school improvement on system metrics—existing in something of an uneasy tension for Max and Scott. While Judy emphasised the importance of a holistic education, she still ensured students were achieving on the system metrics and that her school was performing satisfactorily on tools of surveillance such as the School Data Profiles.

Discourses of data and expectations that principals will be data-literate and data-focused are pervasive in the current climate, both in policy as text and policy as discourse. The forthcoming chapter explores the impact of policies and discourses relating to the use of data in performative cultures, and the way discourses of data governed and steered the work of participants from a distance.

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Chapter 7
School Performance Data Profiles, School-Generated Data, and Principals' Work

> *Is it a data-driven world now? Absolutely.*
>
> —Max

Previous chapters explored the influences on the principalship through a lens of performativity and the quantification of education.[1] A significant theme to emerge from the literature and Departmental strategic documents, as well as from interviews with participants, was the importance or value placed upon school data as a driver for much of the work being undertaken in participants' schools and their wider shared contexts. Under Queensland's policy ensemble, principals were explicitly required to lead their schools with a focus on data as a driver for decision-making, and these requirements were reinforced through multiple strategic and Departmental policies and processes. The strategic agenda required principals to 'know [their] data' in order to monitor performance and inform practice, and to 'analyse student data regularly to inform improvement' (QDET, 2014, p. 2).

Furthermore, the strategic agenda directed principals to other policies and processes that emphasised the use of data, such as the *School Performance Assessment Framework* (QDET, 2015a), which focused on the importance of school data in monitoring schools on a quadrennial basis. The *National School Improvement Tool*, the guideline used for these quadrennial reviews, incorporated a heavy emphasis on the use of school performance data to drive school improvement. One of the nine key domains within the tool related to 'analysis and discussion of data' (ACER, 2013) and references to the use of data could also be found in three of the other domains. The expectation for principals to be data-literate and data-focused was clear and pervasive in messages from the system.

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This chapter explores the place held by data in the principalship and how participants' practices and beliefs were influenced by discourses of data. An original contribution to the field in this area is the specific empirical focus on the influence of the system-generated School Performance Data Profile in Queensland schools.

Being mindful of Richard's comments, as a supervisor of principals, that it was 'clearer that the principal is responsible for the success of every student', and the knowledge that this success was being measured and quantified in a number of ways, this chapter explores the ways participants used data to guide school improvement; how school data profiles were used in the supervision and development of principals; and how this influenced principals' relationships with their supervisors. Finally, the value placed upon NAPLAN results will be explored alongside participants' comments regarding the importance of context and ICSEA scores. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Max, Judy, and Scott's common approach of focusing on individual 'learning journeys' of their students, and how this was reflective of their disciplining (Foucault, 1977) by policies and discourses of the current reform climate. This analysis highlights, in part, the nature of principals' efforts to cultivate more educative logics (Hardy, 2015b) within a performative culture. Max, Judy, and Scott all wanted their students to achieve positive learning outcomes, even as this had become synonymous with measurable data.

Queensland's School Performance Data Profile

To contextualise many of the participants' comments about data, it is first necessary to have a clear understanding of the School Performance Data Profile (also referred to as the 'data profile' or 'the profile') and the place it held in the case studies. The school performance data referred to in these documents primarily took the form of a school data profile compiled by the School Improvement Unit, a subsection of Queensland's education department which is primarily responsible for monitoring school performance through the metrics found within the profile, as discussed below. Schools received four updated versions of their profile each year, twice per semester at points aligning with releases of key data such as NAPLAN and School Opinion Survey data. At the time of the case studies, the profile was six pages of multiple representations of data, but in the past has been twice that size. It contains a range of school data such as student achievement data (including NAPLAN, school-based subject achievement, and Closing the Gap data as discussed in Chap. 2); student demographic data (including enrolment, student needs, attendance, and disciplinary absence data); and school management data (including school audit data, school opinion survey results, and financial and facilities-related data). NAPLAN data are presented in comparisons with 'like' schools based on *MySchool's* ICSEA score, as well as against all schools in the nation. Other data such as enrolment and attendance data, and school-based assessment data are presented in comparison with all schools state-wide.

A key focus of the profile is multiple representations of NAPLAN data, which is presented in eleven different formats across two and a half pages. Just over 40% of the profile relates to NAPLAN data, providing insight into the importance placed upon NAPLAN as a driver for school performance management and review. Aligning with discourses of transparent data-based accountability espoused by the system, this means that the proliferation of data, and the data profile itself, are key tools in the management and supervision of principals (Bloxham, Ehrich & Iyer, 2015).

The data profile thus becomes a tool of surveillance, acting as the means by which the system monitors and judges the work being undertaken in schools (Foucault, 2000; Gillies, 2013). Principals are expected to use data to inform their practice while 'delivering extraordinary and sustained improvement and achievement', according to explicit expectations from the system (QDET, 2014, p. 1). A recurring theme throughout the research undertaken in these case studies was the centrality of the data profile to each principal's work. Max, Judy and Scott referred to the data profile frequently throughout our interviews. When they discussed comparisons with other schools in this chapter they were referring to state-wide or nation-wide comparisons from the data profile (rather than their statistically similar schools on *MySchool*) unless explicitly stating otherwise; an important note to contextualise their comments.

Max, Judy, and Scott all placed great emphasis upon the profile and used it to guide their work in a number of ways. In fact, they referred to it as the very measure of school improvement—as principals, their position description emphasised their role as being to improve educational outcomes at their schools. The profile was thus central to the principalship; used as a measure of improvement by the principals, their supervisors and other regional support staff, and other Departmental staff such as the unit tasked with monitoring and improving school performance.

The Influence of System-Generated Data Via the Data Profile

As discussed in previous chapters, principals are explicitly required to have a significant focus on 'school improvement' as part of their role description. Previous chapters also established that discourses of school improvement guided participants' work explicitly through 'policy as text' in the form of these documents such as position descriptions and strategic agendas (QDET, 2015a) as well as 'policy as discourse' from principals' supervisors and system leaders (Ball, 1993). The relationship between school improvement and school data is inextricably linked within the systemic documents referred to previously, including the system's strategic agenda, the *School Performance Assessment Framework*, and the *National School Improvement Tool*, which guides regular school review processes. Max, Judy, and Scott were asked to comment upon the ways data and school improvement worked together in their schools.

Max described the importance of school data as a means of keeping the focus on school improvement. He commented that his Head of Curriculum used data to enable the leadership team to monitor school improvement in a variety of ways:

> With our Head of Curriculum being as good as she is, she will provide me with regular updates in terms of individual students and where the data showed that they were, and where they are now in terms of raw data – so pre- and post-testing, that's the very first way we keep track of that. Then there'll be overall school data sets, so that's our [system generated] ten-page profile, and that comes out once per semester and lets us know how we're tracking, so they're the two main things. We'll also talk with teachers, we'll be collecting other data from them to have a look at, and we'll also be looking at our school report card data in terms of A-Es. So they're the four main areas.

Here, the variety of data used to monitor school improvement are evident. Each semester or term, according to Max, there were opportunities for new data to drive conversations with teachers. Measurable or quantitative data also held a hallowed place in each of the case study schools as the key measure of improvement and as a way of determining the school's strategic agenda. This aligns with Lingard and Sellar's (2013) comments about the 'naturalisation' (p. 652) of data as the logical medium through which to consider teaching and learning.

Given that discourses of school improvement are embedded explicitly throughout policy documents and rhetoric from the system, each participant was asked to define school improvement at the outset of our interviews. Responses from Max, Judy, and Scott were very much in alignment. Each principal defined 'school improvement' specifically as being measurable by the School Performance Data Profile. The positioning of the data profile as the key measure of improvement can be theorised through Kickert's (1995) notions of steering at a distance. A significant emphasis is placed on the data profile, through its frequent re-releases with updated data each term, and through the fact that principals' supervisors use it as the key measure of improvement and tool for supervision (Bloxham et al., 2015), to guide discussions regarding principal performance. The emphasis placed on the data profile—a tool of surveillance (Foucault, 2003) by which principals are monitored and judged—leads to the creation of norms regarding the importance of the work of participants. Norms, suggested Porter (1995), then govern the work of principals from a distance. This was evidenced in the case studies by the participants' identification of the data profile as their measure of school improvement. Max, in particular, defined this with certainty:

> Well we went through that period of defining what school improvement is, or not really knowing what that was. School improvement now, though, is very clearly defined in terms of what they call the ten-page data set – that's your school's data profile. And that is everything around attendance, tracking individual students for literacy and numeracy in particular. And things like NAPLAN sit there to be able to provide that sort of data. And school improvement, particularly about student improvement, talks about the actual effect size for individual students. So we're very clear in our minds around that.

Comments from Scott and Judy reflected this definition as well. Judy discussed the importance of the data profile relating to notions of school improvement, focusing on particular aspects of the data profile:

> For us probably as [Education Queensland] employees we're driven by what they class as school improvement, and that's around the accountability for improvement of results in things like NAPLAN, it's driven around that, it really is, and politically and everything it's all about that […] and that [school data] profile is gold.

Judy commented that ‘they’ (the Department) have classed school improvement as achievement in NAPLAN and on the data profile. This can be viewed with Lyotard’s (1984) notion in mind that in a performative culture, knowledge is a form of government—‘who decides what knowledge is, and who decides what needs to be decided?’ (p. 7). In this case, Judy highlighted that the Department’s decision of what knowledge would be valued then governed participants’ work as principals (Foucault, 1988, 2001, 2007). Scott’s comments reflected the emphasis on the profile as well, particularly when he spoke about the range of data that could be gathered from the profile to measure improvement.

On the other hand, Richard’s definitions of school improvement were similar from his viewpoint as an Assistant Regional Director, but not as clearly aligned as those from Max, Judy, and Scott. Richard commented that ‘wouldn’t it be good if my definition lined up with the principals’?’, and it was not significantly different, but took a bigger picture view of school improvement than simply that which would be measurable by the data profile. Identifying school improvement as a bigger picture of ‘every child [improving] their life chances by reaching their potential at school’, Richard then elaborated that:

> broadening that out to a school […] level, that means the improvement is quantifiable in the data, in national testing data […] so you can take that to a school level and say that the data is showing the school has identified its gaps and has addressed those, and that the kids’ performance is improving as a cohort in those areas. Or you can take it to an individual student level and look at the relative gain and see what the movement is.

Richard saw the data profile as a ‘useful document’, but noted that ‘it’s more useful in bigger schools than in smaller schools; it loses its validity and becomes highly volatile with smaller schools. They can go from the penthouse to the outhouse in one year’ with one change of family or new enrolments in a small school changing the demographics significantly.

Reliability issues in NAPLAN should be considered when analysing much of the interview data relating to NAPLAN in this chapter. The gap between evidence from the research and the way NAPLAN was viewed by participants in this book—highly experienced educators—is significant. Richard expressed the view that using ‘national testing data’ could provide a measure of school improvement. In actuality, Wu (2016), a professor of statistics with expertise in large-scale testing and assessment, highlighted the large error margin in NAPLAN’s measure of student ability. She noted that while NAPLAN parent reporting documentation gives an impression that the measure of performance is precise (echoing previously discussed phrasing from Richard and Scott), the measurement error margin is large. In fact, the error margin is so large that it is not possible to ‘locate a student in a particular NAPLAN [reporting] band’ (Wu, 2016, p. 22), and NAPLAN tests therefore only provide a general idea of whether a student is ‘struggling, on track, or performing above average’ (p. 23). In addition, Wu (2009) found that through fluctuations in test scores due to this imprecise measurement alone, a student could show no growth at all, or above-expected growth across two tests.

Using student relative gain on the testing as a measure of school improvement thus becomes problematic, suggesting that even in larger schools this data set might be ‘volatile’ as Richard noted. If this is the discourse surrounding the effectiveness, or potential use for NAPLAN data, it makes sense that the data page was seen as more valuable for Max, Judy, and Scott as principals of ‘bigger’ schools. The trust placed in these numbers (Porter, 1995) was a significant theme recurring throughout interviews with all participants.

Each of the principal participants expressed the sentiment that they were appreciative of the clarity they felt the profile had afforded with reference to providing a compilation of the metrics on which they were being measured and what they were expected to attend to as school leaders. It raises some questions about autonomy in the principalship in an environment where system rhetoric espouses principal autonomy as a key feature of the landscape (Gobby, 2013; Gray, Campbell-Evans, & Leggett, 2013). Systemic documents outline the requirements for principals to use ‘school performance data, contextual information, and the findings from the Teaching and Learning Audit’ to inform their School Plan (each school’s strategic agenda, developed every four years) (QDET, 2015b, p. 1). This was reinforced by Richard who described the place held by the profile in school planning processes. Participants were thus expected via policy as text and policy as discourse to draw their school focus from the data contained within the profile. It could therefore be argued that they were less able to exercise their professional judgment in determining the school’s strategic agenda. Indeed, each of the principals in these case studies observed that their school’s strategic agenda arose directly from the data profile.

In performative cultures, principals’ effectiveness is measured and judged according to externally-imposed targets and benchmarks, with the data profile acting as a physical manifestation of this practice. Principals who are seen to be achieving well, as measured by the data profile, are judged to be quality leaders and can be afforded more freedom and trust (Singh, 2014). This discourse of quality is measured in multiple ways in performative cultures, and the most common measure of quality for principals in these case studies was improvement of their school performance data, as measured within the profile. Not only was this confirmed by Richard’s and Tracy’s descriptions about the ways principals were monitored and deemed to be effective, it was also supported by a recent study (Bloxham et al., 2015) which found that the document is the ‘primary data set and point of reference employed by supervisors when monitoring Queensland public schools’ (p. 357). In a performative culture, where being seen as a quality or effective leader is of great importance (Keddie, 2013; Singh, 2014), improvement in the data measured by the profile thus becomes a key influence on the principalship.

Findings from the previous chapter highlighted the different ways participants responded to these practices of measurement and quantification of their work. Whereas Max and Scott could be seen as more ‘self-disciplined’ by the reforms, having philosophies of achievement and improvement that aligned with these discourses, Judy focused more on how perceptions of her as a quality leader enabled her to do the work she was most passionate about—a holistic focus of education at Merriwald. However, this perception of quality still arose from meeting performative requirements such as having steady or improving school performance data on the Department’s surveillance tools (Foucault, 2003) such as the data profile.

This chapter has thus far established that the data profile played a significant role in helping participants to make decisions about school priorities and where to direct their focus. This is a logical response for principals who have been disciplined by discourses in a performative environment, as the very nature of performativity influences principals as subjects within the system. As Lyotard (1984) commented, no self is an island, and each of us exists in a complex network of relationships and interactions. Principals are shaped by discourses of performativity and explicit expectations, and have no choice but to respond in *some* way to the culture and the climate. Lyotard discussed the way people are displaced by the messages that traverse them. Each new message (or in this case, each new performative requirement or initiative) repositions the recipient within the shifting environment. What they can control, however, is *how* they respond.

For example, as previously discussed, in these case studies there was a very explicit expectation that principals would make use of this school performance data to guide their work. To the extent that principals did this, they were working with or against the system as a result. This can be further theorised through Lyotard's (1984) discussion about language games. When a performative 'statement' was made, such as the expectation to work with data, or to use the data profile, principals were affected by the very existence of the expectation, and the environment in which they enacted their work was immediately altered. Comments from Tracy, who worked with principals across the region, indicated that the impact of the proliferation of data has been immense.

Tracy stated that the continued release of data—deemed important enough by the system to warrant four re-releases of the updated profile each year—hampered some principals' abilities to engage in longer term planning. Instead, Tracy observed that many of the principals she worked with were so focused on addressing the latest 'thing' (in her words), that they were working in reactive states, reacting to each new piece of information and changing focus as a result of the updated releases of data (for more, see Heffernan, 2016). Lyotard (1984) discussed the notion of moves and counter moves—in this case, releases of the data profile, and principals' changed behaviours as a response. He explained that by necessity, moves require counter moves, but that 'a counter move that is merely reactional is not a good move' (p. 16). Tracy's comments, right down to the same phrasing, were reflective of this. She noted that this reactionary response to system initiatives was happening with more frequency, and suggested that over time, she believed many principals were losing the ability to take a strategic 'helicopter' view of leadership, highlighted as being vital in implementing effective long-term change for improvement (Lewis & Andrews, 2009).

The data profile, the representation of the school's performance according to system requirements, became such a major influence on principals' behaviours that it resulted in what some may argue (based on Tracy's observations) was a complete alteration of some principals' abilities to lead in the ways that could lead to the long-term improvement that the system was ostensibly seeking. While Max, Judy, and Scott did not specifically display these reactionary planning responses, it is possible that this was a phenomenon more commonly evident in less experienced principals (who comprised the majority of principals within the region). This would be a logical theorisation of the data, given Maguire, Braun and Ball's (2015, p. 494) finding that early-career teachers exhibited 'policy dependency' as well as higher levels of compliance with policies more often than their experienced colleagues did. With that said, Max, Judy and Scott did draw their focus directly from the profile, as discussed earlier.

The data profile was not the only data set that steered participants' work from a distance (Kickert, 1995). Max, Judy, and Scott all conveyed (echoed by comments from Richard and Tracy), that the data profile formed part of a 'bigger' data picture, which included school-generated data. These additional data provided another means of measuring and surveilling the work being undertaken in their schools. This further illustrates the trust placed in numbers (Porter, 1995) and the enumeration (Hardy, 2015a) of schooling practices.

While all participants emphasised the importance of the school data profile, they focused on school-based data as well, which was reflective of Richard's comments about the importance of data collected at the school level. Richard referred to 'school generated' data at a number of points, suggesting that this formed part of the basis for school improvement.

School-Generated Data to Augment the Data Profile

Supporting this notion of a bigger picture of data beyond those generated by the system, Max remarked that only some of the data profile was relevant for their school's needs. According to Max, 'there are only certain elements in there that I pay attention to', and elaborating, he used the profile to look at bigger picture trends within his school data. For example, attendance was not seen as an issue for the school, so this was a data set that was generally dismissed within the profile. A theme emerged within the case study data that showed Max, Judy, and Scott making use of additional school-generated data to supplement the generic data profile. While each of the principals had a different approach within this wider practice, they all emphasised the importance of school context when working in data-heavy climates. Each principal's approach to working with their school's data beyond the ten-page data profile varied, but Max, Judy, and Scott shared key ideas about contextualising the use of data as was relevant to their own school, as a supplement to the data provided by the system. Further, detailed, discussion about the specific data collected by the schools is undertaken later in this chapter.

Principals' Data Literacy and a Resulting Variety of Practices

There were some similarities in the approaches towards student achievement data in each school, such as the use of the same commercial testing products. Researchers are increasingly studying the commercialisation of education, with the edu-business industry being estimated as worth $48 billion per year in the United States alone (Hogan, 2016). Hogan analysed the partnerships between state and private edu-business in the wake of the post-NAPLAN reforms studied in this project, and found that ACER holds partnerships with the vast majority of Australian education authorities. Hogan highlighted that ACER is providing simplified solutions to policy problems that they themselves have had a hand in identifying. An example of this can be seen with the head of ACER, Geoff Masters, producing a report with recommendations that 'standard science tests be introduced in Years 4, 6, 8, and 10 for school use' (Masters, 2009, p. 82) in monitoring student progress. ACER also produces and sells these same science tests. Concerns have been raised about the prevalence of commercial testing solutions, with Hogan (2016) suggesting that the current climate of reforms provides an environment where edu-businesses have influence over policy decisions, particularly in ways that displace experts in education policy. This is an important example in relation to these case studies, because the region's mandated data collection (part of the Regional *Charter of Expectations* discussed in Chap. 4) included commercial products from edu-businesses such as ACER. The region also created a policy document specifying targets and benchmarks. Testing data from these commercial products were forwarded to regional staff at the end of each year for region-wide analysis and monitoring. This process thus served as another tool of surveillance (Foucault, 2003) for schools and principals.

This mandated adoption of commercial testing products was interesting to note in light of Max's comments that regional data targets were not a significant consideration for him in his work as principal at Ironcliff. Their personal responses of resistance or compliance with these discourses notwithstanding, the key similarity recurring between Max, Judy, and Scott was their emphasis on data and the frequency with which the notion of data arose in interviews. Each principal discussed being able to collect, analyse, and use data to draw conclusions about student learning. In addition, all participants discussed the ways they worked with staff in relation to data. Max described the emphasis placed on data at staff meetings, commenting that 'we spend an inordinate amount of time in staff meetings looking at what the data is'. He indicated that the staff at Ironcliff would 'drill down' into data to find the stories or reasons behind what may be perceived as anomalies (or 'blips', as he called them). For example, upon receiving annual School Opinion Survey data, Max saw that staff morale was particularly low and asked himself 'is there anything here I need to drill down on?'. The result was apparently due to his 'pushing' a new style of in-depth face to face parent reporting that teachers did not feel comfortable with. This was one example provided of how principal participants searched for the stories within the data to explain trends or unexpected changes, but also of how prevalent measurement was in schools in these case studies. It was not just limited to student achievement, but also encompassed social climate or morale.

Lyotard's (1984) comments about scientific knowledge (school data) not representing the 'totality of knowledge' (p. 7) are reflected in Max's approach of finding the narrative within the data; a recurring theme with all case study participants. Similar comments were made by Judy and Scott in relation to analysing data at a school level and finding the narrative or 'story' behind the data. Judy discussed regular planning meetings and leadership team meetings where data were presented and discussed, and used to inform future directions and planning. Finally, Scott described a staff-wide focus on the deeper analysis of data at Mount Pleasant, where they tried to identify trends and areas for further focus, while seeking to understand the reasons for these trends.

In contrast, due to a key focus of her role as being working with data at a regional level and supporting principals to work with data at a school level, Tracy noted that a deep understanding of how to work with data was a major challenge facing the region's principals. She expressed her concern that principals were not data literate enough to be able to deeply analyse or interrogate data and make informed decisions to result in significant improvement in the data valued by the system (evident in their inclusion in the school's data profile). After analysing data at a regional level and surveying 300 teachers in the region, she captured trends relating to schools' work with data:

> Here are the trends: at a leadership perspective, they – after the event – they look at the growth and their relative gain. […] They look at the NAPLAN and Progressive Achievement Test [commercial literacy and numeracy testing used within the region] data at staff meetings and say 'That's interesting, okay'. And they move on. That's it. At a leadership level for principals, they're then looking at the big three or the dirty dozen[2], but they're not unpacking anything else. The data is only informing intervention programs and they get a spike.

Tracy suggested that 'the collecting [of data] is happening, the interrogation isn't happening. They're focused on "are we growing or not?"'. She commented that data literacy (Bruniges, 2012) was not something that principals have been taught in depth and is another system assumption influencing current pressures on the principalship, which was impeding long-lasting or significant improvement in schools. This was echoed by Klenowski (2016) who commented that leaders have had limited training in data analysis and interpretation. Data literacy was also raised as an issue requiring attention in recommendations from the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group for incoming pre-service teachers (TEMAG, 2014). With that said, however, the principals in these case studies expressed confidence in their use of data, indicating a contradiction between either their perceived abilities or the requirements for principals' work in this area. This raises questions about data literacy at a wider level with the discussion earlier in this chapter about the focus on NAPLAN as a measure of school improvement, given the evidence (Wu, 2016) that it is not a reliable measure of student achievement in the specific ways it was being positioned within regional discourses.

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[2] When asked to elaborate on these, Tracy described the big three as literacy, numeracy and science. The dirty dozen were the twelve types of data collection or measurement outlined in the regional Charter of Expectations.

Max, Judy, and Scott all acknowledged the complex nature of analysing and using data effectively, with Max commenting that 'you virtually need a Ph.D.' to understand some of the data with which schools were being presented by the Department. However, for the purposes for which they were using data at a school level, all of the principal participants indicated they were confident in their knowledge and skills in the use of data to drive school improvement. This may be translated into a confidence of being able to do what the system was asking from them in terms of data-driven supervision of their own work by ARDs.

Data as a Tool for Surveillance and Supervision

Perhaps one of the areas where a culture of performativity was most evident was within the responses from participants about how data influenced their relationships with the system, when it came to supervision and capability development. Richard discussed the use of school data profiles as a focus for discussions with principals and the way it determined the direction for working with principals. He described the influence of data on these decisions:

> This week for instance, we got a release of this year's school opinion survey data, so that's an opportunity for us in our conversations with principals. That's a fresh data set that opens up new discussion – what's it saying, what are the gaps, what do you see in it, what do I see in it – and then in September we had the NAPLAN data released, so my conversations with principals are generally on a timetable of one school visit per term.

Richard went on to note that each visit comprised of a data conversation, depending on the school or system generated data that had been released or obtained since his last visit. A common theme arising from interviews with all participants was that the increase of availability of different types of data over recent years had resulted in more precision in terms of supervision from ARDs. When I asked Richard if he believed he had a clearer picture of what was happening in schools than he might have ten years earlier, due to the plethora of data now available for monitoring schools, he responded that 'there's a greater degree of precision now'. This was also reflected in comments from Max, Judy, and Scott, and is indicative of Porter's (1995) notions of trusting in numbers and the detailed insights they can ostensibly give about the complex work undertaken in schools.

Max commented upon the shift in ways of working with supervisors that he had seen since his time in senior roles, remarking that the availability of data had increased and as a result, conversations were more sharply focused on trends within the data than they might have been in the past. Previous chapters discussed the shift from school management to instructional leadership. One of the shifts identified by all participants was the change from keeping control of the school (where the region had focused on School Opinion Surveys as a gauge of effective leadership), into a more targeted focus on measurable student outcomes. Judy described this as a demand on principals to understand their data and be able to speak to their data profiles. This can be theorised through Foucault's (2003) notions of surveillance, with the participants' school data being one of the main ways principals were measured and judged. The balance of Lyotard's (1984) notions of science (data) and narrative (being able to 'speak to it') were also evident. Judy explained:

> You've really got to be able to voice it and be articulate about what you're doing whereas before it was a general thing like, 'We haven't had any complaints about you and that's great, and your parents are all good', but now it's not like that at all. It's drilling into deeper things.

Interestingly, as I discussed with Tracy, this viewpoint of the shift to accountability-based environments discounts the types of data and accountabilities that existed pre-NAPLAN, such as Year 2 Net data (an annual collection of continua-based tracking for Year 2 students) and Queensland's own Year 3, 5, and 7 testing data (these were similar tests to NAPLAN, but were not able to be generalised across the nation). The fact that no participants aside from Tracy commented upon this as a way of quantifying or judging the work being undertaken by principals and schools in the past spoke further to the high-stakes nature of NAPLAN testing, and the level of influence it has had on the culture of the system and on how participants viewed their priorities within their conceptualisations of the principalship as currently constituted. This echoes Gorur's (2016, p. 35) suggestion that previous ways of knowing a school had been surpassed by the 'mine of information' provided by NAPLAN and *MySchool*.

Scott's discussion about the shift in supervisory practices as a result of the increased accountability surveillance (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) directly echoed Richard's comments about his supervisory practices and also aligned with the notions of trusting in numbers, or numbers and data being able to give a clear picture of complex work (Porter, 1995). He reflected:

> The biggest difference at the moment is [ARDs] come along and they don't want to talk to you about your School Opinion Surveys – they talk to you now about a kid they identified in Year 5 who didn't move as far as the other kids between year 3-5 in inferential questioning. So as they've got very - incredibly – precise in their agenda, that's forced us to get precise. And there's nothing wrong with that, that's where we should be working. So I think they're good moves.

Scott's comments about precision were interesting to note given Wu's (2016) findings about the error margins and student achievement measures in NAPLAN. This is reflective of findings from earlier in this chapter about the accuracy of discourses surrounding NAPLAN. It also reflects some practices and affordances (Thompson & Mockler, 2016) of the testing and data analysis processes within the region. When information regarding the reliability of NAPLAN results did not form part of the discourse, Scott's comments about precision were logical. This comment from Scott also highlighted the haziness between the performative and the educative and how closely intertwined they may appear to have become for some principals. By indicating that 'they're good moves', educative logics (Hardy, 2015a), and Scott's educative disposition may have seemed at play, but whether this was actually the case, given the conditions within which principals worked, is a moot point. Focusing on student outcomes and specific students was seen as a positive thing, and disciplining (Foucault, 1977) from performative influence is evident here because it was framed within discussions with supervisors where measurement and metrics were a key part of the discussion.

Nevertheless, perhaps in part, a 'logic of appropriation' (Hardy, 2014) was evident. Scott's claim that the performative shift towards data-driven leadership was a 'good move' because it resulted in a deeper, targeted focus on student learning is reflective of performative discourses being appropriated for educative purposes. This also reflects Thompson and Mockler's (2016) notions of principals finding affordances within the climate of audit and testing.

The supervisory nature of working with data was an area where Max, Judy, and Scott felt confident in their approaches because they had all been judged externally as being quality, or effective, principals. Therefore, Max, Judy, and Scott appeared to feel less pressure from external sources than Tracy described seeing in other principals within the region. Max, Judy, and Scott each noted that because their data were stable or trending upwards, they were left more to their own devices than a principal might be who was struggling or experiencing difficulties in leading measurable improvement in their school, aligning with findings from Singh (2014). This has been discussed in previous chapters but is worth noting here again pertaining to data-specific supervision. A comment from Max exemplified those from all participants when he noted:

> If your school performance is showing signs that it is trending upwards – long-term trending upwards – then it leaves very little room for anybody to start coming in and imposing their rules. If your data is trending downwards, whether it's School Opinion Surveys or NAPLAN or anything else, then you really don't have too much of a leg to stand on in terms of people coming into say, 'The Department wants you to do this or that'. But if you're showing that you're successful…

The trust in numbers (Porter, 1995) and the proliferation of data surveillance (Foucault, 2003; Lingard & Sellar, 2013) could provide supervisors with the confidence to judge principals' work from a distance when the data reflected systemic targets in areas of focus. Richard confirmed this, when he described differentiated levels of support for principals based on their school's data:

> Schools that are flying need less supervision than schools that are struggling, but the supervision might be quite different. It might be more collegial, less frequent, less intrusive. At the other end of the scale, inexperienced principals, or principals who have been unable to bring around improvement, will naturally attract more support – more attention, more capability development, and more intervention if you like.

A comment from Scott that exemplified the culture of quantification of education was discussed earlier and also applies here in relation to how data guided supervision of principals—'when it comes down to it, [results are] all they want to see. They're not interested in how I'm doing it, they just want to see this number of kids above this certain point, so it's a very numerical system'. According to these performative approaches, if principals were meeting system benchmarks and targets they were judged to be effective and afforded the freedom to continue working as they saw fit. Here, notions of steering from a distance (Kickert, 1995) and the reconstruction or re-framing of practices around ways of working (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) as desired by the system were evident. Principals were left to 'get on with it', as Max said—provided that this resulted in desirable outcomes for the system as a whole. With NAPLAN forming the majority of the data profile, it held a significant place in discussions about how data governed the work of schools.

The Place of NAPLAN in a Data-Heavy Landscape

Participants expressed a range of opinions pertaining to NAPLAN and its importance in an ever-expanding data landscape. As discussed in previous chapters, all participants (including Richard and Tracy) pinpointed NAPLAN as the catalyst for the changed landscape of accountabilities and school improvement in Queensland. However, differences were apparent in participants' attitudes towards NAPLAN, as well as the emphasis placed upon it by each person.

Seemingly feeling the most pressure corresponding to NAPLAN was Judy, who placed it at the forefront of the system's definition of school improvement. Judy discussed the place it held in the landscape and the tension she felt between what the system expected and what her school tried to do in relation to addressing NAPLAN, commenting that the pressure sometimes arose from politicisation and media focus on the testing rather than from the system itself:

> It's not the be all and end all of everything, and everything doesn't rotate around NAPLAN [in our school]. But we're somewhat driven by that, and the Department does drive you by that, but sometimes they don't even want to do that but it's by political parties.

Judy noted the pressures she felt as principal in relation to the public interest in NAPLAN, primarily due to the media's interest in the testing, as I have previously discussed. When asked how much pressure she felt about NAPLAN from external sources, she replied:

> Oh yeah, a lot. A lot, because I mean the media – oh boy, they've released the results last week and so straight away they're in the Courier Mail and you're like 'whoa'. A lot of pressure. But then you've got to convince your community to say we are doing really well in that and – overall we don't, we've got some red there, we've got some orange which is great [laughs] – we aren't all red […], we've got a couple of green […] but you know, we don't have [green] overall. But when you tell parents […], in the end, lots of them are only interested in their child, and their growth.

This notion of parents being interested in their own children rather than the bigger picture of school data was an important one, and will be discussed in detail at the end of this chapter as part of a strong theme that emerged from interview data relating to participants focusing on individual 'learning journeys' for students. Judy's focus on 'convincing' her community and providing the narrative to accompany the data can, again, be theorised through Lyotard's (1984) notions of the types of knowledge (scientific or narrative) and how the two might co-exist.

Richard made comments about NAPLAN that echoed the seemingly hallowed place it held in the data landscape for schools, particularly the political nature of the testing. In these comments, he recognised the place it did hold, as well as describing the place he believed it *should have* held:

> I think that there is, shall I say, an unholy emphasis on national testing data. But it's the only national data that we have, and because it's of great importance to government, therefore it comes down the line and is of importance to us Departmentally, and regionally, and at a school level. But it's not the only important data – there's a range of other data that schools collect, and it's equally important or more important. So NAPLAN is lag data – it's telling us what happened in the past. We're encouraging schools to collect real-time data, that tells us what is happening now with kids, and respond to that with agility.

The 'real time data' Richard referred to here was the short-cycle data collection Max was strongly against in Chap. 6, so there is still a tension between what the region expected and what principals would implement. By positioning NAPLAN as part of the regional data landscape, Richard's pragmatism about NAPLAN testing was evident. He went on to elaborate:

> Michael Fullan talks about drivers. And he talks about the right or wrong drivers, but he also says the reality is that there'll be some wrong drivers that are foisted upon us and we can't deny that they're there […] and we need to make the best use we can of them, and at the same time put our energy into the right drivers, as much as we can […] but the annual national testing is a reality and we deal with it and understand its place.

This attitude is reflective of literature reviewed in Chap. 2 surrounding discourses of accountability, autonomy, and leadership which discussed the notion that successful principals understand and acknowledge the limitations of the system (in this case, NAPLAN being used as a driver for their work), and find ways to work around it (Adamowski, Bowles Therriault, & Cavanna, 2007). Richard, representing regional discourses, accepted that NAPLAN had been 'foisted upon' schools and he encouraged for it to be positioned as part of a bigger picture. This is reminiscent of Lyotard's (1984) discussion of the power that can be found in language games. The message passed through Richard that NAPLAN is a 'driver', but he positioned himself and his schools in a more powerful way when he responded by encouraging alternative ways of viewing the data.

Richard's comments about NAPLAN being part of a wider data landscape were reflected in the work Max undertook as principal at Ironcliff. He described a range of data being collected at the school, with NAPLAN constituting just one aspect of this. Max was very matter-of-fact when asked if he felt external pressures pertaining to NAPLAN, responding simply 'I don't, no'. When asked to elaborate on his thoughts on this, he commented:

> Without being flippant and dismissive, we know that there's the NAPLAN focus and that's something that causes angst every year, but we all know it's one point in time of data that sits in our beaker, and it's the beaker that matters, that we're talking about at any given time with parents.

This ‘beaker’ approach is again demonstrative of earlier theorising regarding the balance of narrative and scientific knowledge (Lyotard, 1984). When Max referred to what the school ‘is talking about at any given time’, he was commenting on how the narrative of achievement was shaped by a range of ‘objective’ data. The notion of NAPLAN as part of a bigger picture of data was reinforced by all participants. Even when Judy felt more external pressures around NAPLAN, she addressed it as part of the larger picture of data within her school, commenting on the snapshot, single point in time nature of NAPLAN. This bigger picture approach for participants involved emphasising the context of their schools and how this context influenced performance on narrow measures of educational achievement, such as NAPLAN.

Participants’ Use of ICSEA to Frame School Data

All participants particularly emphasised the importance of ICSEA, the score of socio-educational advantage initially described in Chap. 4’s introduction of participants’ contexts. To contextualise these comments, it should be noted that principals were referring to the colouring on the data profiles at some times, and to the *MySchool* website at other times. They made reference to comparisons enabled against ‘all’ schools (rather than ‘like’ or similar schools) in both of these tools, but they returned to their ICSEA score to contextualise their school data. I contend that due to their ‘ownership’ over their school data, principals were more keenly aware—and perhaps more vocal about—the potential impact of outside influences on results. Scott was the most emphatic regarding notions of fairness and equity in terms of the impact of each school’s ICSEA score on their data. He recalled the interactions he had with Richard and some other regional support staff to better understand the impact of ICSEA on NAPLAN data and described a formula that the region developed to provide a filter over NAPLAN data that essentially offset the ICSEA score and would alter the overall picture of ‘reds’ and ‘greens’ when compared to the state or the nation. Participants commonly spoke in colours rather than numbers or bands, speaking perhaps to the effects of the simplification of complex data in these discourses.

As a result of viewing Mount Pleasant’s data through this offset filter, Scott maintained that his school was performing well against non-‘like’ schools in light of their ICSEA score. He noted that schools with the highest ICSEA scores in the region were receiving similar NAPLAN results:

> So my conversation with Richard is that these blokes [at the highest ICSEA rated school in the region] should be doing twice as good as us. Those numbers should be twice as good. So don’t come down to the likes of [schools with particularly low ICSEA scores] and say ‘you’re in the red’. We’ve got an ICSEA percentile of 20, theirs is 80, and they’re only better than us in one area. We’re better than **them** in one!

By ‘one area’, Scott was referring to one measure of NAPLAN, for example Year 3 reading. Scott’s frustration at what he perceived to be an inequity of cultures where surveillance of principals and teachers (Foucault, 2003) was at unprecedented levels

(Lingard & Sellar, 2013) was evident. He elaborated further on challenges faced by schools with particularly low ICSEA scores who were struggling to meet national means:

> If you're sitting at [remote school] on a scale score of 4, which means that 96% of schools in Australia are better off than you, it is impossible to get there. Impossible. And the demoralising thing there is – if you put that filter over for the disadvantaged schools, you must do it for the green leafy schools here. They have to have it added on. And it's got to be relative. Just because you've got a cushy job at [very advantaged school in the region], turn up at 8:30, swan around, got good kids, have it easy, go home… they should be as accountable as we are for this stuff and they should be pushed hard.

Relating to Scott's work at his own school, the filter was also important for Mount Pleasant:

> I want all of my kids above the national mean score. BUT I want to be able to put another lens over it to say, 'Okay, let's put the ICSEA thing on top and just take a moment to realise that if we take off [the formula], where does that put us?' It actually puts us where the colours should be. So we had nothing to do with the formula itself, we were just pushing [to the region] that the ICSEA score has to be considered [when comparing non-'like' schools]. […] If the formula was applied, we'd look excellent […] and we want to be able to say to parents that sort of stuff too – there are elements that look bad, but let's look at it from a different point of view and see, some of this stuff is working. If we had all kids coming in fully supported, access to medical, specialists, high literacy levels, we could be there.

This seemed to be presented as a more nuanced way of looking at their data and taking individual contexts into account. Judy and Max were in agreement about the challenges of the local context and ICSEA score (and its associated implications) influencing NAPLAN results—which, it is important to remember in terms of performative cultures, were the publicly published and reported upon measures of 'quality' that schools were most commonly judged by, as 'perpetually assessable subjects' (Niesche, 2015, p. 138).

Judy expressed her belief, as discussed earlier in this chapter, that Merriwald's ICSEA score had implications for their potential performance on NAPLAN, commenting that 'we don't get lots of green [when compared to national averages] and we probably never *will* because of our ICSEA and because of our demographics'. She also explained that when tracking individual distance travelled for students and disregarding the notion of 'greens and reds', her school did a better job of improvement in NAPLAN for students than many of the 'leafy green schools who do actually get lots of green'. This particular discussion focused on comparison with all schools through the school data profiles as well as *MySchool*, not just with statistically similar schools on *MySchool*.

Similarly, Max commented that you 'build all of that', referring to ICSEA impact upon NAPLAN data into discussions about school improvement as well. He did note, however, that ICSEA data simply confirmed what he already knew about the school's changing demographics and data:

> Well the ICSEA data just sort of fits in with looking at it and saying, 'Okay, uh huh, that's about where we're at' – I don't need ICSEA data to tell me we don't have the Mercedes and BMWs dropping kids off at school anymore, I can see that for myself. We had police out the

> front with the speed gun booking people left right and centre but also lots of unroadworthy or unregistered cars – that would never have happened in the past. So that's a reality check – do I need ICSEA to tell me that? No.

Max did not think that regional staff such as ARDs and support officers were particularly interested in the impact of ICSEA scores on their data because they were more focused on trends than on aspects such as the 'reds and greens'. I would suggest that this is possibly because they had already applied the aforementioned filter to these data, and focused instead on the aspects that Scott and Judy mentioned were more easily tracked such as long-term trends and individual growth.

This ongoing discussion about ICSEA is another example of the trust placed in numbers in this climate (Porter, 1995). The ICSEA score was embraced by participants and served as an 'objective' way of measuring their school against others, an incredibly complex notion in theory. This example also serves as another demonstration of the importance of scientific knowledge (Lyotard, 1984). In this case, the ICSEA score served almost as a narrative in itself to contextualise the school in the wider performative landscape. Principals expressed frustration at being compared to schools with a different ICSEA score, and they referred to this more than to the 'like' schools for which ICESA was designed. This may be because performative cultures can encourage comparison, and for schools to aim 'to be better than others' (Keddie, 2013).

Perhaps as a result of participants' beliefs in the inequities of comparing schools, each of the participants shared an approach that emerged through the analysis of interview data as a major theme—tracking individual student 'learning journeys' to identify success.

Common Approaches to Student Data: Narratives of Individual Student Journeys

Each principal emphasised their approach of sharpening their focus about data down to individual students. Max described a 'big picture' view of student data at Ironcliff with the school's 'beaker model' approach. In this approach, each student had an individual data profile which tracked a variety of data, including NAPLAN, regionally-mandated commercial testing data (such as PAT-R and PAT-M testing[3]), as well as 'a whole range of school-based data [more commercial products such as CARS&STARS, and Brigance testing of early years students] and all of that stuff goes into the mighty beaker'. Each student received a beaker of their own, 'and we simply say "what do we need to do for that kid to get them from there to there?" and we can demonstrate that'. The beaker was emphasised as providing a bigger picture of student learning, with Max commenting that 'it's the beaker that matters, that we're talking about with our parents at any given time'.

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[3] PAT-R, PAT-M, and CARS&STARS are commercial products used by schools within the region. PAT [Progressive Achievement Testing] is published by ACER and tests come in a variety of areas including mathematics (PAT-M), reading (PAT-R), Spelling, and Science. All schools within this region used these tests as part of the regional charter. CARS&STARS is a diagnostic reading program that provides data on students' reading comprehension and schools in the region use this to augment NAPLAN and other testing data. Brigance is a diagnostic test for students in the early years and purports to identify developmental needs and school readiness.

One of Scott's reasons for tracking individual growth was pragmatic. As Mount Pleasant's data improved, so did that of the state and nation, which Scott suggested made it difficult to clearly measure improvement and shifting the goalposts in terms of benchmarks and targets. He described these goalposts as moving because 'every time our average goes up, so do *all* the averages […] so it's really difficult to judge yourself because if all of Queensland rises, the average goes up too'. As a result, their school moved to tracking individual students:

> I'm hoping to be able to track individual improvement [on data beyond NAPLAN] and then look at school improvement. […] I'm more interested in micro-tracking every kid, monitoring, tracking, monitoring, tracking, planning, and then over six-month intervals stand back and look at those averages and say, 'Okay, our average was there and now it's here' and compare it to just ourselves.

Highlighting the importance of the narrative to support the science (Lyotard, 1984), part of this approach involved conversations with parents. Scott believed he would be telling parents a more positive picture about their child's education by tracking individual students, as well as providing parents with a clearer picture of their child's learning journey:

> The most important thing for our kids is that you've got those high expectations and know where they are. If you're talking to mum and dad, it's about progression – you need to know where they are and where you want them to go. If you can tell them that story about progression, you're golden. If you're not at benchmarks and you don't even know where these kids are or what they've done, you're stuffed.

Judy had similar reasons for tracking individual students which also took conversations with parents and carers into account. At the same time they encompassed her own conceptualisation of her role as focusing on holistic education for individual students and valuing their individual 'learning journeys'. Judy regularly used the term 'journey' when talking about students' education, providing insights into her beliefs about the importance of long-term pastoral care of students across their school career. Also illustrative of the power of the narrative in coexisting with the scientific (Lyotard, 1984), she noted that when discussing students' journeys with parents, it is 'very important' to have a measure of distance travelled because 'you can hang on to that and say "here's what sits behind the picture for our school, and we are doing really well individually. […] Those kids have moved, and they have actually shown improvement"'. She commented that when working with parents, 'really, in the end, lots of them are only interested in their child and their growth'. As a result, the school's approach is to focus on individual student 'learning journeys':

> We give them lots of communication [about data and student 'learning journeys'] and I think that reflects in our School Opinion Surveys because when you go back and look at that, those parts we get 100% for repeatedly, all the time, for staff, parents, and students is all about 'Do we give a good education at this school?' and yes, we do. And there's 100% of people

> believing in you there, so they will go on that journey with you. And they're not questioning the overall picture too much, they question the individual thing, and they see that.

The quantification of work in schools was evident here even as Judy spoke about the importance of the narrative of numbers. Numbers in the form of school surveys provided a measurable, objective (Porter, 1995) picture of something as complex as community satisfaction with a school.

Parallels could be seen in the approaches adopted by Max, Judy, and Scott in how they addressed discourses of data as a 'given' within the performative system. They made use of narrative knowledge (Lyotard, 1984) and contextualised the data within their schools. Rather than pushing back against the quantification and measurement rife in the education landscape, there was evidence of collecting *additional* data to provide information to support this narrative, and even using data to judge their own success in this endeavour.

Conclusion

Gillies (2013) raised the question of what it takes for a principal to be valorised within the current discourses of educational leadership, management and administration. This chapter goes some way to answering this question. It does appear that the most direct way for principals to be valorised in this particular case study climate was for their school to perform well on system-defined achievement metrics. Participants wanted to improve educational outcomes for their students, but the policy conditions within which they were working, and the discourses shaping educational leadership, impacted upon the ways they were focusing on these outcomes and the key areas being measured and targeted.

The chapter highlighted how these educative goals have become inextricably linked with measurement and data. Participants wanted to succeed and to be seen as quality or effective leaders (valorised, in this sense) and given more freedoms as a result. Success has essentially been reduced to performing well on the variety of testing and assessment or diagnostic tools they had at their disposal as compiled, in particular, within the school performance data profile. The development and the means in which this profile was used has changed the nature of the principalship. When principals pointed to the data profile as their key measure of school improvement—which, in turn, is one of the fundamental requirements of the principalship in Queensland—the impact of the profile became more evident in terms of principals' leadership practices and the implications for long-term school planning and leadership. If the data profile continues to drive principals' leadership practices and the school's agenda so closely, schools may well become stuck in an infinite loop of changing focus with each release of the profile. This reduces the opportunities for strategic long-term planning that meet deeper needs of students. Quick fixes, by their nature, tend to be more superficial and address surface needs at best. They are prevalent in these types of conditions, as suggested by Keddie and Lingard (2015) and reinforced by Tracy's comments throughout this chapter.

As established early in this book and reinforced throughout this chapter, discourses of quality surrounded the principalship and, measured by the data profile, were reinforced by responses from the system in relation to supervision and development as a direct result of improvement in the profile. This therefore placed the profile itself at the height of importance in the data landscape for principals, though findings within this chapter did indicate that principals spoke about a 'bigger picture' of data. While principals were somewhat dismissive about NAPLAN at times, they did return to the emphasis placed on it by the system, the community, and again, the affordances this type of data offered them. The hallowed place of NAPLAN data in the profile also explicitly indicated the importance of NAPLAN data in the case study principals' schools and the wider system.

With concerns being raised by Tracy about principals' data literacy, where in a 'data driven world' the focus tends to be on reacting rather than being proactive, there appeared to be some work to do in this area to better understand the ways principals perceived responses to data from supervisors and system policies (both policies as text, and policies as discourse). In relation to the productive aspects of data in schools today, participants expressed appreciation of the data and the clarity and precision they afforded them as school leaders. This echoes research from Thompson and Mockler (2016) about the affordances offered by data as well as notions relating to the trust placed in numbers as giving weight to decisions or guiding decisions when the decision-maker may not be as powerful as they are perceived to be (Porter, 1995). It therefore gives gravitas and meaning to leadership decisions and makes them easier to justify. There is an intricate amalgamation between principals' embrace of the data and affordances they provide, and the notion of steering at a distance that will take some exploration to unpack further in future research. The impact of this for participants' leadership practices is the same at the end of the day—data holds an esteemed place in the policy and discourse landscape.

Part of the discourse relating to data in the case studies, as explored within this chapter, was that principals owned their data, and were considered to be responsible for their school data. As a result of this, the external influences on data became more pronounced for these school leaders. Each of the principals in this book spoke emphatically about the impact of ICSEA and what it meant for their school data. Some participants went on to comment that it is unfair to judge their schools, or more disadvantaged schools than their own, against the scores of schools with students from advantaged areas with few diverse learning needs. One response for principals in this study was to focus more on individual progression for students rather than the oversimplified 'data for dummies' coloured banding presented on *MySchool* and in the data profile. This is problematic when considering the measurement and reliability errors inherent in NAPLAN.

Indeed, Tracy suggested that these approaches of focusing on individual student learning may have been due to a lack of data literacy and the fact that principals perceived it as being easier to track distance travelled for individual students than to examine more complex data sets across cohorts and years, although Wu (2016) cautioned against this practice as well. However, I would suggest a different theory behind the reasoning for this approach. If principals owned their school's data, as indicated by Richard, and the influence of ICSEA was so significant on data valued by the system, measuring distance travelled for each student was an effective means of seeing success—not only for students, but for themselves as educators and principals as well, providing 'moments of quality', as theorised by Ball (2003) and elaborated upon by Keddie (2013).

Here, performative notions of 'quality' can be seen as principals showing growth in measurable student outcomes. The influence of data as a construct influencing principal participants' work is undeniable when examining interview data. Their approach of focusing on individual students enabled principal participants to take control of the narrative by focusing on positive learning stories, and it spoke to a bigger picture than provided through systemic data such as NAPLAN. This was a way of ensuring they enacted their own conceptualisations of the principalship. Scott was able to guide his work with teachers and direct his energies where he saw fit, as he led from behind. Judy was able to take a holistic view towards students, and Max was able to quantify and measure student outcomes effectively, ensuring that he enacted his vision of improving measurable student outcomes.

Within this chapter, the reconstruction of educational practices around system priorities (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) was evident in the way data, targets, benchmarks, and accountabilities influenced supervision and capability development of principals; school agendas; and the work being undertaken by Max, Judy, and Scott as they enacted their individual conceptualisations of the principalship within current policy ensembles and the landscape of leadership discourses.

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Chapter 8
Implications for Leadership

I began this study seeking to better understand the impact of the introduction of an ensemble of policies I myself was expected to enact. During the research period as I moved to a position outside of the system, I was able to observe the disciplining of the principalship (Foucault, 1977; Niesche, 2011) as practices evolved and more policies and discourses were added to the expectations governing participants' work. As Alvesson (2011) suggested, the real nature of the study emerged over the period of the research project. The longitudinal nature of this study and my own experiences and knowledge from my time within the Department afforded me the opportunity to observe these changes over time and to collect rich, detailed data through these case studies. The nature of the wider case focusing on one particular schooling system within one region in Queensland provided an opportunity to explore the implications of an ensemble of specific policy conditions in a more delineated context. Given the findings about the impact of discourse as conversation and the unwritten rules of leadership, the principals' shared context was an important element of the study because it provided an opportunity to examine the impact of the shared discourses within that particular region. As highlighted by Mills et al. (2014), 'policy borrowing' (Lingard, 2010) means that findings from studies from within one system can be used to make sense of systems with similar policy conditions in other locations.

What Has This Book Taught Us About Leadership?

This study is one of the first to take a longitudinal approach to analyse the effects of this post-NAPLAN policy ensemble in Queensland. In doing so, it has contributed to our collective understanding of the influence of contemporary policies and related discourses on principals' subjectivities in a climate of urgent reforms. The findings from this book also contribute to understandings of how the shift to a performativity-informed form of instructional leadership (aiming towards specific aspects of educational achievement) has been interpreted and how these discourses

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shaped participants' conceptualisations of the principalship, as well as their practices as school leaders. The findings of this book also provide an exploration of the intertwined nature of participants' educative dispositions with the performative cultures of the system and how this influenced participants' work. It has provided further evidence of the way policies and discourses steer the work of principals from a distance, disciplining them to act and respond in ways that achieved the system's stated intentions of improved student achievement on clearly defined metrics.

In seeking to understand how discourses of educational leadership in the current climate shaped the subjectivities of principals working within the Queensland state schooling system, this study established that the shift from manager to instructional leader and the associated expectations from the system had been a source of pressure for participants. Difficulties also arose from a lack of clarity about how to enact the aforementioned discourses of leadership as framed within a school improvement agenda. The study highlighted the ways external accountabilities took time away from the educative aspects of leadership and that, regardless of the policies and discourses requiring principals to be instructional leaders, managing still overrode leading when clashes arose between the two. This leads to questions about how realistic the shift in role expectations has been, confirming findings from previous research that while more has been added to principals' work, few responsibilities have been taken away.

System representatives implied that it was up to principals to delegate these responsibilities so they could focus on enacting the Department's instructional leadership agenda; however, principal participants suggested that they saw their role as providing opportunities for learning and teaching to take place in the school, and thus these management duties still formed part of their own responsibilities as principals. Perhaps partly in response to this, but also due in part to their own philosophies of leadership and learning, Max, Judy, and Scott found ways to work around the system's explicit instructional leadership requirements. They saw their roles not as the heroic curriculum expert, but as being to develop the skills and instructional leadership capabilities of their staff, resulting in a team of instructional leaders with shared expertise.

These additional expectations and requirements of principals, in combination with the nature of performative cultures, resulted in a sociality of anxiety (Keddie, 2013), and this research found that quality of leadership could be perceived as success in performative metrics in the areas being valued highly by the system, with school data serving as a strong discourse found within policy documents and Departmental rhetoric. Notions of quality and effectiveness also aligned with levels and styles of supervision for principals, with more autonomy being given to school leaders who were deemed to be effective in their roles. The relationship between participants and their supervisors was complex. Even Max, Judy, and Scott, all very experienced principals within this region, discussed tensions between how they saw the role of principals' supervisors (likely influenced by its previous incarnation as a top-down supervisory role) and the professional companioning approach now encouraged by the Department (borne partly from the rhetoric around principal accountability and autonomy). The principalship was being constructed in an environment with heavy external accountabilities, and leaders were disciplined to work in certain ways as a direct response to these accountabilities, so were perhaps less likely to need ‘managing’ from their supervisors.

Whereas the rhetoric from the case study context was that principals had been given more autonomy, the study supported previous findings that it is difficult to be wholly autonomous in a wider system. With that said, the study provided evidence of suggestions from participants that as long as their school data profiles were improving, they were afforded more freedom to work in ways they deemed appropriate, as evidenced by the work being undertaken at Mount Pleasant prior to their commencement in the IPS programme. The performative and quantitative natures of education were evident here, particularly in Scott’s comments that improved results mattered the most in a numerical system, and that the Department just wanted to see improvement in the data.

These discourses of improvement were the key factor influencing the principalship. What this meant for ‘the knitting’, or participants’ key priorities, varied among participants, but they shared the same overarching goal of school improvement in performative ways, as required by the system. Tensions were evident at times during this study between these performative requirements and participants’ educative dispositions. The study found these two elements to work in tandem much of the time due to the nature of performative cultures requiring principals to work in certain ways to be deemed successful, and having changed what success actually meant for student achievement.

In Queensland, the system-generated data profile was the predominant measure of success and of quality leadership. It dictated which principals received support from regional staff, what level of support they were given if they were deemed to be requiring further development, or what sort of freedom they were afforded if they were deemed to be quality leaders. Therefore, participants responded to the performative aspects of the emphasis on the data profile in certain ways, aligning with performative practices such as focusing on specific elements of education that would provide improvement in this profile, or adopting the data profile itself as a driver for their own school’s agenda. In contrast, more educative practices were also evident where participants contested some of the more problematic practices by filtering departmental directives and deciding what to adopt or introduce to their school communities based on their perceptions of what would benefit their students and staff. A shared practice that could be interpreted as both performative and educative was participants’ focus on individual journeys of students, which was performative in a sense because participants were deemed to ‘own’ the responsibility for the results of each student and they gathered more data in a pursuit of a ‘bigger picture’ of achievement, but educative in another sense because these additional data were gathered in an attempt to better capture a wider view of academic and social aspects of students’ learning.

The complex nature of these practices highlights the way these discourses and school improvement policies have influenced the principalship during the period of these case studies.

Implications for Leadership Scholars

This book holds possibilities for scholars interested in adopting these critical theories as tools for analysis. I have made use of Lyotard's (1984) notions of performativity to understand the impact of these discourses and policies on the principalship. The culture of enumeration (Hardy, 2015a) and the trust placed in numbers (Porter, 1995) aligns with Lyotard's (1984, p. 7) reference to 'scientific knowledge'. Such scientific knowledge is associated with discourses of objectivity such as those surrounding numbers and data. The contribution of this book is also in theorising participants' discussion about the 'story behind the data' and their frequent comments about how they would frame or discuss school data with various members of their school community as the 'narrative knowledge' that Lyotard (1984, p. 7) noted must exist in addition to, in competition with, and is often subjugated by scientific knowledge in these performative cultures. The importance placed by participants on the story behind the data serves as a way of understanding how narrative knowledge was still considered important in a performative culture. Participants used narrative to explain and justify practices in relation to the scientific data. In fact, findings showed that the narrative knowledge even drove scientific knowledge at times, such as when participants collected additional data to provide information that would supplement their narrative of individual 'learning journeys' for students.

Lyotard's work was also used in particular to analyse the ways participants responded to the system's directives and discourses. While much of Foucault's work focuses on power and forms part of the theoretical framework in this book, Lyotard's description of language games provided an interesting new way to consider participants' positioning within a performative culture; in particular, their responses to the mechanisms steering their work at a distance (Kickert, 1995). When discussing language games, Lyotard noted that when a performative statement is made, the addressee is altered because the statement itself alters the environment in which the addressee is positioned. He noted, however, that nobody is powerless and that there is some mobility in how people respond to these messages. Theorising performative requirements through this lens, I have suggested that participants chose to respond to performative system requirements, discourses, or initiatives in various ways that enabled them to exercise their power, and they did this for various reasons. Examples of this included: Max deciding to not pass on 'messages' that might detract from his school's focus; Richard seeking to reposition NAPLAN as being less powerful in the data landscape in the region; and Judy's intent of lessening the workload and potential for 'initiativitis' (Carter, 2012) on her staff by not adopting all initiatives that arose during the case studies.

These theoretical contributions provide a new way of understanding the way principals might use narrative knowledge to reclaim some power from scientific and 'objective' measures of education, which could be useful, given Moore's (2004) findings that some educators face difficulties when trying to balance educative dispositions (Hardy, 2015b) with performative requirements. This contribution also provides another way of understanding shifting power in the principalship, and principals' responses to wider performative requirements and initiatives from systems.

Another key contribution of this book was the application of the macro- and micro-layers of theoretical resources in the design and analysis of this research. I have responded to calls for research to make use of poststructural theory to analyse educational leadership in the current climate of school reform (Eacott & Evers, 2015; Niesche & Gowlett, 2015) and built further upon research that has made use of Foucault's theories (including Gillies, 2013; Niesche, 2011, 2015, 2016; Niesche & Keddie, 2016) and Lyotard's notions of performativity (Keddie, 2013; Lingard, 2013; Singh, 2014) to better understand the experiences and subjectivities of participants. The application of a theoretical framework that layered the use of poststructural theory at a macro-(system) level with theory at a micro (individual)-level responded to calls (Niesche, 2013, p. 145) to use Foucault's work to better understand the 'complex terrain and shifting situations school leaders face'. Working with Lyotard's theories in parallel with Foucault's theories provided a unique way of understanding principals' leadership practices; in particular, the interplay between performative moves from a system with an improvement agenda, and the impact of these moves on individual school leaders. The approach of an application of layered theories could be adopted by future researchers in a range of fields to theorise how individuals are positioned by systems, how they choose to respond to system requirements, and how their subjectivities might be shaped by systems.

Implications for Policymakers

Findings of the study could support policy makers to better understand the impact of school improvement policy ensembles and how these demands might be balanced with the management demands inherent in the principalship.

In addition to this, an implication for leadership practices can be found in the responses from supervisors and the system at large in terms of data and leadership. Some principals (although not Max, Judy, or Scott) were described by participants as expressing unease about seeking help in this environment—participants suggested that seeking help in some principals' minds might have equated to seeming incompetent. On the other hand, principals who are confident in their place in the local (regional) hierarchy such as Max, Judy, and Scott seemed to be more confident to make use of the support structures available to them. If this is a trend that continues beyond the principals in these case studies, it has significant implications for leadership at large in terms of principals' development and leadership capacity building, but also stress and resulting mental health concerns for principals who feel unable to seek support in a highly pressurised environment.

Given the study's findings confirming the existence of a sociality of anxiety in this particular context—the urgency of the discourses surrounding reform and improvement—and the impact of the measurement and discourse of quality in the principalship, system leaders could use the findings to support the development of a culture of support and professional capability or capacity building, emphasising the use of data as a learning process as Tracy suggested, rather than the use of school data as measures of principal quality.

Implications for Leaders

The stories within this book hold lessons for leaders who are working under similar policy conditions. Whether Judy's, Max's, or Scott's story resonated with you, there are connections or experiences within these pages that are common for many leaders.

Judy's commitment to maintain a focus beyond that which can be easily measured may seem like an approach worth emulating. Her focus on the school's vision and her ways of working with her school community seem to many to be potentially out of reach in an environment where data—and specifically narrow forms of it—have proliferated policy and discourse. However, Judy shows us that it is possible to satisfy the performative requirements of the principalship and still maintain a commitment to a picture of schooling that is bigger and, I would argue, richer, than what policy currently emphasises.

What specifically could be done? By developing and maintaining a vision with her community, Judy remains accountable to them before filtering departmental requirements through their shared purpose of schooling. To satisfy the performative requirements of the principalship, Judy works incredibly hard to maintain a good track record. On a technical level, she complies with regional and departmental regulations. She takes on teachers with challenging backgrounds (where other schools might not) and supports them to succeed. She works hard to maintain relationships with her school community that result in high opinion survey outcomes and no complaints to her supervisors.

Importantly, her data trends are steady. Make no mistake, she was clear that this was a vital aspect of her track record and subsequently being given higher levels of autonomy. The school emphasises academic achievement, but by focusing on individual journeys and success, she can also show progress and meet performative targets that allow the school to focus on the things that she believes matters.

Other readers might connect more with Max. Nearing the end of his career, Max is incredibly experienced, incredibly knowledgeable, and incredibly confident in his vision and his position. He knows how far he can bend rules without breaking them, because he knows the rules back to front. Max, not seeking promotion or relocation, feels far less beholden to the rules of engagement under current policy conditions. Whereas Judy is compliant and feels the pressure to stick to timelines and tasks, Max works to his own timelines—defined and refined over decades of leadership in the department. He, like Judy, has built strong relationships and a reputation, and a bank of trust that withstands his pushing back on initiatives and pressures.

Max felt the same levels of autonomy as formalised IPS principals. He did what he felt he had to do to make his school the best it could be. He was conscious of data and used it to drive the agenda. However, for as long as I have known him, that has been the case, so this was not as large of a shift for Max as it was for some of the other principals. Indeed, the key shift for Max has been the availability of data that he can use to prosecute his agenda.

Max and Judy both built strong and experienced leadership teams in their schools. Their jobs were more strategic, while their leadership teams could focus on the school improvement agenda. Having staff devoted specifically to school improvement (be it through curriculum, teacher development, or working with specialists) surely influenced their data trends. Some readers might be thinking at this point that this is all well and good, but that they are without a leadership team to provide this kind of strategic support. Enter Scott.

Scott was adept with working with what he had. He thought outside the box and sought ways to make the changes he felt were needed. Take, for example, the narrowed curriculum focus at Mount Pleasant. Scott saw a need to do 'something different', decided on a plan, and found ways to make it happen. Starting in small ways (removing the requirement for students to learn an additional language), he then moved bigger into removing more mainstream curriculum areas from the school's offering. Opinion will be divided about the choice they made in doing so, but Scott was adamant that he and the school were working towards a form of social justice by giving their students opportunities to achieve equally on the areas being emphasised by the Department.

Moving beyond that approach, Scott's other key move that is achievable (and much of the leadership literature emphasises is desirable) was to take a distributed leadership approach. He invested in the people in his school, identifying their strengths and passions and creating a team of teacher leaders. Readers could consider their own contexts and the people with whom they work, who might be able to take on leadership roles. We know—and it was confirmed by these case studies—that leaders can struggle to balance leading and managing. Who might be able to take the lead in your school? Who can you work with to develop passion and interest in the area you want to develop but can't find the time to do so? This would be a logical starting point to try to adopt and adapt some of Scott's, Max's, and Judy's approaches to distributed leadership in your school.

Like Max and Judy, Scott had a strong relationship with his supervisors and the regional office, built on a track record of trust and collegiality. There are lessons to be learnt from this in terms of being proactive and collegial—not being afraid to ask for support or help. I do acknowledge, though, that not all environments are conducive to this kind of trust, support, or collegiality. Taking time to establish yourself as a leader (as Max described, and as was evident in Scott's stories)—getting to know the school and community, and the people with whom you'll be working, are all strategies each of the principals emphasised as vital for success.

Concluding Thoughts

New policies and practices focusing on school improvement imperatives, along with a sense of urgency, have been accompanied by an increase in discourses of accountability, autonomy, instructional leadership, and the datafication of education in this context. This book has contributed to the field's understanding of the impact of these discourses on individual participants' subjectivities, as well as to the principalship itself. Max, Judy, and Scott balanced their educative dispositions as school leaders with the performative cultures and quantification of education that were inherent within their wider shared context. These two elements of leadership were closely intertwined at many stages; the performative influencing the educative and vice versa when principals had to balance their vision of the principalship with the discourses governing their practices. In a bid for school improvement, by quantifying and measuring student outcomes, the system also quantified and measured principals' work, resulting in new practices and constructs within the principalship.

The changes resulting from these policies and discourses are taking place in school systems around the world (c.f. Sahlberg, 2011), and by illuminating the experiences of three principals in the shared context of a specific policy moment, I have highlighted the significance of the impact these changes can have on school leaders and on the principalship itself. These rich stories of the impact of rising external accountabilities have highlighted the complex nature of the principalship, and the importance of principals being able to find a balance between an educative focus and the performative demands of external accountabilities. Judy highlighted the balance she had to find as principal, commenting that 'I know I've got to meet those demands, but I'm still not going to be drawn away from that core of what we're really here for'. Judy, in particular, appeared to move beyond the performative and focus on the educative with a heavy emphasis on holistic education for the students at Merriwald. In contrast, Scott and Max also expressed educative goals for their students but performative influences were more evident in these goals, which focused more explicitly on improving students' skills in the literacy and numeracy practices measured by testing.

Thinking back to the conference in 2011 that sparked my research focus, I did not at the time understand the enormity of the changes that faced Queensland's state school leaders. Although we commented at the time on the sense of urgency we felt from our Departmental leaders, I did not anticipate how sweeping the changes would be, or how the principalship itself would evolve so rapidly and so vastly. The discourses that 'swarm and seethe' (Ball, 1999, p. 14) around the principalship have changed what it means to be a principal in a time of rapid global reforms. Methods of disciplining the principalship, including the use of school data as surveillance and policies and discourses that closely directed the work of schools, have reconstituted the work of principals even as they sought to contest some of the more performative practices inherent in these reform agendas. In this book, I have explained and explored the tensions experienced by principals in a period of rapid reform, using layers of theories to come to better understand the way the system's school improvement agenda has shaped the principalship at a macro-level, as well as the way principals' subjectivities were constructed at a micro-level as they navigated within and around these reforms.

This book builds upon the scholarship that came before it, and provides a solid foundation for future work. Policies are continually evolving, along with discourses about schools, school improvement, teachers, and leadership. It is clear that expectations for leaders enacting these policies are complex and require difficult choices of principals who are trying to balance their visions of schooling alongside the shifting requirements of their roles. While we know that it is not a new phenomenon for schools to be the targets for reform and improvement agendas, we also know that the ways these agendas play out can shift practices and school priorities dramatically in relatively short periods of time. Critical theory has a long history of providing ways of thinking about these ideas and while it might not provide a simple solution or list of strategies, it helps us to better understand the particular challenges and nuances of leading schools in times of highly pressurised change. Stories matter in helping us to understand the lives and experiences of the people leading these changes. By sharing their stories, Max, Judy, and Scott have provided new insights into the particular challenges principals face in a journey towards school improvement, and in balancing wider priorities and goals with their own senses of what matters in leadership, and in schooling.

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