Chris Dolan

Paradox and the School Leader

The Struggle for the Soul of the Principal in Neoliberal Times

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Educational Leadership Theory

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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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Series Editors' Foreword

Discussions of educational leadership research are always discussions about theory. Sometimes, matters of ontology, epistemology 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 and 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
- 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?
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 education research and as education 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 theorizations 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 opens 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
Series Editors

Preface

[Curiosity] evokes 'care'; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is disappearing; a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental. (Foucault, 2000b, p. 325)

Foucault's thoughts on curiosity and care are not meant to encapsulate succinctly all that follows. Nor are their perceptive qualities or natural eloquence intended to stand over the more modest attempts I make in this book to argue my position or express my own thoughts. Rather, their inclusion at the beginning of this preface is to create a thematic resource to help position the book in a broader field; to make better sense of my use of related ideas about questioning, imagination and risk; and to lend support to a short narrative of my own.

This book looks to position itself within the field of critical leadership studies, to utilise the work of others in the field and to add some contributions of its own. While there appears to be some scholarly consensus that critically oriented leadership texts should be concerned with power relations and critiquing of prevailing orthodoxies, the field is strewn by a plurality of perspectives on leadership and the diverse interests which follow. I contend, in this heterogeneity, that the type of curiosity Foucault advocates might amount to a unifying call – one that reminds the critical author to remain sceptical of the all too familiar and to shift attention to that which is problematic, deficient and absent in mainstream leadership research. My own efforts to position this book, therefore, draw from Foucault's observations about a sharpened sense of reality and a determination to see things in a different way. In making the school principal the focus of my work, I also look to unsettle taken-for-granted notions of leadership and authority and of their assumed connection to the lives and work of principals.

A key move away from the familiar and the orthodox in this book is the invoking of *paradox* as an intervention in the constitutive politics of school principals. The choice of paradox – which emerged in analysis the ethnographically informed field data that underpins this book – speaks quite directly of Foucault's references to

finding familiar surroundings 'strange and odd' and looking at the 'same thing in different ways'. I develop the theoretical content and language of paradox by drawing from its historical and contemporary deployment beyond my chosen field. The possibilities for *thinking* with paradox – and the simultaneity and interrelatedness of its opposing sides – are conjoined with the notion of a paradox lens for *looking* more closely at my field data. This lens is subsequently used to identify and construct a series of paradoxes that I claim as both influential in the lives and work of principals and as providing insights into the competing forces that haunt and contradict the simplistic positivist accounts that inform contemporary school policy.

A close companion to Foucault's curiosity is a requirement to ask telling questions. In responding to the question, *how are principals and their work constituted in neoliberal times?*, I propose that, in neoliberal times, the subjectivity of principals is better apprehended and understood in its paradoxy than in the simplified and essentialist accounts of school leadership that currently proliferate. This central question about the shaping of principal subjectivity leads to many others. Inside of a paradox conceptual frame, the book also dwells on the power relations in which principals are enmeshed, asking after principal agency and authority and posing further questions about the potential of a broader ethico-political project founded in practices of critique, counter-conduct and agonistic resistance. Principal policy work is also the subject of various lines of inquiry, as the book attempts to problematise current roles and practices by undermining the fixed and respectful position that neoliberal policy seeks to occupy and to see through and beyond the artifice of its ambitions. Of course, asking questions is somewhat more straightforward than answering them. Alongside of the imagination and illumination that curious questioning seems to promulgate are less promising, but arguably unavoidable, companions like incomplete responses, missed opportunities and less productive choices. While readers may adjudicate these shortcomings differently, they stem from the same point of departure as the more meritorious qualities of the book, and, in my optimism, I trust they will be read as opportunities for feedback and further inquiry.

Throughout, I lean on Foucault to light the way. Foucault's understanding of discourse is deployed in the initial management of my data, and his insights into governmentality, power/knowledge and subjectivity are posited as epistemologically crucial in the subsequent analysis of the neoliberal policy discourses of choice, excellence, entrepreneurship and managerialism. In turn, the argument is advanced that various paradoxes form and develop at the margins of these discourses, allowing possibilities for thinking otherwise about the constitution of the principal subject. In response to constitutive questions, I am concerned with the 'soul' of the principal, conceived, after Foucault as a product of various forms of power exercised around, on and within the principal subject. Resisting an overdetermined, hegemonic account of neoliberalism, I pursue a more nuanced analysis of the governing of principal conduct that reveals and holds open its paradoxical qualities – the contradictions, conflicts and ambiguities that inhere within, and work constitutively on, the process of principal 'neoliberalisation'.

Curiosity does not proceed towards knowledge without a set of tools. Methodologically, my efforts to look at the same things in different ways rely on the

tenets of critical policy sociology. In particular, this involves bringing together the macro-level influences of neoliberal policy and the micro-level policy work of principals in schools, in order to gain insights into the current rationalities shaping the principal, as well as more imaginative and emancipatory possibilities. The merits of this design are realised by joining the illuminating qualities of ethnographic fieldwork directly to a body of theory, principally inspired by Michel Foucault, and to additional tools of analysis, construction and representation developed within a paradox conceptual framework.

I conclude the book by claiming that the subjectivity of principals has become the site of ontological and epistemological impositions that are best understood as a struggle for the soul of the principal. I claim, as the central thesis of my research, the twin imperatives of revealing the politics of this struggle and of advocating ways in which principals might become productive and politically active participants in it. In summarising my research, I dwell on the relations of subjectivity, truth and paradox and describe several distinct contributions made to theory, policy and practice in critical leadership studies. Amongst these contributions, I offer as perhaps my most original contribution to the field a schematic representation of the learning possibilities in paradox – described as *the pedagogy of paradox* – distilled from the use of a paradox lens in my empirical work.

To return to themes of curiosity and care, this book is part of a personal transformation of sorts – a summoning of my best efforts to fashion a narrative that confounds, counters and questions most of what I had come to believe and rely upon in my working life. While I hesitate to use the weary and overworked trope of the 'journey', I do feel a certain turning away from the conventions of my work as a school and regional leader and a shift towards a more inquisitive and less certain destination as researcher and author. I claim, at about the half-way mark in this book, that a curiosity akin to that described by Foucault underpins my political, social, ethical and philosophical endeavours. At this point, Foucault's curiosity quotation resurfaces as I affirm my affinity with the interests of critical leadership scholars and articulate an enduring concern with the reigning constitutive influences on principals and the inductive work of surfacing new and different possibilities. My own story, and its connections with school leadership, is one of changed thinking and reimagined possibilities. Prompted by a realisation of the parlour and insufficiencies of simplified and essentialist accounts of leadership, my shift has been sustained by a curiosity about what else resides alongside of the current orthodoxy, about the merits of other ways of being and working and the possibilities for action that reside in a broader ethico-political project.

Chris Dolan

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Thank you also to Rosemary, whose love and patience extended to providing me a formidable sounding board for new ideas, enthusiastic conversations about my progress and, the most generous of all commitments, sharing my reading of Michel Foucault, and to Tom, Patrick and Isabel, whose healthy scepticism and wonderings about when I would ever finish, I interpret as displays of undying love and affection for their dad! Of course, I love all of you too.

Contents

Chapter 1
Scope, Position and Sequence

This book seeks to contribute to the field of critical leadership studies by invoking *paradox* as an intervention in the constitutive politics of school principals. It proposes that, in neoliberal times, the subjectivity of principals is better understood in its paradoxy[1] than in the austere and essentialist accounts of school leadership that currently prevail. In *Paradox and the School Leader*, I am concerned with the 'soul' of the principal, conceived, after Foucault (1977), as a product of various forms of power exercised around, on and within the principal subject. Fifteen paradoxes derived from theoretical and empirical analysis are used to provide insights into the competing forces that haunt and contradict simplistic positivist accounts of contemporary school leadership and to reveal the presence of a political struggle for the soul of the principal in this neoliberal era.

It Is and It Isn't

The apparent confidence and likely conceits of this opening statement serve to sharpen the need to shift this introduction into more equivocal territory in order to resolve questions of scope, positionality and sequence. What follows is not just an explanation of what the book is about, but also what it is not. Such an approach describes choices made within different sets of contestable ideas. It is aimed at outlining the scope and fixing the position of this book more precisely in a broader field while, at the same time, filling out otherwise disingenuous claims about its modest, uncertain and partial contribution. Inextricably tied to the book's ontological, epistemological and methodological premises, this work of articulating and defending

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[1] The word 'paradoxy', which refers to 'the quality or state of being paradoxical' (paradoxy, 2019), appears to have enjoyed prominence during the Renaissance when the revival of ancient paradoxes became a popular form of amusement and public entertainment. It is used in this book to denote a state of ambiguity, tension and conflict in the lives and work of principals.

decisions made, orientations preferred, and risks taken is directed to making the intentions of the book more transparent and intelligible. The placing of this book within four such 'contests' is now described.

A Focus on the Principal

At a recent anniversary celebration of one of the schools in which I had worked as a school principal, I was intrigued by the prominence given to former principals in attendance. The six of us were introduced individually and then paraded as a group at the front of the crowd. The formal celebrations were entirely taken up by speeches from the current principal and two previous principals. This programming choice was noteworthy for its selective recognition of principals who had essentially transitioned through the school, often as a stepping stone to more senior appointments, and the absence of representation from a large section of the audience who had worked in the school for far longer and, arguably, made a greater professional commitment and gained a more extensive understanding of the school's history.

I use this example as a localised illustration of the taken-for-granted *primacy* bestowed on principals in contemporary schooling and to introduce my case for focussing this book on school principals and their work. In naming and separating out the principal position, I run the risk of overplaying its importance and, through the denotative effect of the language, immediately attaching normalised meaning and an expectation of explanatory potential. I seek to overcome these effects by taking principals as discursively constituted subjects and by identifying and explicating a range of tensions that, I contend, are ubiquitous and deeply affecting in their lives and work. This means, for example, examining the principalship in terms of its complexity, variety and limitations, interrogating and destabilising assumptions about principals and their work and critically examining the often automatic conflation of 'principal' and 'leadership'. My intention is, therefore, to regard the grammar as *connotative* – to treat the position of principal as one that is arbitrarily constructed and so able to be considered both in terms of the forces by which it is constituted and its alternative conceptions.

A more pragmatic response to risks of nomenclature and attribution is to recognise that the principal position (or its equivalent) exists in virtually all schools, that certain qualities and responsibilities are widely attached to it and that it is clearly distinguishable from other designated leadership positions in schools. For better or for worse, principals generally exert more power and control than others in the school over processes of resource management, direction setting and planning, marketing and promotion, decision-making and resolution of personnel issues. They are well positioned to see how their school fits within a broader system and to 'capture the bureaucratic apparatus' (van Bommel & Spicer, 2017, p. 152) in ways that allow them to be directly influential in the lives of others. Furthermore, from my observation, principal's work is characterised by more diverse and pressing demands. In turn, this means they see and experience a wider range of complexities and, as

designated leaders, are drawn to responses that minimise uncertainty and set clear and unambiguous direction.

A (Particular) Critical Orientation

In *Paradox and the School Leader*, I endeavour to work within some of the broad parameters that mark out and distinguish the field of critical leadership studies. These include critiquing populist notions of leadership and pervasive functionalist assumptions about leadership as fixed and natural, developing an interest in the social and discursive construction of leadership and of leader's identities, surfacing and interrogating existing structures of power and control and exploring expanded notions of democracy, fairness and freedom in directing analysis towards emancipatory goals.

However, contrary to a picture of apparent uniformity and containment, studies that claim a critical orientation range across broad and, at times, difficult territory. As Collinson (2011) observes, critical leadership studies 'do not constitute a unified set of ideas, perspectives or a single community of practice', but rather, the field 'comprises a variety of approaches informed by an eclectic set of premises, frameworks and ideas' (p. 181). The critical field is also marked by relatively low levels of scholarly engagement. Niesche (2018) notes that critical approaches to the study of leadership have generally 'hovered in the wings of mainstream educational leadership' because of 'the erroneous assumption that such approaches have little to offer those seeking best practice' (p. 145). In a field of heterogeneous approaches, porous borders and modest take-up, it becomes necessary to both clarify more exactly where this book locates itself in the broader field and to state a case for the theoretical and practical importance of the critical position that it embraces.

Popkewitz's (1999) room metaphor allows a more accurate positioning on the critical 'leadership terrain'. Popkewitz imagines a 'social room' where most of the space is taken with finding 'useful' knowledge and using 'the procedures of measurement and the rules for collecting data' – what he calls 'pragmatic-empiricism' (p. 2). Such research work focuses on the internal logic of institutions, such as schools, and is committed to gaining conceptual clarity and to connecting better and more efficient systems of administration to social progress. Squeezed into the end of this room are a group of 'critical' researchers with somewhat different concerns. Their focus is on 'how existing social relations can be interrogated to understand issues of power and institutional contradictions' (Popkewitz, 1999, p. 3). With its emphasis on the critical tradition of thinking otherwise, this book is most often positioned at this end and, at its most ambitious, in the corner that determinedly holds to productive practices of critical thought and to emancipatory goals.

In this relatively small and often derided space, I am concerned with connecting thought to knowledge and theory to practice. I am interested in power relations and how principals are implicated in policies and structures that impose on their freedom and that of other individuals and groups in schools. To this end, I seek to

constructively interrogate the agency of principal subjects in both my critique of social, political and structural constraints and my exploration of possibilities in struggle and resistance, reviving of contradictory discourses and ethical practices of the self.

My epistemological positioning within the critically oriented field is also fixed more exactly by a determination to strike the difficult balance between non-normative critique, with its requirement to abstain from normative judgement and refuse to build new solutions to existing problems, and the more pragmatic call of performative critique (see Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; van Bommel & Spicer, 2017) to be braver about tackling issues that actually matter and more savvy about the political work of making a difference. The balance I endeavour to strike is well captured by Ball's claim that the critical case is made powerful in social analysis because it 'means being difficult and constructive at the same time' (Ball, 2006, p. 3–4).

My settling of this apparent tension is not founded on a wholly negative critique of school leaders or in siding with what van Bommel and Spicer (2017) describe as an 'elite group of intellectual naysayers' (p. 6). Nor am I overly concerned with proposing alternatives to current norms as expressed in dominant discourses or in taking up and expanding the 'what works' agenda of positivist studies. Rather, I prefer the affirmative stance of non-normative critique, in order to problematise and repoliticise contemporary and pervasive modes of governing (Hansen, 2016, p. 129) and to edge critique towards a more just – less oppressive – social world. More specifically, my aim is to engage in what Foucault (2007) calls 'tactically effective analysis' (p. 3) by exploring the political agency available to principals through ideas associated with agonistic resistance and democratic designs for school leadership.

Finally, in this donning of the 'critical' label, it is important to note the joining of the epistemological positioning of this book with conceptualisations typically asso-ciated with post-structuralist theory. While it has spawned a 'proliferation of con-flicting definitions' (Lather, 2007, p. 5), the general concerns of post-structuralism are with disrupting the normative ways of understanding the world (Khoja-Moolji, 2014, p. 277) and foregrounding 'the contingent aspects of complex systems' (Woermann, 2016, p. 5). The objectivity of the sciences and positivist assumptions about the capacity to discover an absolute and generalisable truth are thus margin-alised in favour of taking knowledge as socially constituted and allowing 'space for multiple, even contradictory, positions to be held as truths' (Khoja-Moolji, 2014, p. 279).

A Paradox Conceptual Frame

Rather than embracing complexity and plurality, literature about educational leader-ship has tended towards more reductive, positivist studies that often overlook or minimise the diversity, ambivalence and tension in the school workplace (see

Niesche, 2018). As a result, within this body of work, there is scant evidence of a scholarly interest in using the theoretical and conceptual resources of paradox. *Paradox and the School Leader*, with its objective of connecting paradox in the lives and work of school principals with the interests of educational leadership, is, therefore, something of a transgression into unoccupied territory – a manoeuvre that must draw widely from historical and contemporary sources beyond the field of education in order to attenuate the solitude and risk of cutting entirely new ground. By way of introduction, I will distil this work into four themes that are prominent in this book in order to better elucidate a paradox conceptual frame and to highlight choices made from the bigger field.

Firstly, in the debate about the nature and ontology of paradox (e.g. in Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Smith & Lewis, 2011), my deployment relies on a 'constitutive approach' (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016). Such an approach takes paradox as formed out of the constitutive practices of discourses rather than functioning as representations of conflict or complexity. The apparent symmetry and pragmatism of two-sided conflict is replaced with an array of competing discourses, marked by variations across space and time, differential interminglings with local practice and asymmetrical levels of prominence and influence. In this 'tangled plurality' of practices (Foucault, 1972, p. 53), I turn to Foucault's theoretical insights to help explain what discourse does (or is doing) in situations where paradoxes form. In this constitutive approach, the epistemological space I am looking to occupy is neither neutral nor apolitical. I seek to problematise and make vulnerable the discourses that dominate contemporary schooling and to reveal, through the formulation of various paradoxes, the competing interests that shape and influence principals and their work.

This work of problematisation highlights a second theme associated with the conceptual reach of paradox and, concomitantly, with the challenge of giving paradox sufficient heft and girth to support critically oriented work. Pushing hegemonic claims into uncertain territory often shifts my use of paradox into what Lather (2007) describes as 'the between space of any knowing'. In this space, I look to generate thought and knowledge that is not currently available from 'the vantage point of our present regimes of meaning' (p. 16) by taking paradox as a theorising tool for *thinking* and as a lens for *looking* critically and differently at the constitutive politics of principal subjectivity. This additional reach for paradox is underpinned by Colie's (1966) seminal text *Paradoxia Epidemica*, where her interest in the revival of 'formal paradoxy' in the Renaissance (p. 4) includes the notion of the 'epistemological paradox' and the range of possibilities it carries for countering received opinion, challenging rational discourse, stimulating further questions and speculating on new possibilities.

Thirdly, the implications for considering paradox as formed in the constitutive practices of discourse are not confined just to contemplating what discourse is doing when paradox forms and develops. Importantly, they extend to include the conditions set by discourse for how actors appropriate and manage contradictions in their workplace (see Putnam et al., 2016). This book notes the emphasis on responding to paradoxical tension in management and organisational studies that adds significantly to the language of paradox and to the theoretical content that deals with the

merits and implications of the various processes of separation, compromise, synthesis, convergence, acceptance and accommodation.

However, a more crucial interest of this book is in post-structural ideas about non-closure of meaning, contingent knowledge and radical ambiguity. Such ideas favour responses that accept and accommodate paradox. They recruit the language of 'antinomy' and 'aporia' to support holding open the sides of a persistent tension, rather than seeking its expedient resolution. In this book's focus on the shaping of principals and their work, this preference renders as contestable one of the prized and time-honoured tropes of school leadership – the resolution of complex conflict by the unequivocal and decisive action of an individual. Thinking with paradox signals instead very different possibilities for how principals appropriate, manage and decide these conflicts.

The fourth theme works beyond the deployment of a paradox lens in understanding and critiquing the status quo. This theme shifts into more speculative possibilities for the use of paradox and to consideration of what Smith, Lewis, Jarzabkowski and Langley (2017) describe as its 'generative potential' (p. vi). Two possibilities are advanced in the context of applying the theoretical possibilities in paradox in future research in the field of critical leadership studies:

1. That the language of paradox can help narrate an oppositional politics. In 'exploring the critical consequences that complexity holds' (Woermann, 2016, p. 3), the relevance of thinking with paradox is here shifted to the constitutive possibilities in using the language of paradox to narrate the politics of opposition to the status quo. This function – later referred to as a 'warrior topos' quality (after Barthes, 1975) – proposes ambitious, but still relevant and transferrable possibilities in a paradox language that direct leaders away from reductive and simplified problem-solving logic and towards strategically challenging the current orthodoxy, troubling one-sided interpretations, seeking creative alternatives and keeping options open by delaying the rush to resolution.
2. That paradox creates opportunities for new learning. Schad, Lewis, Raisch and Smith (2016) allude to this quality when they observe that 'paradoxes stare us in the face – taunting our established certainties, while tempting our untapped creativity' (p. 6). A detailed case for *a pedagogy of paradox* is made in Chap. 9, with each of the multiple learning opportunities proposed being conditional on filling the prerequisite need for a 'wonderer' – an audience to paradox who admire and wonder about it and who are willing to share in and prolong its actions (Colie, 1966, p. 519).

The Grounding of Theory in Research: An Inductive Approach

Theoretical insights into the constitution of principals and their work advanced in this book did not start from imagining paradox as imbued with theoretical content. Nor were they mined straight from the extant literature or from the 'threads' of

post-structuralism (Woermann, 2016, p. 6). Rather, decisions about theory originated from empirical data drawn from fieldwork conducted in five secondary schools (*Appendix 1* is an anonymised list of the schools and research participants cited in this book). This data, and the various 'analytical insights and interpretive hunches' (Ball, 2012, p. viii) it provided, was subsequently put into an iterative relationship with key ideas related, for example, to the expanded epistemological possibilities in paradox, the use of the conceptual resources of Foucault and others and the imbrication of neoliberal policy discourses with the processes of principal subjectivity.

While this grounding of theory in research, or what Heffernan (2018) terms 'theorising of the data' (p. 7), is not reflected directly in the order of chapters which follow, the inductive qualities of this process have a direct bearing on the breadth and depth of what unfolds. In much of the book, I have preferred expansive and imaginative possibilities over reductive and precise findings. The first-order insights used in this book from principals and other participants in my research are indicative of the diverse and often contradictory data collected and are chosen for their illustrative qualities rather than as evidence of a definitive truth. In treating paradox largely as an outside concept working its way into a new field of study, assertions about the significance of persistent tensions are not grandiose and unequivocal, but rather are advanced in a qualified and tentative ways. Throughout, I am looking to avoid definitive answers and, instead, to fill out themes, categories and ideas on which critically oriented scholarship might develop and from which further questioning might proceed.

Methodologically, the more expansive qualities of this book are influenced by the tenets of policy sociology (see Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Gale, 2001; Ozga, 1987) which bring together analysis of systems-level policy development and micro-level investigation of the perceptions and experiences of those implementing policy. A policy sociology approach supports my interest in understanding the social complexities of the policy work of principals and, more particularly, following Bowe et al. (1992), the portrayal and analysis of 'the processes of active interpretation and meaning-making' that principals undertake in order to 'relate policy texts to practice' (p. 13). Such positioning helps me work against one of the traditional polemics of sociology that separates macro-level interests in broader social structures from the micro-contexts of individuals and their practices. Instead, I endeavour to summon what Mills (1959) famously describes as 'the sociological imagination' which 'enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals' (p. 5).

An important conceptualisation that relies on these inductive and imaginative qualities is the formulating of principal subjectivity as a process of 'neoliberalisation' founded in the variations in the take-up of neoliberal policy in practice. This concept, which draws from the extant literature as well as accounts provided by principal participants in my research, opens critical spaces adjacent to a vast store of readings that treats the neoliberal political-economic project as dominant and ubiquitous. In revealing plurality and contingency, neoliberalisation suggests a more nuanced

analysis of the governing of principal conduct that, in turn, reveals and holds open its paradoxical qualities – the contradictions, conflicts and ambiguities that inhere within, and work constitutively on, the process of principal subject formation.

The data used and analysed in this book was collected using the 'qualitative and illuminative techniques' (Ozga, 1987, p. 144) of ethnographically informed field-work. The choice of this method – and the use of its traditional staples of extended observation, in situ interviews and document analysis in the field – supports the idea that there is value in understanding the 'wholeness' of the lives and work of principals through extended contact with individuals in their natural setting. I seek to utilise what Bray (2008) describes an 'intrinsically sensitive' quality in ethnographic work that reveals the nuances, subtleties and complexities so important in understanding people, behaviours and culture (p. 300). This involves getting inside the 'messy and ecological' everyday practices of principals (Thomson, 2001, p. 16) to engage with the inherent complexities, to see the tensions and contradictions they invoke and, ultimately, to undertake some useful sense-making work to shed light on the constitutive forces at play.

The Sequence of Chapters

The following summary of chapters attempts a gradual prising open of the key ideas, arguments and aspirations of this book while also trying to depict, more sequentially, the ground to be covered and the plates to be kept spinning.

Chapter 2 is concerned with securing the theoretical content of paradox in order to enhance its possibilities as a tool of thought and to inform the use of a paradox lens in subsequent chapters. It explores the historical allocation of 'epistemological' (Colie, 1966) qualities to paradox and uses contemporary research, mostly from the fields of organisational and management studies, to explicate its componentry and its synergy with, and separation from, familial terms. The latter part of the chapter takes a post-structural turn, with the relationship between discourse, contradiction and paradox established through the work of Michel Foucault, with a segue then made to the political possibilities of a paradox lens in the work of Foucault and his contemporary, Roland Barthes.

Chapter 3 turns more fully to the application of Foucault's theoretical resources. Foucault's notion of the 'soul' is introduced as that part of the subject which is exposed to various techniques of power in the interests of government. This chapter makes a selective raid of Foucault's vast catalogue in order to understand the extended and different impacts of power on the soul of the principal. More specifically, Foucault's work is used to make the argument that the principal subject, in neoliberal times, is rendered as fully disposed to outside forces of government and to the self-fashioning of authority and practices inside of a compliant subjectivity. The locus of support is found in Foucault's understanding of the arts of liberal government and, in particular, the emergence of a distinctly neoliberal form of governmentality. This central concept is linked to Foucault's later work on tech-

nologies of the self in order to surface notions of principal freedom and introduce the prospect of a contest over principal subjectivity. Subsequent connections are made, at the nexus of governmentality and subjectivity, to explanatory themes of discourse, power/knowledge and truth.

The discourse analysis conducted at the beginning of Chap. 4 works from Foucault's prescient genealogical accounts of the art of (neo)liberal government. It takes the policy discourses of neoliberalism as an object of analysis that help discern, from a sprawling and ambiguous field, the varied constitutive influences of neoliberal governmentality on the principal subject. The analysis of four policy discourses – *choice*, *excellence*, *entrepreneurship* and *managerialism* – is directed to revealing their problematisations and to critiquing the rationalities and power/knowledge arrangements that confer on them hegemonic qualities and subjectifying tendencies. In support of a processual understanding of neoliberalism, this analysis includes second-level critique at the margins of each discourse to open a critical space against dominant and ubiquitous readings. The aim is to reveal greater fragility and contingency as well as to reinstate alternative discourses that have been forgotten, subjugated or put aside.

Chapter 5 introduces and elaborates key concepts and ideas to be applied in the 'paradox' chapters which follow (i.e. Chaps. 6, 7 and 8). The chapter commences by proposing the 'neoliberalisation' of the principal as a variegated and contingent process that suggests the availability of a variety of different subject positions. My claim of a struggle for the soul of the principal is then explicated and defended. I argue that principals should involve themselves in such a struggle and, subsequently, offer critique, counter-conduct and agonistic resistance as appropriate *struggle tactics*. The chapter concludes with a more detailed account of a paradox lens for looking at the constitutive forces shaping the lives and work of principals. This chapter also provides background to the use of principal 'portraits' in the chapters which follow.

Each of Chaps. 6, 7 and 8 introduces a series of paradoxes derived from evidence collected in the field and supported, in aspects of their construction and componentry, by the theoretical work and discourse analyses that have gone before. The chapters are titled as follows:

- Chapter 6: Paradoxes of Subjectivity and Authority
- Chapter 7: Paradoxes of Neoliberal Policy
- Chapter 8: Paradoxes of Managerialist Practice

While Chaps. 6, 7 and 8 continue to make the case for paradoxical representation, they are primarily concerned with shedding further light on the political struggle for the soul of the principal. To this end, I take the conventional truths and knowledge claims contained in each of the paradoxes as rendering principals susceptible to the conducting forces of government and to invitations to shape themselves and their own conduct. Against these depictions, I test the capacity of the simultaneous and interrelated oppositions in paradox to reveal and illuminate a struggle for the soul of the principal and to inform the political work of discovering

and instating valid oppositions and fashioning the spaces of freedom where they can be enacted.

Chapter 9 draws conclusions from preceding work in the form of a number of generative possibilities for research in the field of critical leadership studies. Three broad areas of possibility are proposed. Firstly, *a pedagogy of paradox* is explicated as a schematic model to guide the researcher (as learner) in the application of paradox to existing conditions of conflict and struggle. The model is extended to show how paradox may yield expanded learning opportunities in the 'critical engagement' of the researcher with and beyond existing conditions. Secondly, *the process of principal neoliberalisation* is further explored in terms of the support it offers for different conceptualisations of the broader neoliberal project and, more specifically, for the constitutive possibilities held in the broader array of subject positions it appears to make available to principals. To conclude, following Foucault's (1984) edict that 'we always have something do' (p. 343), generative possibilities aligned with principal practice are distilled from the notion of 'negative capability' (Keats, 2010) and from the future work suggested in Foucault's (1982) 'permanent provocation' of the agonistic subject.

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Chapter 2
Thinking with Paradox

In this chapter, I argue that the theoretical and conceptual possibilities for paradox in studies of school leadership have, so far, largely gone unrealised. I describe its deployment in this book as a conceptual frame for understanding the way principals and their work are currently constituted. The use of 'conceptual frame' is to capture the way paradox is broadly influential in the book's design, reaching into 'the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories' (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39) that it proposes and expounds.

For the most part, Chap. 2 is concerned with developing the 'theoretical content' of paradox so that it might be rendered as a tool for thinking (and thinking differently) about how principals and their work are shaped. Later in the chapter, as the emphasis tips towards empirical understanding, paradox is also considered as a lens for looking and interpreting (see Smith, Lewis, Jarzabkowski, & Langley, 2017, p. 6).

My aim in this work is not to create a theory to capture and explain paradoxical tensions (e.g. Smith & Lewis, 2011), nor to study these tensions in order to build new theory (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016; Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016). Rather, I aim to work against the rendering of paradox as a tired cliché, as captured in the oft-used and generally careless declaration 'it's a paradox', to instead enrich its general form by infusing it with added complexity and theoretical influence. Furthermore, in these 'paradoxical purposes' (Smith et al., 2017, p. 6) of thinking with paradox and of 'seeing' through a paradox lens, it will become clear that I prefer to accept and work with the coexistence of paradox's interdependent opposites over trying to resolve their contradictions or seek better ways to manage their inherent tensions.

In allocating expanded theoretical content, this chapter also begins to mark out the territory within which these applications of paradox will be applied. The 'constitutive intervention' described in my introduction to Chap. 1 is into the 'territory' of school principals – marked out in this chapter by frequent references to the tensions, ambiguities and contradictions that principals face, but significantly expanded in subsequent representations of the shaping effects of policy (Chap. 4) and constitutive insights gained in studies of principal practice (in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8).

The bringing of paradox to the field of critical leadership studies represents something of a transgression into unoccupied territory. Rather than embracing complexity and plurality, literature about educational leadership has tended towards more reductive, positivist studies that often overlook or minimise the diversity, ambivalence and tension in the school workplace. As a result, studies of paradox are few and far between. There are some notable exceptions focussing on the paradoxical demands on principals and other school leaders (e.g. Eden, 1998; Peters & Le Cornu, 2004; Starr, 2014); the need to identify, embrace and research paradox (e.g. Collinson, 2014; Watson, 2013); and some specific paradoxes that arise in policy and leadership work in schools (e.g. Barker, 2007; Watson, 2013; Webb, Gulson, & Pitton, 2014).

In this chapter, I have resisted making an assessment, via the literature, of the current state of what is a very sparse field. Instead, I draw more opportunistically on some of the definitive paradox texts – what Platt (2016) describes as the 'loci classicus' – from a range of periods in order to support my explication of thinking with paradox. The objective of my engagement with paradox literature may, therefore, be better expressed as an assessment of how the prominence of paradox in historical and contemporary contexts, within and outside of education, may inform the opportunities and risks of its deployment within the field of critical leadership studies.

To elevate paradox above its everyday (mis)use, it is also necessary to build a paradox 'language' that is both adequate to the task of speaking of the complex ways in which principals and their work are shaped as well as able to support a vocabulary for thinking (and speaking) critically within, beyond and against the current orthodoxy. Paradox denotes simultaneous and persistent contradiction between interdependent elements. At a utilitarian level, such a definition captures the specific componentry of paradox in the language of contradiction, simultaneity, interrelatedness and persistence. Additionally, as Lewis and Smith (2014) note, it marks out the 'boundary conditions' which differentiate 'paradoxical versus nonparadoxical tensions' (p. 137).

However, the more expansive aims in developing the language of paradox are to articulate alternative theoretical categories, to provide a different way of describing and apprehending contradictions and to surface the dangers in deciding too early that we know how to resolve a conflict or to choose from alternative options. This language looks to work against a push for closure and towards acknowledgment of the difficulty of perplexing choices. In suggesting tentative delays in making decisions, it seeks to allow continued dialogue and the development of strategies and solutions in diverse perspectives and accumulated knowledge.

As these early claims may appear lofty and inflated, I will briefly shift attention to some well-known and somewhat disparate observations about paradox in support of a prima facie rendition of my case. These insights are not offered for proof-of-concept purposes, but to suggest the tenor in which my arguments are to be made. In *Reassembling the Social* (2005), French philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour, in a rather provocatively titled opening chapter, *Learning to Feed off Controversies*, claims a particular place for paradox in sociological studies:

> Like all sciences, sociology begins in wonder. The commotion might be registered in many different ways but it's always the paradoxical presence of something at once invisible yet tangible, taken for granted yet surprising, mundane but of baffling subtlety that triggers a passionate attempt to tame the wild beast of the social. (p. 21)

In a not dissimilar vein, renowned analytical psychologist Carl Jung (1968) indicates a long-term fascination with paradox by saying that 'only the paradox comes anywhere near to comprehending the fullness of life' (p. 16). More pointedly, Jung (1966) also claims that 'a paradoxical statement is a better witness to the truth than a one-sided, so-called "positive" statement' (pp. 34–35). From a very different field, Peter Platt (2016), in introducing his study of paradox in the works of William Shakespeare, claims great value in holding open the opposing sides of a paradox. He says, 'paradoxes can – if we let them, if we resist the urge to harmonise their contradictions and instead allow their opposites to resonate – help bring variety, complexity, and insight to a world that too often can seem weary, stale, and unprofitable' (p. 16). Lastly, in this eclectic set of quotations, nineteenth-century Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1985) evokes both the gravity and fecundity of bringing paradox and thought together by asserting that 'one must not think slightingly of the paradoxical … for the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity' (p. 37).

Taken collectively, the claims of these authors and scholars amount to a general assertion of the richness and importance of thinking with paradox and, by comparison, the complacent and depleted qualities of orthodox renditions. While these sentiments partly capture my aspirations for this chapter, I am also concerned to mount a more detailed case for thinking with paradox – one that more directly relates to the critical positioning of this book and opens possibilities for thinking about the relations of paradox with critique, resistance and political action.

This expanded case for thinking with paradox is made in three parts. Firstly, in the context of the historical prominence and durability of paradox, Colie's (1966) notion of the *epistemological paradox* is introduced as a critical and generative tool of thought. Secondly, the *meaning* and the *boundary conditions* of paradox that set it apart from a number of its familial concepts are used to derive additional theoretical possibilities based on its unique componentry and its seemingly impenetrable oppositional form. The final part of my case shifts attention away from the 'conventional ways of paradox' (Colie, 1966, p. 325) by using the *threads of post-structuralism* – and drawing opportunistically on the work of Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes – to support an interpretation of paradox as formed and developed in discourse and to advance the notion that paradox might do political work.

Paradox History and Epistemological Possibilities

Paradox studies have, at various times, held a prominent place in philosophical and political life. Their extensive history, I contend, is indicative of their durability and a long-held regard for their importance as a tool of thought. Rosalie Colie in her seminal text *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (1966), describes the 'many collections of paradoxes, ancient and modern' amongst the 'mass of humanist publication' and says that this demonstrates 'the popularity of paradoxes amongst the learned who made them up and the educated who were amused by them' (p. 4). Along similar lines, Schad et al. (2016) describe paradox as a 'time-proven concept' (p. 9) and outline its enduring popularity and prominence in both Eastern and Western philosophy as well as in psychology and organisational studies.

In the West, paradox has its origin in the Greek *para* (beyond) and *doxon* (opinion) signifying opposite meaning. In ancient Greek literature, it appeared to denote situations or propositions that opposed or even reversed the common meaning or expectation, conferring on paradox the 'ability to challenge common opinions, to rankle to unsettle' (Platt, 2016, p. 4). These qualities are amply displayed in *Zeno's paradoxes* (written by Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea, 490–430 BC), including the famous Arrow, Achilles and Tortoise paradoxes. The ten known paradoxes attributed to Zeno are formulated against scientific assumptions of the day about divisibility of time and space. While this creates the enduring paradoxical quality of the seemingly impossible existence of contrary sides, it also shifts the emphasis in these paradoxes from tight rhetorical construction to the opposing of commonly held opinion.

The interest in unorthodox oppositions and double and multiple perspectives in paradox arguably reached its intellectual peak in the Renaissance. Peter Platt, in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox* (2016), claims that '(t)he Renaissance tradition of paradox employed the figure as a challenge to both conventional thought and to single, stable truths' (p. 19). Luhmann (1995) also notes the rediscovery of paradox in the sixteenth century, but is more guarded than Platt about its employment, when he claims that it 'could emerge only in rhetoric and poetics, given the contemporary search for a mathematical experimental science' (p. 30).

In what may seem a theoretical leap of faith, I apply to the contemporary school setting the use of paradox in the rhetoric and poetry of arguably its richest period – a period when, according to Orgel (1991), 'complexities and obscurities were … an essential part of the meaning and not to be removed by elucidation' (p. 435) and 'audiences tolerated, and indeed courted, a much higher degree of ambiguity and opacity than we do' (pp. 435–436). My case for utilising historical paradox in this way relies largely on Colie's (1966) notion of 'epistemological paradox'.

Colie (1966) cites 'recovery of ancient texts and imitation of ancient forms' as important in the 'revival of such formal paradoxy' in the Renaissance (p. 4). She claims this revival included both strict logical and rhetorical paradoxes involving

'some kind of dialogical contradiction' as well as 'a formulation of any sort running counter to received opinion' (p. 9). It is the latter meaning, and its links to critical thinking and consideration of less orthodox positions, that encourages Colie to attach an 'epistemological' descriptor to certain paradoxes. Colie (1966) says that 'the epistemological paradox calls into question the process of human thought, as well as the categories thought out (by human thought) to express human thought' (p. 7).

From this notion of the epistemological paradox, additional theoretical content for paradox begins to emerge. Again, following Colie (1966), it opens possibilities for other ways of thinking by 'stimulating further questions, speculation, qualification, even contradiction on the part of that wondering audience' (p. 22). Important in this description is the presence of what Colie (1966) describes as the 'wonderer'[1] – the reader who admires and wonders about paradox and who is willing to share in, and prolong, its actions (p. 519). Colie further claims that the epistemological paradox offers the wonderer new categories of critical thought, by 'play[ing] with rational discourse' and challenging 'at the edge of progressive thinking', that which has become fixed 'into adamantine hardness' (p. 7).

A Renaissance to present-day translation, and the allocating of epistemological qualities to paradox, is not without its risks. In contemporary times, when the continued dominance of scientific knowledge 'requires a language purged of every trace of paradox' (Platt, 2016, p. 40), the captivating case that Platt, Colie, Orgel, Luhmann and others make for the relevance of historical paradox is lined with warnings about overly ambitious aspirations. In the prising open of broader possibilities, I propose a modest but useful opening contribution from this brief consideration of the history and durability of paradox and from Colie's epistemological attributions. At this point, I claim an expansion of the rationale for my extensive use of paradox. For example, this contribution supports:

- Working beyond the common-language use of paradox to describe how unorthodox, subjugated, unfashionable and forgotten perspectives can be shown to reside in revealing of its opposing sides.
- Ushering in new knowledge forming possibilities via Colie's epistemological paradox.
- Describing the importance of an audience to paradox – the necessary presence of the 'wonderer' who is called to the doubtful, ambiguous and contradictory.
- Countering and, at times, radicalising scientific and rational explanations that saturate the current field of educational leadership studies.
- Mitigating the tendency to regard paradox as 'logically unserious' in the construction of theory (Luhmann, 1995, p. 30).

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[1] The 'wonderer', used here by Colie to describe the audience to paradox, was a term originally used in George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589/2012). Puttenham refers to the poet 'wonderer' who will 'report of a thing that is marvellous' and 'seem not to speak it simply but with some sign of admiration' (p. 233). He then likens the wonderer to the figure of the 'doubtfull' who 'will seeme to cast perils' and 'makes doubt of things' (p. 234).

Finding Meaning in the Meaning of Paradox

While fixed definitions can result in unnecessary confinement and compartmentali-
sation of ideas, the need to clearly establish the *meaning* of paradox is essential to
a full explication of its theoretical content and to using and applying a paradox
language. The common-language descent of paradox into cliché has already been
noted. This has led to a diminishing of theoretical possibilities as paradox is
wrongly or vaguely applied to almost any situation marked by tension or conflict.
The finding of meaning is, therefore, partly a problem of distinction, as suggested
by Engeström and Sannino (2011) in the claim that 'terms such as paradox, con-
flict, dilemma and double bind tend to be bundled together or used interchangeably
in an ad hoc manner' (p. 368). Clarifying meaning is not only tied to making these
distinctions but also to ideas that cross over, inhabit and colour the meaning of
paradox. *Dialectic*, *antinomy* and *aporia* all fall into this category and, therefore,
warrant additional explanation about their respective relationships with paradox
later in this section.

   While I earlier described the Greek origins of paradox in the context of ancient
and Renaissance interests, paradox research in contemporary organisational settings
shifts the definitional emphasis. Organisational studies scholars seem less con-
cerned with orthodox/unorthodox positions, and reversing of common meaning,
and more interested in the tensions that arise out of competing interests and ideas –
what Schad et al. (2016) describe as the 'tug-of-war experience' of contradiction
(p. 10). Smith and Lewis (2011), for example, define paradox as 'contradictory yet
interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time' and highlight
the underlying tensions between 'elements that seem logical individually but incon-
sistent and even absurd when juxtaposed' (p. 382).

   Along similar lines, Stoltzfus, Stohl and Seibold (2011) claim that 'paradox
involves the simultaneous presence of contradictory and mutually exclusive ele-
ments' (p. 352). Their definition is usefully expanded by references to 'pragmatic
paradoxes' which the authors describe as developing out of 'ongoing relationships',
rather than logic or rhetoric. Pragmatic paradoxes, they claim, 'develop over time
through the accumulation of messages and activities, which create a cycle of self-
reflexive contradictory alternatives' with the resulting dualities embodying 'oppos-
ing forces at work at the same time' (p. 353), thus creating deep-seated conflict. In
this way, the working of paradox can be understood as re-apprehending a situation
by effecting a shift from a contingency question about which way a problem should
be solved towards understanding the simultaneous presence of contradictions that
are mutually co-dependent (see Lewis & Smith, 2014).

   Noticing the importance attached to the interactive componentry of paradox in
organisational studies supports me in working against the tendency to represent ten-
sion and conflict as disconnected contradictory parts. Instead, I contend, important
theoretical content is added to paradox by revealing, through its componentry, qual-
ities of self-contradiction and the interdependency of its opposing sides. This
amounts to taking what Smith, Lewis and Tushman (2016) describe as a 'both/and'

approach and using metaphors like 'two-sides of the same coin' and the Möbius strip[2] to counter simplified dilemmatic interpretations and, instead, to exploit the possibilities in simultaneity and interdependency.

The theoretical understanding of how each element of paradox continually informs and defines the other (Schad et al., 2016, p. 11) has important implications for this book's concerns with the conflicting demands experienced by principals and the different ways they respond to them. In particular, taking account of the dynamic relationship between the component parts of paradox suggests possibilities for coping with persistent tensions that hold open and keep in play opposing elements and their interactions. This thinking about different principal responses to paradoxical conflict invites comparison with responses that rely on dilemmatic construction and decisive resolution in order to reduce risk and discomfort and to protect political interests. Lewis (2000) adds a further dimension to this favouring of one-sided resolutions when she describes the tendency of paradox 'to mask the simultaneity of conflicting truths', thus obscuring the relatedness of its parts and presenting either/or alternatives as the only available option (p. 761).

This linking of the meaning of paradox to theoretical content helps determine the 'boundary conditions' under which a paradox interpretive lens does and does not apply while also pointing to the importance of clearly distinguishing the concept of paradox from others with which it is often wrongly confused. Two such terms are *dilemma* and *dualism*.

Dilemma and Dualism

The tendency to characterise conflict as the either/or options of a dilemma presents 'leaders with a clear, though by implication, uncomfortable choice' (Watson, 2013, p. 258). In Ann and Harold Berlak's (1981) exemplary text *Dilemmas of schooling*, they describe a 'dilemma language' aimed at capturing and responding to a wide range of tensions and contradictions affecting all educators, including principals. The application of the language of paradox in this book brings its differences from the Berlaks' project into sharp relief. Having either/or choices in a dilemma suggests that both options are available, visible and viable and that a distinct choice will have to be made. This dichotomisation demands the privileging of one choice over another and, as a result, may eschew ambiguity, paradox and tension from analysis (Collinson, 2014, p. 38).[3]

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[2] A Möbius strip is a two-sided strip which becomes a one-sided continuous band when its ends are joined.

[3] According to Smith and Lewis (2011), persistent dilemmas may actually signal the possible emergence of paradoxical qualities. They claim that a dilemma 'may prove paradoxical' if contradictions continue to resurface over time, so suggesting 'interrelatedness and persistence' (p. 387). Lüscher and Lewis (2008) applied this idea in action research to help middle managers 'work through' double binds as they grappled with the need to manage self-managed teams. They termed

In looking away from productive consideration of the interdependency and simultaneity of the different the sides of a conflict, a dilemmatic construction shows a preference for 'weighing the costs and benefits of each choice and deciding which one is most advantageous' (Stoltzfus et al., 2011, p. 351). Despite the fundamental differences in meaning, the preference for dilemmic constructions of tension and conflict that I noted in fieldwork with principals still yields important insights into the possibilities and challenges of thinking with paradox. These insights come from recognising the effects of the 'cleft stick' quality of dilemmas on the ways principals develop their decision-making responses. Principal preferences for configuring conflicts *as* dilemmas, rather than trying to discover and work *with* their paradoxical qualities, were observed, for example, in:

- Cost/benefit calculations made by principals about loss and compromise
- Construction of difference and division between sides (e.g. in making trade-offs between options or in asymmetrical privileging of one side over another)
- Showings of anxiety and defensiveness about competing demands and difficult decisions
- An overriding need, amongst some, for clarity and structure (over ambiguity and reticence)
- Public expressions of conviction and decisiveness ostensibly founded on a perceived need amongst principals to inspire confidence and diminish anxiety

Collectively, these observations demonstrate how the construing of conflicts into dilemmas simplifies their complexity and obscures their paradoxical qualities. They point to principal preferences for quickly resolving conflict and, relatedly, styles of decision-making that they associate with strong showings of their leadership. Concomitantly, they are observations that require further explanation in terms of their links 'to the exercise of power and control' (Collinson, 2014, p. 37), to their overlap with various political interests and to persuasive personal and outside preferences to gain particular solutions and to quickly ease discomfort.

Similar to dilemma, *dualism* refers to opposite poles. In the context of my project, it connotes dichotomies and binary opposites such as leader/follower, subjectivity/freedom, hierarchical/distributed, individual/team, stability/change, etc. While dualisms can describe the bipolar relationships that permeate practice, this need not imply that the poles of a two-sided issue are fixed by their incompatibility, antagonism and exclusivity. Rather, following Putnam et al. (2016), these dualisms can contribute to paradoxical thinking if their antithetical connotations are put aside in order to consider the possibilities in *duality* – in the 'interdependence of opposites' – and to test the options available in 'embracing both poles simultaneously' (p. 73).

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their strategy *sparring sessions*, during which managers would move toward rather than away from a tension, examining it first as a problem to solved, then as a dilemma and, finally, as the tension persisted, as a paradox to live with on an ongoing basis.

Familial Concepts: Dialectic, Antinomy and Aporia

Finding meaning in the meaning of paradox is also enhanced by connecting it with associated concepts of *dialectic*, *antinomy* and *aporia*. In their application in this book, all of these terms are considered to fall within a broader definition of paradox while, at the same time, contributing in distinct ways to a richer and more nuanced theoretical content.

A *dialectic* – or dialectical problem – takes contradiction as a starting point for contemplation. The dialectic has a rich history. In the Socratic understanding, it is seen as an underpinning source of truth, reached through error detection, inquiry, discussion and disputation. Aristotle referred to the useful structural qualities that dialectic lent to logical argument. He claims the dialectic as 'a process of criticism wherein lies the path to the principles of all inquiries' (Aristotle in Ackrill, 1988, p. 62). Contemporary notions of the dialectic, often described as 'Hegelian',[4] are more prescriptive, describing the dialectic in a three-step process:

> One begins with a static, clearly delineated concept (or thesis), then moves to its opposite (or antithesis), which represents any contradictions derived from a consideration of the rigidly defined thesis. The thesis and antithesis are yoked and resolved to form the embracing resolution, or synthesis. (O'Connor, 2003, p. 1)

In Hegelian dialectics, the inherent tendency for synthesis to find similarity in its two contributing parts and to put aside their disparate qualities means that differences remain in play after resolution. This may create short-term harmony, but contradictory positions are likely to eventually re-emerge. The important quality in a dialectic that draws it into the paradox fold is the maintenance of *simultaneity*[5] – the interplay of contradictory forces where one does not subdue the other, but rather joint processes of discrimination and convergence occur simultaneously.

According to Collinson (2014), dialectical studies 'can surface important questions about organisational power relations, conflicts, tensions, paradoxes, and contradictions that are typically under-explored or marginalized within mainstream leadership studies' (p. 38). This claim for dialectics shifts away from Hegel's interest in resolving conflict by synthesising a fixed meaning and draws more from the *relational dialectics* of Russian philosopher and theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. It grounds dialectics in contests over meaning in discourse and emphasises the incorporation of 'multiple and competing viewpoints' (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 119). An example relevant to the investigations in this book is found in the way models of leadership

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[4] While described as 'Hegelian', this process is only a general reference to the work of Hegel as he never actually used the terminology 'thesis', 'antithesis' and 'synthesis'. Hegel ascribed these terms to Kant, making wide use of a different model based on the terms 'abstract', 'negative' and 'concrete. See Maybee (2016).

[5] In a relationship that bears on my own empirical work, Droogers (2002) applies the idea of 'simultaneity' to the participant-observer role in anthropological fieldwork. He says that the position represents 'continuity as well as rupture, identification as well as distance, both simultaneity and simulation' (p. 53).

that give primacy to the principal as the binary opposite of those that advocate shared and distributed leadership overlook important questions about the relationship between these apparent poles. A dialectical approach can draw new insights from this relationship, for example, about the distribution of power in models where leadership is shared, about a principal's need for 'follower' endorsement even in the most hierarchical arrangements and regarding the merit of the principal trying to hold open conflicting positions in decisions about the allocation and distribution of leadership responsibilities.

The contribution of dialectics to the theoretical content of paradox can be productively advanced by using the idea of 'thirdness' (Peirce, 1998) developed out of critique of Hegelian logic. Thirdness here refers to the generation of 'concepts and patterns of activity that go beyond and transcend the available opposing forces or options' (Engeström & Sannino, 2011, p. 371). This 'going beyond' adds to the canon of paradox thought, possibilities from outside of the imagined boundaries of opposing sides that might first appear peripheral, irrelevant or fanciful. In principal management of conflict and tension, it cautions against the premature choice of one option over another by suggesting the need to be sensitive to broader possibilities. It brings *heteroglossia*[6] to the language of paradox – the hearing of many voices and the consideration of multiple perspectives which invites the detection of some new efficacy in the oft-disparaged qualities of hesitancy and indecision.

An *antinomy* is a type of paradox distinguished by the apparent validity of both of its sides, thus comprising 'a pair of logically sound arguments leading to contradictory conclusions' (Schad 2017, p. 29). An antinomy can be considered a 'true paradox' in that it does not just appear to be paradoxical but is actually comprised of two equally positive values 'intimately entwined' (Rappaport, 2002, p. 123). The implication in this description is that many so-called paradoxes are more apparent than real. This means that part of the critical work of the researcher is to distinguish between the paradox that may resolve, disappear or crumble under scrutiny, and the true paradox founded on antinomy that requires deep consideration of its sides. It is in these considerations that antinomy adds additional theoretical content to paradox. In demanding that 'the search for one monolithic way of doing things' (Rappaport, 2002, p. 137) be abandoned, the antinomy calls into question accepted ways of reasoning that are directed to reductive, single solutions. Quine (1976), in his famous essay *The Ways of Paradox*, makes very clear the power and importance of antinomies. He says that they 'bring on the crises in thought' by establishing that 'some tacit and trusted pattern of reasoning must be made explicit and henceforth be avoided or revised' (p. 5).

Ancient associations with the term *aporia* typically evoke Plato's early dialogues and their 'aporetic' descriptor. In these dialogues, most famously the *Meno*, Plato uses a questioning process to reduce his conversation partner to a state of confusion and to admission of being stuck in 'aporia' – trapped in a seemingly insoluble

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[6] 'Heteroglossia' is a term coined by Bakhtin (1934/2004) to denote the presence of two or more voices.

impasse. The rhetorical use of aporia gives way, under post-structural influences, to philosophical and sociological considerations of its immovable and contradictory qualities. Jacques Derrida (1993) describes aporia as 'this old worn out Greek term … this tired old word of philosophy and logic' (p. 12) but goes on to make references to aporia and associated ideas (such as 'antinomy', 'double constraint', 'contradictory injunction') in various of his writings. He evokes 'the opaque existence of an uncrossable border', a non-passage, an impossible impasse, so concluding that, in this way, an aporia is 'paradoxical enough' (Derrida, 1993, p. 20). This apparent unresolvability suggests limited use for aporias in more conventional paradox studies (e.g. in organisational studies, where a key interest is with management and resolution of contradictions). However, accepting Derrida's assignation of impenetrability supports a stance that acknowledges and keeps in place profound contradictions. As such, aporias more than other potentially 'resolvable' paradoxes become tools for characterising and analysing contradictions and tensions, rather than reducing them to single solutions.

The Elements of Surprise and Irony

Paradox is further distinguished from dilemma, and the antithetical opposites in a dualism, by its capacity to surprise and or even startle its audience.[7] This long-recognised quality is displayed in many ancient texts and, according to Colie (1966), catered to the desire amongst sophisticated Renaissance audiences to be entertained and amused by both 'exercises of wit' and a 'duplicitous intent' that encouraged various forms of 'novelty and trickery' (p. 5). Colie's (1966) observation that the capacity of paradox to surprise and shock was also related 'to the defence of a proposition officially disapproved in public opinion' (p. 4) draws Renaissance paradox closer to the critical orientation of this book.

Central to understanding the constitutive forces at work on principals are the 'surprises' that emerge from the revival of one side of something that may have been forgotten, masked, suppressed or put aside. This work speaks, for example, to the imbrication of truth and power that privileges one discourse over another, that allows principals to say some things and not others and that encourages them to formulate subjectivities only from those that are sanctioned and made available. Somewhat ironically, the currently favoured subject positions, in neoliberal times, include the requirement for principals to be agile and decisive in the face of ambiguity, conflict and competing demands.

The quality of surprise in paradox also references the presence of *irony* in the lives of principals, where oppositional tensions produce deceptive, incongruous and

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[7]Luhrmann (1995) describes a self-referential function for these qualities, which is relevant to allocating theoretical content to paradox, when he says that 'the practical function' of paradox 'is to produce the shock necessary if one is to have the courage to propose a far-reaching theoretical change' (p. 30).

even absurd responses. Most obviously present in the 'doublespeak' (Orwell, 1949) of parties to a conflict, where what is said is not what is meant, irony is also experienced in the surprising and unforeseen ways that issues unfold, to the 'incongruity between what is expected and what occurs' (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 76). Irony brings the element of wry observation to the theoretical content of paradox. It introduces the absurd and unforeseen to orthodox categories. In doing so, it confuses and destabilises these categories by revealing the deception of their necessity and rationality and by pointing to the essential investigation, in paradox, of their oppositions and alternatives. As Ybema (1996) observes, paradoxes 'seem to smile ironically at our nicely constructed theories with their clear-cut distinctions and point at an unthought-of possibility, a blind spot in oppositional thinking' (p. 40).

Paradox and the Threads of Post-Structuralism

So far, this loading of paradox with theoretical content has established its imbrication with new thought via Colie's (1966) epistemological paradox and has considered the simultaneity and interdependence of its sides as affecting a shift away from binary opposites, by presenting ways of thinking about conflict that are more complex and nuanced. These qualities have also contributed to a language of paradox – a language further refined by differentiating paradox from dilemma and duality and by adding terms like dialectic, antinomy and aporia to its lexis. While supportive of my case, these claims run the risk of appearing parsimonious and detached, with their apolitical depictions of two-sided conflict and the apparent demarcation of their breadth and scope.

To breach what I imagine as an inner boundary, I take my bearings from several continental philosophers on whom the system of thought known as 'post-structuralism' confers membership. Platt (2016) backs his assertion that 'paradox looks different after post-structuralism' (p. 15) with discussion of how the historical weakness of paradox in political work is addressed in the works of philosophers often connected with post-structuralism, such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Lacan. My shared interest, with Platt, is in using the ideas of some of these philosophers to join paradox to thinking about matters of freedom, conflict, politics and power.

In the context of the book's key concern with the constitution of principals and their work, I am looking to bring more generative qualities to paradox through selective use of post-structuralist ideas. Niesche and Gowlett (2015) provide some support for this move when they claim that understanding the educational leadership field from 'a post-structuralist movement of thought' does not involve a 'collective whole or approach', but rather 'an interpretive assemblage of concepts that can provoke different lines of thought into the prevailing discourses and approaches' that characterise the field (p. 373).

This final move in expanding the theoretical content and language of paradox does not involve capturing a particular meaning for post-structuralism from a

somewhat strewn and discordant academic history (e.g. Bansel, 2015; Niesche & Gowlett, 2015; Howarth, 2013). Rather, I draw on some of the 'threads' (Woermann, 2016, p. 6) that run through the canon of philosophical work associated with it. These include, most pertinently, 'the significance of the nonclosure of meaning' and 'the contingent nature of knowledge and identity' (Woermann, 2016, p. 6) and a fascination for 'doubleness, undecidability and radical ambiguity' (Platt, 2016, p. 6).

This work can be considered an expansion of Colie's (1966) epistemological paradox which, in its Renaissance iterations, appeared confined by its rhetorical and logical boundaries, its political ambivalence and an onlooker audience wanting to be entertained. Under the influence of these post-structural threads, the revelation of discursive origins, contingent operations and impossible foreclosure are conjoined with new possibilities of spectator engagement in the workings of paradox and the attendant call to political action that this engagement might provoke. A deeper engagement with the 'theoretical fruitfulness, novelty, and provocative capacity' (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 258) of paradox is certainly envisaged; however, such a political shift in thinking with paradox also seeks to make direct links to the critical orientation of this book – to disrupting narrow conceptions of the ways principals and their work are constituted and to consideration of those spaces within which different subjectivities and new forms of political participation might emerge.

While following multiple threads, my predominant interest is in bringing the archaeological insights of Michel Foucault on discourse and contradiction to possibilities of thinking with paradox. I also draw selectively on the works of Roland Bathes, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler.

Paradox and Discourse

Examples used so far from historical and contemporary accounts have treated paradox as a useful but reductive strategy for understanding complexity. The underpinning assumption about their operations has been 'as a window to feelings and cognitions' (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 77), with paradox assumed to be part of the discourses that signify and vivify current reality. Foucault (1972) reverses the notion that discourses work to *reflect* what is real and instead asserts that their operations (or their discursive practices) *form* reality, so that the world and its subjects can only be 'known' through an understanding of these operations. In other words, Foucault's understanding of discourse, which exceeds language to include a range of institutional and organisational logics and practices, is that it works to form and produce its own reality rather than to describe and reflect what is already happening.

This aspect of Foucault's thinking about discourse suggests for paradox a different consideration of its origins, emergences and qualities. In addressing questions of ontology that persist in organisational studies literature (e.g. Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Smith & Lewis, 2011), a 'constitutive approach' (Putnam et al., 2016) is posited that takes paradox as formed out of the constitutive practices of discourses rather than functioning as representations of conflict or complexity. The apparent

symmetry and pragmatism of two-sided conflict are replaced with an array of competing discourses, marked by variations across space and time, differential interminglings with local practice and asymmetrical levels of prominence and influence. In this 'tangled plurality' of practices (Foucault, 1972, p 53), I again turn to Foucault's theoretical insights to help explain what discourse does (or is doing) in situations where paradoxes form.

In his methodical explanation of discourse formation, Foucault (1972) identifies the *statement* as the principal object of analysis. The statement is taken to exceed 'a unit of the linguistic type' (p. 119), such as an act of speaking or writing, by performing an enunciative function in relation to discourse. While it exists in 'exact specificity' and 'is endowed with a repeatable materiality' (p. 120), the statement relates to a whole adjacent field and 'always has borders peopled by other statements' (p. 110). Foucault says that discourse is defined by the 'group of statements that belongs to a single system of formation'. He terms 'the law of such a series' a *discursive formation*, which he describes as consisting of groups of statements that appear to cohere as 'a sort of great, uniform text' and to 'converge with institutions and practices, and carry meanings that may be common to a whole period' (Foucault, 1972, p. 133).

While these archaeological terms are not obviously imbued with the conflict, ambiguity and uncertainty associated with paradox, their workings do create an early insight into the way paradox, when considered to be constituted in discourse, can be concealed or made obscure. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault attends to the conditions under which a group of statements achieve unity and, thus, bring particular phenomena into view. He says that 'analysis of statements and discursive formations … wishes to determine the principle according to which only the "signifying" groups that were enunciated could appear' (p. 134). In this way, he reveals how a constellation of related statements work to privilege a particular point of view over others. Bleiker (2003) brings this idea closer to practice when he says:

> Discourses give rise to social rules that decide which statements most people recognize as valid, as debatable or as undoubtedly false. They guide the selection process that ascertains which propositions from previous periods or foreign cultures are retained, imported, valued, and which are forgotten or neglected. (p. 27)

The apparent authority and validity of a certain discourse, thus, hides the presence of conflicting or ambiguous statements, such as those 'manifest in the half silent murmur of another discourse' (Foucault, 1972, p. 31). Under these rules of visibility, the system of dispersed statements that constitute a wider discursive formation obscure the presence of paradox by working to appear natural and untroubled by its oppositions. They delimit what is possible and block the statements 'that do not conform to the dominant regime' (Lazzarato, 2009, p. 112), creating an obstacle and interruption to the work of locating and revealing paradoxical tensions in the wider discursive field.

Contradictions

In the *Contradictions* chapter of *The archaeology of knowledge*, Foucault (1972) provides an antidote to dominant regimes with an account that seems to more resolutely follow post-structural threads about the non-closure of meaning and the contingency of knowledge. He describes how an analysis of discursive practices brings into play 'a fundamental contradiction … a model for all other oppositions' replete with 'incompatible postulates [and] intersections of irreconcilable influences' (p. 168). Foucault claims that such contradiction is not an oversight or accident of discourse, but rather that discourse emerges and 'speaks' in order to 'translate' and 'overcome' contradiction – contradiction that 'is always anterior to the discourse' and so 'constitutes the very law of its existence' (Foucault, 1972, p. 168).

I interpret this arrangement of discourse and contradiction as connecting quite directly with the formation and development of paradox. These connections resonate most strongly in the near-paradoxical qualities that Foucault (1972) attributes to archaeological analysis, when he says that it 'erects the primacy of a contradiction that has its model in the simultaneous affirmation and negation of a single proposition' (p. 155). 'The great game of contradiction', Foucault (1972) says, is 'present under innumerable guises' (p. 153). It is in his account of this innumerability that more nuanced and fluid influences on paradox are revealed, along with the possibility that paradox, when considered as constituted in discourse, is imbued with a different language and new theoretical content.

Following Foucault's primacy of contradiction argument, a discursive formation can no longer be viewed as 'an ideal, continuous, smooth text' but rather must be seen as 'a space of multiple dissensions; a set of different oppositions whose levels and roles must be described' (Foucault, 1972, p. 173). Such 'discursive struggles' (Gillies, 2013, p. 22) help cast new light on the formation and operations of paradox by surfacing the forces that define, influence and obscure their contradictory qualities. Treated, until now, as largely apolitical and detached (or even as annoying background noise to be ignored or argued away), the oppositional forces in paradox can be viewed, instead, as invested with the power of competing discourses. When these struggles are given expression, they carry with them new theoretical and explanatory possibilities for bringing paradox to the constitutive forces operating on principals, for example, in using paradox to:

- Portray how dominant discourses exude self-certainty and suppress the ambiguity and 'subjugated knowledges'[8] (Medina, 2011) that contradictory discourses carry

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[8] Medina (2011) says that Foucault's (2003) notion of 'the insurrection of subjugated knowledges' describes 'forms of experiencing and remembering that are pushed to the margins and rendered unqualified and unworthy of epistemic respect by prevailing and hegemonic discourses'. Such knowledges, Medina claims, 'remain invisible to mainstream perspectives' so that 'certain possibilities for resistance and subversion go unnoticed' (p. 11).

- Challenge the rationality of absolute judgments and common-sense solutions carried by the dominant discourses affecting principals and their work
- Highlight the contingency and uncertainty brought on by competing discourses in order to render the power relations in which principals are enmeshed as dynamic and unstable
- Perform a 'comparative' function that brings non-formal knowledge to the formal knowledge claims of dominant discourse – while at the same time avoiding a compulsion to find 'a picture of destiny' (Grant, 2010, p. 223) in their conjuncture
- Account for, and address, the origins of the uneven and asymmetrical qualities of conflict, ambiguity and tension, including the effect of this politics on principal responses
- Uncover the political interests that advocate fixed interpretations of principals and their work, thus revealing the production of principal subjectivities as a 'complex accomplishment' under the influence of multiple, competing discourses (Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010, p. 11)

In the next section, I depart from Foucault's contradiction and its play of opposites to draw on the work of twentieth-century French philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes, in order to more pointedly substantiate the potential for paradox to do political work.

Political Paradox

The political content of paradox, using Barthes' work, is fashioned largely out of his pejorative view of the doxa. Barthes (1977) claims that 'The *Doxa* is current opinion, meaning repeated *as if nothing had happened*' (p. 122, italics in original). This reference highlights taken for granted and natural qualities which he describes, elsewhere, as the doxa's 'sensible insistence' at an intersection with the 'banal opinion' of the stereotype (Barthes, 1972, p. 162). Pierrot (2002), in her analysis of the doxa in Barthes' work, says that he gave it an 'imperious and arrogant voice' (p. 434). His contempt is further revealed in a description of how the doxa operates in conjunction with power. Barthes (1972) says it 'is not triumphalist; it is content to reign; it diffuses, blurs; it is a legal, a natural dominance; a general layer spread with the blessing of Power; a universal Discourse' (pp. 153–154).

It is against these descriptions that Barthes alludes to the political work of paradox in securing a type of oppositional freedom from the doxa's oppression. He describes a two-tense dialectic as 'the tense of *doxa,* opinion, and the tense of *paradoxa,* dispute' (Barthes, 1975, p. 18, italics in original). Elsewhere, he characterises this dialectic as 'the stereotype and the novation, fatigue and freshness' (Barthes, 1972, p. 68). However, he is also mindful of the limitations of paradox in influencing this dialectic when it is reactively formulated as just a contrary opinion to the doxa. While the interrelatedness of its parts has, so far in my dis-

cussion, been recognised as a theoretical strength in paradox, Barthes (1972) suggests that, in a doxa/paradox dialectic, it puts paradox at risk of turning bad and becoming 'a new concretion … a new doxa' (p. 71). To counter this tendency, he proposes that paradox must be rendered as dynamic and uses the metaphor of the spiral to suggest the discovery of a third term 'which is not a synthesis but a *translation*' – an imagined and fictional alternative 'at another turn of the spiral' (p. 69, emphasis in original).

Barthes' treatment of doxa and paradox is theoretically rich, but studiously refuses engagement with any pragmatic application. Before using his work to draw some tentative conclusions about the language and theoretical content of political paradox, I will, therefore, briefly depict a more practical picture of the joining of principals with their politics. I will then try to bring some of Barthes' ideas into this picture. Ball (1997) alludes to this politics in claiming that discourses circulating in schools 'are typically entangled and confused and they are obscured by micropolitical struggles, tactical plunderings, disguise and ploys' (p. 318). Berkhout (2007) describes how competing discourses:

> create ongoing tensions that have to be negotiated and meaningfully mediated. The widely diverse, often conflicting, local discourses shaped by particular groups' histories and experiences, interacting with national/ provincial imperatives and the powerful neo-liberalist discourse, puts exceptional demands on educational leadership. These discourses shape not only the enactment of education leadership and management in school settings, but also its conceptualisation as a discipline and the concomitant enactment in schools and other education settings. (p. 407)

Accounts like those of Ball and Berkhout, when brought to Barthes' doxa/paradox dialectic, encourage me to think of the principal as not entirely constituted by a cemented-in orthodoxy, but rather in a competitive, messy and unstable network of both dominant and subjugated forces. Certainly, the doxa can be considered to exert particular versions of its politics on principals, albeit in subtle and diffuse ways. For example, it may insist on the common-sense logic of its controlling discourse and may evoke in principals what Pierrot (2002), drawing on Barthes (1972), describes as both a 'dual relationship of fascination and repulsion' and a sense of being caught in a struggle against an active force from which they cannot be free (p. 431).

The question remains, what exactly might paradox say and do in responding to a doxa that lays claim, along with the sciences, to 'an arrogance and discourse of truth' (Pierrot, 2002, p. 431)? Barthes' disdain of the doxa, and his guarded support for a paradox corrective, provide a type of centre plank for my consideration of this question. His work underlines the need, already established in interpretation of Foucault's work, to be sceptical of the current orthodoxy, to be mindful of the political power bound up in it and to acquire productive ways of disputing and resisting it. Barthes' contribution also suggests that more dynamic and ephemeral iterations are needed to work within and against dominant interests – versions of paradox that do not merely give simplified expression to opposing sides, but that show a nuanced understanding of the active and shifting qualities of the stereotype and find, within and beyond the doxa's political discourse, a 'sumptuous and fresh wisdom' (Barthes, 1972, p. 123).

So, what of the language of 'political paradox'? Barthes (1975) describes how the language of the doxa is simply jargon, which spreads across social life only 'if power is on its side' (p. 28). He claims it is found in the 'supposedly apolitical jargon of politicians, of agents of the State, of the media, of conversation' and is often split, as rival jargons 'struggle among themselves' (p. 28). Barthes (1975) refers to language, in this fight for hegemony, as a 'warrior *topos*' (p. 28, italics in original).

The warrior topos is a term that seems to me usefully appropriated to another side – to a language that supports paradox in its political work. 'Warrior' evokes an obvious need for a bold and combative vocabulary, but also suggests inventive, strategic and determined opposition that vigilantly shadows and subverts its opposition. Discussed in Chap. 5 and further elaborated in my empirical chapters (in particular, Chaps. 7 and 8), this oppositional political work is formulated as a type of 'agonistic thought and practice' and characterised as a democratic contest between adversaries, based on the reasonable expectation that conflict will (and should) arise in circumstances of paradoxy and ambiguity. 'Topos' is also a useful and purposeful concept. Derived from ancient Greek, topos refers to the embedded and accepted procedures 'that are used to deal with situationally relevant activities, problems, thoughts and actions' (Nørreklit, Nørreklit, & Israelsen, 2006, p. 43). As part of a language to support thinking about principals and their politics, this topos is the practical language for analysis of political discourse. It forms part of a paradox interpretive lens – a way of looking at the constitution of principals and their work that is inclusive of the power relations in which they are enmeshed and of thinking that supports some freedom from these relations.

Each of these somewhat ambitious extensions of the theoretical content and language of paradox allude to the inclusion of a power/resistance dialectic within its repertoire. This dialectic can be seen at work in struggles over truth and meaning, the conduct and responses of individuals in conflict and the negotiation and production of subjectivities. In the interplay of its sides, this dialectic appears to shed light on how the outside exertion of power, and a corresponding local resistance, are differently interpreted and enacted in the lives and work of principals, for example, to account for the variations in their local responses to the macro-influences of dominant policy discourses.

While the power/resistance dialectic might be a useful entry point into the analysis of paradoxical conflict (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 113), it must take account of the complexities that lie between its poles. Returning to Foucault (1978) and drawing on his understanding of power relations:

> where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power … one is always "inside" power, there is no "escaping" it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned. (p. 95)

Foucault's (1978) understanding of resistance as inscribed within power 'as its irreducible opposite' (p. 96) is further expanded in Chap. 3. In the latter part of the chapter, this includes using the thematic of plurality in Foucault's work on power and resistance to expand the already discussed theoretical possibilities of deploying the language of paradox as warrior topos. Medina (2011) describes an 'epistemic

pluralism' that marks much of Foucault's genealogical investigation. It is this pluralism, 'that focuses on the gaps, discontinuities, tensions and clashes among perspectives and discursive practices' (p. 24), that I direct to the constitutive possibilities for principals and their work held in admitting contingency, embracing complexity and thinking about resistance.

Appropriating and Responding to Paradox

The implications for considering paradox as formed in the constitutive practices of discourse are not confined to contemplating what discourse is doing when paradox forms and develops. Importantly, they extend to include the conditions set by discourse for how actors appropriate and manage contradictions in their workplace (Putnam et al., 2016). Accounts abound in management and organisational studies literature of the different options for dealing with paradox (e.g. Storey & Salaman, 2010; Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003; Westenholz, 1999) and with associated processes of decision-making (e.g. Lucas, 2006; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Watson, 2013) and change management (e.g. Engeström & Sannino, 2011; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2013; Stoltzfus et al., 2011). These accounts deal at length with the various processes of separation, compromise, synthesis, convergence, acceptance and accommodation. In doing so, they add significantly to the language of paradox and to the theoretical content that deals with the merits and implications of different responses.

Post-structural ideas about non-closure of meaning, contingent knowledge and radical ambiguity favour those alternatives that work to accept and accommodate paradox. They evoke qualities of the aforementioned 'true paradox', with its resistance to collapse or easy compromising of its sides and recruit the language of 'antinomy' and 'aporia' to support holding open, rather than seeking expedient resolution, of paradoxical conflict. Applied to my own project, these ideas hold the key to thinking differently about a major constitutive influence on principals and their work. They render as contestable one of the prized and time-honoured tropes of school leadership – the resolution of complex conflict by the unequivocal and decisive action of an individual. Thinking with paradox signals instead very different possibilities for how principals appropriate, manage and decide these conflicts.

In an earlier description of aporia, I cited the work of Jacques Derrida to illustrate its opaque and impenetrable qualities. Derrida's aporetic logic necessarily renders meaning as incomplete.[9] Derrida embraces the response of 'undecidability' to indicate that aporias display 'the unities of a simulacrum' rather than a tendency to solving binary opposites by resorting to a third alternative (Scarpetta, Houdebine, & Derrida, 1972, p. 36). The bringing of the aporia to thinking about how principals appropriate and respond to paradox treats undecidability as a valu-

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[9] Woermann (2016) provides a convincing account of how Derrida sought to deal productively with this aporetic logic and the incomplete nature of meaning, through development of his deconstructive philosophy.

able addition to paradox language. It signals my intention to follow to more productive ends the theoretical content and enabling ideas that can be found in the aporetic experience of the 'impossible' and in 'working through the stuck places of present practice' (Lather, 2006, p. 45). This does not involve trying to compromise, synthesise or resolve these aporias, but, rather, it treats them as irresolvable and works to establish the practical and political importance of holding their opposites apart while, at the same time, finding possibilities in the 'haunting' of one side in the other (Derrida, 1993, p. 20).

Given these dimensions, thinking with paradox now shifts into the awkward and unfamiliar spaces created by what Lather (2006) describes as 'a praxis that disrupts the horizon of an already prescribed intelligibility' (p. 45). Here, the clarion call to decisive leadership and quick decisions is interrupted by the aporetic conflicts that arise when such fixed and established meanings slip and crack and open spaces in which new meaning can be insinuated. A paradoxical rendition of these spaces seeks to describe their 'ruptures, failures, breaks and refusals' (Lather, 2006, p. 45) in order to better understand how they are constructed, the meanings and aspirations of their sides and the effects they produce. It commits to the 'not yet' in a belief that 'the future is inscribed in the present' (Clarke, Bainton, Lendvai & Stubbs, 2015, p. 184) and that productive possibilities reside in thinking differently and in waiting for new ideas to emerge.

However, the take-up by principals of this theoretical call to thinking differently must also face the confounding qualities held in the risks of embracing undecidability, the impossibility of simplified resolution and the urge to impose essentialised meaning in order to hide inherent ambiguities. While embracing the acceptance and accommodation of paradox is a move toward 'epistemological indeterminacy' (Lather, 2006, p. 52) that brings new theoretical content and language to thinking with paradox, it cannot overlook the practical difficulties of inviting principals to such an embrace.

Barthes (1972) provides a metaphorically rich account of a multiplicity of risks to the individual (the 'writer') who positions themselves as undecided:

> The *Doxa* speaks, I hear it, but I am not within its space. A man of paradox, like any writer, I am indeed *behind the door;* certainly I should like to pass through, certainly I should like to see what is being said, I too participate in the communal scene; I am constantly *listening to what I am excluded from;* I am in a stunned state, dazed, cut off from the popularity of language. (p. 123, italics in original)

As well as the risk of alienation and exclusion, Barthes (1975) talks of the 'implacable stickiness' (p. 29) and, elsewhere, of the 'somewhat glutinous language' (Barthes 1995 in Pierrot, 2002, p. 432) of the doxa. This metaphor of sticky and viscous popular opinion speaks directly to the bonding of principals to popular discourse and the difficulty of becoming free in order to speak differently against the majority or outside of what is currently acceptable.

Beyond these outside risks, paradox itself suffers something of an 'image problem' via its often self-evident qualities of equivocation, conflict evasion and delayed decision-making. Connolly (2002) alludes to the risk arising from a lack of clarity

in observing that '(c)ritics translate the code of paradox into the charge of incoherence and easily enough convict opponents of the sin they have defined' (p. 68). Here, I posit a type of cascading effect, where the call for principals to embrace such qualities not only produces feelings of discomfort and insecurity but also of impatience amongst those lobbying for a decision in their favour. In turn, the fear arises in principals of pejorative perceptions of their leadership and damaging allegations of weakness, ambivalence and fence-sitting. In the face of these risks, real or imagined, principals seek the promise of short-term relief from conflict by making quick decisions, often founded in risk-averse politics and the sway of local allegiances. Rescher (2001) describes this type of resolution as an 'an exercise in epistemic damage control' and warns that it 'never comes cost-free: there is always something that we must give up for the sake of recovering consistency' (p. 26).

Conclusion

Given its very selective and sparse use, paradox essentially remains a borrowed concept in the field of educational leadership. As a result, the possibilities I have described for thinking with paradox have been derived from diverse sources, almost entirely outside of my own field of study. The formidable risks of appropriating heavily from the pragmatics of organisational studies; of assuming a productive application of historical examples of paradox, including those from literature and the arts; and of pulling the threads of post-structuralism into paradox thought have not at this point been fully addressed. Thus, the application of this thinking to the contemporary work of principals may still seem overly ambitious or even a perilous walk down into Wittgenstein's 'green valleys of silliness'[10] (in Fiumara, 2013, p. 194).

While my response to these risks is marbled through this book, two major applications represent my more comprehensive efforts to settle the risk versus reward equation for paradox in favour of the latter:

- A *paradox lens* is used for looking at my field data (in Chaps. 5, 6 and 7). This lens carries the promise of epistemological paradox to prompt new thinking and to call into question that which has become a matter of fact and obvious. Given the claims herein, new possibilities for interpretation are added to this lens through the utilisation of paradox componentry and consideration of how the discursive origins of paradox underpin its constitutive influences and political potential.
- The *pedagogy of paradox* (Chap. 8) advances the case for learning with paradox, not as a 'soggy eclecticism … that laps up any and every kind of theoretical

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[10]The more expansive version of Wittgenstein's famous quote is also relevant. It says, '(n)ever stay up on the barren heights of cleverness, but come down into the green valleys of silliness' (in Fiumara, 2013, p. 194).

approach' (Foucault, 1980, p. 81) but as a functional model of the ways in which paradox might inform the thoughts, understandings and actions of principals.

Inevitably, a close consideration of how to bolster paradox possibilities also uncovers possible weaknesses and shortcomings of these efforts. Like any representation of real-world complexity, paradox suffers from the reductive dangers of simplification, selectivity and limitation. A paradoxical representation, even when distinguished by its efforts to hold to a complex reading must, inevitably, manipulate that complexity to satisfy imperatives of intelligibility, manageability and evaluation. For example, the 15 paradoxes derived for empirical work in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8 may appear to comprise a simplified and bounded model of representation which risks sanitising the intricate and messy qualities of the actual conflict they purport to represent. I also acknowledge my efforts to leverage the ancient wisdom and historical accounts of paradox, to mine the vast body of organisational studies research and to draw from the work of a number of so-called 'post-structural' philosophers as partial and incomplete.

While not wishing to parry away these shortcomings, I am drawn to metaphors that evoke the balancing of restrictions and possibilities in a type of simplicity/ complexity dialectic. The seesawing qualities of this dialectic are captured by Schad et al. (2016) who describe, in theory building, the weighing of the 'parsimony and pragmatism' of simplicity with the 'goodness of fit and comprehensiveness' of complexity (p. 8). I add to this description a fulcrum for my own project, where the balance of its sides will be determined by a critical commitment to understanding whether the constitution of principals and their work in neoliberal times is better understood in its paradoxy than in the currently favoured orthodox renditions.

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Chapter 3
Governing the Soul: The Theoretical Support of Michel Foucault

In the schematics of chapter arrangement, the positioning of this chapter is to create useful imagery about an already established relevance of Foucault's work to the conceptual frame of paradox and to suggest important support for what lies ahead. His work is here treated as exceeding the complementarity of its application in Chap. 2 to be considered epistemologically crucial to arguments made in the chapters which follow. The theoretical resources discussed in this chapter – built around the central concept of governmentality – are predominantly directed to my analysis of policy discourses of neoliberalism in Chap. 4 and the construction and representation of field data using paradox in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8. The deployment of Foucault's tools of *problematisation* and *critique* is held over until Chap. 4, when they are used to both inform and illuminate a struggle for the 'soul' of the principal.

In drawing from Foucault's formidable catalogue, I am conscious of the significant and heartfelt criticism, often levelled by his acolytes, of the opportunist efforts of authors and researchers to simplify, manipulate, exceed and even corrupt his work (see, e.g. criticism levelled by Peters & Besley, 2007). My intention in what follows is certainly to avoid this type of misappropriation. However, it also holds that selecting from a catalogue of such breadth, depth, density and ambiguity necessarily poses risks of simplification, fragmentation and misunderstanding. I aim to mitigate these risks, not only by close reading and diligent application of Foucault's original work but also by restricting my use of his theoretical resources to those with which I have been heavily engaged and which are closely aligned with the arguments of this book. Optimistically put, my aim is less a rattling around and more a purposeful raid on his famous 'toolbox'.

The orientation of my choices is framed and delimited by a central concern with revealing, and intervening in, the constitutive politics of school principals. Within these parameters, I am interested in gaining theoretical support for thinking about both the instatement of the influential shaping forces of neoliberalism, as well as the possibilities for working beyond and against its rational and taken-for-granted operations. Set in the wider field, my research seeks to engage with, and make a contribution to, the Foucauldian strand of critical leadership studies. In this work, I cast myself as an interlocutor with a small group of authors – many of whom are cited in this chapter – who use Foucault's work and apply his concepts to critiquing and disrupting conventional positivist accounts and to gathering, after Niesche (2011), 'more nuanced, theoretically rigorous understandings of the complexities faced by school leaders' (p. 139).

Foucault (1977b) captures the orientation of these interests in one of the few direct references to paradox in his work. In the context of what he terms the 'dreary succession of the identical' that flows from the generality of common sense, he asks:

> What if thought freed itself from common sense and decided to function only in its extreme singularity? What if it adopted the disreputable bias of the paradox, instead of complacently accepting its citizenship in the *doxa*? What if it conceived of difference differently, instead of searching out the common elements underlying difference? (p. 182)

He further claims that common sense, in its homogenising work of specification and repetition, exerts a particular subjectivity that eschews the thoughts of the errant individual and turns 'away from mad flux and anarchic difference' in order to establish 'the universality of the knowing subject' (p. 182). Foucault's entreaty to paradox not only links his work to the conceptual framing of my project but also shapes the approach taken in this chapter to the sorting and taking up of his theoretical resources. This approach takes Foucault's question as an important call to understand the forces at play that hold common sense in place and to contemplate what it would take to 'pervert good sense and allow thought to play outside the ordered table of resemblances' (Foucault, 1977b, p. 183).

In what might appear something of a backwards reading of Foucault's vast oeuvre, I organise my explanation around the concept of governmentality. This portmanteau creation, a fusing of 'government' with 'mentality', was developed as part of Foucault's late-career interest in 'how government is justified and rationalised' (Gillies, 2013, p. 68) and, according to Dean (2002), 'best summarises the multiple directions of his thoughts' at this time (p. 174). In accounting for my use of Foucault's work, governmentality is taken as a concept that is central to principal subjectivity and as shaping related ideas of power, discourse, truth and ethics.

I commence by describing how Foucault's (2008) understanding of governmentality as the 'conduct of conduct' brings the simultaneous operations of politics and ethics into play and creates a unique 'grid' for analysing these modern relations of power (p. 186). This is not to suggest that 'government' now replaces 'power' as a methodological target, but, rather, that the shift to governmentality necessitates a focus on both the diffuse sources of power – beyond the state – that go to governing

the conduct of individuals and populations and the specific and complex conditions under which this type of government is made possible.

Governmentality

In the fourth of his 1978 lectures in *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault (2007) describes governmentality as an 'ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power' (p. 108). Here, Foucault advances a broader and more pervasive form of government by adding everyday, informal political endeavours to the power of the state and its institutions, thus expanding the processes traditionally understood as shaping the individual. This expanded meaning is arguably the most influential aspect of bringing a governmentality approach to my project, as it takes the governmental process of conducting conduct to include both 'endeavours to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others' as well as 'the ways in which one might be urged and educated to bridle one's own passions, to control one's own instincts, to govern oneself' (Rose, 1999, p. 3).

Govern-mentality, following Lemke (2002), makes reference to government 'in a comprehensive sense' that exceeds the current 'political meaning' by 'adumbrating the close link between forms of power and processes of subjectification' (p. 50). In turn, this link helps reveal how government of the self and others is constituted, influenced and directed by what Foucault terms a *dispositif* or assemblage of institutions, programmes, procedures and calculations. Here the term dispositif describes a heterogeneous ensemble of discursive and nondiscursive practices that work to constitute the world in fixed and discernible ways. Foucault's dispositif is explained and deployed more fully later in this chapter and in Chap. 4.

Dean (2010) asserts that a governmentality perspective 'seeks to connect questions of government, politics and administration to the space of bodies, lives, selves and persons' (p. 20). This notion of self-government usefully supports an understanding of how governments act by implementing particular rationalities and mechanisms by which principals' conduct is influenced and dictated and how these practices make a particular version of the principal thinkable and viable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it is practised.

Foucault's genealogies described a range of different rationalities of government from different historical periods, including those associated with pastoral, sovereign and police power and, with the emergence of liberalism, as a 'form of critical reflection on governmental practice' (Foucault, 2008, p. 321). Links between these rationalities and some of my key arguments remain relevant and are variously applied in the following chapters. However, my predominant interest is in the emergence of the model social state under a form of governmentality that Foucault introduces in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008) as 'neoliberal governmentality' (p. 192).

Neoliberalism: A Distinctive Governmentality

Drawing on Bailey (2013), neoliberalism, as a rationality of government, reflects a particular 'mentality of rule' which 'rearticulates classic liberal concerns for limited government, economic freedoms and individual responsibility' (p. 816). Positioned as a politics of 'not governing too much' (Foucault, 2008, p. 17), this *neoliberal governmentality* is, accordingly, described by Rose, O'Malley and Valverde (2006) as creating a 'problem space' which is concerned with 'new ways of thinking about and seeking to enact the government of freedom' (p. 92).

The paradoxical qualities of the phrase 'government of freedom' are dissolved in the interpretation, following Foucault (2008) – as well as in Rose (1999), Dean (2010) and Dardot and Laval (2014) – that, in neoliberal times, freedom is not opposed to government but rather becomes a *strategy of* governing. Understood in this way, subjects are required and obliged to adopt a certain set of freedoms that are made possible and shaped within government. For example, calls for individuals to become autonomous, entrepreneurial and self-monitoring and self-possessed are made to further the aspirations of government. They represent an exemplary exercise of what Foucault (2008) describes as 'biopower', as they respond to the population problematic by 'distributing the living in the domain of value and utility' (Foucault, 1978, p. 144) in order to control and regulate the population as a resource to be manipulated and optimised.

Neoliberal governmentality is not marked by a withdrawal or retreat from state control and intervention, but rather by new acts of subterfuge, incentive and 'steering at a distance' (Kickert, 1991 in Ball, 2006, p. 10) and by taking subjectivity as one of its key modes of power (see Protevi, 2009). The technologies and institutions of governmental power now develop, conjoin and operate in the guise of more benign and apolitical processes. They steer the performance of individuals and groups by processes of measurement, appraisal and comparison – they incite people to govern themselves and posit an 'artificially arranged' liberty (Lemke, 2012, p. 45) by championing entrepreneurial and competitive instincts. In short, thinking with Bailey (2013), they fold the 'mundane and everyday practices and conducts' of individuals 'in with the requirements and exigencies of the state' (p. 816).

Applied to the pressures shaping principals, the constrained freedoms of neoliberal governmentality are a resource of government that implicate principals directly in ruler ambitions and, therefore, are significant to understanding their contemporary make-up. Neoliberal governmentality reveals a new marking out of constitutive and constraining powers – an elucidation of a political rationality that shapes principals and their work 'through the coalescence of circumstances of their everyday lives' (Springer, 2012, p. 139). The subjectivities available to the principal are under the constant influence of a power/knowledge apparatus that confers particular privilege and primacy on principals and imbues them with certain knowledge and expertise while, at the same time, imposing restrictions on what they can think, say and do.

More forensically, neoliberal governmentality allows in what Rose (1999) terms 'a technological rationalisation of the human soul … a reduction of human subjec-

tivity and creativity to that which can be acted upon in the interest of government' (p. 54). As these new 'technologies of power' (Foucault, 1988b, p. 18) do their objectifying work, principals enact their subjection as if an obvious and conscious choice and a matter of their own free will. These technologies manifest in practice, for example, in the pressing and essential status attached to new work principals are urged to undertake, in the replacement of coercive and prescriptive controls on the principal with more surreptitious tactics of empowerment and responsibilisation (see Wright, 2012) and in the attachment of their success and survival to principles of self-enterprise and market awareness.

Foucault's genealogical accounts in the lectures that comprise the *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008) provide historical background and a governmentality perspective that forms a telling and prescient backdrop to understanding the novelty of modern-day neoliberalism. However, I do not take them as giving me direct and immediate licence to embark on a critical analysis of the political rationality of neoliberalism or the logics of associated policies. In fact, Foucault's relatively brief presentations about neoliberalism in these lectures give little direct encouragement to critical scholars. Flew (2012) notes that the 'excoriating critique' of neoliberalism was actually left to 'contemporary interlocutors' working from Foucault's relatively 'non-judgemental commentary' (p. 59).

My own orientation towards critical analysis seeks to work into a more ambiguous and empirical political space. It is founded on Foucault's recurring question, in his exposé of liberal modes of governmentality, about what amounts to 'too much', 'too little' or 'just enough' government (e.g., Foucault, 2008, p. 17). In repeatedly posing this question within the broader thematic of governmental reason (or *raison d'État*), Foucault draws attention to shifts in the technologies of power over the course of his broader project on the arts of liberal government. More particularly, Foucault (1987) expands on the strategic possibilities in governmentality for the self-governing individual when he says:

> Governmentality implies the relationship of self to self … in the idea of governmentality, I am aiming at the totality of practices, by which one can constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other … the notion of governmentality allows one, I believe, to set off the freedom of the subject and the relationship to others, i.e., that which constitutes the very matter of ethics. (pp. 130–131) ma

It is this reference to an ethics based on the freedom of the subject implied by governmentality that directs more productive elements of my critical work and shifts analysis of the constitutive influences on principals closer to what Orr (2010) terms 'the contours of an effective counter-politics' (p. 550). I now turn my attention to the possibilities afforded by an ethics of self-care founded in what Foucault (1988b) termed 'technologies of the self'[1].

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[1] This shift to 'technologies of the self' garners support from Connolly's (2002) insistence that 'one needs to examine established tactics of self-identity … by exploring the means by which one has become constituted as what one is, by probing the structures that maintain the plausibility of those configurations, and by analyzing from a perspective that problematizes the certainty of one's self-

Technologies of the Self, Ethics and Practices of Freedom

Springer (2012) describes a form of 'neoliberal subjectivation' (p. 139) that can be interpreted, using Foucault (1982), as the process of subjecting individuals to relations of power that both subjugate them 'to someone else by control and dependence' as well tying them to their own identity 'by a conscience or self-knowledge' (p. 781).[2] Accordingly, while technologies of power under conditions of neoliberal governmentality may be shown to have a powerful subjugating influence on principals, it is through an interpretation of governmentality as bringing out the freedom of the subject (Foucault, 1987) that new possibilities may emerge in governing of the self. Foucault (1988b) describes 'technologies of the self' as permitting:

> individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 18)

In the more empirically oriented chapters which follow, I highlight evidence of these technologies of the self being deployed in the field. I link these technologies to the efforts described by principal participants in my research to make decisions about the sort of subject they would like to be and to fit themselves around and against the subjectifying outside influences of neoliberal discourses. Skinner (2012) captures this interpretation when she says, 'technologies of the self provide an intervention mechanism on the part of active subjects, injecting an element of contingency to everyday encounters and alleviating the determinist effect that technologies of power would have otherwise' (p. 918).

Dean (2002) claims that, in governmentality, Foucault 'defines a novel thought-space across the domains of ethics and politics' (p. 174). In working further into this space in Chaps. 5, 7 and 8, I use the conjoined notions of *spaces* and *practices* of freedom to propose a form of ethics that imagines principals directing their thinking, as a type of 'caring for self' (Foucault, 1987) – a critique of their own discursive conditions and of the techniques and practices that shape their subjectivity. Further, I contend an ethics that enables taken-for-granted assumptions to be challenged and alternative views to be entertained, tested and publicly shared. This work draws from Foucault's (1987) claim, based on his genealogical analysis of Greco-Roman ethics, that:

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identity the effects these structures and tactics have on others' (p. 9–10) . Connolly brings a 'Foucaultian care for identity and difference' (in conjunction with a Nietzschean affirmation of the 'abundance of life') to what he terms an 'ethic of cultivation' (p. 10–11).

[2] 'Subjectivation' (sometimes translated as 'subjectivisation') is a word coined by Foucault and used in his post-1981 writings, to refer to 'the process by which one obtains the constitution of a subject, or more exactly, of a subjectivity' (Foucault, 1988a, p. 253). In his earlier writings, Foucault gave the existing French word *assujettissement* a similar meaning.

in order to behave properly, in order to practice freedom properly, it was necessary to care for self, both in order to know one's self … and to improve one's self, to surpass one's self, to master the appetites that risk engulfing you. (p. 116)

My use of ethics remains fully awake to the powerful constitutive elements of neoliberal discourse and understands that the bodies of knowledge, belief and opinion in which principals are immersed require and form particular technical 'mentalities' that are not usually open to question by those who use them (Nicoll & Fejes, 2008, p. 12). In taking this ethics as a type of agonistic mobilisation of freedom, I do not consider the principal a docile subject awaiting determination by formidable political technologies. Rather, I take the 'conduct of conduct' in neoliberal governmentality as both penetrating deeply into the souls of individuals and calling them to action – exerting on them an urgent and formidable demand to make themselves agile, flexible and enterprising – as well as inviting them to 'practices of self' (Foucault, 1987, p. 122) that require them to take active responsibility for their own choices, expertise and susceptibilities and to watch, measure and audit the value they return to their schools.

The point of my focus on ethics, when set inside of and against neoliberal governmentalities, is to surface different spaces for, and practices of, principal freedom and to introduce the prospect of a struggle over principal subjectivity. In the apparent asymmetry of such a struggle, the processes of governmental shaping and constituting of principals are treated as bringing some contingency to overdetermined readings and, towards the use of a paradox interpretive lens, enabling the conception of alternative meanings and practices.

In the multiple moves out from this central concept of governmentality, Foucault's resources for understanding subjectivity are most closely aligned to the needs of my project. These are now expounded in two broad categories – (i) discourse and power/ knowledge and (ii) the operations of power.

Discourse and Power/Knowledge

Central to the understanding of governmentality and the constituting of the principal subject are what Foucault (1972) describes as 'discursive formations' (p. 133). To reiterate, these formations derive from groups of statements in discourses that appear to cohere as uniform, meaningful and influential knowledge fields. The reason for bringing this theoretical postulate to my research is illuminated by Foucault's (1972) claim that analysis of discursive formations 'opens up a quite contrary direction: it wishes to determine the principle according to which only the "signifying" groups that were enunciated could appear' (p. 134). In the context of my research, discursive formations prompt consideration of how uniformity in discourse allows order and regularity to be discerned in the practices of government thus preparing the way for policy responses by (i) normalising and naturalising a particular cluster of meanings (Clarke, Bainton, Lendvai, & Stubbs 2015, p. 20); (ii) delineating

knowledge in ways that constrain what can be said and who can say it; and (iii) shaping problems in ways that 'subvert progressive intent' and, in doing so, restrict allowable solutions and resist attempts at change (Bacchi, 2000, p. 47).

This signifying group principle in discursive formations is articulated in my project through Foucault's renowned bracketing of power and knowledge in order to turn discourses into 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980c, p. 131). Perhaps Foucault's best-known treatise on the inextricable relations of power/knowledge is in *Discipline and Punish* (1977a), where he is concerned with the emergence, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, of a modern and insidious type of power – 'disciplinary power' –and its capacity to generate detailed knowledge of the individual from its practices of discipline, surveillance and constraint. It is out of this entanglement that he claims that 'power and knowledge directly imply one another' (p. 27). A discourse depends for its power on the knowledge it constructs but, at the same time, this knowledge confers power on the discourse. Applied more directly to the connecting of the discursive constitution of principals, Bevir (1999) notes that power and knowledge 'interpenetrate within specific regimes that provide the modes of subjection, and also liberation, through which subjects constitute themselves' (p. 66).

Foucault (1980c) says that each society has its regimes of truth:

> the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of saying what counts as true. (p. 131)

In these regimes of truth, distinctions between true and false, derived from the imbrication of power and knowledge, have the effect of fixing popular discourses in a time and place and giving them an outward appearance of impenetrability.

In utilising power/knowledge, I take Foucault's concept of the dispositif as usefully adding the component of calculation to power/knowledge pairings in discourse. The concept of dispositif refers to the complex and heterogeneous mixture of discursive and nondiscursive elements that are put into place 'as a result of calculations aiming to constitute the world in a determinate way' (Lazzarato, 2009, p. 110). Premised on the nonexistence of universals, they are apparatuses of power/knowledge that mark out reality according to a particular determination of the division between true and false. In my efforts to think and think differently about principal subjectivity in the chapters that follow, I work to critique expressions of power/knowledge in persuasive regimes of truth and in the dispositifs that mark out a neoliberal version of the principal subject.

Foucault (1972) says, of the analysis of discourse, it 'operates between the twin poles of totality and plethora' (p. 134). Such a description captures much of the order and intent of the analysis of neoliberal policy discourses which follows (see Chap. 4). Here, I am concerned, in the first instance, with the totalising qualities of dominant discourses and the principles that instate them as essential and permanent and which underplay and obscure their indeterminacy and contingency. It is in this type of analysis that regimes of power/knowledge can be seen as simultaneously

carrying acceptable versions of the 'truth' while working to hide their essentially political character and subjectivising tendencies. These suggestions of domination run the risk of creating a simplified image of power departing from the top on a linear and downward course to principals in schools. Such an understanding fails to engage with the plethora of discursive possibilities within and beyond dominant discourses. It is therefore necessary to reveal and account for the workings of power in ways that look away from top-down renditions and towards more nuanced accounts of how principals' lives are currently governed. The *will to truth* is a Foucauldian concept that provides insights into these workings.

The Will to Truth

Amongst the mechanisms that permit and prevent certain discourses, Foucault (1981) names 'the will to truth' – the desire to speak 'inside' the discourse that is attached to power because of its claim to truth – as 'a prodigious machinery designed to exclude' (p. 56). He claims that our conceiving of truth as 'a richness, a fecundity, a gentle and insidiously universal force' (Foucault, 1981, p. 56) masks how this will to truth excludes possibilities for bringing truth into question and for advancing other truth claims. From this masking work, 'true' discourses emerge as regimes of truth and take on hegemonic qualities that hold our attention and prevent us looking elsewhere.

Judith Butler, in *Giving an account of oneself* (2005), theorises that 'a regime of truth offers the terms that make self-recognition possible' because it constrains in advance 'what will and will not be a recognizable form of being' (p. 22). She identifies the site of this constraining work of truth regimes as occasions when an individual is compelled to give an account of oneself. Butler further argues that in giving such an account, regimes of truth offer 'a framework for the scene of recognition, delineating who will qualify as a subject of recognition and offering available norms for the act of recognition' (p. 22). The importance of Butler's insights is that they embed truth-telling in an account of how power works. They show that the individual only asks questions of power because of the demand to give a 'truthful' account of oneself. These questions are not, therefore, about the nature of truth but about the relations of truth to power.

As an extension of the necessity for me to take account of the explanatory possibilities in power and the will to truth, Butler's (2005) insights into regimes of truth and giving an account of oneself influence the remaining chapters in this book in specific ways. They encourage me to:

- Pay attention to whether an ethical demand on principals to tell the truth is, in fact, more likely to prompt a political account – so that it is not a truthful enterprise at all

- Consider whether an ethics based on freedom and care of self can only be credible if it recognises the restraints imposed on truth-telling and, concomitantly, includes a critique of the power relations in which principals are embedded
- Recognise that acts of truth-telling by principals bring 'the weight of power to bear on others' and so, themselves, constitute an act of power (Butler, 2005, pp. 124–125)
- Contemplate the various possibilities that arise when an individual principal continues to seek self-recognition and the recognition of others but does not recognise her/himself within available regimes of truth
- Proceed thoughtfully and tentatively to the possibilities of resistance and recalcitrance at the limits of established regimes of truth, knowing that to disclose 'a truth which threatens the majority' (Foucault, 2001, p. 18) always requires a certain risking of the self
- Be alert to extensions of the will to truth in the lives and work of principals, by diligently noting how the particulars of each principal's context must be detached 'from the porous universals' (Connolly, 2002, p. 61) to which they are constantly exposed and invited to embrace

Discourses, with their particular truth claims and capacity to produce the objects of which they speak, separate what is true and appropriate from what is wrong and untenable. My account of Foucault's development of power/knowledge, regimes of truth and the exclusionary work of the will to truth has drawn attention to the division of true and false and the totalising tendencies of discourse. To mitigate these tendencies, and repudiate criticism of Foucault as 'a prophet of entrapment' (Simons, 2013, p. 301), I will now use insights from Foucault's later work to more clearly articulate the possibilities for a 'space of action or room to maneuver' (Fairhurst, 2009, p. 1619) within and against these stymieing effects.

Subversive Spaces

Foucault (1978) describes a different joining of power with discourse when he says:

> Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it … We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (pp. 100–101)

Applying this reading to my research appears to shift my consideration of the constitutive influences on principals to more subversive spaces, for example, where power may be given expression in critiquing dominant assumptions, contesting the

force of centralised directives, caucusing on alternative positions and engaging in acts of resistance, counter-conduct[3] and micro-emancipation.

In the various analyses which follow, I do not suggest that principals are free to position themselves and their work outside of institutional discourses or to seek an alternative and 'better' version of truth by having an excluded or marginalised discourse replace that which is accepted. Rather, I claim discourse as a site of both power and resistance and look to find within 'a multiplicity of discursive elements', those 'enunciations required and those forbidden' (Foucault, 1978, p. 100). This involves thinking about what principals say and what they are prevented from saying, when they are allowed to speak and when they are not, and the institutional settings in which they exercise power and those in which it is wielded over them. Further, it is an engagement with thinking about how counter-conducts, after Foucault (1980c), are entwined with the current operations of power, so that the politics of resistance become not 'a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power' but, instead, the political work 'of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time' (p. 133).

Foucault (1980c) asserts that 'power *is* "always already there", that one is never "outside" it, that there are no "margins" for those who break with the system to gambol in' (p. 141, italics in original). This assertion is compatible with various observations already made about the pervasiveness of neoliberal discourses in the lives and work of principals and is given full expression in my discourse analysis in the next chapter and in *the paradox of politicised subjectivity* in Chap. 6. However, Foucault also reiterates that discourse does not impose a condition of inescapable domination and that just because one cannot operate outside power, this does not mean 'that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what' (Foucault, 1980c, pp. 141–142). Working from this claim, I imagine a space on the 'constitutive outside' (Butler, 1997, p. 94) that is formed from the discursive summoning of principals to shape themselves inside intelligible and authorised boundaries. This thinking interprets current intelligibilities as 'far from filling all possible spaces' (Foucault, 2000a, p. 140) or of imposing an absolute limit on the necessity of what principals think and do.

In my discussion of the operations of power in the next section, I am, therefore, concerned not only with the 'general conditions of domination' (Foucault, 1980b, p. 142) that authorised power/knowledge pairings impose on principals but also with the possibilities for action that might remain available.

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[3] The notion of 'counter-conduct' emerges in Foucault's (2007) *Security, Territory, Population* as he rethinks the problem of resistance inside of a governmentality frame. At its core, counter-conduct is 'the struggle in order to claim and obtain an *other* conduct' (Lorenzini, 2016, p. 11 italics in original). Counter-conduct is given more extensive explanation in Chap. 5.

The Operations of Power

Foucault (1980a) describes theoretical conceptions of power as located at, or emanating from, a given point as 'based on a misguided analysis.' Instead, he claims that, 'in reality power means relations, a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations' (pp. 198–199). Foucault's (1982) notion of power relations, in suspecting that power is without essence or ontological origins and suggesting that its study should avoid its reification and unification in theory, shifts attention to the macro- and micro-practices of power and what happens when they are exercised. He asserts:

> The exercise of power … is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. (p. 789)

This reading provides a reasonable tracing of the lines of discussion which follow about my application of Foucault's understanding of the exercise of power and my consideration of the freedom of the subject as its corollary. It evokes, in power relations, both the power/knowledge arrangements that make the individual 'an effect of power' and 'the element of its articulation', as well as structuring 'the possible field of action of others' (Foucault, 1980d, p. 98). Power relations are, therefore, not treated as akin to domination, but rather as productive – as creating what Simons (2013) describes as the 'conditions of possibility' for subjectivity 'which would not have any form without relations of force that govern them' (p. 307).

Power and Freedom

Foucault (1982) posits freedom as a necessary prerequisite condition for the exercise of power, albeit in 'a complicated interplay' (p. 790). He expands on this relationship:

> Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized. (p. 790)

The case for the interplay of power and freedom is further advanced by Foucault's (1982) account of how the conditions for the exercise of power rely on the freedom to choose from within a field of possibilities and how the prospect of recalcitrance marks the separation of power, freely exercised, from conditions of domination (or what he terms, 'determination') (p. 791). References to freedom, and its mutually constitutive relationship with power, take distinct forms in my empirical chapters. In Chap. 4, I draw on Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics* (2008) to chart the historical enshrinement of freedom as part of the rationality and calculation of neoliberal

government and the associated development of security mechanisms, in the form of limitations, coercions and obligations, that seek to limit the risk of certain freedoms. This interplay of freedom and security is subsequently thematised in references, in the policy discourses of neoliberalism under analysis, to the already discussed constrained freedoms of neoliberal governmentality. Here freedom is taken to be a strategy of government that is manipulated through discourses such as competition, excellence and entrepreneurship, in order to further its aspirations.

Foucault (1988a) claims that 'the source of human freedom is never to accept anything as definitive, untouchable, obvious, or immobile' (p. 1). Chapters 6, 7 and 8 analyse, construct and represent my fieldwork through a series of 15 paradoxes. In analysis, I contend that several of these paradoxes function to open *spaces of freedom* within which principals might refuse the entreaties of definitive, obvious and immobile truths and, instead, think differently about themselves and their work. In turn, these spaces are implicated in Foucault's (2000c) conjoined notions of *thought* and of *stepping back* (p. 117) and their links to the possibilities for principals to understand how they have become who they are and what they might do about it. A resource for operating in these spaces is derived from Foucault's (1982) summation of the tying together of power and freedom, where he makes reference to the agonistic quality of relations of power. He says:

> At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an 'agonism' – of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation. (p. 790)

This resource, which I fashion as a type of agonistic thought and practice, is further explicated in Chap. 5: *The Lines of Struggle* and then joined with the political work of paradox in the conclusions to each of Chaps. 6, 7 and 8. The notions of 'incitation and struggle' and 'permanent provocation' are taken to suggest a persistent disequilibrium in opposing forces and a reasonable expectation of dissonance and conflict. A more productive gap is visualised for the expression of resistance and freedom and, I contend in the concluding chapter, contributes to a *critical engagement* function in the explication of the pedagogical possibilities in paradox.

Power Techniques and the Soul

I will now extend the concept of power/knowledge to the 'techniques' (Foucault, 1982) of power and their application in the rest of this book. In its orientation to a central concept of governmentality, this means looking back into Foucault's earlier deliberations on power/knowledge, not as an exercise in retrofitting old ideas to newer concepts, but rather to acknowledge that governmentality – which Foucault (1991) characterises as now 'the only real space for political struggle and contesta-

tion' (p. 103) – incorporates various historical and contemporary techniques of power. As Bevir (1999) notes, based on his reading of Foucault's 1978 *Governmentality* lecture (in Foucault, 1991), this 'modern regime of power incorporates all of sovereignty, discipline and government' (p. 71). For constituting the subject, this means that it is reasonable to think about different power/knowledge regimes from different historical periods that now, often in a thoroughly modernised form, impose certain techniques on individuals as part of the governmental rationality which produces and sustains their subjectivities.

Following Olssen's (2006) interpretation, Foucault's interest in the *political* exercise of power is concerned with both its *individualising* and *totalising* functions – with its shaping of the conduct of 'both individuals and populations' (p. 215, italics in original). Two of Foucault's techniques for this collective exercise of power are now described – *pastoral power* and *disciplinary power*. These techniques are subsequently folded into, and rearticulated as, components of a modern form of power which I characterise as *the technologies of government.*

The notion of pastoral power is explicated by Foucault (2007) in its older Christian version through an extended shepherd and flock metaphor. He describes a 'power of care' that is 'entirely defined by its beneficence'. More expansively, he says:

> Pastoral power looks after the flock, it looks after the individuals of the flock, it sees to it that the sheep do not suffer, it goes in search of those that have strayed off course, and it treats those that are injured. (p. 172)

Foucault (2007) highlights qualities in the shepherd of vigilance and sacrifice and describes the shepherd's willingness to protect the flock from the violence of the sovereign. He also notes the individualising quality of pastoral power, so that the shepherd 'does everything for the totality of his flock, but he does everything also for each sheep of the flock' (p. 173). Finally, the merit of the shepherd is, to some extent, decided by successful management of recalcitrance from within the flock and a capacity to save those that stray and bring them back to the bigger group (pp. 228–229). In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault (1982) reveals 'this old power technique' as now transformed to a new apparatus of government, finding its support in a multitude of institutions and 'spread out in the whole social body' while still retaining its 'individualizing "tactic"' (p. 784).

My application of this power technique acknowledges both the 'pastoral governance' (Hunter, 1994, p. 64) of individual principals and the local applications of the shepherd/flock dynamic in the relations of principals and followers. Continuing to follow the lines of Hunter's (1994) discussion, it is concerned with the subjectifying process of 'comportment' that enfolds the objective of 'a pastoral pedagogy'[4] – to have individuals 'comport themselves as self-reflective and self-governing

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[4] In the introduction to Hunter's renowned text *Rethinking the School* (1994), editor Meghan Morris describes Hunter's understanding of 'pastoral pedagogy' in the school setting as concerned with 'the arts of self-examination' and 'care of individual souls' (p. vii).

persons' (p. 57) – into the corresponding logics of neoliberal governmentality. While I take pastoral power as 'buried deep in the logic of today's political rationality' (Orr, 2010, p. 549) and as shaping the individual comportment of principals by techniques of 'governmental calculation and bureaucratic organisation' (Hunter, 1994, p. 83), I also note that it is a power that passes through the consciousness of individual subjects and needs them to decide to collude in its application. This requirement for higher levels of individual consciousness distances modern pastoral power from more pressing and immediate forms of domination and, in doing so, creates some space for my consideration of its different applications and possibilities, including those that run to acts of counter-conduct and resistance amongst principals.

Foucault's exposition of *disciplinary power* in arguably his most famous text *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) brought an irresistible new complexity to his work on discourse and power/knowledge by expanding it into a more explicitly political inquiry into the configurations and operations of power. Interpreted broadly, *Discipline and Punish* is an example of Foucault's abiding interest in the way discursive fields shift over time so that different discursive formations (or knowledge fields) bring different possibilities into play. In *Discipline and Punish*, this is a shift of power from the aristocracy to the middle classes, from the force of the ruling monarch's sovereign power to the normalising and panoptic gaze of disciplinary power – 'that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise' (Foucault, 1977a, p. 170).

The transition to disciplinary power shifts emphasis to the individual and their subjection under specific techniques of power. Foucault (1977a) describes the 'human body entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it' (p. 138). He says this new 'political anatomy' and 'mechanics of power':

> defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile bodies'. (p. 138)

My particular interest in deploying this productive conception of power in my research is to explicate those instruments of control, the 'means of correct training' (Foucault, 1977a, p. 170), that discipline the principal and to divine how they produce docility and foreclose on possibilities for individual freedom and agency.

The instruments of this 'modest, suspicious power' (Foucault, 1977a, p. 170) involve the coercive surveillance of *hierarchical observation* and the standardised calculation of *normalising judgement*. The procedure of *examination* is derived from combining these instruments together. Foucault's (1977a) evocative description of the examination, thus, captures the techniques of power that are enclosed within it:

> The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differ-

entiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the exami-
nation is highly ritualized. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the
experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. At the heart of the
procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects
and the objectification of those who are subjected. The superimposition of the power rela-
tions and knowledge relations assumes in the examination all its visible brilliance.
(pp. 184–185)

I argue, along the lines established in Rouse (2006), that the techniques of power
that comprise the examination open the lives and work of principals to inspection,
rendering them as more visible and 'more thoroughly knowable or known' (p. 99)
as well as inducing a 'strong element of self-scrutiny' (Morley & Rassool, 2002,
p. 61). Each of these disciplinary instruments finds individual and collective expres-
sion in the empirical chapters which follow. For example, the policy discourses of
neoliberalism, analysed in the next chapter, are shown to utilise forms of hierarchi-
cal observation in the processes and techniques of quality assurance, standards
frameworks and school inspections. Some discourses are also shown to rely on the
normalising judgement of methods of measurement and appraisal that rank and
compare individual and organisational performance.

In the formation of principal subjectivity inside the symbiotic power/knowledge
pairings of discourse, the scrutinising gaze of disciplinary power brings more
searching and pervasive qualities to principal accountability and to the demand that
principals give an account of themselves (see Butler, 2005). References to the vari-
ous disciplinary techniques of surveillance, accountability, judgement and examina-
tion in my field data also reach to more visceral and affective aspects of principal
subjectivity. Reflecting something of what Schwan and Shapiro (2011) describe as
'the private, invisible discipline of our psychological sense of selfhood' (p. 12), I
observed feelings of anger, disappointment, intimidation and humiliation brought
on by various disciplinary mechanisms. Principal participants described stressful,
wishful and often futile efforts directed towards more favourable judgement and the
foreclosure of opportunities to escape the homogenising gaze of policy and to sub-
vert processes of regulation and standardisation.

From the observation and hearing of these effects, I determined the site of a
struggle over principal subjectivity, after Foucault (1977a), to be the 'soul' of the
principal. Foucault distinguishes the separation of 'this soul' from that of Christian
theology, saying that it is:

born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint … [it] is not a sub-
stance; it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and
the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations
give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the
effects of this power. (p. 29)

These explicit references make clear Foucault's understanding of the soul as
originating in the operations of a certain type of power (i.e. disciplinary power). By
extension, and from some fainter leads given elsewhere in Foucault's work, I inter-
pret other techniques of power – the already discussed pastoral power, and the tech-
nologies of government, to which I now turn my attention – as making extended and

different impacts on the soul of the principal. Furthermore, I characterise the struggle for the soul as not merely one of escape or relief from pervasive power/knowledge orderings, but as demanding a more complex depiction as a significant, multisided contest of the doxa and its often less obvious oppositions.

Biopower and the Technologies of Government

In building this summary of my use of Foucault's work around a central concept of governmentality, it is important to note that he emphasised the continuity of the individualising power techniques (i.e. pastoral and disciplinary power) discussed in the last section, into his later work on the conduct of conduct and its associated technologies of power. His interest in government emerged from the introduction of 'biopower' in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978). Here, he sought to show both the reorientation of these historical techniques as well as their incorporation into an 'explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and control of populations' (Oksala, 2013, p. 321).

In introducing the concept of biopower, Foucault (1978) encapsulated a shift away from the sovereign rule of juridical law and towards technologies of power that exert a positive influence on life, that endeavour 'to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations' (p. 137). Foucault (1978) describes biopower as having two poles of operation. The first pole is directed to disciplining the performances of the body:

> the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls. (p. 139)

The second pole focuses on 'the species body' and the supervision and regulatory controls of its biological processes (propagation, birth and death, the level of health, etc.) to form a '*biopolitics of the population'* (Foucault, 1978, p. 137, italics in original). At this pole, the population is turned to a 'calculable' and 'statistically communicable' social body in its 'policy-oriented and evermore policed form' (Orr, 2010, p. 549).

My predominant interest, in interpreting this 'the double itinerary of power' (Orr, 2010, p. 549) into my project, is in how bio-political technologies of government are constituted, influenced and directed by a dispositif of institutions, programmes, procedures, calculations and tactics and, in turn, how this discursive and nondiscursive ensemble simultaneously shapes the conduct and subjectivities of principals and ensures that the neoliberal aspirations of government are met (see Niesche, 2011, p. 36).

The detection of these technologies in my field data returns my attention to principals' souls and to sites where power is articulated on their bodies. Beyond the productive disciplining of policy technologies, such as standardisation, performativity and accountability, I seek, in the multifarious practices of government,

evidence of the more 'visceral and intimate' (Ball, 2012, p. 29) effects of neoliberal governmentality on principal subjectivity. This involves revealing and utilising what Foucault (1977a) describes as the 'capillary function of power' (p. 198) – a less juridical but more furtive function that works through everyday conversations and transactions and is rehearsed and embodied in professional relationships and school structures.

In concluding this chapter, I will join this capillary power with paradox as part of a more general discussion about fitting Foucault's insights to my paradox conceptual framework and an appraisal of the interpretive possibilities they add to deployment of a paradox lens.

Foucault and Paradox

In Chap. 2, I utilised Foucault's treatment of discourse in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) as sets of statements formed and articulated as relatively autonomous systems of thought with the capacity to form the reality of which they speak. This interpretation provided an explanation of the formation and development of paradox in discourse. It also helped me account for the concealment of its presence or the weakening of its sides and opened a plurality of spaces for thinking about ambiguity, conflict, tension and dissension.

This application of Foucault's earlier treatise stopped short of a complete attempt to reveal the relations of power that intersect, cross and characterise the discursive struggles from which paradox emerges and develops. To move to the more political work of challenging the orthodoxy of absolute judgements and common-sense solutions, I now bring the already discussed theoretical resources that Foucault provides directly to my use of paradox. To this end, I offer four observations which mediate, clarify and build from the theoretical content of paradox established in Chap. 2.

The first of these observations links the exclusionary work of power/knowledge discourses with the asymmetrical qualities of many of the paradoxes that represent my empirical work in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8. Foucault (1981) provides a pertinent example when he points to education as one site of exclusion. He positions education as the instrument that rightfully should allow the individual access to every discourse, but claims:

> this does not prevent it from following, as is well known, in its distribution, in what it allows and what it prevents, the lines marked out by social distances, oppositions and struggles. Any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers they carry. (p. 64)

In treating education, or more precisely the educational system, as part of a governing dispositif that shapes, approves and shifts what is permissible, Foucault helps account for the asymmetry of many of the paradoxes in my study. Unlike familial cousins such as dilemmas and dialectics, these paradoxes do not openly display the presence of equal and opposing sides, but rather, even as a relationship of forces that

are simultaneously present, their tendency is to have one of their parts rendered silent or subjugated by a truth regime to which it does not belong. The bringing of Foucault's understanding of power to these paradoxes works against these prevailing truths to build a more substantive and convincing case for thinking about the sides that have been quieted or quashed and 'the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth' (Foucault, 1980c, p. 133).

Secondly, to mediate the first observation, Foucault's thinking, across his entire oeuvre, was firmly resolved not to replace one truth with another. As Veyne, Potter and Davidson (1993) note, 'Foucault's originality among the great thinkers of our century lay in his refusal to convert our finitude into the basis for new certainties' (p. 5). In working with a paradox lens, this distinctly post-structural Foucauldian quality warns against the 'predetermined conceptual architecture' of the dialectic (Grant, 2010, p. 221) and the positing and defending of alternative solutions that run in direct opposition to the status quo. Instead, it suggests a more complex reading of paradox that allows for a plurality of oppositions and provides insights into the variegation and indeterminacy of the constitutive effects of power/knowledge and truth on the principal subject.

I endeavour to bring this quality of plurality to paradox through a series of principles which accumulate at the nexus of theory and empirical work. These include:

- Focussing on discerning paradox in the *practices* of principals in order to find, in their heterogeneity and singularity, sites where power is articulated differently, where different subjectivities become known and, following Rabinow and Rose (2003), where souls are produced, reformed and, even, sometimes liberated (p. 3)
- Working from Foucault's (1972) assertion of 'multiple dissensions' in discourse (p. 173) to reveal the 'presence of multiples' in terms of multiple levels, voices and tensions (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart 2016, p. 82) that are in play in my data and which bring a fluidity and complexity to paradox that cannot be fully conveyed in a two-sided rendition
- Following Foucault's (1980d) treatment of 'genealogical knowledge' as resurrecting and foregrounding 'the buried knowledges of erudition and those disqualified from the hierarchy of knowledges and sciences' in order to consider a more plural field of knowledge than that marked out by 'the tyranny of globalising discourses' (pp. 82–83)
- Depicting the oppositional forces in paradox, not as indicative of the bipolar qualities of a power/resistance dialectic, but rather as mapping a broader terrain of contestation and struggle over principal subjectivity

Thirdly, returning to capillary power and its contribution to my use of a paradox lens in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8, I note Fraser's (1989) observation that the capillary forms of power which Foucault identifies are obscured by the seemingly innocuous ways in which they circulate 'via a plurality of everyday micro-practices' (p. 18). In the formulation of various paradoxes, this capillary function is shown to surreptitiously privilege and naturalise dominant discourses and persistently reinforce current 'realities' (e.g. in the various *paradoxes of neoliberal policy* in Chap. 7), commu-

nicate subtle messages about the centrality and primacy of the principal (e.g. in *the paradox of team belonging* in Chap. 6 and *the paradox of hierarchy and distribution* in Chap. 8) and quietly hold in place stratified systems of control that work to legitimise designated leaders and differentiate them from follower groups (e.g. in the various *leader/follower paradoxes* in Chap. 6).

Jackson and Mazzei (2011) note that power exercised at a local and capillary level can be thought about as 'relational and productive' and 'unstable and unequal' (p. 54). Their description gives a clue to my accounts, in the conclusions of each of Chaps. 6, 7 and 8, of potential interventions of paradox into the more mundane aspects of principals' lives and work. In these accounts, I suggest that the elements of conflict, simultaneity and interdependence that paradox introduces may be usefully work on and against what Ball (2012) describes as 'the numerous moves, incremental reforms, displacements and reinscriptions, complicated and stuttering trajectories of small changes and tactics' (p. 30) that hold neoliberal forms of governmentality in place.

Fourthly, to conclude this section I direct attention to the contribution of Foucault's understanding of power and resistance to the warrior topos function of paradox. To recap, in Chap. 2 the theoretical insights of Roland Barthes were used to make the case for paradox as a warrior topos. This function was proffered as bringing a particular language to the analysis of political discourse and the establishment of a practical, oppositional politics. In my empirical work which follows, Foucault's work on power and resistance contributes to and fills out this warrior topos function of paradox in three significant ways:

(i) *Admitting Contingency.* Interpreting Foucault's notion of governmentality as widening the domain of power and its dissemination (see Leask, 2012) allows in 'different styles of thought' and new 'contestations and alliances' (Rose et al., 2006, p. 84) that contribute to variations in practice and in available subjectivities. This bringing of an element of contingency to obedient and oppressive readings of the neoliberal subject, I contend, allows particular possibilities for paradox as warrior topos to emerge. These possibilities reside in the interpretation of Foucault's (1987) 'care of the self' as shaping an ethics that extends beyond the safety of self-constituting practices to directing the freedom of the subject to acts of risk and refusal and to what Pignatelli (2002) describes as 'a relentless exposure to the perils of self-examination' (p. 169). In taking the self as 'the permanent heartland of subjectivity' (Hacking, 1986, p. 236), it is an ethics that opens principals to the inherent vulnerability of renouncing the established self and of deeply questioning 'the sovereignty of an authenticating or originating discourse' (Pignatelli, 2002, pp. 170–171).

In pursuing this version of Foucauldian ethics, I advance a language of paradox as usefully deployed at and beyond the limits of authorised efforts at self-government. This language provides a resource for 'accomplished' resistance through the affirmation of ethical work on the self (see Bardon & Josserand, 2011) as well as for agential possibilities in formulating practical oppositions to outside forces. I claim a warrior topos function in the potential of a paradox

language to ease the vulnerability of the questioning principal and to 'create critical purchase for *problematizing* and truth-saying' (Stickney, 2012, p. 657, italics in original) in order to open spaces of freedom – spaces in which principals can step back so that they can think and talk about the real possibilities for struggling against, and resisting, dominant constitutive influences.

(ii) *Rejecting Simplified Dialectics*. Foucault's (1987) understanding of power and resistance introduces new layers of complexity in the linking of paradox to political opposition by rejecting a simplistic power/resistance dialectic. He claims:

> in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance – of violent resistance, of escape, of ruse, of strategies that reverse the situation – there would be no relations of power. (p. 123)

Foucault's preference for joining, rather than separating, power and resistance also warns against my deployment of paradox to dichotomous readings of other dualisms such as centralised domination/individual autonomy, conformity/nonconformity and coercion/freedom. As McNay (2009) notes, political opposition 'must be thought outside these pervasive dualisms' (p. 74). These insights work to moderate and complicate any tendency, in my depiction of paradox, towards simplified representations of two-sided struggles between power and resistance. By extension they advise that I direct the warrior topos language of paradox to a coherent rendering of resistance within relations of power, while looking to depict plural possibilities in what Clarke et al. (2015) call 'repertoires of refusal, resistance and recalcitrance' (p. 26).

(iii) *Framing Resistance and Struggle.* In deploying paradox, I do not resile from conflict but rather treat it as reasonable (and necessary) in 'playing a certain game of truth' that speaks back to power (Foucault, 1987, p. 126). Even as the grandiose and homiletic storying of neoliberal discourses creates seemingly unalterable power relations, I subscribe to Foucault's (1977a) oft-quoted observation that 'we must hear the distant roar of battle' (p. 308). However, I distance the warrior topos function of paradox from connotations of militant confrontation in political resistance or 'a utopian reading of transgression' (Pickett, 1996, p. 448). Rather, I take the language of interdependency and simultaneity, which comes with paradox, as conjoined to more subtle versions that are enmeshed in relations of power and which take account of a multiplicity of positions and tensions – versions of resistance that most likely form in persistent and ongoing struggle rather than as decisive combat. Foucault (1978) provides support for this type of positioning when he says:

> there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. (pp. 95–96)

An axiomatic extension of my reluctance to use paradox language to mobilise grand narratives of resistance is my preference for a more contingent freedom than that associated with an essentialised agency or complete emancipation. I take principals as discourse users and, therefore, able to access certain individualised responses and independent actions from within a given discursive field. Drawing from the interpretive work of Bardon and Jossarand (2011) on 'the Foucauldian project' of freedom, the understanding of freedom I am trying to convey is usefully described as assessing 'how we can practice our liberty and become active agents of the power/knowledge matrix' (p. 506).

Not only do the insights in this account reject a 'doom and gloom' reading of Foucault's work (see Butin, 2001, p. 158) and the critics' metaphor of 'an iron cage with no escape possible' (Biesta, 2008, p. 173); they also provide paradox with a useful antidote to allegations that it is benign, non-committal and politically impotent in its depictions of reality (e.g. in Stevens, 1996). Instead, bringing Foucault's work to my deployment of a paradox lens bolsters its possibilities for supporting principals in practices of critique and counter-conduct that speak back to pervasive truth regimes. Furthermore, it connects them to a broader ethico-political project founded in an ethics of practices of the self, a seeing of the strategic possibilities in governmentality for different forms of self-governing and a realisation of the political potential of the principal position through practiced oppositions that insist on the intransigence of freedom inside complex relations of power.

Conclusion

To conclude, I take the political, social, ethical and philosophical endeavours of my project, after Foucault (2000b), as realised in practice through a type of curiosity about the reigning constitutive influences on principals and the empirical work of surfacing new and different possibilities. I give Foucault (2000b) the last word on this curiosity, but note, with some added confidence, its resonance with the work which follows:

> [Curiosity] evokes 'care'; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is disappearing; a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental. (p. 325)

My selective raid into Foucault's 'toolbox' continues in Chap. 4 where I (i) draw on his genealogical accounts of the emergence of liberal forms of government as a backdrop to my discussion of the constitutive influences of modern-day neoliberal policy on principals and (ii) deploy his tools of problematisation and critique in my analysis of a number of neoliberal policy discourses.

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Chapter 4
In Neoliberal Times

The 'meteoric' expansion of academic inquiry into neoliberalism (Springer, 2012, p.135) over the last two decades has undone scholarly consensus about its meanings and effects. Disagreements have emerged over the way the 'academic growth concept' (Flew, 2012, p. 44) of neoliberalism should be apprehended and about its power and pervasiveness across social fields such as education. To commence this chapter, I flag an a priori concern about neoliberalism's burgeoning literature catalogue and the enormous breadth and depth of its contexts and applications and the contemporaneous disappearance of unifying structure or coherent meaning.

To bring a more coherent foundation to my analysis of the policy discourses of neoliberalism later in this chapter, I will look to clarify my positioning within these ambiguous contests while holding to my central interest in discerning the constitutive influence of neoliberalism on the subjectivities and work of principals. Towards addressing this concern for clarity, I will use, as a starting point, Foucault's (2008) genealogical accounts of liberalism and the prescient understanding of neoliberalism they yield. Foucault's work supports the comprehension of neoliberalism as a unique form of governmentality and usefully forecasts both the discourses through which it circulates and its processual qualities of variegation and contingency.

Comprehending Neoliberalism Using Foucault

In *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), Foucault provides a course of 12 lectures that build from his earlier work on a historical shift in governance from the disciplinary micro-control of individuals to that centred on the problem of population or bio-power (e.g. Foucault, 1978, 1991). He develops three separate genealogical accounts: (1) the eighteenth-century emergence of *liberalism* as an 'art of government'; (2) German liberalism in the period 1948–1962, with a focus on the *Ordoliberalism* of the socially oriented Freiburg School; and (3) the *American neoliberalism* of the Chicago school's political economists in the middle period of the

twentieth century. Taken together, these genealogies, rather than being directly concerned with the emergence of biopolitics as a governmental apparatus (see Flew, 2012; Oksala, 2013), are occupied with connecting the art of government expressed in eighteenth-century liberalism with 'currents of thought' in more contemporary (neo)liberalisms that present 'radical challenges to the system of the welfare state' (Gordon, 1991, p. 41). While not claiming to be an exhaustive coverage, the following three categories of understanding are summarily discerned and shaped from Foucault's genealogical insights and subsequently used to identify several of the policy discourses of neoliberalism in my analysis.[1]

The Market as a 'Site of Truth'

In outlining the novelty of liberalism in the eighteenth century, Foucault (2008) observes that liberal government is conducted to procure the prosperity of the population, and governmental actions are devised, not in terms of juridical considerations of right or wrong but in light of their possible effects – whether they will succeed or fail in the context of the market. Foucault (2008) contends that the market thus emerges in the eighteenth century as the 'site of truth' (p. 30) of liberal government. This respect for the logics of the market continues into his more contemporary accounts of German and American neoliberalism, albeit with a significant change in emphasis, as the 'truth' of the market becomes more enmeshed with interventions of the state and with the exercise of political power. In configuring the market as a form of truth, Foucault (2008) flags its pre-eminence as a mechanism of contemporary neoliberalism. He also opens to critique a market-driven approach to economic and social policy by posing questions – and addressing them through his German and American examples – about the capacity of a market economy to 'serve as the principle, form, and model for a state' and about 'knowing how far the market economy's powers of political and social information extend' (Foucault, 2008, pp. 117–118).

In homing in on the new thinking of the ordoliberals of Germany's Freiburg School, Foucault (2008) describes how their analysis of Nazism and its origins enabled rejection of the non-interventionist (or laissez-faire) principles of classical liberalism in favour of a fully functioning market based on principles of competition and regulation. He says that the ordoliberals propose 'that we should completely turn the formula around and adopt the free market as an organizing and regulating principle of the state' (p. 116). However, in this shift to economic rationalities, Foucault (2008) also notes that the ordoliberals judge competition as structurally rigorous but historically fragile and 'not a given of nature' (p. 120). Consequently, they make their case for state intervention and control of the conditions of

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[1] For a more comprehensive coverage of Foucault's treatment and framing of neoliberalism, see Brown (2015), Chaps. 2 and 3.

possibility of economic processes. Foucault (2008) treats this meshing of the market with a 'rules of the game' (p. 173) state function as a crucial neoliberal insight provided by the ordoliberals.

The second of Foucault's contemporary studies shifts focus to the American neoliberalism of the Chicago School. Described in his 1979 lecture as a 'pet theme' in France, Foucault (2008) claims that the liberalism the school's economists favoured is positioned against the interventionist state to formulate a version of liberalism, 'not as a technical alternative for government' but as 'a whole way of being and thinking' – 'a general style of thought, analysis, and imagination' (pp. 218–219). Referencing the libertarian work of Austrian economists Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, the Chicago School seeks utopian possibilities in a model of enterprise that appears as a natural process and 'comes to encompass the whole sphere of subjectivity, affectivity, and intimacy' (Wallenstein, 2013, p. 27).

A distinguishing feature of this 'global claim' (Foucault, 2008, p. 218) of American liberalism is the entry of entrepreneurial relations into the self, via the idea of 'human capital' (Wallenstein, 2013, p. 27). This 'breakdown of labour into capital and income' (Foucault, 2008, p. 224) takes 'the body as genetic capital' (Wallenstein, 2013, p. 27) and positions the worker as making choices between competing ends about how they develop their 'human capital', for example, by treating education as investment in order to maximise their wages. In this interpretation, Foucault (2008) notes that capital becomes 'inseparable from the person who possesses it' and, more particularly, in a 'conception of capital-ability', the individual is drawn to increasing their personal productivity by investing in themselves (pp. 224–225). In the context of contemporary studies of (neo)liberalism, and of making the individual a target of deliberate investment, Foucault's (2008) revival of the notion of *homo œconomicus* (p. 225) becomes particularly pertinent.

Homo Œconomicus in the Enterprise Society

Having established that neoliberalism does not mark a return to the laissez-faire principles of classical liberalism, Foucault (2008) is concerned to describe a 'style' of government, a 'way of doing' (p. 133) government that adopts the principles of the market through its policy interventions. One manifestation of this new figuration of power is the resurrection of *homo œconomicus* or 'economic man', albeit somewhat transformed from the classic liberal conception of a partner of exchange left alone to fulfil her/his own needs. *Homo œconomicus*, emerging in an idealised form from the enterprising of social relations, now becomes an 'eminently governable' subject of interest (Foucault, 2008, p. 270) – a productive and agile individual, who is entrepreneur of her/himself and who is amenable to contributing to the power of governmental reason (or *raison d'Etat*) shaped according to the market and competition.

According to Foucault (2008), *homo œconomicus*, under conditions of neoliberal governmentality, is someone who accepts reality by the systematic pursuit of

'rational conduct', which he describes as 'any conduct which is sensitive to modifications in the variables of the environment and which responds to this in a non-random way' (p. 269). Thus, the subjectivity of *homo œconomicus* is pegged to the enterprise form. Individuation ensures the conditions of control over conduct, and the rationality of the market creates a willing acceptance of 'the obligation to maximise one's life as a kind of enterprise' (Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006, p. 91). In this way, *homo œconomicus* becomes a depoliticised subject, imbued with her/his own desires and prone to egoistic choices – shaped to meet market demands but infinitely flexible in adjusting to inevitable shifts in the arts of neoliberal government.

An Interplay of Freedom and Security

Foucault (2008) claims that the enshrinement of freedom in liberal government in the eighteenth century was not based on a juridical framework that respected and defended the rights of the individuals but occurred 'simply by the evidence of economic analysis which it knows has to be respected' (p. 62). He interprets the production of freedom – for example, freedom of the market, freedom to buy and sell and freedom of property rights – as underpinning the rationality and calculation of liberal government, with the corollary to arousing and producing freedom being seen in the emergence and proliferation of security mechanisms that seek to limit its risks. Thus, the interplay of freedom and security also 'entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats, etcetera' (p. 64).

Foucault (2008) addresses the issue of freedom in a different tenor in his charting of the rise to prominence of neoliberalism in post-World War II Germany. He contends that the adherence of individuals to promises of economic freedom implies consent to those governmental decisions taken to guarantee the same freedom. In this way, he claims, economic freedom 'is able to function as a siphon … as a point of attraction for the formation of a political sovereignty' (p. 83). Foucault's analysis of this 'economic game of freedom' (p. 84) reveals the consolidation of a permanent political consensus about power and freedom, founded on a circuitry 'going from the economic institution to the population's overall adherence to its regime and system' (p. 85).

These insights into freedom are prescient in the way they translate usefully into contemporary neoliberal settings, such as schools. For example, the corollary that freedom forms with control is revealed in the way the limited freedoms that are championed and bestowed by government are offset by various disciplinary technologies that maintain tight governmental control. The agreement over power and freedom that Foucault discerns in the circuitry between institution and population in post-World War II Germany provides a rationale, in present-day politics, for the various levels of compliance, comfort and seduction that are induced by a consensus between government and the governed. In schools this can be observed, for example, in the ready acceptance of conditional versions of self-government and

principal autonomy and in the general absence of less constrained acts of freedom, such as opposition, refusal and resistance.

Like his earlier writings about madness, disease, delinquency and sexuality, Foucault's (2008) genealogies of liberalism and neoliberalism – including his insights into the market, freedom, *homo œconomicus* and enterprise society – are premised on the non-existence of universals, so that they are, instead, concerned with 'how the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus (or dispositif) of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false' (p. 19).

The dispositif, while 'resolutely heterogeneous' in its componentry (Foucault, 1994, p. 299), can also be understood as working towards an 'exhaustive ordering of the world' (Foucault, 1970, p. 74) and, in neoliberal times, enacting a particular rationality. What might be termed the 'policy dispositif' of neoliberalism (e.g. in Bailey, 2013) is particularly pertinent to my focus on principal subjectivity in the analysis of policy discourses which follows. This dispositif is interpreted by Rose et al. (2006) as shaping 'a novel periodization of governmentalities' (p. 91) that, in turn, brings the calculative management of principal conduct 'to the space of bodies, lives, selves and persons' (Dean, 2010, p. 12).

Neoliberal Policy Discourses

The Analytic Terrain

In the discourse analysis which follows, neoliberalism is conceptualised as a form of governmentality, drawing it close to what Giroux (2008) calls 'a political project of governing and persuasion' (p. 1). Accordingly, it is not taken as producing specific outcomes in principal subjects but, rather, following Walkerdine and Bansel (2010), as providing 'the terrain through which the changes around the organisation of work and self are governed' (pp. 505–506). In this reading, neoliberalism is a discursively constituted mentality of government made operational by the 'mutable, inconsistent, and variegated process that circulates through the discourses it constructs, justifies, and defends' (Springer, 2012, p. 135). More forensically, neoliberalism is understood to validate the various statements that confer an appearance of truth on certain discourses (and undermine and disqualify the truth claims of others). These regimes of truth are here configured as the policy discourses of choice, excellence, entrepreneurship and managerialism. Before bringing these discourses into sharper focus, I will first clarify some of my category and nomenclature choices and outline the process of discourse analysis used.

The choice of *policy discourses* as the object and unit of analysis is, initially, to capture a broad definition of policy that includes the centrally developed documents, directives and codified instructions that flow into schools (and the problems

to which they respond) as well as the complex processes that shape the school-based settlement, translation and enactment of policy. Subsequently, working at the level of policy discourses admits analysis of both the constraints and demands placed on principals by policy texts. For example, it accommodates an interest in the interpretive responses of principals to questions of meaning and local relevance and attends to school-based practices that principals undertake as receivers and advocates of policy and as agents in its implementation.

The grammar of *policy subjects* and *policy actors* is applied to particular subject/actor positions formed when principals become the object of political and governmental activity because, as Gobby (2017) notes, 'the position they hold in schools makes them mediators and translators of government policy' (p. 86). The key term *policy subjects* is used to evoke the work of principal subjectivation – especially as it is imposed inside the symbolic order of neoliberal policy discourses by the 'taken-for-granted and implicit knowledges and assumptions' (Bailey, 2013, p. 814) and the 'network of social practices … infused with power relations' (Ball, Maguire, Braun, & Hoskins, 2011b, p. 611). *Policy subjects* is also used to suggest that new subject positions might emerge when principals locate themselves in 'outside' fields and think differently about how policy discourses shape them.

Continuing to draw from the work of Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins (2011a), the designation of *policy actors* shifts attention from discourse to practice by paying regard to the 'complex and differentiated activity' of principals in shaping 'the "responses" of schools *to* and their work *with* policy' (p. 625, italics in original). In relation to outside pressures to audit, appraise and adjudge these responses, it includes the work of principals in communicating the best possible performance of themselves and their school as a measure of productivity, authority and worth. The term *policy actor* also invokes the 'complex conditions of possibility' (Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010, p. 506) in principal performance when extra-local and local variations create differently mediated contests over policy.

I do use not use the terms *policy subject* and *policy actor* pejoratively or to imply that principals are policy dupes working at the behest of central bosses. Rather, I seek in their analytical possibilities ways of revealing a more productive understanding of principal subjectivity – one that takes account of the complex relationship that Bernstein (1996) describes between the 'official' field 'created and dominated by the state' and the 'pedagogic field' occupied by 'pedagogues in schools' (p. 48) and which understands principal subjectivity as an uneven *process* of 'neoliberalisation'[2] rather than as a complete subjugation to irresistible forces of domination.

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[2] The process of 'neoliberalisation' as it might be applied to principal subjectivity is given more detailed treatment at the beginning of Chap. 5.

A Grid of Analysis

My analysis of the discourses of choice, excellence, entrepreneurship and manage-rialism – what I term *the policy discourses of neoliberalism* – brings Foucault's (2008) understanding of the liberal arts of government and, in particular, his account of neoliberal governmentality, to an archive which includes broad themes distilled from data collected in the field as well as a significant body of extant literature and policy texts. I seek answers to 'why?' and 'how come?' questions about the power of policy discourses as they circulate through principals within different networks of relations and the subjectifying and constitutive influences they exert on their ways of being and working. In accordance with Tamboukou's (2003) assertion that the point of analysis of discourse is to focus attention on particular 'regimes of truth' that 'may elude the knowledge terrain of the ethnographer' (p. 211), I also seek to emphasise macro-level influences, often beyond and outside of local per-spectives collected in the field.

In conducting this analysis, I reaffirm and consolidate my commitment to draw-ing from Foucault's theoretical and conceptual catalogue. While Foucault provides extensive and valuable insights into discourse formation and effects, he is, over his entire oeuvre, somewhat arcane about the actual method for doing discourse research (see Graham, 2011; Jackson & Mazzei, 2011; Keller, 2005). Therefore, in analysing the policy discourses of neoliberalism, I do not follow the distinct charac-teristics and patterns of Foucault's archaeologies or genealogies. Rather, I take his offer to extract 'tools' and 'gadgets' from his books and from the methods he used (e.g. in Foucault, 1980b, p. 65), as allowing in my own 'categories' of analysis.

Based on Foucault's (1972) assertion that discourses are 'practices that system-atically form the objects of which they speak' (p. 54), I focus my analysis on the power relations that find their 'epistemic context' (Rouse, 2006, p. 96) as they are imbricated with the specific knowledges (i.e. 'discourses') of neoliberal policy. From this theoretical backdrop, I follow Foucault's (1980a) instruction that the researcher needs 'a grid of analysis which makes possible an analytic of relations of power' (p. 199). My own grid draws on a number of sources, most significantly the components of a method outlined by Howarth (2010) as well as methodological insights from the work of Keller (2005, 2011), Bacchi (2009) and Webb (2014). Schematically, my 'grid' can be distilled into four categories:

(i) *Problematising policy discourses: turning a given into a question.* To animate the gap between the macro interests of policy-making and the micro concerns of local school principals, I consider the problem-making work of the policy dis-courses. Foucault's distinct genealogical concept of 'problematization' is used to seek, 'on the very surface of discourse' (Foucault, 1996, p. 58), the formula-tion of a problem to which policy offers a particular and favoured solution. This 'development of a given into a question' (Foucault, 2002, p. 118) supports me to look away from 'the pervasive logic that maintains educational *problems* can be *solved* in, with, or through policy' (Webb, 2014, p. 364, italics in original) to instead think about the representation of 'problems' within each discourse and

how and why these representations have come about. I also look to join the
hegemonic tendencies of neoliberal policy discourses with the naturalisation of
their problem-solving possibilities and the concealment of their political power.

In applying this form of questioning directly to my research question, my inter-
ests follow those of Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, and Lee (2014) in finding out
'how nebulous concepts become reality' and 'how ideas become normalized'
(p. 1076). I focus on how problematisations create conditions of intelligibility
within which 'already known' (Foucault, 1978, p. 9) versions of principals and their
policy work emerge. I work with qualitative insights gathered in the field to show
how principals are cast as a specific category of policy actor, assumed to understand
the purposes and intent of policy and charged with transmission of its meaning into
schools. I also note the ways in which principals, within this intelligible space, are
taken to be ambivalent about the political conditions of policy formation and uncon-
cerned about its 'rational posturings' (Webb, 2014, p. 366). My grid of analysis,
thus, widens to include the application of what Flynn (2006) calls the 'socially
sanctioned body of rules' (p. 31) to the way spaces for principals' thoughts, judge-
ments and actions are specified and confined.

(ii) *Uncovering logics: governing of discursive frontiers and boundaries.* In policy
analysis, Ball (2006) claims that we must be concerned not only with what
'those who inhabit policy think about' but also to attend to what actors do not
think about (p. 48). I use Ball's observation to affect a shift in my analysis away
from reliance on data derived from self-interpretation of principals and their
colleagues and towards uncovering the social, institutional and political 'logics'
(Howarth, 2010, p. 325) of discourses. This second category of analysis is
directed to identifying the logics – the rules and conditions of possibility – that
enable discourses to govern meaningful practice through the production of par-
ticular and intelligible truths. While more partial and speculative than other
categories, this shift helps me determine the limits placed on what principals
think and do and, by extension, what is left unthought and undone. Further,
using Howarth (2010), it asks how power elaborates 'political frontiers' and
draws 'lines of exclusion and inclusion' through logics of hidden contingency
and naturalised domination and the extent to which such logics work to create
principal subjects who 'are gripped by discourses' (p. 326).

In this category, I use a governmentality perspective to reveal the logics that
underpin a reconfigured relationship between the governing and the governed in
neoliberal times. I conceptualise the principal subject as vulnerable to the technolo-
gies of government that operate through both formal and everyday channels and are
constituted, influenced and directed by a heterogeneous assemblage (or *dispositif*)
of discursive and non-discursive forces. Under conditions of neoliberal governmen-
tality, these arrangements are interpreted as both disciplining the principal through
institutionally sanctioned rationalities and technologies and inducing levels of self-
government and volunteered 'enjoyment' procured by principals 'in identifying
with discourses and believing things they do' (Howarth, 2010, p. 326).

(iii) *Providing critical explanation: thinking with power/knowledge.* This third category of analysis involves a shift to a critique of the intelligible background against which principals and their work are constituted. I apply Howarth's (2010) process of 'critical explanation' to work back and forth between a central proposition about the constitutive work of policy discourses of neoliberalism and my empirical data. In keeping with Foucault's (1997) claim that critique should start by identifying 'connections between mechanisms of coercion and contents of knowledge' (p. 59), I propose that the specific knowledges contained in the operations of discourses of neoliberal policy are inextricably linked with particular relations of power. I contend that discourse gives this power its epistemic context while simultaneously depending on this power for its production and standing.

This proposition, as a contextual reworking of what Foucault (1977) describes as 'power-knowledge relations' (discussed in detail in Chap. 3), allows me to connect my empirical data to thinking about how power routinely draws upon and mobilises particular notions of the principal that are housed in the knowledge generated in discourses and their practices. Critical explanation, therefore, takes account of both the outside constitution of principal subjects in the image of dominant discourses and the discursive conditions within which principals secure their authority and identity. I consider how the attachment of dominant discourses to power, derived from the truth claims they make, creates pressures and desires amongst principals to speak 'inside' these discourses. Against this interpretation, I also begin to contemplate possibilities for refusal, contestation and resistance held in the multiple claims on the truth made by different discourses.

(iv) *Critique at the limits of discourse: asking questions of truth and power.* In this fourth category of analysis, critique shifts from 'an outward directed narrative' explaining the potent claims to truth in power/knowledge pairings to inside questions about the discursive limits of power and truth and deliberations on what Foucault (1997) describes as 'the art of not being governed like that and at that cost' (p. 45). Discursive practices, previously taken as shrewd, shrouded and seductive in holding principals firmly in their grip, are here critiqued at their limits in order to not only reveal their inadequacies and fragilities but also to render as visible and speakable a range of other discourses and their practices.

In expediting this critique at the limits of discourse, I extend the conceptual reach of problematisation to thinking about neoliberal policy discourses as transitory and contingent and, following Bacchi (2009), ask how they could be 'questioned, disrupted and replaced' (p. 19). This means taking account of Foucault's (2000) conception of problematisation as a 'movement of critical analysis' that includes 'any new solution which might be added to others' (pp. 118–119). More tangible targets for this work of disruption, fragmentation and discontinuity are also sought in Foucault's (1997) reference to 'governmentalization' as the 'movement through

which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth' (p. 47).

To further this critical ambition and reveal spaces of 'multiple dissensions' (Foucault, 1972, p. 155), the concept of governmentality is applied to references in my data to governmental shaping of principal subjectivity that could be construed as interruptive or unorthodox – that appear to speak back to power. My analytical work shifts to the thoughts that exist 'both beyond and before systems and edifices of discourse' (Foucault, 2002, p. 456) and which are given expression in the nuance and complexity of principal responses to the way they are governed and the way they govern themselves and others.

In rounding off this summary of my grid for analysing policy discourses of neoliberalism, it is worth noting how it fits inside this book's paradox frame. While paradox may appear something of an interloper into Foucault's vast and theoretically rich oeuvre, I claim a certain complementarity in the relationship. The positive settlement of my calculations of the methodological salience of Foucault's theoretical work is significantly aided by linking of Foucault's consistent interest in the conflicts, provocations and contests that characterise the operations of discourse, with the possibility that a paradox lens may shed further light on these discursive struggles. Beyond simple representation of complexity, conflict and ambiguity, I reason that a paradox lens can complement Foucault's theoretical interpretations of struggle within and against policy discourses by opening different ways of thinking, talking and understanding. The enhanced possibilities for interpretation created by 'looking' through a paradox lens are discussed in the conclusion to the next chapter and, subsequently, realised in the chapters that follow (i.e. Chaps. 6, 7 and 8).

The Choice Discourse

As a discourse of neoliberal policy, choice draws upon and intensifies the established logic that parents and students, as consumers of schooling, should be free to choose the school they think is best for them. Buras and Apple (2005) add a corollary to this logic founded on the assumption that schools work better when they 'are motivated and disciplined by market forces' (p. 551). The discourse of choice presupposes a standardised and apolitical field of judgement that all consumers are equally free to access. Regularity of this field is assured by the production of a competitive environment in which all schools must develop and continuously improve their educational 'product' in ways that attract the best possible share of parents and students. As Dardot and Laval (2014) note, of 'the operations of competition' under neoliberal conditions, '(i)t is no longer a question of postulating a spontaneous agreement between individual interests, but of creating the optimal conditions for the interplay of their rivalry' (p. 47).

Implicit in these opening comments is a governmental preference for choice that rests on a particular construction of the schooling 'problem'. This problematisation posits choice as a solution to perceived underachievement, lack of initiative,

complacency and ambivalence in many schools. Drawing from a range of critically oriented texts, the answers to these problems are considered to reside in the ways choice, marketisation and competition purportedly engender greater efficiency (Springer, 2012, p. 136), compel schools to be more responsive to the community (Buras & Apple, 2005, p. 556), raise standards and strengthen accountabilities (Lingard, 2010, p. 132) and promote an enterprising approach by anticipating and satisfying the expectations of education consumers (Angus, 2015, p. 396).

Neoliberal values of deregulation, consumer primacy and competition contribute to making choice into a unified discursive formation. These values create the important precept that there is nothing political about school choosing. As Angus (2015) notes, school choice is constructed as:

> just atomized, self-interested, rational choosers dispassionately acting to maximize their individual advantage in ways that are ostensibly equally open to all right-thinking and conscientious people. (p. 404)

However, the full enunciation of the policy discourse of choice is not left only to the rationality of the market. It also includes the simultaneous presence of a dispositif of texts, institutions and regulations that both legitimate freedom of choice as a priority of government and activate a range of technologies that police its discursive boundaries and quell its contradictions. This mix of the discursive and non-discursive provides the key to understanding the constitutive influence of the choice discourse on principals.

The choice discourse not only assures parent and student participation in the school marketplace but also describes, for principals, a particular form of self-government based on their ability to transform market potential to actual competitive performance. To this end, the choice discourse casts principals as autonomous agents, free to develop and improve their competitive selves and to get the best out of others and their school. The themes of development, improvement and 'competing to be chosen' (Angus, 2015, p. 396) are evident in the description Imogen, the principal of McCullough School, provides:

> *When I came to the school, I was informed of what the projected numbers would be. We're above that … we're maintaining. That's encouraging. My boss has informed me many times that he hears within the community that our school is the desirable school of choice. I'm hearing that from the principals in my local partnership as well that the image of the school is changing, but we still have a long way to go.*

While imploring others to contribute, principals must also accept as fundamental tenets of neoliberal governmentality their individualisation as designated leaders and as self-governing agents of policy and, drawing on Savage (2013), their responsibilisation as '*active producers* of their own market identities and practices' (p. 85, italics in original). Their participation involves greater personal risk and accountability as a centralised policy of choice is devolved to their empowered and self-disciplined selves. However, this is not to suggest that principals are unwilling to embrace competition or reluctant to occupy a subjectivity founded, at least in part, on successful participation in the school marketplace. The following exchange

reveals Imogen's enthusiasm for working on a marketing plan at her school inside the policy discourse of choice:

Imogen: We haven't actively gone out and promoted ourselves as well as we could, but next year there is a very different plan on how we can do that.

Chris: Is this a marketing plan?

Imogen: Oh, definitely …We've already started it. I have a publicity person. We put out a part-time position for a promotions person. He is now working with a website company to rebuild our website. We've rebadged ourselves in the last three years, so new logo and a whole lot of material as well. He's now aligning all of that material together. He's also an amazing photographer, so there's going to be a photo-shoot. If you walk around the school, there are photos everywhere.

To account for the hold of the choice discourse on the principal subject requires further analysis of the logics – the rules and conditions of possibility – that enable the discourse to govern meaningful practice. The interpretation that schooling exists in a 'quasi-market' refers to the requirement that the school marketplace needs to be constructed by government in order to operate effectively (Webb, Gulson, & Pitton, 2014, p. 33). Accordingly, one of the important logics of the choice discourse is that schools – and principals – do not deal in a free-market environment but, rather, are expected to willingly submit to various inducements, conditions and accountabilities, imposed by the state through its legislation, policy and funding arrangements. Here, an understanding of the school market as mediated, controlled and manipulated by government connects to various technologies that impose obvious and necessary qualities on the choice discourse. At the nexus of the specific knowledges the discourse produces, and the particular relations of power in which it is enmeshed, I locate two technologies evident in my field data – competition and impression management.

Competition is central to the mercantile policy interests of contemporary government. For the schools in my study, it appeared to operate on the discursive practices that seek to naturalise and embed competition between schools, as well as providing a rationale for the broader dispositif of policies, techniques and instructions that promote and sustain it. In my ethnographic fieldwork, the most obvious indicator of the operations of competition in schools was a widespread concern, expressed in interviews with principals and others, about maintaining and increasing their school's enrolment share. For example:

So with the governing council in the last few years, there's been a big focus on the image of the school, and we want to attract – we as in the governing council and the principal – we want to attract more enrolments. We want to keep the school chugging along, growing … That means then that the principal, the school community, everyone has the responsibility to show what a good school it is and why people would want to come here. (Leah, Governing Council member, McCullough School)

Other comments make clear the local objectives of competition between schools for student enrolments:

We're still a business in terms of if we don't get students because of poor performance, then staff numbers decrease, which could lead to the eventual closing of the school. It's happened with other schools. (John, McCullough School)

The reality is if you don't get the numbers, you don't stay open. I've been in a school where the bottom line was that the school's results there were not good enough and the staff was reduced by 17, I mean 17 displacements in a single year. (Oman, McCullough School)

Interpreting successful competition for enrolments as important to the survival and viability of the school positions the principal as a key influence. This is evident in the following interview exchange at Caldicott School:

Chris: What are some other measures that we might use for principal effectiveness?

Jay: Enrolment data. I know that over the years, particularly here, to start with our numbers were lower. Now we're at a point where we virtually only take students that are in zone because we can't fit them.

Calvin: We have a massive waiting list for those out of zone.

Jay: We used to have five classes at year eight, then it went to six, this year it's gone to seven. There are people coming in, and feedback from parents, and that is the word is out that this is a good place to be. That is a really positive and good example, I think, that the school is being led in a good direction.

Taken collectively, these local observations of competition made operational in schools through the quest for enrolments point to a more-or-less unproblematic embrace of the choice discourse and to perceptions of a marketised school environment as positive, natural and inevitable. They also suggest that the principal is conferred some rights by the discourse and draws some authority from speaking within it. While the tenor of these observations is distinctly local, locating the technology of competition in a broader dispositif of governmental strategies, tactics and disciplinary measures speaks more directly of the macro-level practices and their power effects on principals and schools. These practices typically construe choice as an educational investment (see Webb et al., 2014) with competition mediated through student achievement and other data sets in order to better inform the economic decision-making of parents. Under the guise of more open and transparent competition, this data is transformed into metrics via systems of classification, comparison and ranking, most notably, in the Australian context, through the national implementation of the *MySchool* website (2013) run by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

The homepage of *MySchool* locates the website squarely within the neoliberal policy discourse of choice. It describes a resource for parents, educators and the community that 'enables fair comparisons' between schools and that helps parents 'make informed decisions about their child's education' while aiming to support and drive improvement across the nation. In producing and disseminating knowledge about schools, especially about levels of student achievement in high-stakes NAPLAN testing and comparisons of individual school performance in these tests

against 60 statistically similar schools, *MySchool* confers power and legitimacy on the choice discourse. At the same time, it is the power of this discourse that legitimises this form of 'technical infrastructure' (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p. 637) as a productive tool of competition and comparison. This regime of power/knowledge works to fix and institutionalise the choice discourse and, within it, the subject positions available to principals. The effect on principals is evident in the following exchange in an interview at Heatherbank School:

> **Chris:** *Are they [principals] bound to show that in relation to the school down the road, they're doing a better job?*
>
> **Angela:** *It's a bit of a competition, isn't it?*
>
> **Chris:** *Is it?*
>
> **Angela:** *Well it seems to me it is. They now have a website where they put information about schools, one against the other. I suppose principals must feel pressure that my school needs to perform or we're going to look bad against other people.*

MySchool, along with comparisons made available through the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA), serves as an example of using reductionist measures of school and system performance to foster competition and make comparisons. The powerful disciplinary influence of such measures and the persistence of their efforts to fix schools in a success/failure binary and to commodify educational practice are likely obscured from principals (and teachers) by a blind faith in the logics of the market and a determination to eschew 'any sense of being ordinary' (Maguire, Perryman, Ball, & Braun, 2011, p. 2). The effect of this individuating and commodifying work of competition is to have responsibility for student performance sheeted home to individual schools (and their teachers and principals), further accentuating differences between rich and poor schools while obscuring the socio-economic disparity at the heart of those differences.

In what Maguire, Perryman, et al. (2011) call the 'manoeuvre against being regarded as ordinary' (p. 5), schools are bound to create representations of themselves that show them in the best light and which distinguish them as a school of choice in the local (and often extended) marketplace. This results in the technology of impression management being deployed in competitive schools, and by enterprising principals, to conjure unique qualities and create favourable comparisons. Oman, from McCullough School, captures part of this work of impression management:

> We have an image consultant at the moment. That's symptomatic of the fact that schools have to function as businesses. To that end we've been running business management courses where we've been talking about the way we dress, the way we approach people, how we answer emails, all that sort of stuff.

Rob, principal at Heatherbank School, provides an insight into the taken-for-granted involvement of principals in impression management:

I'm sure all of us would say, 'Hey, we're all about promoting our school and the image of our school and we're all about keeping our school afloat'. So, we're all about our enrolments, and when you are talking about enrolments, it does come back to how you present the school and its image and its values and all of that stuff. That is part and parcel of our job.

In my research, the work of principals in managing the impression their school creates was observed in an array of overt and more subtle forms. One obvious example, variously expressed in each of the schools, was the linking of school uniform to community perceptions of the quality of the school and its student. Observations of uniformed mannequins in the front office, school newsletter directives about appropriate uniform and lengthy staff and governing council meeting discussions about the minutiae of uniform management, all underscored the importance attached to impressionable ways of presenting students positively in the community. In a strategy closer to what Foucault (1977) describes as 'dressage',[3] Imogen described how her efforts to improve the standard of dress at McCullough School extended to the dress code of staff:

I made a statement at the beginning of the year that I wanted staff to actually change their dress, their attire and I didn't want staff to wear jeans. I said I felt that it was really important for staff to dress appropriately and that we needed to model behaviour and expectations with students. The change was immediate. I couldn't believe it. It's the power of just the principal saying something.

From recorded observations in my ethnography, impression management strategies also extended to sophisticated advertising campaigns, new road-facing signage, displays of various awards and trophies, design-rich websites and print publications and large format photographic displays. Several principals acknowledged the increased time and importance now attached to their impression management work and to accessing new expertise and resources from beyond the school. While these observations may add the metaphor of 'marketing manager' to a popular 'jack-of-all-trades' depiction of principal's work, they do not fully account for the transformative impact of this technology on principals.

Imogen provides another example of her impression management work at McCullough School:

I cannot get over the difference that just doing the front office has made and the front of the school, even in the data from our parent community. They now consider that we are a very attractive school and we have amazing facilities. Of course, we don't necessarily have them everywhere. It's just on the surface we've done a few things.

While apparently benign in its effects, this example introduces the idea that impression management can involve a level of exaggeration and deception. Drawing from the work of Ball (2001) and Maguire, Perryman, et al. (2011), I contend that impression management, as a technology supporting the rationality of school choice, implicates principals (and others) in creating a particular and, arguably,

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[3] Foucault (1977) uses the term 'dressage' in reference to 'a technique of training' that regulates behaviour and ensures obedience (p. 166).

fabricated version of their school in order to look better than other local competitors. Maguire, Perryman, et al. (2011) claim that the 'capacity to "manufacture" and positively "spin" the performance of a school [to fabricate] is all part of the contemporary demands being made of the modern school leader' (p. 5). This claim is enriched by Ball's (2001) portrayal of fabrication as the purposeful creation of versions of an organisation that does not exist – versions that are judged not for their truthfulness but for their effectiveness in the market and which work 'on' and 'in' the organisation in transformative ways (p. 216).

Finally, drawing impression management closer to my interest in the constitution of principals as policy subjects, I contend that principals are involved, often by necessity, in the work of managing impressions of themselves – work that is also inclined to deception and fabrication. The work of managing impressions of the self is further explored in Chap. 7 in discussions of *the paradox of principal autonomy* and *the paradox of professionalism.*

I will now test the possibilities in critique and (re)problematisation for interrupting 'the unqualified celebration of "choice" in schooling' (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002, p. 6). This necessitates a shift in my analysis to the margins of the choice discourse in search of what Butler (2004) terms 'a certain incoherence' or even 'entire realms of unspeakability' (p. 308) in the discursive ordering of the social setting of schools and of the subjectivity of principals.

The rhetoric of choice positions parents and students as consumers of schooling and implies that all parents have equal access to information and are politically savvy and capable of securing the best available education on behalf of their children. However, when this rhetoric is juxtaposed with the choices available to parents and students who are on its receiving end, a more uneven and inequitable picture emerges. The policy discourse of choice is revealed as obscuring and even exacerbating the limitations on school choice available in less-privileged communities. As Angus (2015) notes, 'the competition is stacked' so that the groups who generally benefit from choice are the already relatively advantaged 'who are competing on a much more comfortable and familiar terrain' (p. 410).

Much of my ethnographic data was collected in schools in less privileged communities. However, it contained few observations about the impositions and limitations that prevent parents from ranging beyond their local neighbourhood in search of a 'good' or 'better' school or of the residualisation of their own schools brought on by those who have chosen to move away. Rather, these ideas could only be gleaned from a more overtly expressed interest of principals in being the school of choice in a limited, and in some places shrinking, market. Principals appeared to regard as futile the critique of school choice policies weighted against them and their communities. They chose, instead, to make an enterprising commitment to optimising the participation of their school in the marketplace and to gaining and retaining the best possible share of students.

However, at the edge of this choice discourse, I share with Angus (2015) a suspicion that schools serving disadvantaged students 'are unlikely to achieve much by simply trying to compete in neoliberal terms' (p. 410). Not only does the neoliberal imaginary of market competition promoting greater accountability to parents and

students not coincide with the evidence (see Buras & Apple, 2005), but it also plays to parental notions and aspirations about 'good' and 'bad' schools in ways that entrench current inequities. As Zipin, Sellar, and Hattam (2012) observe, 'when pursuing a future defined in relation to the axioms of capital, those with less access to social, cultural or economic resources must aspire in competition with those who have greater access' (p. 187).

The incoherence and unspeakablity at the margins of this discourse are, therefore, found in an aspiration for choice that is more likely thwarted and turned to 'a largely illusory concept' (McKay & Garratt, 2013, p. 742) for those with fewer resources. This critique suggests a re-problematisation of the choice discourse that shifts away from, and makes fragile, solutions bound up in neoliberal market logic. In the literature, alternatives are proffered for the classroom that develop the radical potential of 'local funds of knowledge' (Angus, 2012, p. 239) and 'foreground pedagogies that inhere *in* students' lifeworlds' (Hattam & Zipin, 2009, p. 299, italics in original). Opposition to 'exclusionary and undemocratic neoliberal policies' is mounted through local, context-sensitive learning programmes (Smyth & McInerney, 2012, p. 57), and ideas for practice are promoted that reclaim the social justice purposes of schooling and 'more progressive, educational and democratic purposes' for accountability (Thomson, Lingard, & Wrigley, 2012, p. 3).

Adding the modest contributions of my analysis of school choice to the alternatives proposed by others is mediated by the formidable opposition of a discourse that seeks 'to pathologise alternative modes of conduct that deviate from the norm' (McKay & Garratt, 2013, p. 742). As a result, principal-participants in my research generally appeared to be drawn to positions that obey the policy logics of choice, competition and the market, rather than those outside of them. Perhaps the clearest insight into principal's efforts to deviate towards responsive local practices is contained in various portraits of principal-participants in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8. While each depicts a type of macro-discursive shaping, they also highlight the school-based efforts of these principals to create locally relevant program and learning opportunities and to privilege, beyond a priority of 'competing to be chosen', the needs of the existing student cohort.

Several other neoliberal policy discourses intersect with the choice discourse. The performative aspiration for excellence is one of the prominent points of articulation and convergence. It is to 'excellence', formulated as a policy discourse of neoliberalism, that I now turn my attention.

The Excellence Discourse

References to excellence are marbled through my ethnographic data. In school documents, the term was variously noted as one in a set of school values, in the professional development plans of principals and teachers and in descriptions of schools' missions, goals and strategic directions. It was observed in outside and front-office signage and in publicity and communications directed to parents and the

community. In interviews, 'excellence' was used in descriptions of student achievement, teaching and learning, school standards and facilities and infrastructure, with principals most commonly linking it to aspirations for school improvement and to impute a desired school reputation.[4]

The contemporary prominence of the rhetoric of excellence has its roots, according to Peter (2018), in the twinning of notions about 'striving for excellence' and 'everyone can do it' in the mid-twentieth century. He claims that this created a broad-based conception of excellence, extending from 'top performance' to the ability to awaken excellence in others, and formed numerous focal points for policy-making by the state (pp. 37–38). In neoliberal times, the discourse of excellence remains prominent but is now coordinated by the market on behalf of the state. 'Unmistakably shaped by the semantics of neoliberalism' (Peter, 2018, p. 38), striving for excellence is now transformed from an egalitarian value of the masses to the responsibility of self-governing individuals as they harness their personal creativity and enterprise in pursuit of economic success.

As a policy discourse of neoliberalism, excellence responds to perceptions of a school-based workforce that is accepting of underachievement and mediocrity and where the entrepreneurial qualities of the individual have been driven out by 'bureaucratisation' and 'rigid hierarchies' (Peter, 2018, p. 39). This problematisation is supported by the managerial creep of corporate discourses and the seductive and incontestable qualities they lend the term excellence. Like the summoning of 'best practice' and calls for 'continuous improvement', the inarguable character of 'excellence' allows it to unproblematically preface almost any aspect of schooling.

While this problematisation broadens the semantic space for excellence, it leaves it open to allegations of being a 'hollow signifier' (Higgins, 2011, p. 452) and what Smyth and Shacklock (2003) describe as one of those 'educational aerosol words' that is sprayed around as the latest bouquet (p 21). In its rhetorical deployment, it may indicate high achievement or grand aspirations; however, using it like this fails to measure and quantify excellence in a way that lends it the particular truth status and constitutive power of a discourse. Under 'steering at a distance' requirements of neoliberal governmentality, this power is needed to form a set of instrumental logics – the rules and conditions of possibility – that enable the prevailing discourse to govern meaningful practice through its claims to truth and its assumption of a natural and taken-for-granted status.

In the realm of schooling, the excellence discourse appropriates this rationality, most conspicuously, from measures of student learning outcomes that underpin the policy logics and research claims of the school effectiveness movement. This research movement was founded on, and to a large extent continues to hold as its central tenet, the capacity of schools to deploy a set of agreed inputs to gain a positive difference to the outcomes of students. Here the emphasis is on bracketing out nonschool factors and adjudging the extent to which schools can add value to students' abilities – the so-called school effect (see Townsend, 2007). School

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[4] For purposes on anonymity, I have not cited or fully expanded these references.

effectiveness proponent David Reynolds (1998) acknowledges the political orientation of the effectiveness movement when he notes that 'school effectiveness has sung the policy makers tune in its emphasis on how schools can make a difference – indeed we wrote their words' (p. 20).

If this quantifiable school effect is taken at the level of 'statement' in Foucault's (1972) archaeological method, it can be considered as working inside of the neoliberal policy discourse of excellence and, by extension, helping enunciate what principals and others must treat as urgent and important. These connections appear to be in play in comments that Rob, principal at Heatherbank School, makes about central office concerns with student achievement data:

> The system is concerned about NAPLAN results. So the system will set up through its strategic directions a focus on literacy, or as is happening now, a focus on numeracy. There is an expectation that the principals of schools will enact policies or put procedures in place that will endeavour to lift the standards in literacy or in numeracy.

Similarly themed observations can be gleaned from the provocation discussion amongst principal participants (see *Appendix 2)*. Sasha, from Sullivan School, links data from high-stakes tests to its political function in supporting government policy objectives of choice and competition, while Janet, from Caldicott School, adds that it is only the data from these tests that holds value in outside judgements of her school. On the imposition on schools of central office requirements for student achievement data, Belinda, from Lawson School, claims 'you have to do it and I do believe we all have to be accountable for that'.

Such accounts describe the involvement of principals and schools in a policy preoccupation 'with an empiricism that fetishises numbers' and a concomitant insistence that the measurable indicators of excellence are the only ones that count, matter and have meaning (Bansel, 2014, p. 6).[5] Extrapolated further, these accounts begin to reveal the power of the discourse to elicit knowledge about school excellence and the capacity of experts to institutionalise it as an accredited knowledge system (Rajagopal, 2014, p. 2). At the same time, this knowledge adds to the controlling power of the discourse to create what Stickney (2013) describes as the 'is/ oughts' of an authorised power/knowledge dyad (p. 658).

School effectiveness creates the discursive conditions, sets the parameters and nominates a currency for calculating excellence in schools. However, the power/ knowledge *effects* of the discourse of excellence are more fully revealed in the detection of an immanent ordering in the practices, strategies and interventions of government. Here, the discourse is imbricated with a power/knowledge dispositif that functions as a regime of truth against which claims to excellence can be judged as true or false. Institutional policies, directives, processes and technologies, conjoined with the self-governance requirements of the neoliberal subject, work to

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[5] Heffernan (2018) adds theoretical weight to ideas like those of Bansel (2014) by invoking the notion of a 'sociology of numbers'. She claims that this notion embodies the idea that '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' (p. 7).

ensure that principals pursue particular subjectivities that signal excellence and that they measure, order and classify their efforts to be excellent and articulate these with the quasi-marketised schooling environment and its school choice policies.

Amongst the heterogeneous elements of the dispositif that impose themselves at school level, the following macro-influences gained some prominence in my interviews and document analysis in fieldwork:

- The regime of high-stakes testing (in particular, NAPLAN testing) and standardised curriculum that is used to create comparative measures of achievement across schools.
- The use of NAPLAN test data on the *MySchool* website to provide the community with simplified (and colour-coded) representations of bad, good and excellent schools and, in turn, the construction of media-friendly school league tables that make abundantly clear that while 'everyone should be excellent … not everyone can be excellent' (Peter, 2018, p. 47).
- Various accountability and surveillance processes, typically conducted at state and regional level, which dwell on NAPLAN and other data in order to proffer an outside perspective on the realisation of local excellence aspirations. Heffernan (2018) brings a paradoxical quality to these processes of 'local' measurement when she notes that '(o)bjectivity is implied by the presentation of numbers, facts, and figures in standardised forms that do not take local contexts or complexities into account' (p. 7).
- The sets of professional competencies and standards for principals and teachers that both promulgate precise links between the quality of the input of school staff and improvement in the outputs of students and assume the pre-eminence of school-based actions in the achievement of excellence.

While each of these elements represent various Australian national and state policy initiatives, it is also important to recognise the less ostentatious, but arguably more deeply affecting local processes that establish the truth status of the excellence discourse. In my fieldwork, these local calls to excellence were observed in the attention paid by principals to messages from further up the hierarchy about their reputation, progress and achievement. They were also noted in the conversation of principals with teachers and students about externally developed measures of excellence and the necessity to take shared responsibility for their implementation. In school documents, such as site improvement and performance development plans, the local influence of the discourse could be detected in descriptions of aspirations for excellence that relied on numerical achievement targets, based on NAPLAN and other external measures, to plot progress and to secure motivation.

The ordering of these elements into a power/knowledge dispositif is neither objective nor politically disinterested. As Pignatelli (2002) notes:

> Embedded in these systems are a cluster of technologies of power – e.g., the grid, the timetable, the chart, the graph, the examination – which promise greater efficiency in defining and measuring stages of excellence, mediocrity, and failure, as they sort, circulate, and manage, reward and punish students, staff, and schools. (p. 171)

For principals, the discourse of excellence, and its power/knowledge effects, foregrounds the discursive and material conditions for a particular subjectivity. They invite the principal to secure themselves and their work through an engagement with the notion of excellence that includes an acceptance of quantified measures of effectiveness and submission to the technologies through which these measures are turned into tools of judgement, competition and comparison. As a subject of the discourse, principals are expected to engage in and promote its practices and use the speaking rights it confers to ensure that others do the same. In these ways of governing, various subject positions emerge for the principal which signal success and improvement and excellence. They offer the pleasures of performance to those who can inhabit these positions with a sense of achievement, although they are premised on the positioning of 'others' outside of such pleasures (Maguire, Hoskins, Ball, & Braun, 2011, p. 608).

While the policy discourse of excellence may appear incontrovertible in its mobilisation of principals towards superior performance and achievement, Peter (2018) claims that 'the excellence discourse is as efficacious as it is fragile' (p. 47). Against depictions of a totalising force, and in keeping with my promised processual treatment of neoliberal governmentality, my critical explanation of the discourse of excellence and its dispositif of power/knowledge draws from a number of intersecting discourses that work to contradict its truth claims, to render it more fragile and suggest that the subjectivities of principals may cross into different discursive fields.

This explanation starts by drawing somewhat opportunistically from the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (2015). In summarising how *the Standard* sets out what successful principals are expected to know, understand and do, it claims to take 'full account of the crucial contribution' principals make to 'excellence and equity' (p. 4). While an admirable sentiment, this twinning of excellence with equity points to a major contradiction that the discourse of excellence must work to ameliorate and conceal. In drawing measures of excellence, under the auspices of school effectiveness, from numerical calculations of school-based variables, the discourse fails to account for those things that are marginalised and left out of the measures. When factors such as family background and social class are regarded as 'noise' that must not be allowed to interrupt the focus on school factors, the effect, following Willmott (1999), is to 'conceal the reality of structured inequality' and instead 'point the finger of blame … firmly at individuals' such as teachers and school leaders 'for inefficient and wasteful schools' (pp. 255–256).

Following this interpretation, the additional risks faced by principals can be detected in this shifting of responsibility for social justice and equity outcomes to schools. These outcomes must now occur within the strictures of dominant neoliberal policy discourses, such as the discourses of choice and excellence. They are increasingly tied up in accountabilities related to individual school performance, rather than being seen as a systems responsibility, so that leaders and teachers in individual schools are seen as primarily responsible (see Thomas & Watson, 2011). Thus, the pairing of excellence and equity becomes highly problematic when principals, wanting to continue the local work of improving social justice and equity

outcomes, must do so against the momentum of policy demands and their applied strictures.

While the assumption in the excellence discourse that 'what is possible for an individual must be possible for all individuals at the same time' is highly compatible with the individuated social policy of neoliberalism (Willmott, 1999, p. 267), it quietens references to significant variations in the social circumstances of students. Belinda, principal of Sullivan School (the lowest SES school in my study), makes these circumstances and their effects abundantly clear:

> *So we measured for the first year and a quarter. What had happened in our school was that the kids went backwards. Which is what the state does, it's the trend and we haven't bucked the trend. I don't think we ever will. Our kids didn't get potty trained, they didn't get read to, they didn't have that talk that says, 'we're doing to kindy and when we get to kindy we are going to … so get in the car and we'll do it'. They haven't had any of that. So, if I just think about that, I wouldn't do the job because I would always be working from a deficit model.*

Left to its own devices, the neoliberal policy discourse of excellence creates sharp divisions between excellent and failing schools – divisions that follow lines of social class and economic wealth but are, nevertheless, sheeted home to school-based factors such as inadequate teaching and ineffective leadership. Its power/knowledge effects, obscured by the outwardly benign expectation of equality of outcomes for all, are, in the words of Slater and Griggs (2015), both 'coercive' and 'duplicitous' (p. 441). Thus, the discourse of excellence secures its hegemony by preying on a desire for quality schooling in educationally dispossessed communities while at the same time enforcing measures of excellence that are largely disconnected from, and unattainable in, those communities.

This twinning of excellence and equity brings more ambiguous and variegated qualities to the neoliberal policy discourse of excellence. Moving closer to the interests of this book, it suggests that detailed consideration of the impact on principals' lives and work in those schools servicing disadvantaged communities is missing from the excellence commentary. In these places, principals are responding to the same demands as their counterparts in richer schools while often having to make riskier decisions about the allocation of resources, make headway in the face of 'pernicious outcome statistics' (Thomson, 2004, p. 2), respond to more transient communities and manage a more vulnerable and diverse student cohort.

This analysis is illustrative of a second-level critique at the margins of the excellence discourse. By asking 'inside' questions about the discursive limits of its 'outside' claims to power and truth, it reveals how certain contradictions are obscured or subjugated by the dominant neoliberal logic. Further ambiguity arises when mandated excellence measures are juxtaposed with local aspirations. Janet, principal at Caldicott School, responding to an interview question about the tension between raising high-stakes test scores and other purposes of schooling, says:

> *That's a challenge across the board in education, because essentially what's valued is what's measured, and while what's measured is NAPLAN results, it's very limiting.*

Janet's comments suggest an apparent ambiguity stemming from the way mandated calls for excellence, predicated on narrow and homogenised test measures, may actually work against the realisation of broader local educational goals. Bates (2013) expands this link into the distinctly paradoxical by claiming 'the relentless focus on standards has changed the system in ways that suggest an erosion of educational quality' (p. 39). Applied to principals, and their efforts to attain excellence, the policy technology of standardisation recasts qualities as quantities and, drawing from Higgins (2011), values 'efficiency and productivity … as ends in themselves' (p. 453). It suggests favoured subjectivities and renders excellence as a stark, disciplinary mechanism for judging principal effectiveness and worth.

The Entrepreneurship Discourse

The discourse of entrepreneurship shifts my analytical attention directly to the modes of subjectivity made available to principals under conditions of neoliberal governmentality. Dey (2014) sets the scene for the problematisation of this policy discourse by describing how it works as a 'programmable reality' to turn 'the social into a space of competition, individual responsibility and self-organisation by demanding entrepreneurial virtues and behaviours from people who until recently were not envisioned as entrepreneurs' (p. 55). As Walkerdine and Bansel (2010) claim in their treatment of 'neoliberalism as entrepreneurship', the 'passive citizen of the welfare state' becomes 'the citizen as active entrepreneur of the self' with an expectation that they will capitalise 'on existence itself through calculated acts and investments' (p. 4).

In the world of business and economics, being entrepreneurial is generally associated with shifting responsibility away from the state in order to posit the creativity, agility and shrewdness of individuals and private enterprises as a solution to gaining the best share of resources in austere times. Translated to schools, and 'shifting the locus of "austerity" from the private sector to the public space' (Dey, 2014, p. 61), the discourse of entrepreneurship responds to, and supports, the already established discursive registers of competition and achievement and, I contend, is most obviously embodied in expectations about the demeanour, conduct and priorities of principals in response to a different set of scarcities.

The entrepreneurial principal is formulated as part of a rational solution to a perceived problem amongst parent/consumers of a shortage of 'good' schools and as an in-school solution to securing more student enrolments – especially 'good' enrolments – in order to keep the school viable. In the state system in which the schools in my research are situated, perceptions of the need for an entrepreneurial principal appear to be exacerbated by the dominance of neoliberal logic 'which privileges the private sector over the public sector' (Angus, 2012, p. 232). Imogen, the principal of McCullough School, suggests how this plays out in her local context:

We've got a college next door, for goodness sake, an independent school, so I've got to actually ask, 'why go there, when you should come here? This is what we offer. VET is free and it's very expensive there and a whole lot of other things …' Obviously, I wouldn't say that, but that's an aspect of that I'm having to do.

Entrepreneurial principals, in an idealised form, are subjects who prevail in economically challenging conditions. Thinking with Dey (2014), they are amenable to the normative script of neoliberal governmental reason 'which compels them to internalise entrepreneurial principles and values out of practical necessity' (p. 62). They seek to develop and capitalise on personal qualities such as agility, enthusiasm and enterprise; to take responsibility for their own choices, expertise and susceptibilities; and to watch, measure and audit the value they return to their schools.

Imogen gives an insight into the processes, as well as some of the benefits and costs, of this self-capitalisation:

I think the first thing is about maintaining the level of energy. I really noticed that within the first year that I was finding that I was working really long hours at work. I'd be taking it home, long hours at home. Then, of course, trying to put on the bright face the next day and not being able to keep up with the energy. If you don't have the energy, how can you be there for staff? Also, I try to have an open door policy. I try to be as visible, especially with staff, as much as I can. I find it difficult to be out there with students, but nevertheless I do try to do that. Looking after my own wellbeing, I think that has been the hardest thing.

The enterprising and creative efforts of principals and schools, as already noted in analysis of the choice discourse, are deeply enmeshed with trying to meet consumer expectations. Jack, from Lawson School, notes the historical emergence of these efforts:

I've been working in schools since 1987 and in that time I've seen the role of principals change a huge amount, from being somebody who was almost a figurehead at a school … to somebody that has to be very dynamic, respond to community needs, respond to educational department needs, parent needs, teacher needs, student needs.

By extension, casting principals as entrepreneurs is to fit them to a programmatic ambition of neoliberal government where 'empowerment and obligation go hand-in-hand' (Ball, 2013, pp. 130–131). Principals are implored to use conferred freedoms in enterprising and responsive ways, with their subjectivity simultaneously secured, following Davies and Bansell (2010), in 'their individuality and their regulation as responsibilised and accountable subjects' (p. 9). That the enacting of this government of freedom is a form of control did not escape the attention of participants in my research. Seb, from Sullivan School, notes the constraints on principal freedom:

The principal provides leadership and guidance of the school within certain constraints. And the constraints are the rules and regulations you have to work under. They can only do in a school what they are allowed to do … whilst they are trying to get the best out of their school and the best for their students.

Felicity, also from Sullivan School, after describing the principal as a 'pilot' who looks to maximise the benefits of centralised policy in their own school, ponders how they must balance autonomy and accountability:

I think we are seeing this increasing accountability, at the same time we've seen an increase in devolution of responsibility to schools. Which actually in some ways could be interpreted as being counter to this idea of increased accountability. So it's a bit of a fine line that the principal needs to walk.

Simons and Masschelein (2008) describe the mode of subjection favoured by the discourse of entrepreneurship as 'a permanent economic tribunal' (p. 54) that provides a particular way of knowing the 'true' principal. Returning to *homo œconomicus* (Foucault, 2008), this knowing is derived from the practices of the individuated and depoliticised subject, whose conduct is pegged to the enterprise form. Its 'truth' relies on individual self-understanding of how certain behaviours, skills and qualities yield benefits in terms of satisfying the rationality of the market. In practice, these are benefits such as improved competitiveness, school-of-choice status and greater market share of enrolments, realised because principals 'assume responsibility for themselves and others by dint of acting and thinking like entrepreneurs' (Dey, 2014, p. 62).

Thus, the principal as entrepreneur is performatively constituted, with the conditions of freedom that neoliberal governmentality demands making available a range of resources and techniques of self-formation while, at the same time, working to hide the political intentions of the entrepreneurship discourse. This is not to suggest that subjectivity replaces power in neoliberal conceptions of the entrepreneurial subject but, rather, that subjectivity is the site in which power operates (see Protevi, 2009). Knights (2009) provides the following insight into the relations of subjectivity and power/knowledge in this discourse:

> subjectivity is not only one of the conditions that make knowledge and its relationship to power possible but it is also a self-fulfilling effect of such power/knowledge. This is because knowledge is grounded in representations of reality that cannot be constructed independently of certain constitutions of subjectivity that it goes on to reproduce. (p. 158)

Exercised through various technologies of government, these power/knowledge arrangements target the bodies and souls of principals and work to constitute them as subjects that identify with being entrepreneurial and are thereby drawn to reproducing the entrepreneurial practices that define them. Its discursive field is marked out by a heterogeneous and complex dispositif which polices its frontiers and determines the conditional freedoms and constrained choices that are made available. It is a dispositif that divides the practices of the entrepreneur away from older depictions of the principal as staid, reactionary and bureaucratic. Discursively, it interprets personal qualities as entrepreneurial potentialities to be instrumentalised and applied to better results in the school marketplace. To support its normalisation, it harnesses various technologies of (self)control and (self)surveillance, third-party renditions of required standards of professionalism[6] and the rewards of recognition

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[6] While this reference is, most obviously, to the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*, it encompasses a range of other third-party documents, such as professionalism/performance rubrics, psychometric tests and various state-based leadership frameworks.

and performance embodied in a multiplicity of ceremonies, awards and professional opportunities.

To guard against an overdetermined account of the effects of the discourse of entrepreneurship on the principal subject, it is necessary to move away from attributions of dominance and the willing acquiescence of principals at its centre and towards more marginal possibilities. Binkley (2009) provides a useful entry to this type of second-level critique when he claims that 'top-down' readings of neoliberal governmentality that 'consider how neoliberal subjects work to optimize, individualize and entrepreneurialize themselves and their conduct' are also 'shadowed by a certain ambivalence and instability, a technique of subjectification that remains open to the potential for being otherwise practiced' (pp. 63–64).

This opening, previously revealed in limited ways at the intersection and coalescence of discourses of choice and excellence, is made wider by considering 'the unleashing of the entrepreneurial spark' (Dey, 2014, p. 61) in principals – a spark of active and practical self-production that may have plural constitutive possibilities. Referring again to Foucault's (1977) notion of the 'soul' as a product of various forms of power exercised around, on and within the principal subject (p. 29), I interpret the task at the margins of this discourse of entrepreneurship as refuting the inevitability and muscularity of its power/knowledge effects and as beginning to compile evidence of a political struggle for the soul of the principal. This task requires both 'rebuilding a sensibility for the contradictory nature of governing' (Dey, 2014, p. 66) and creating new spaces of freedom[7] where ethical and territorial contests can emerge and productive forms of ambivalence, transgression and resistance can develop.

This is not to suggest that entrepreneurship is the original or only site of such a struggle. Rather, calls for the principal to be entrepreneurial provide a useful starting point because they advance, as a tactic of neoliberal governmentality, an ideal version of the principal subject – one that can be tested against my empirical evidence of principal practice to help discern the reach of its power/knowledge dispositif and the nature and uptake of its contradictory opposites. Certainly, in analysis of my field data, entrepreneurial rationalities were identified as prominent and influential. However, subservience to the rational discourse was rendered incomplete by observation of alternative practices and expression of contradictory truth claims. For example, ephemeral expressions of solidarity, refusal, resistance and cooperation in my data formed into a type of marginalised opposition to dominant readings of entrepreneurship. Principal expressions of values of trust, concern, equity and democratic participation were also taken as symptomatic of a more contestable terrain than that revealed by the pervasive truth regime.

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[7] In a chapter titled *Unforeseeable freedom* (Derrida & Roudinesco, 2004), Derrida cautions against careless use of the word 'freedom'. However, he adds an interpretation that accords with my use of the word in the phrase 'new spaces of freedom'. He says he would 'militate for a recognition and respect' for a freedom that 'is an excess of play in the machine, an excess of every determinate machine' (p. 48–9).

Chapter 7 includes a portrait of Imogen, the principal at McCullough School, which focusses on her enterprising practices – her efforts to get the best from herself and to project the best possible image of her school. This chapter also contains several paradoxes which work to test the rationality of the discourse of entrepreneurship.

The Managerialism Discourse

In transcripts of my field interviews and observation notes, the numerous metaphoric references to the principal as 'captain of the ship' and as 'company CEO' link to a version of leadership that Clarke (2013) describes as 'neoliberal managerialism' (p. 233). They imply the uncritical colonisation of schools by marketing and managerial values. These references are further enriched by unsolicited and often detailed extensions of these metaphors to (1) attributions of superior visionary, organisational, management and problem-solving qualities found in the principal and (2) attaching personal qualities such as enterprising, charismatic, determined and influential to principal descriptions. The following interview excerpts further elaborate the managerialist discourse and its pronouncement, proclamation and designation of principals as 'leaders':

> *I see the principal as the leader of the school, so for me the principal is really the captain of the ship in determining where we go in terms of the overarching philosophies. I see the principal as setting the main agendas within the school in conjunction with governing council. And, I see that their particular role is really to inspire and lead the staff to achieve those absolute goals that we have. (Felicity, Sullivan School)*

> *She's our leader. She's our motivator. She deals with the business side of running our organisation. (Rita, McCullough School)*

> *I equate the principal's role to that of a CEO in a small to medium sized company. Basically, they're responsible for running the school effectively, ensuring the resources are available as and when needed in order to deliver on a curriculum. That staff are managed and performance of staff is managed effectively, so that they deliver the programs that are required to get the children through the curriculum. And at the same time, they are managing up through the education system, not too dissimilar to a board, in delivering on the expectations of key stakeholders and also their funders. And so, it's very much like a CEO. (Odette, Sullivan School Governing Council)*

The frequent evocation of the language and pragmatic logic of business and enterprise in these descriptions points to what Lingard (2011) describes as the 'ecumenical application of private sector management practices in the public sector' (p. 370). Such descriptions also support my inclusion of managerialism as a constitutively influential policy discourse of neoliberalism as they:

- Privilege certain 'identity categories' (Youdell, 2006) that impose a conception of the principal as a versatile, autonomous and responsible agent and discard older notions of bureaucratic and professional leadership

- Depict a simplified rendition of the principalship based on an untroubled take-up of generic structures and processes from the private sector, an easy equating of success with measurable outputs and a willing embrace of the outside language of goals, strategies and deliverables
- Suggest the discursive imposition of the performative expectations of neoliberal governmentality in the principal's concerns with promoting personal excellence, motivating others to produce quality outcomes and generating a collaborative commitment to competitive excellence
- Evoke the importance of a potent individual at the top and the ready acceptance amongst followers of the positional authority and exceptional individual qualities of the designated leader

The problematisation on the very surface of this discourse is found in constructing managerialism as a version of school leadership that is the solution to formulated problems of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. It proposes a visible and measurable response to public perceptions of low standards, lack of direction and variations in quality between schools. Managerialism looks past the political, ethical and social dimensions of these 'problems' to construe them, instead, as issues of management 'that new and more efficient managerial regimes can resolve' (Lynch, 2014, p. 4). It presents to principals, through policy and an array of associated supports, a new insight into what counts as knowledge and a seductive and accessible set of strategies that appear to offer, following Wright (2001), 'a rational, value-free approach to solving their immediate problems' (p. 284). Managerialism, thus, builds on the previously discussed subjectivity of the entrepreneurial principal by adding the macro-value systems of private enterprise as constitutively important in the micro-processes of principal subject formation.

My critical explanation of the discourse of managerialism works to refute its neutral, apolitical and strategic posturing by revealing it as a political project for governing the conduct of principals. As a body of knowledge, this discourse speaks about the principal subject in specific ways. It positions principals as advocates and enthusiasts and, after Wright (2001), invites them to apprehend managerialism as both a set of beliefs and a set of practices (p. 281). In the first instance, working from Foucault's (1972) description of discourses as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which it speak' (p. 54), I take the policy discourse of managerialism as working to form principal subjects that embrace the language and pragmatics of managerialism and put managerial practices to work in their schools.

In grasping managerialism, principals are asked to embrace the nomenclature of 'customers', 'competition' and 'market share' and to undertake calculative and technical work directed to the measurement of their school's educational outputs. Thinking with Lynch (2014), this work includes privileging efficiency and productivity over 'social and moral values' such as 'trust, integrity and solidarity with others' (p. 5). Their compassion, in managerial terms, hinges on relations of power that evoke pastoral notions of the shepherd managing the flock (see Chap. 3), whereby principals are encouraged to cultivate the obedience of staff by shepherding them to the acceptance of managerialist truth claims. In proposing change and

improvement in their school, managerialist principals are expected not only to develop a preference for data-rich processes borrowed from private enterprise but also to attend to the willing participation of others in these processes and to the alignment of their school-based aspirations with the priorities of centrally developed policy.

The power/knowledge pairings in these managerial practices confer truth status on the managerial discourse and rely on a broad dispositif of discursive and non-discursive practices that work on and within the principal subject to induce their willing participation. This dispositif is inclusive of outwardly applied technologies of standardisation, accountability and surveillance. However, in accordance with principles of neoliberal governmentality, it is the practices of self-regulation directed to a subjectivity that internalises managerial values that are arguably most telling. Lynch (2014) describes 'a governing of the soul that deploys new technologies of the self, governing from the inside out' (p. 4). Subjectivity is here invoked as an 'exercise of managerial power' by which principals 'come to know themselves' (Thomas, 2009, p. 171). This is a productive power that regulates principal's 'hopes, fears and expectations of success' (Lynch, 2014, p. 4) while, simultaneously, providing them with calculative opportunities for great authority and control, for example, in the management of finances and achievement data.

In this somewhat idealised reading of the uptake of the managerial discourse by principals, the self-disciplined subject finds their own seductions and generates their own compliance, so that the hegemony of the discourse appears assured. The constitutive effect is to categorise (Styhre, 2001) and technicise (Thomson, 2001) principals and their work. One prominent method of categorisation and technicisation occurs through third-party renditions of principal leadership, typically in the 'leadership by adjective' (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2007, p. 202) designations of instructional leader, transformational leader, authentic leader, democratic leader, etc. While this type of categorisation manifests in ostensibly useful checklists of abstract attributes and technical skills (that someone else thinks principals will need in order to be effective), it also has more telling effects by specifying preferred subject positions within the broader discursive field. To add greater complexity to the theoretical account of managerialism I have so far provided, I will now use an example of these effects from my fieldwork. The example draws principally from interview responses to questions about the principal as 'instructional leader'.

One of the consequences of a managerialist categorisation of principals as instructional leaders is to assume a straightforward connection between principal practice and student learning. More specifically, the discourse of managerialism favours a more technical input-output model of schooling that posits a causal link between the strategies and techniques the principal deploys and the quality of measurable outcomes, as read from standardised tests of student achievement. The performative efforts of principals to position their subjectivity within the discourse are illustrated by the following observations from two of the principal participants in my study:

Principals, ultimately, they're ultimately responsible. The principal is the person that's steering the ship and leading direction. The buck stops with the principal. The principal, yeah, if there is data that is negative and not positive, I would be questioning myself and asking myself, 'Well, how have I worked with others? What's happened in my work with others that has facilitated this particular breakdown' (Rob, principal, Heatherbank School)

When you're a principal, you really do feel there's a level of accountability. You're there. You're leading the school and if it fails, you're failing because of your leadership. Because you've got all these people in front of you and you're working with them, but they're not being accountable. (Belinda, principal, Lawson School)

These comments suggest that principals identify with, and thereby reproduce, the very operations of the discourse of managerialism that constructs them as subjects. They appear to be knowing participants in practices invoked by power/knowledge pairings in this discourse that posit a direct connection between principal practice and improved student achievement. The significance of these examples lies in the slippage between the rhetoric of the discourse and a more complex set of observations from my fieldwork and from the critical leadership studies literature. For example, Sasha, principal at Sullivan School, disputes the connection:

It is built on a lie and that is that the principal can affect the student learning outcomes. That's actually in the research; they found that principals have about that much effect [gestures a very small effect] on student learning outcomes.

Veronica, from McCullough School, highlights the unfortunate effects of conflating principal and student performance:

It's a bit of a shame that there seems to be so much pressure on principals to perform well in these types of tests like NAPLAN … I know of principals in the past that have felt that pressure so hard that they've actually removed specific data from data sets to ensure that things reflect positively on the school as well as on the principal.

On a different plane, Carlo, from Sullivan School, laments the normalising effect on principals of an emphasis on testing and outcomes:

One of the things that really worries me is the normalising influences that are around us – the bringing of education back to meeting a set of key performance criteria and external examination criteria. I like the idea that a principal can be freed up to be an advocate for the mission of the school in the community and in the education department. Actually given the freedom to speak for the school, rather than to have to be constrained to what I think are very normalising influences of standardised testing and specific outcomes.

The managerialist expectation that principals have capacity to deliver success 'in the currency of test scores' (MacBeath, 2007, p. 244) is also heavily contested in the literature. Thomson (2004) claims 'the absurdity of the assignation of total responsibility' to principals for student outcomes (p. 2), while Muijs (2011) describes a 'great deal of rhetoric' coming from studies of the leadership/learning link, but says 'when we examine these studies more closely it is clear that most leadership variables are only modestly related to outcomes, and in some studies no relationships were found at all' (p. 45). I have included this example to illustrate the 'Trojan' offers that managerialist practice (Wright, 2001, p. 285) makes to principals. This

deceptive quality helps shift my analysis into more empirical and contestable spaces at the margins of the discourse of managerialism.

The power/knowledge effects of the discourse of managerialism have, so far, been shown to both draw upon and inform a raft of policy texts that support, for example, the generation of data from high-stakes testing, the evaluation of school and individual performance and the standardisation of conduct, behaviour and practice. However, the political heft of the discourse is not restricted to its relations with formal policy. Coextensive with policy, and often drawing from it and intersecting and enriching its ambitions, is a vast 'education leadership industry' (Gunter, 2013, p. 206) concerned with 'providing practical guides to running schools in an era of devolved management' (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003, p. 12). This industry comprises a varied array of managerialist texts, travelling experts, consultancies, professional learning opportunities and leadership theories. By nature, practical and accessible, this industry is shaped by the common-sense logics, techniques and problem-solving qualities of managerialism. I cite it here not to dwell on the possible limitations and repetitions of its 'how to' approach but rather to underline the ubiquitous take-up of its simplified accounts of managerial school leadership and the substantial obstacle they put in the way of alternative readings.

If, as Thrupp and Willmott (2003) contend, managerialism 'has clearly become *the* solution of our time' (p. 12, italics in original), a shift to its discursive margins is made against a prevailing orthodoxy that is both popular and entrenched. However, the necessity of such a shift, I argue, is to access a key agenda for critical leadership studies – to make an empirical case for the inadequacies and contingencies of the current managerialist order. To conclude this section, I describe two techniques that I use in my deployment of a paradox interpretive lens in Chap. 7 to access and advance this key agenda:

- Following Foucault's (2000) problematisation as 'the work of thought', I take his entreaty to 'turn a given into a question' as requiring the taken-for-granted qualities of managerialism be problematised in order that 'diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response' (p. 118). In this work, I seek to shift the problem-making emphasis away from perceptions of inefficiency and ineffectiveness, to instead question the rational, calculative and simplistic qualities of managerialism – to try to reveal these qualities as antithetical to the educative and caring purposes of schooling and as obstacles to thinking about and instating various alternatives.
- Expanding on the 'Trojan' offers of the discourse, I use data from my fieldwork to try to expose various managerial practices, such as visioning, strategic planning and change management, as privileged, pretentious and deceptive. Of particular relevance to the easy admission of these practices into the mainstream are the connections they make with the managerial tenets of principal primacy, masculine and heroic leadership and the 'ethic of autonomous selfhood' (Rose, 1998, p. 17). Critical analysis of these connections using a paradox lens suggests the need for principals to (re)claim political, professional and ethical positions weakened or lost in the push to managerialism.

Conclusion

This chapter has ranged widely across, what was described at its outset, as the many ambiguous contests that characterise a vast body of commentary about neoliberalism in education and other social fields. In conclusion, I avoid the inherently reductive process of summarising the many strands that have been followed. Instead, I try to capture retrospectively at least three different methodological possibilities that have emerged from the various analyses in the hope that this amounts to a more expansive exercise in knowledge building and transferable possibilities.

Firstly, my analysis of policy discourses both exhibits and capitalises on what might be termed a 'policy sociology' approach. Ozga (1990) claims as the defining quality of a policy sociology the bringing together in analysis of systems-level policy development and micro-level investigation of the perceptions and experiences of those implementing policy (p. 361). In this chapter, the introduction of the voices of principals (and others) was to highlight the social complexities of the policy work of principals and, following Grace (1995), to resist 'the tendency of policy science to abstract problems from their relational settings by insisting that the problem can only be understood in the complexity of those relations' (p. 3). Such positioning has helped me work against one of the traditional polemics of sociology that separates macro-level interests in broader social structures from the micro-contexts of individuals and their practices.

Grace (1995) also claims for policy sociology, a propensity to illuminate 'the cultural and ideological struggles in which schooling is located' (p. 3). This political work is emphasised by Gale (2001) who invokes the term 'critical policy sociology' in order to better align its methodological qualities with those of the critical social sciences (p. 381). In adopting this critical orientation, I looked to find an 'epistemic edge' (Clarke, Bainton, Lendvai, & Stubbs, 2015, p. 196) by taking policy as a form of knowledge production which advances a neoliberal conception of the principal subject. This edge was further honed by a personal political conviction that certain of these discourses, and the knowledge claims they make, had become sedimented within schools and that my research should be directed to both critiquing their dominance and vested interests and revitalising contradictory positions.

A policy sociology also admits a more nuanced and inconstant version of neoliberalism from that which proffers an 'essential and global truth' (Brown, 2015, p. 21). With its insistence on the intrusion of micro-level interests, a policy sociology approach suggests the possibility of variegation and contingency in the way policy discourses shape the lives and work of principals. In support of this position, Brown (2015) claims, as a common feature of scholarly analysis, that 'neoliberalism has no fixed or settled coordinates, that there is temporal and geographical variety in its discursive formulations, policy entailments, and material practices' (p. 20). To commence Chap. 5, I draw on the diversity and inconstancy of these 'processual' (Springer, 2012, p. 135) readings of neoliberalism and apply them to principal subject formation. A process of principal 'neoliberalisation' is proposed

and, subsequently, used to help demarcate the lines of a struggle for the soul of the principal.

Secondly, in rendering policy as (and inside of) discourse, I claim several productive possibilities. Importantly, this rendition conceives of policy as having meaning beyond a policy-as-text interpretation. Ozga (2000) broadens the scope of policy texts to include any 'vehicle or medium for carrying or transmitting a policy message' (p. 33). Such a definition supports, in my own inquiries, the inclusion into policy of devices like spoken directives, official instructions and the various processes of marketing and promotion that announce and endorse new policy texts. The broadening of meaning is also suggestive of the more dynamic and unstable qualities of policy, introducing the contingency of 'central input and local inflections' (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 15) in order to interrupt notions of a linear flow of policy knowledge and assumptions of a smooth and untroubled implementation of ruler ambitions and intentions in schools.

As a corollary to a more expansive understanding of policy, new critical and interpretive possibilities arise in treating policy as both formed and made operational within discourse. This positioning is inclusive of Bacchi's (2000) interest in 'the active marshalling of discourses for political purposes' (p. 45) and of the grammar of 'policy actors' and 'policy subjects' in the creation and delimiting of particular speaker/actor positions. It also extends to research into spaces of struggle associated with the 'discursive battles' over policy responsibilities (Keller, 2011, p. 52) and the designation of principals as both subjects and users of dominant discourses (Bacchi, 2000).

Thirdly, the interpretive 'grid' devised from Foucauldian tools and the work of other researchers and put to use in my discourse analysis was positioned as a necessary intervention in the often simplified and naive way in which observation and interview data collected from the field are treated as 'pipelines' for knowledge transmission (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 141). In resisting the reification of methods and the simplification of analysis, I was drawn to the more complex task of considering how my data could be made to work beyond common-sense interpretations and idealised accounts. I assert, from this experience, that the dearth of interpretive tools suited to critically oriented work in qualitative research undermines the more imaginative and expansive ambitions of researchers and leaves unsupported the interpretive workload that the researcher must assume if they are to move beyond the literal meaning of spoken and written input.

A corollary – and in some ways a corrective – to my observations about the (un) availability of interpretative tools in critical research lies in the way researchers use the extant literature. In this chapter I have worked beyond the conventional 'mapping of the field' function to actively deploy the literature drawn from within and beyond my field as a form of 'textual data'[8] providing both an intellectual resource and a summative understanding of the state of the field. In doing this, I have tried to

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[8] 'Textual data' is used descriptively to indicate the contribution of literature to my empirical work (rather than to suggest a link, metaphorical or otherwise, to the technical process of extracting data from texts).

emphasise the need for an expansion of my archive beyond data collected in the field by treating parts of the vast canon of literature on neoliberalism as an additional data source. Given that it is not easy to systematise these literatures, I also rely on a principle established by Lather (1999) that a cut of the literature that is 'situated, partial and perspectival' is more feasible and useful than an 'exhaustive' coverage (p. 3). In making such a cut, I have favoured those texts that provide both an intellectual resource and a summative understanding of the state of the field, while, at the same time, pushing my own work at its critical frontiers.

While this chapter has been less overtly linked to the book's paradox conceptual frame, it has been marked by ubiquitous references to conflict, ambiguity and tension. While these ideas have formed something of a thematic running through the historical, methodological and analytical concerns of the chapter, I have not attempted to generalise or characterised their operations or to distil them into any fixed form. Rather, these themes have been used to hold open some of the complex and contrary forces that go to shaping the lives and work of principals. In Chap. 5, I embark on a more deliberate consolidation of these themes as I look to (1) take the process of principal neoliberalisation as opening a more contestable and ambiguous field of constitutive possibilities; (2) reveal in detail the lines of struggle for the soul of the principal and possible tactics for principal participation in such a struggle; and (3) prepare the way for the subsequent paradox chapters (Chaps. 6, 7 and 8) by dealing with the pragmatic considerations of bringing a paradox lens to the interpretation of empirical data.

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Chapter 5
The Lines of Struggle

My a priori characterisation of a contest over principal subjectivity is as a political struggle for the soul of the principal – a struggle with and against the technologies of neoliberal government that confer a particular permutation of power, truth and ethics on principals. This is a struggle directed to gaining some freedom from the impositions and enclosures of neoliberal governmentality in order to remain 'open to alternative and foreclosed ways of being and knowing' (De Lissovoy, 2016, p. 167).

While this chapter leverages initially from my analyses of policy discourses in Chap. 3, it is designed primarily as a segue to – and a foundation for – the three 'paradox chapters' which follow. Previously, a Foucauldian understanding of neoliberal governmentality was used to show how neoliberalism 'as a political project of governing and persuasion' (Giroux, 2008, p. 1) installs a compelling conception of the principal subject as a free, autonomous and self-directed agent. Analysis of neoliberal policy discourses of marketisation, excellence, entrepreneurship and managerialism used ethnographic and textual data to help describe how a dispositif of discursive and nondiscursive practices frame the power/knowledge relations ingrained in each of the discourses and, in turn, how these discourses work on principal subjects to garner their willing participation.

On balance, the previous chapter conceded a neoliberal hegemony over policy and practice. However, use of additional tools of interpretation also revealed the broad, if at times faint, outline of a contest over who principals are and what they know and do. In this chapter, I resist the incontrovertibility of neoliberalism in order to direct my empirical work towards revealing more of this contest. Working from Gramsci's (1971) insight that 'every relationship of "hegemony" is necessarily an educational relationship' (p. 666), I take the casting of principals as neoliberal subjects in discourse as also creating a resource in which embryonic ideas about opposing forces can be made more distinct and where these ideas, when joined with local

stories of practice, reveal new possibilities for more agentic subjectivities.[1] It is at this conjunction, where possibilities for principal participation in their own making become more feasible and tangible, that I propose that this *contest* is more productively thought of as a *struggle*. My first move in building this resource involves applying a processual understanding of neoliberalism to the principal subject.

The Process of Principal Neoliberalisation

Drawing on Foucault's insights, analysis conducted in the previous chapter sought to expose the 'processual character' (Springer, 2012, p. 135) of neoliberalism by opening a critical space adjacent to the vast array of literature that takes neoliberalism to be a dominant and ubiquitous political-economic project. Accordingly, I continually acknowledged the powerful formative work of policy discourses while also introducing an empirical interest in perspectival accounts of their articulation with existing circumstances. In this analysis, my intention was to follow lines of argument developed by Foucault (1991) to show how policy discourses of neoliberalism depict 'the *episteme* of a period' and represent a 'space of *dispersion*' – that is not 'a slice of history' but a 'simultaneous play of specific remanences' (p. 55, italics in original). By extension, I also pursued variegation, mutability and inconsistency in the discourses, their 'endlessly unfolding failures and successes' (Springer, 2012, p. 137) and possibilities, at any of their frayed edges, for critique and resistance.

These qualities of my discourse analysis align with writings that challenge the coherence of the neoliberal political-economic project. Following Dean (2010), these works posit 'a field of contestation in which there are multiple rationalities of government' (p. 150). Additionally, they focus on temporal and spatial variations in the take-up of neoliberalism in practice (e.g. in Cahill, 2011; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Raaper, 2016; Springer, 2012). A common preference in this diverse body of literature is to describe an ongoing process of *neoliberalisation* in order to capture plural and contingent characteristics and to generate accounts of what Peck and Tickell (2002) refer to as 'actually existing' neoliberalisms (p. 383). This processual understanding of neoliberalism, in breaking from the theoretical enclosure of a vast store of monolithic and omnipresent readings, is attentive 'to *both* local peculiarities *and* the generic features of neoliberalism' (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 388).

While generally applied to time and space variations in the take-up of neoliberal market logics into policy and practice, I claim that the process of neoliberalisation might also be usefully scaled to the level of the individual subject in consideration of its many 'subject forming strands' (England & Ward, 2008, p. 3). In particular, I

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[1] This connection is supported by Butler's (1995) theoretical interpretation of Foucault's 'productive' power and subjectivity. Butler says 'that the subject is that which must be constituted again and again implies that it is open to formations that are not fully constrained in advance … If the subject is a reworking of the very discursive processes by which it is worked, then agency is to be found in the possibilities of resignification opened up by discourse' (p. 135).

seek to test the epistemological prospects in positioning principals as 'neoliberalised' subjects inside of an influential discursive field that proposes their positions and instructs their practice but remains, at the same time, vulnerable to the vagaries and contradictions of local histories, knowledges, contexts and institutions. Consideration of the 'neoliberalised' principal shifts analysis closer to 'the ambivalence and fragmentary nature of discourse construction of subjects' claimed by Niesche and Gowlett (2015, p. 377) and suggests the emergence of what Phillips (2006) describes as 'a "palette"[2] of multiple patterns of self' (p. 314). More ambitiously, in focussing on the actual practices of principals, the process of neoliberalisation admits the notion of a struggle founded in an 'epistemic friction' (Medina, 2011) between the forthright and pervasive knowing of neoliberal policy discourses and the knowledge stocks[3] of principals derived from within policy limits as well as in the outside accumulation of local, historical and subjugated oppositions.

My treatment of the neoliberalisation of the principal follows distinct lines into the rest of this chapter as well as the three chapters which follow. It uses Foucault's understanding of *power* as inextricably bound to the productive work of discourse (e.g. in Foucault, 1977, 1980a, 1980b) to account for the commanding and pervasive qualities of neoliberalism and points to a 'cartography of dispositifs of power' (Lazzarato, 2009, p. 114) where different logics and strategies of government are shaped and exercised and certain power effects are realised. In these arrangements, the neoliberalisation of the principal subject is, prima facie, the realisation of the effects of power *on* principals – effects that permeate, characterise and constitute their subjectivity and work to render them as submissive and docile.

Against these seemingly fixed arrangements, as my discourse analysis in Chap. 4 illustrated, Foucault's rendition of neoliberal governmentality allows access to some space for movement and contingency. To reiterate, neoliberal governmentality, with its 'ensemble of rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques' (Springer, 2012, p. 137), submits individuals to relations of power that reinterpret and relocate outwardly focussed disciplinary pressures. While hegemony and its vertical domination continue to be important, the decentring of government imbues principals with a desire to govern themselves and connects them to promulgated notions of freedom and autonomy. Thinking with Leask (2012), it is this 'profoundly normalising' rationality of the self as enterprise that creates a more immanent and material dispositif and, concomitantly, more multiform and various power relations (p. 63).

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[2] Phillips' (2006) reference to 'palette' is derived from Felix Guattari's metaphor for thinking about the possibilities for new subjectivities within existing discursive boundaries. Guattari says, 'One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette' (1995, p. 7). Phillips (2006) elaborates on the metaphor in saying that 'the subject-as-artist is afforded a level of creativity but only in so far as new forms can be derived from the "palette," which is presumably made up of previously encountered forms' (p. 314).

[3] The term 'stocks of knowledge' comes from the pioneering work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) in their book *The Social Construction of Reality*. It refers to an accumulated body of social understandings, distilled from 'biographical and historical experience' that comes to represent and delimit an objective reality and 'which is available to the individual in everyday life' (p. 41).

While accounting for this more inwardly focussed set of power relations, I have resisted depictions of the principal as freely transcending the dominant discursive order or as having control over the discourses from which they draw their existing subject positions and find their possibilities for speaking and acting. Instead, I interpret this movement of the neoliberalised principal subject as an oscillation between distinct and antinomous oppositions and, following Phillips (2006), as providing 'a crucial space in which an element of creativity can be introduced' and 'a potential for disruption', brought on by competing subjectivities, can occur (p. 314). From here onwards, I interpret the task of utilising the processual qualities of neoliberalisation to look beyond the common sense of existing subjectivities, as better served by detecting and working *with* the obdurate paradox of these circumstances rather than railing *against* them.

Webb, Gulson, and Pitton (2014) signal the possibilities for working with paradox in proposing 'the aporia of a freerer self' (p. 39). The authors describe, in observations very close to claims of the discursive capture of principals in my own study, the 'conundrum' of the free subject 'ironically, evidenced in the choices that regulate the self' which they suggest, under neoliberal conditions, are 'largely determined *a priori* and regulated within appropriate identifications, metrics and performances' (pp. 39–40, italics in original). The use of aporia is to signal 'an attempt to not resolve such conundrums, but rather, to examine and better understand how such a puzzle has been constructed and to discuss possible effects that such a puzzle produces' (p. 32).

The aporetic qualities of this freerer self are useful for considering the neoliberalisation of principals and an attendant struggle. As researcher, they hold me in extended puzzlement about the construction and activation of freedoms beyond and aside from those that disguise the covert control of government. They raise ontological questions about the possibility or otherwise that principals might have available 'any kind of self-originating ethical intention' (Leask, 2012, p. 57). They suggest a stepping back from instrumental concepts such as principal autonomy and local governance and a consideration of the meaning in practice of words such as *participation, struggle* and *resistance*.

In this aporetic reading, the process of neoliberalisation is held open, so that new lines of questioning and different ways of thinking about the 'messy process' (Niesche & Gowlett, 2015, p. 381) of principal subject formation might emerge. In a space of macro/micro influences, it positions principals as not just in the thrall of irresistible global forces of neoliberalism, or obedient servants of ideational policy-making, but also as 'locals' who are strategically and dynamically situated to act at the nexus of external policy demands and home-grown issues and priorities. I interpret, in this shift, opportunities to use the multiplicity of principal practices observed and noted in the field to 'tell stories of destabilisation to monolithic representations' (Niesche & Gowlett, 2015, p. 382) and to inform more plural and nuanced accounts of the ways neoliberalism actually exists in practice. In other words, I gather from local accounts of principal practice markers of contingency, insufficiency and variability in the process of principal neoliberalisation. In turn, I consider how these

accounts might be viewed through a paradox lens to provide broader conceptions of who principals might struggle to be and what they might struggle to do.

Characterising the Struggle

My references to a struggle for the soul of the principal in this chapter, and empirical insights into that struggle in Chaps. 5, 6 and 7, range over ontological and epistemological ground:

- Ontological in the reach of neoliberal consequences into the being of principals to form their understanding of themselves, their relationships and the social and political contexts into which they are cast (Slater & Griggs, 2015, p. 439) and in the original determinations they are able to make (or not) about their freedom and their constitution as an effect of power
- Epistemological in the political imposition of knowledge and meaning via the scripted narrative of neoliberal policy – where the contradictions found in attending to local and 'subjugated knowledges' (Foucault, 1980b, p. 81) are confounded by fixed notions of identity and work, and formidable constraints on the understanding of what is possible

In neoliberal times, the lopsidedness of this struggle is revealed both in the intensification of restraints on principals created by policy technologies such as competition, standardisation, accountability and performativity and by inducements to find their authority within the conventional and accepted 'truths' of prevailing discourses. As principals use these truths to build and stabilise their personal authority, they also contribute, intentionally or not, to the stabilisation of the broader system and to the certainty and immovability of the knowledge it privileges and promulgates. In this way, truth is positioned, following Haugaard (2012), as 'the final vocabulary of power' that 'cages social action' (p. 90–91), so that any challenge to the existing system is thus construed as unreasonable and unwise. Inside of this seemingly one-sided and foreclosed arrangement, Connolly (2002) does note an ethico-political struggle over knowledge claims and truth assertions; however, he goes on to describe how the forces of the status quo work to enlist and subsume their oppositions:

> in the first instance we have a subterranean conflict over the nature of language, discourse, and identity that issues in an overt conflict over where the political danger is located in the late-modern period. One side seeks to open up discourses that are too closed and self-righteous and the other to protect established truths it considers threatened. But this ethico-political conflict, as I see it, is hardly ever thematized by the modernist in overtly political terms. The opponent is treated as if she shared (or must share, if she is a rational, responsible thinker) the modernist's political starting points, and the ethicopolitical difference is unconsciously translated into a universal philosophical issue with one rational response. (p. 60)

Descriptions like those of Haugaard (2012) and Connolly (2002) present a bleak picture of curtailed freedoms, rational/functional choices and quashed opportunities. They also seem to substantially undermine the efficacy of my claim of a struggle for the soul of the principal.

Against these constraints, in Chaps. 5, 6 and 7, I work back into the Connolly's ethico-political conflict in more overtly political ways and revisit and reiterate Foucault's (1985) epistemic call to 'to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known' (p. 9). To do this, I bring data I have collected in the field to a body of critical leadership literature in order to engage with the paradox of current experiences, behaviours and practices of principals. Furthermore, following the argument developed about principal neoliberalisation, I claim that patterns of principal interactions with other elements in their lives and work, including external policy demands, vary according to situations and circumstances and, by extension, can only be understood in their particular contexts.

In the previous chapter, my methodological critique of the policy status quo, and its claims to sovereignty, marked out a front on which oppositions could be envisaged and elaborated. This work, captured by De Lissovoy's (2016) description of a desire 'to hammer away slowly at the edifice of the official story' (p. 169), is now conjoined with (1) the inductive task of detecting those dispersed acts that may consolidate into a pushing back against established truths and (2) the anticipatory work of imagining different practices and oppositions. Following Ball (2015), this empirical shift aims to breach the 'theoretical silence' in governmentality studies around contestation, by creating a reasonable expectation of principal participation in conflict and resistance and by suggesting that this participation might make 'new sorts of statements, new sorts of truth, imaginable' (pp. 1130–1131).

Struggle Tactics: Critique, Counter-Conduct and Agonistic Practice

To this point, the struggle for the soul of the principal has been characterised, somewhat programmatically, as a contest between the governing and the governed – between the impositions and entreaties of governmental mechanisms of power and dispersed acts of refusal aimed at pushing back against this power and discovering new truths and subjectivities. In *What is critique?*, Foucault (1997b) introduces a new relativity to this characterisation:

> I do not think that the will not to be governed at all is something that one could consider an originary aspiration. I think that, in fact, the will not to be governed is always the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price. (p. 72)

This insight speaks to the complex relationship of the subject to power and, in doing so, invites a more nuanced rendition of the possibilities and limitations of pushing

back against the controls and forces of government. A further complexity can be detected in Foucault's (1978) claim that points of resistance are ubiquitous in the network of power:

> there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat. (p. 96)

In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault (2007) pursues a 'striking back' theme in proposing a 'tactically effective analysis' of 'the circle of struggle and truth'. He describes an underpinning 'conditional imperative' of what is to be done as no more than 'tactical pointers' and says that this imperative should be of the kind: 'If you want to struggle, here are some key points, here are some lines of force, here are some constrictions and blockages' (p. 3). In preparing the way for the next three chapters, I will highlight certain tactical pointers and lines of force that both reflect the diffusion and ambivalence of Foucault's various accounts while still forming into an arrangement of possibilities for supporting and leveraging a paradox lens. This work is directed to further conceptualising of a struggle and the possibilities of productive principal participation, as well as linking to more ambitious aspirations for paradox, flagged in Chap. 2 as its 'warrior topos' function and applied in Chaps. 5, 6 and 7 to the paradoxes developed from my empirical work.

From the field of possibilities, three points of resistance or, more colourfully, 'struggle tactics', are now introduced in readiness for their utilisation in the next three chapters. They are critique, counter-conduct and agonistic resistance.

Critique

Foucault's concept of critique has already been quite extensively referenced in other places in this book, most prominently as a tool in the process for data analysis described in Chap. 4. The previously identified qualities of Foucauldian critique – such as questioning of established norms, creating critical explanation of discursive and constitutive limits and interrupting the hegemony of dominant discourses – are now configured as tactics of introspection and oppositional constitutive recognition. This is a shift towards what Foucault (1984) describes as 'practical critique' in the form of a 'crossing over' so 'that criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value but, rather, as an historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognise ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying' (pp. 45–46). This critique of what we are, Foucault (1984) describes as a 'labour of diverse inquiries … at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and experiment with the possibilities of going beyond them' (p. 50).

The necessity of a critique that finds and tests these limits is well captured by Butler (2004) in *What is critique? An essay on Foucault's virtue.* Her insights also reclaim some ground for the critical interests of this book and hint at the blockages, silences, confusions and ambiguities that I seek to reveal in subsequent use of a paradox lens:

> One does not drive to the limits for a thrill experience, or because limits are dangerous and sexy, or because it brings us into a titillating proximity with evil. One asks about the limits of ways of knowing because one has already run up against a crisis within the epistemological field in which one lives. The categories by which social life are ordered produce a certain incoherence or entire realms of unspeakability. And it is from this condition, the tear in the fabric of our epistemological web, that the practice of critique emerges, with the awareness that no discourse is adequate here or that our reigning discourses have produced an impasse. (p. 307)

Insights into critique from Foucault and Butler are used in the chapters which follow to develop possibilities for facing and resisting excessive governing of society and individuals (Chap. 6), to invoke a 'critical ontology of ourselves' linked to more active involvement of principals in authoring their ethical selves (Chap. 7) and to support the argument that conflict and political debate are necessary and important to democratic aspirations of principals (Chap. 8).

To complete this segue, two other interpretations of Foucault's *What is critique?* (Foucault, 1997b) that relate to putting critique into practice are important in the positioning work that follows. Firstly, Foucault's oft-quoted, but never fully elaborated, claim that 'there is something in critique that is akin to virtue' (p. 25) is interpreted as a kind of virtuous curiosity founded in principal acts of 'questioning, probing doubting and exploring' (Gillies, 2013, p. 17). This is not to suggest being critical for the sake of it, but rather to regard as virtuous the willingness of principals to think critically about their own subjectivity and in the formulation of new knowledge about their lives and work. It also takes, as a sign of virtue, the courage of principals to work beyond established norms and to face the risking of the self that this involves (see Butler, 2005).

Secondly, the take-up of Foucault's (1997b) notion of 'critical attitude' is to emphasise the crucial role played by the will of the individual principal within the framework of governmental power mechanisms (see Lorenzini, 2016). This reference to 'will' functions as a counterpoint to my theorisation in Chap. 2 of the subjectivising qualities of Foucault's 'will to truth'. For principals, the adopting of a critical attitude is taken to elicit a propensity to realising they no longer recognise themselves within available governmental truth regimes and, subsequently, a voluntary risking of the self in acts that exceed the limits of established truths. This 'will' to know and to risk also sets a principal's readiness to engage in a struggle both within and against the orthodox expectations of the system to which they belong (and which employs them) against the potentially hazardous confinements of apathy and inaction.

Counter-Conduct

While critique has an apparent practical function, or as Foucault (1997b) describes, 'some stiff bit of utility' (p. 25), the notion of counter-conduct (Foucault, 2007) involves a broader conceptualisation of involvement in a struggle. Counter-conduct infers a contest, with one side formed around shaping of conduct by the imposition of governmental power and the other by refusal amongst the targeted to be conducted this way and a desire to be conducted differently. As Lorenzini (2016) notes, at the core of counter-conduct is 'the struggle in order to claim and obtain an *other* conduct' (p. 130 italics in original).

In Chap. 3, Foucault's reading of the operations of various governmental power techniques was connected to the production and maintenance of particular subjectivities. To reiterate, these techniques, when folded into a modern form of governmental power (which I characterised in Chap. 3 as the *technologies of government*), create a rationale for governing. They impose a specific and preferred conduct on individuals and, at the same time, invite them to shape their own conduct, based on the premise that they have already freely acceded to being governed thusly. This means that to govern someone, according to Foucault (1982), is to structure their field of freedom and, therefore, their possible field of action (p. 790). In accordance with these arrangements, Foucault (2002) defines an arena for analysis of power relations inside of governmental endeavours to induce, guide and direct the conduct of others – what he calls 'conduire des conduits' or 'conduct of conducts'.[4]

Foucault's use of 'conduct' informs a broad project directed at recasting simplified and reductive dichotomies about power and resistance and, following Rossdale and Stierl (2016), 'moving away from binary oppositions about sovereigns and subjects' (p. 2). In *The Subject and Power* (Foucault, 2002), Foucault says:

> Perhaps the equivocal nature of the term 'conduct' is one of the best aids for coming to terms with the specificity of power relations. For to 'conduct' is at the same time to 'lead' others (according to mechanisms of coercion which are, to varying degrees, strict) and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities. The exercise of power is a 'conduct of conducts' and a management of possibilities. (p. 341)

The conceptual possibilities in the term 'conduct' are further developed by Foucault (2007) in the series of lectures that comprise *Security, Territory, Population*. Tracing his use of the concept through the lectures reveals a marked shift in emphasis from governmental power that takes the shaping of the conduct of individuals as its object to a 'struggle against processes implemented for conducting others' which he denotes as 'counter-conduct' (p. 201). Davidson (2011) describes this 'creation of the couple conduct/counter-conduct' as a 'conceptual hinge' that sets up a movement 'between the ethical and the political' in pursuit of a desire to be conducted

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[4] Even though often cited as such, the phrase 'conduct of conduct' does not appear in the original English translation of Foucault's (1982) *The Subject and Power* – where it is translated as 'guiding the possibilities of conduct' (p. 789). The phrase can, however, be found in the new translation of *The Subject and Power* (Foucault, 2002) where it appears as a 'conduct of conducts' (p. 341).

differently (pp 8–10). The focus of this desire is perhaps best captured in Foucault's (1978) conference paper *What is critique?*, when he says that the 'perpetual question' about 'ways to govern' is 'how not to be governed *like that,* by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them' (Foucault, 1997b, p. 28 italics in original). The use of counter-conduct in the chapters which follow is directed to ways of resisting being 'governed *like that*'. Foucault's own deliberations on the register in which the 'ways' of counter-conducts might be struck are highly instructive.

The emergence of counter-conduct, Davidson (2011) claims, indicates Foucault's careful and deliberate attempt 'to find a specific word to designate the resistances, refusals and revolts against being conducted in a certain way' (p. 28). For various reasons, he departs from the more expressly political and unruly registers of revolt, dissent, disobedience and insubordination and embraces the variability and intrinsic ambiguity of counter-conduct and the implied simultaneity of its work in transforming relations of the self and others and in the formulation of a countervailing power that subverts its dominant oppositions. More pointedly, in finding (and finding out about) counter-conducts, Foucault (2007) explicitly advocates a focus on politically oriented practices when he says, 'by using the word counter-conduct … we can no doubt analyse the components in the way in which someone actually acts in the very general field of politics or in the very general field of power relations' (p. 202).

I take the tenor and intentionality in Foucault's (2007) delineations as supporting a politically oriented focus on the practices and subjectivities of counter-conduct in the chapters which follow. Such an approach involves the disaggregation and unpacking of resistance into its smaller, more ambivalent and less remarkable parts and a shaping of those parts as activities and tactics that unseat the inert and habitual positioning to which principals are currently invited. Working more forensically with Foucault's (2007) account, I now describe three broad deployments of counter-conduct in Chaps. 5, 6 and 7:

Detecting Counter-Conduct in the Field From Foucault's 'immense family' of counter-conducts, I am interested in finding evidence of those that may already be present in principal's lives and work and to notice their dimensions and componentry. Disparate and inventive – and often noted as incidental or unintentional – these examples serve to populate the more agentic side of individual and group practice. They form the broad inventory of practices that function as correlatives to instruments of government and position principals as various actors engaged in ongoing contestation. This inventory is generally oriented away from grand gestures of refusal (see Foucault, 1978, pp. 95–96) and towards a 'general mobility' (Foucault, 1997a, p. 123) based on a shift to more equivocal and invigilated acts of participation. For example, counter-conducts amongst principal participants in my research are suggested in acts of risk-taking, complaint and deflection, in attempts to nullify, ignore and quash outside interference and in the prioritising of local wisdom and school-based decisions.

When this work of detection exceeds a hunt for showings of counter-conduct, it is to draw attention to new *possibilities* in subverting dominant ways of doing and being. As Foucault (1982) notes of the one over whom power is exercised, 'faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up' (p. 789). To extend the theoretical development of governmentality that commenced in Chap. 3, detection of counter-conducts will be used to help delineate what Binkley (2009) describes as 'the tactical reversals to which rationalities of governmentality are prone' (p. 75) and to respond to allegations that governmentality studies tend to remain quiet about questions of agency and, in doing so, overlook the fact that it is people who create meanings and practices (see Bevir, 2010).

Understanding the Tactical Importance of Freedom   In the chapters which follow, references to 'spaces of freedom' and 'practices of freedom' underscore the notion that, while government gives shape to freedom, it is not constitutive of freedom (Dean, 2010, p. 21). These references are to the tactical importance of treating freedom as exceeding the ways that its purpose is foreseen by government. It is in this excess that principals are conceived as actors capable of fashioning out spaces less encumbered by authority and of developing practices, in these spaces, that amount to counter-conducts – to desires, decisions and efforts to not be governed thusly.

Foucault (2014) sees this 'movement of freeing of oneself from power' serving 'as revealer in the transformations of the subject and the relation the subject maintains with the truth' (p. 77). In graduating this movement from its revelatory capacity towards possibilities for practising of counter-conducts, the will of the principal is again implicated. Here, it is the will to loosen the hold of governmental power by determinably unmasking alternative conducts that this power hides from view and by enacting specific counter-conducts in order to 'experiment with *other* forms of conduct and self-conduct' (Lorenzini, 2016, p. 13). Towards realising the tactical importance of this freedom, my analysis in the following chapters uses Foucault's (2005) theoretical proposition about 'mobility, transformability and reversibility' in the field of power relationships that is governmentality (p. 252) to submit ways in which the practices of government can be turned to focuses of resistance. More materially, it looks for (and imagines) intentional efforts amongst principals to see and understand the effects of current modalities of power and to highlight (1) qualities such as courage, disobedience and effort as counter-conducts in the face of this power and (2) strategies of risk mitigation founded in the caucusing of like-minded principals and the possibilities, in their collective voice, of countering specific forms of authority.

Linking Counter-Conduct to a Broader Ethico-political Project   In Chaps. 5, 6 and 7, counter-conduct is connected into efforts to position principals differently in a broader ethico-political project. The foundation of this connection can be detected in Davidson's (2011) description of counter-conduct as 'an activity that transforms one's relation to oneself and to others; it is the active intervention of individuals and constellations of individuals in the domain of the ethical and political practices and

forces that shape us' (p. 32). This characterisation of counter-conduct as running the political/ethical gamut not only describes a potential contribution to positioning principals differently but also speaks to the breadth of inversions on which these conducts operate – a series that runs from the macro-level technologies of rule to the specific ethical practices by which individuals rule themselves (Binkley, 2009, p. 76).

The political inclinations of counter-conduct are read from claims, already outlined in this section, of possibilities for contesting and thwarting the forces that govern principal conduct. Here, the entreaties and enticements of government – and the legitimate and accepted conduct they embody – are set against a will to entertain oppositional conducts and a willingness to direct practices of freedom to a desire to be governed otherwise.

Linking counter-conduct with ethics draws from the Foucault's (1988) work on 'technologies' or 'practices' of the self and how they might harness the capacity of individuals and groups to apply a 'certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being' (p. 177) in order to make decisions about the sort of subject they would like to be. This introduction of counter-conduct to an ethics based on doing work on the self, while focussed on the individual subject, does not presuppose the certainty or desirability of any particular subjectivity. As Demetriou (2016) observes, counter-conduct is present along the spectrum of subjectivity … (i)t moulds subjectivities – majority, minority and even radical (p. 223).

To reiterate, in Chap. 3 the contingency and interruption proposed by Foucault's theoretical explanation of technologies of the self was turned to imaging a form of ethics that enables principals to critique the discursive shaping of their own subjectivity. The resistance implied by this ethics while still concerned with the recalibration of governmental power now includes, following Odysseos, Death, and Malmvig (2016), 'the co-emergent incitement of counter-conduct as ethical transfiguration' (p. 155). Chaps. 6, 7 and 8 introduce a range of practices – both observed and imagined – that help fill out this 'ethical core' of counter-conduct (Gillies, 2011, p. 217) and, in turn, lend support to the ethico-political repositioning of principals. The risky truth-telling of Foucault's (2010) notion of *parrēsia*, the entertaining of different subjectivities, critiquing existing power relations and entering into 'games of truth' (e.g. Foucault, 1987) to gain advantage are all taken as points of resistance that imbricate counter-conduct with explicitly ethical practices of the self.

Agonistic Practice

In the struggle for the soul of the principal, explored using a series of paradoxes in the next three chapters, agonistic practice is posited as a constructive and preferred mode for participation in conflict or, more specifically, in contests between rival positions. Wenman (2013) describes *agonism* as 'a strategic and tactical doctrine

concerned with the capacity of human agents to challenge the tragic forces that seek to govern their lives and determine their conduct' (p. 39). Therefore, the use of *agnostic practice* is, in the first instance, to denote a positioning of principals as subjects able to wrest back possibilities for self-formation by contesting the 'tragic' effects and dominating tendencies of governmental power. In this tenor, Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) describe, in agonism, 'a situated practice of choice-making within structured conditions' (p. 111). Speaking of agonistic practice in these terms draws its use into already discussed Foucauldian themes of power, freedom and resistance. Additional applications in the following chapters rest on other theoretical resources, in particular, those developed by the Belgian political theorist, Chantal Mouffe.

Mouffe (2000) emphasises the value of conflicts and confrontations in political activity, claiming that 'far from being a sign of imperfection (they) indicate that democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism' (p. 93). Elsewhere, Mouffe (2013) proposes an 'agonistic model of democracy' in which the struggle over competing ideas is between 'adversaries' who share a belief in the right to defend their ideas, rather than between antagonistic 'enemies' bent on destroying each other. From this distinction, Mouffe claims that 'a well-functioning democracy calls for a confrontation of democratic political positions' (p. 7).

Applying Mouffe's perspectives to the political work of principals helps inform choices about their participation. Recognising both the importance and inevitability of conflict invites principal to a style of work that embraces the possibilities conflict holds for seeing and performing intelligible subjectivities beyond the versions favoured in the current doxa. In drawing attention to the need for plurality and to the distinction between agonism and antagonism, Mouffe also alludes to a preferred tenor for participation in adversarial contests. She advocates the ever-present prospect for mutually destructive antagonism between political 'enemies' be transformed into, and played in, a more constructive form of rivalry with an 'adversary'. Extrapolating from this distinction, I treat the political participation of principals as potentially more productive when brought closer to Connolly's (2002) 'agonistic respect' – founded in the way adversaries are engaged, challenged and resisted in situations of conflict. This type of engagement is to acknowledge the inevitability of a plurality of views, the mutuality in the experiences of opposing sides and the always remaining possibility of dignified negotiation. The lines of Connolly's explanation of agonistic respect can also be followed into discussions of principal subject formation when he describes a 'respectful strife with the other achieved through intensified experience of loose strands and unpursued possibilities in oneself that exceed the terms of one's official identity' (p. 166).

Finally, agonistic practice is laced with warnings of the dangers of hurrying to consensus in decision-making. At a macro level, principal policy work is taken to include expectations that principals will willingly form a consensus around the intentions of policy-makers. I treat these expectations as designed to obscure the power differential between participating parties and as quieting the possibilities for local disagreement and push-back. At school level, building consensus is shown to alleviate principal impatience at the equivocality of ongoing conflict and as satisfying a pressing expectation from others to bring issues to a decisive end. However,

against these practices, I reaffirm a preference for the oppositional qualities of ago-nism founded in my determination to reveal and hold open multiple positions and to test the possibilities in paradoxy (and its related tensions, ambiguities and conflicts) as an intervention in the constitutive politics of principals.

Deploying a Paradox Interpretive Lens

In the opening chapter, I described this book as deriving an inductive quality from its use of empirical data drawn from fieldwork conducted in five secondary schools. In previous chapters, this data and the various 'analytical insights and interpretive hunches' (Ball, 2012, p. viii) it provides have been put into an iterative relationship with key ideas related, for example, to the expanded theoretical possibilities in para-dox, the use of the conceptual resources of Foucault and others and the imbrication of neoliberal policy discourses with the processes of principal subjectivity. This preference for grounding theory in research, or what Heffernan (2018) describes as 'theorising of the data' (p. 7), is also prominent in my formulation of a paradox lens – a theoretical construct applied in analysis in the next three chapters.

In fieldwork, observing certain emotions and behaviours in participants, listen-ing to various anecdotes and assertions and watching casual and formal interactions alerted me to background themes about contradiction, contingency, tension and ambiguity. At first only peripherally noted, these themes emerged, both in situ and in subsequent iterations of my data analysis, as ubiquitous in the daily lives of prin-cipal participants and, by extension, central to an understanding of the constitution of principals and their work. In this way, without 'going after' a paradoxical under-standing, my fieldwork and the data it generated functioned as a starting point for seeing paradox and developing the idea of a paradox lens through which to look at the constitutive forces shaping the principal.

Gale (2001) asks of the researcher undertaking critical policy sociology, 'how is what is found/produced, (to be) represented?' (p. 384). Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are organised by a three-part division of the 15 paradoxes identified in my study. While this structure provides a relatively straightforward response to Gale's question, it fails to acknowledge the implications of what Gale terms an a priori question central to issues of representation which asks, 'what lenses do I use to look (read) with?' Responding to Gale, I work from the idea of thinking with paradox (see Chap. 2) towards the more practical application of paradox as a lens for looking at my data. The shifting of paradox 'from a label to a lens' (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008, p. 222) requires the development of conjoined processes of analysis, construction and rep-resentation of my data.

Attributing analytical possibilities to paradox involves translating its language and theoretical content, established in Chap. 2, into new ways of looking at my field data that foreground complexity, plurality and contradiction. It means seeking the epistemological qualities of each paradox and the ways in which each 'calls into question the process of human thought' (Colie, 1966, p. 7) and invokes surprise and

wonderment by deviating from orthodox understandings of how principals and their work are shaped. The following is a summary of the purposes to which a paradox interpretive lens is put in the next three chapters.

To join the macro-analysis of the policy discourses of neoliberalism (conducted in Chapter 4) to the micro-practices of principals. I aim to demonstrate (1) that many of the paradoxes emerge and develop from the discursive struggles inherent in these macro-policy discourses and (2) how the shaping influence of various discourses on the subjectivity of principals directly influences both the conflicts, contradictions and ambiguities that confront them and the choices they have for managing them.

To highlight how the componentry of each paradox supports the revival and maintenance of conflicting truths that mark the struggle over principal subjectivity. I endeavour to restore simultaneity and interdependence to the sides of each paradox and, in doing so, resurface less popular, subjugated or forgotten perspectives – including analysing how some perspectives are masked for principals by the power of ruling truths that are taken for granted and opaque. What Gramsci (1971) describes as the 'elite' knowledge 'between the rulers and the ruled' (p. 666) is not abandoned under the scrutiny of a paradox lens but rather is kept in play so that possibilities for its repurposing to serve broader and more emancipatory ends can be considered.

To suggest political possibilities for paradox that challenge the power relations that support the current doxa. This purpose harnesses possibilities, emerging from the language of paradox, for a 'warrior topos' (Barthes, 1975, p. 28). It tests whether earlier established theoretical possibilities might have practical application in mitigating the risks and consequences of working beyond accepted and orthodox responses and in deploying critique to more palpable practices of transgression and counter-conduct.

To map, through its many paradoxical contests, the terrain of the struggle over principal subjectivity. The materiality of real and actual neoliberalism, including the variegation, contingency and fragility attached to the previously described process of neoliberalisation, is used to surface the complexity of principal experiences of conflict, tension and struggle and to counter rational and simplified accounts. A series of questions that might be addressed using a paradox lens arise, such as: How can principals detach themselves from existing forms of subjection and pursue the art of not being governed quite so much? What is the performative dimension of this break? What type of politics needs to be reclaimed?

In presenting the paradoxes in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8, I do not wish to overreach the interpretive possibilities of a paradox lens nor claim a complete response to the question of constitutive influences. Rather, I try to hold to its deployment as a critical tool for gaining insights that would otherwise be inaccessible. Deacon (2000) neatly captures the place of this work:

> This is not to suggest that one ought to focus exclusively on discontinuity, to celebrate contingency, or to extol difference; rather it is a question of problematizing the superficiality of what appears to be profound, of warily exposing the transitory patterns that configure capricious chaos. (p. 142)

The confident assertion of these purposes may appear to stand in contrast to a ten-
dency, in the chapters which follow, to remain undecided in the face of conflicting
alternatives. Slowing the making of decisions raises the question of whether my
analysis amounts to an uncritical and timid response. I contend, against such per-
ceptions, that paradox reveals a bigger space of possibility by halting the tendency
to rational reconciliation of competing sides. Paradox leaves open multiple alterna-
tives and, at the same time, provides language and theoretical content through which
they can be pursued. In holding to undecidability, I take heart from Marcus and
Fischer (1999) who claim:

> The only way to an accurate view and confident knowledge of the world is through a sophis-
> ticated epistemology that takes full account of intractable contradiction, paradox, irony, and
> uncertainty in the explanation of human activities. (pp. 14–15)

Finally, in shifting the lens metaphor to something closer to a viewing platform, I
claim for paradox a capacity to better see what Giroux (2008), citing the philoso-
pher Ernst Bloch, describes as 'the possibilities of the *not yet*' (p. 139). In the next
three chapters, I apply this concept of the 'not yet' to visualising from a paradox
platform the more distant and diffuse possibilities of new and productive gaps for
the agonistic expression of resistance and freedom. Such visualisations rely on a
more imaginative reading of the previously mentioned 'epistemic friction' (Medina,
2011) between the fixed assertions of neoliberal policy discourses and the plurality
of local knowledges and oppositions – readings which not only represent this plural-
ism in paradox but use 'the gaps, discontinuities, tensions and clashes among per-
spectives and discursive practices' (Medina, 2011, p. 24) that paradox reveals to
envisage new ways in which principals might fashion their political participation.

As part of sharpening the focus and broadening the possibilities of a paradox
lens, the next three chapters also contain 'portraits' of each of the principal partici-
pants in my study.

Principal Portraits

The individual 'portraits', incorporated within Chaps. 6, 7 and 8, introduce and
provide some insights into each of the principal participants in my study. Each por-
trait is generated from information gathered through observations and interviews.
However, the temporary, temporal and situated qualities of my ethnography mean
that I have only glimpsed the work of each participant, and the choices made by
participants to reveal, hide, avoid and ameliorate their thoughts and expressed opin-
ions have imposed a further limitation.

I am not, therefore, claiming a comprehensive portrayal. Rather, these are partial
accounts, each privileging certain versions of subjectivity from the multiple and
mobile subjectivities from which each of the principals draw. While this focus on
particular subjectivities is created from a corresponding emphasis in my ethno-
graphic data, it is undertaken to support more detailed exploration and analysis

rather than to suggest definitional or exclusive qualities. My aim, drawing on Lecompte (2002), is to avoid 'presumptuously arrogating the lives and words of … informants' (p. 289) while, at the same time, looking beyond 'received stories and predictable scripts' (Lather, 2001, p. 483) to better understand the particularities of individual principal subjects and to remind myself of the inadequacies of generalised and reductive accounts.

Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) asserts the status of portraiture as a 'discerning, deliberative process and a highly creative one' (p. 10) that 'moves closer to the unique characteristics of a person' (p. 12). While Lawrence-Lightfoot's portraits have a more lyrical and ephemeral feel when compared to my grounded and practical accounts, I similarly contend that portraits offer a unique way of disseminating the views, positions, performances and struggles of individual principal participants. They add an individual perspective to the layered and iterative process of analysis of my fieldwork data. They show how discourses – and systems of power and regulation that attach to discursive regimes – work differently on the subjectivity of each participant and how each positions and defines themselves differently within these discourses. In speaking for themselves in these portraits, principals also describe acts of 'self-interrogation' and 'self-problematisation' (Hunter, 1996, p. 158), where new complexities are often revealed and acts of conformity and resistance realised.

Conclusion

The inductive qualities of this book include acknowledgement of the active role I took as researcher in foregrounding paradox and using it to frame and represent my empirical work. To conclude this chapter on a more reflexive note, I will discuss two specific areas of my involvement that appear particularly relevant to my deployment of paradox in the next three chapters.

Firstly, as ambiguity and contradiction began to emerge as useful tools of description and explanation in analysis of my initial field data, I decided to initiate an additional 'layer' of data collection. I invited principal participants to expand on alternative thinking or on some of their more unorthodox ideas by using a series of 'provocations' (see *Appendix 2*) to which they responded in a group setting. This 'provocation discussion' represented a deliberate attempt to examine and develop some of the paradoxical tensions that had begun to emerge, in both my theoretical and empirical work. My ambitions extended to provoking the critical reaction of principals to some initial insights from the data, prompting new discussion in order to extend their thinking about these claims and revealing previously unacknowledged contradictory, paradoxical and ambiguous qualities in their working lives.

In the execution of this additional method of data collection, each of these aspirations gained some traction, although factors such as group dynamics, individual interpretations of purpose, participant confidence and comfort levels, variations in prior preparation and capacity to formulate responses appeared to be in play at

different times. As a result, the actual input of participants was complemented with observations about the limits of their interpretive choices, including what they appeared to reject and what remained out of reach and, therefore, left unspoken. Managed in this way, the data from the provocation discussion provided insights into the slippage between the input of individuals and the broader narratives of policy discourse represented in the provocations. The transcription of the provocation discussion and the observation notes it generated were subsequently added to the bigger store of ethnographic information already collected.

In the provocation discussion, as in all parts of my fieldwork, the invitation to principal participants to think more paradoxically was gently imposed. Nevertheless, data analysis consistently revealed that the views of participants, even when confidently asserted, often resided alongside of alternative and even secretly harboured possibilities. It gave insight into the complexity of principals' working lives and the negotiations and concessions that are induced by competing discourses. Importantly, it also suggested that the constitutive work of dominant discourses could be troubled, and perhaps even interrupted, by allowing interference from different and competing 'truths' and encouraging an oft-neglected capacity to think otherwise.

Secondly, my use of paradox to depict tension opens my interpretive work to the attendant risk that such representations might be perceived as originating from a certain 'construction' of my data made to fit a predetermined framework and a set of normative categories. The temptation to this type of scholarly manipulation is held in the capacity of paradox to rein in complexity and to represent a plurality of ideas, positions and perspectives as an entity made up of well-ordered, distinct and oppositional elements. Less tempting in this constructed 'entity' approach (see Smith, Lewis, Jarzabkowski, & Langley, 2017) to paradox are shortcomings related to (1) reductive tendencies that simplify complex and holistic practices and processes and diminish a wider array of perspectives and (2) static depictions that fail to acknowledge the dynamic and shifting nature of conflict and tensions. Smith et al. (2017) point to the risks involved in positioning paradox as just a made-up entity by asserting that 'assuming that paradox is only a construction of the mind imbues individuals with ultimate control over the construction and deconstruction of paradox, and diminishes both assumptions and experiences of their persistence' (p. 5).

Applied to my own use of paradox, mitigating such risk relies on a nuanced response to the ontological question about whether paradoxes really exist in the lives and work of principals or whether they are social constructions made to encapsulate persistent tensions and contradictions (see Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016, p. 24). This is a variation on a question posed by Clegg (2002) when he asks, 'Are the paradoxes inherent to the nature of that which is being represented or the means of representation?' (p. 1). This 'ontological disparity' (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 385) is a persistent theme in organisational studies literature and goes to important considerations in my study, for example, about what can be done with paradox, how paradox can contribute to thinking – and thinking differently – about principals and their work, and how principals might reflexively fashion their own responses to perceived tensions, ambiguities and conflicts.

The position I take is to consider paradoxes as *both* inherent in the lives and work of principals *and* needing a level of formulation to fully realise their representative possibilities. Following Lewis (2000), I seek in my field data those 'contradictory yet interwoven elements' (p. 761) that can be derived, or directly inferred, from observations about the feelings, perspectives, identities and practices of principals. Bringing a paradox lens to construction of this data allows the actual tensions and complex interrelationships observed in social interactions to be encapsulated and represented in the multisided simultaneity of paradox. In this way, a paradox lens helps make sense of the 'felt experiences' (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016, p. 82) of tension, conflict, ambiguity and struggles for power expressed by research participants.

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Chapter 6
Paradoxes of Subjectivity and Authority

The themes of truth and power permeate each of the paradoxes distilled from my empirical work and theoretical interpretation. Those grouped as *paradoxes of subjectivity and authority* relate particularly to the *use* of truth as a form of power (Foucault, 1988, p.107) to work directly on the soul of the principal by shaping principal authority and subjectivity. While the use of 'authority' does not discount the legal responsibilities that legitimise the principal's representative function, the focus is mainly on the performative acts of authority and the 'legitimate resources' they provide (Haugaard, 2012, p. 73) in constituting the principal as a figure of authority in schools within particular social and political limits. In the systemic arrangements within which my study is situated, the circulation of power between central policy-makers and the principal is vitally important in bestowing and sanctioning preferred subjectivities. More pointedly, the regimes of truth that are given expression in prominent discourses form a political incitement for principals to recognise and shape themselves in these discourses.

In effect, principals derive their authority by speaking inside of these claims to truth and by understanding the limits to their authority imposed by a necessity that their 'practices count as valid in the eyes of others' (Haugaard, 2012, p. 74). As Ball (2015) notes, the 'crucial point is that subjectivity is the point of contact between self and power' (p. 3). It is this productive function of power at a macro-political level that forms the basis of the first of the paradoxes in this chapter: *the paradox of politicised subjectivity*. This paradox works against dualistic conceptions of the principal subject as constituted either through 'subjectivation and interiorization of domination' or 'emancipating action based on free will' (Rebughini, 2014, p. 2). Instead, it suggests that complex relations of power create a permanent tension between forces of constraint and emancipation. In fitting the formation of the principal subject to a distinctly post-structural account of structure and agency, this paradox reveals the discursive forces shaping the principal as both oppressive and productive and speculates on subjectivity as a site of struggle and resistance.

This pervasive and influential paradox is further expounded through (1) *the paradox of system membership* which develops from conflict experienced by principals

between system and local loyalties and (2) *the paradox of gender identity* which identifies how managerialist conceptions of leadership held in neoliberal policy discourses confound calls for a more diverse principal membership.

The authority of the principal is also subject to the micro-political dynamics of the school. While the legislative positioning of principals suggests a form of 'licensed autocracy' (Ball, 2012, p. 80), the social and political complexities of local execution mean that a different set of power relations are also in play which impose different controls and variables on principal authority. The other paradoxes identified in this chapter – *the paradox of team belonging* and *the leader/follower paradoxes* – while still acknowledging the powerful systemic influences on the principal render as paradoxical some of the local forces that appear to constrain and emancipate principal authority.

To reiterate, from my segue into this work in the previous chapter, my use of a paradox lens is not directed to putting a different normative truth up against the status quo. Rather, it is to interrupt and counter the prevailing truth in ways that raise pertinent and often neglected questions about principals and their work, and which reveal principal subjectivity, not as a fait accompli, but as a site of political struggle.

The Paradox of Politicised Subjectivity

The paradox of politicised subjectivity provides a broad schema for the relations of power in which principals are enmeshed and, as such, underpins many of the other paradoxes in this chapter and the two which follow. It relies on Butler's interpretation, in the *Psychic life of power* (1997), of Foucault's work on the productive function of power and its implication in the process of subject formation. School principals may understand and feel the oppressive effects of power exercised from above and outside. However, the very power that pushes down on principals and asks for them to submit to external demands is, paradoxically, the power on which principals depend for their authority and identity and which they 'harbor and preserve' (Butler, 1997, p. 2). Butler describes 'a fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency' (p. 2). As Rob, principal at Heatherbank School, observes:

> *I think my work is, in large effect, determined by the system and the system's expectations just follow.*

In this paradoxical arrangement, the principal appears to be afforded some power to act. However, it is not expressed as unencumbered choice, but rather set against the rules and structures that work to constrain and contain it or, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006) say of Butler's account, 'the subject is never fully determined by power, but neither is it fully determining' (p. 32). Such an understanding guards against idealised positivist readings of individual agency and, instead, takes principals and their work as discursively constructed within the inherent tensions and complexities of 'politicized subjectivity' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 32).

Certainly, participants in my study expressed a familiarity with a type of power that Butler says 'subordinates, sets underneath and relegates to a lower order' (p. 2). Belinda, principal of Lawson School, notes that:

> The power of the centre just swells and often at the expense of the school. The role is being described to me, imposed on me – they are imposed roles that are not connecting necessarily to resources at the school site, to students and staff.

Sasha, the Sullivan School principal, alludes to the ontological struggle brought on by this pressing influence from the outside:

> I think we compromise in many ways right from what we believe a good education is through to some of the procedures that we are expected to undertake. Principals are required to present themselves as other than their real selves. The principal has to be careful how they present themselves because they are 'performing', 'following a process', to 'achieve an outcome' to 'resolve an issue'.

In one extended response, Imogen, the principal at McCullough School, described the intervention of a central office policy directive into a very sensitive issue that she was trying to manage within the school. She said that the requirement to use form letters and to follow a particular set of procedures not only unnecessarily raised levels of staff and community disquiet and 'had the media at our door' but also put her in an unenviable position of feeling she was not acting in the best interest of her school. She concludes:

> I wasn't able to actually follow my true values and support the staff member. I was responding as a bureaucrat and representing the department, so I felt that there was genuinely a compromise in that situation.

Each of these examples depicts the principal as not fully enclosed, but already constructed, by power (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). Phillips (2006) provides deeper insights into these arrangements, describing the 'self' as:

> crafted and re-crafted out of the points of identification provided in the exterior fields of power and knowledge. These points of identification, in turn, provide symbolic anchors by which a subject is moored, at least temporarily, into a particular subject position within which they become identifiable and intelligible in terms of the broader formation of discourse.

A prominent feature of this discussion, so far, has been the power of the authoritative voice and the interpellation of a principal who answers the call to comply and submit. However, politicised subjectivity, when understood in its pardoxy, involves more than a 'hailing'[1] (Althusser, 1971) of the principal subject. Rather, as noted in my analysis of the policy discourses of neoliberalism, the dispositif of discursive and nondiscursive forces acting on principals requires and forms particular technical 'mentalities' that are not usually open to question by those who use them.

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[1] In his oft-quoted metaphor of *interpellation*, Marxist and Marxist critic Louis Althusser understands the subordination of subject as the effect of the authoritative voice that hails the individual. Butler (1997) provides a useful critique of Althusser's interpellation (pp. 5–6, 95–96).

After Foucault (2008), conditions of neoliberal governmentality involve the *conduct of conduct* penetrating deeply into the lives of principals to create an expectation that they not only submit to being governed but also submit to lending a hand to the mode of governing to which they are subjected. Their 'agency' under these conditions is cast in an interdependent relationship with their subjectivity. It is found in the efforts of principals to seek in themselves qualities such as agility, flexibility and enterprise and in the way they take responsibility for their own choices, expertise and susceptibilities and watch, measure and audit the value they return to their schools. In short, their agency is derived from their efforts to govern themselves.

Championing of principals as agential and transformational – for example, in the centrality of their positioning in the school effectiveness movement – tends to obscure the power relations that underpin their compliance and submission and which entreat their self-governance. This is especially evident in interview data collected from non-principal research participants in response to questions about the role of the principal. The following interview excerpts are offered as examples of my observation of the generally apolitical and unproblematic quality of non-principal responses.

> *I believe that the first role is to implement central office policies. Then, working down from that would be curriculum, making sure that the curriculum is developed within the school, that the safety and wellbeing for staff and students is developed; that's bullying, occupational health and safety, sexual safety, and then parent communication, and increasingly, there is accountability. (Gillian, Heatherbank School)*

> *My understanding [of the role of the principal] would be that when there is a policy push from head office and they want it in schools it is Janet's job to ensure that the school is implementing that policy. (Bernadette, Caldicott School)*

These responses suggest that the application of the *paradox of politicised subjectivity* necessitates critical work that surfaces and examines how power operates to produce principal subjectivity, and a constrained form of agency, and the extent to which it forecloses other opportunities for freedom and autonomy. It describes, in its simultaneity and the interrelatedness of its parts, a fundamental shift from sociology's traditional structure versus agency debate and, more particularly, a permanent separation from the idea that agency is a free-floating quality that individuals apprehend and use (see also Clarke, Bainton, Lendavi, & Stubbs, 2015, p. 57).

This paradox locates the principal inside of their political surroundings and, concomitantly, suggests the possibility of a shifting and unpredictable relationship between the principal and the situation in which they are held. Principal identity, in this reading, moves away from any ontological notion of innate or fixed qualities and opens spaces for the articulation of some other altered versions of the principal subject. It is at this juncture that possibilities for what Rebughini (2014) describes as 'marginal emancipation from the inevitability of the processes of subjectivation' (p. XX) emerge. These possibilities will be pursued in more detail in the conclusion to this chapter.

The Paradox of System Membership

The paradox of system membership draws quite directly from the previous account of *the paradox of politicised subjectivity* and from Butler's (1997) interpretation of subjectivity as originating in entreaties to submit to external demands. In these arrangements, deep contradictions arise from centralised attempts to describe to each of the tiers in the hierarchy their need to see their work in a broader system-wide context. For principals, the paradoxical qualities of system membership originate in the uneven power distributions and contradictory demands that mark processes of communication, consultation, line management and accountability. Starr (2014) points out that 'accountability systems do not allow school leaders to appraise or comment on the performance of those above them in the systemic hierarchy'. She says that this is an example of the way school leaders are pushed to the outside of a core-periphery power model which 'assumes power differentials between leaders and followers with decision-making authority at the top' (pp. 230–231).

Paradoxically, in the system in which my study is situated, this hierarchical model is downplayed in favour of claims about democratic and consultative qualities that are, in turn, used as 'pastoral pedagogies' (Hunter, 1994) to discourage ambivalence and create expectations of loyalty and support amongst principals.

The plural qualities of *the paradox of system membership* appear to gain prominence when the principal's membership of the broader system is brought into conflict with local commitments and loyalties, for example, in the implementation of policy that may be deemed a poor fit to local needs. In fieldwork, strong evidence was provided of an already well-developed paradoxical understanding of principal membership of the broader system. Interview data from principal participants described both their commitment to working within a broader system and their feelings of indifference, disappointment and resentment towards particular policy directives and central office compliance requirements.

Rob, the principal of Heatherbank School, describes an alignment between his school and the broader system and the way membership of the system evokes the notions of being one of a team:

> *We talk about teams, well we're part of the team. The team is the system. It's the public education system. I suppose we can't get away from the fact that we are a public school and we are part of a big system, and that system has its structures and has its expectations of its schools and of its school leaders. We have a governance structure that also is cognisant of those responsibilities that the principal has to the system and to the public purse.*

Other principals provided more nuanced accounts about the risks in being part of a broader system and of meeting its expectations. Sasha, principal of Sullivan School, described her public disapproval of a requirement to undertake a centrally sanctioned school review process that she considered of little or no value to her school. She claimed that the only rationale provided was that 'you're the only one in the region that hasn't done it' and that her reason for eventually proceeding was linked to her personal friendship with the person asking her to comply, rather than

finding any new merit in the process. Janet, principal of Caldicott School, followed up on Sasha's story by describing the risks of speaking back to policy directives that are ill-suited to local needs:

> *People who publicly take risks like that are either that kind of personality or they're close to retirement! Which is true, we know that and we rely on colleagues who are close to retirement to have a louder voice. It's helpful to the masses if those that don't feel they are so much at risk can have a loud voice.*

The themes of risk and vulnerability that emerged in interviews with principals highlighted the paradoxical nature of systemic claims about democracy and consultation. Three of the principal participants explicitly mentioned how it was safe to provide certain perspectives in the context and setting of my research that they would not provide in hierarchically arranged professional settings.

However, this tension between system requirements and local needs can also be *obscured* by authoritative voices located further up the hierarchy providing directives to principals to act in particular ways. In these circumstances, principals may utilise the official, mandatory and prescriptive qualities of the directive to relieve the immediate anxieties of local dissonance (Storey & Salaman, 2010, p. 57). While this 'only acting on orders' style of resolution may provide short term relief, it is unlikely to resolve the antinomy that continues to reside in conflict between the needs of the broader system and those of the local school. Moreover, this depiction is not just of claims and expectations from the centre imposed on the unwitting principal. It also involves the work that principals do on themselves to align themselves with the system and to derive their authority from this alignment. In something approaching what Ball and Carter (2002) describe as 'the *external alliances* repertoire' (p. 558, italics in original), principals seek self-legitimation through their relationships with others closer to the centre as a way of gaining specialist knowledge that reinforces their position in local power relations. The presence of the principal's self-made alliance with the system and the benefits that accrue from this is evident in the following teacher observation:

> *Also they are like the captain of a ship because they can read the environment. Often, organisations like departments don't get a read on boots on the ground of the location, while the principal has that contact as well as the connection with the system. I think that's the principal's job to then put that all together to create a functioning work place. (Darius, Lawson School)*

Later in interview, Darius notes how alignment with the system yields possibilities for enhancing the authority of principals when he observes that 'the principal gains collateral by working as a vessel or a medium between the system and their staff'.

Against these depictions of easy compliance and seductive alliances, it is important to acknowledge considerable evidence from my fieldwork of principal efforts to lead improvement and to become more effective in responding to the needs of their school, their students and the community. All of the principals in my study appeared cognisant of a range of situational variables in their own and their school's history and culture and sought to address these, for example, in efforts to use data to improve

teaching practice and learning outcomes, in trying to meet the needs of at-risk student cohorts and in attending to the broader social justice functions of schooling. Much of this work appeared to be conducted in a policy environment characterised privately as extrinsic and generic but, at the same time, embraced publicly by principals for its hierarchical dispersal of authority. What appears to be at work in this paradox of system membership is what Foucault (1997a) describes as the 'versatile equilibrium' of government, 'with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which impose coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by [her/] himself' (p. 154) .

The Paradox of Gender Identity

In the provocation discussion conducted with principal participants, Sasha, the principal of Sullivan School, in commenting on what she refers to as 'the leadership industry', says:

> *Don't get me started … a group of boring men that go around talking about their heroic, servant, transformational, moral leadership styles … sigh.*

While Sasha's input was ostensibly addressed to travelling experts who spruik their wares around schools and other educational settings, it also captures one side of an identity paradox that is derived from depictions of gender in school leadership. This paradox develops from a deep contradiction in the logic of the reigning discourse of managerialism that dominates current understandings of school leadership (see Chap. 4). Gill and Arnold (2015) claim that, on the one hand, there is general agreement that leadership 'needs to reflect current notions less implicated by the traditionally male dominant gender order and more in tune with gender equity' (p. 5). However, they go on to point out that this 'runs counter to the business-driven ethos of the new accountability with its press for heightened competition between schools and public listing of league tables which identify some schools as more successful and others less so' (p. 5).

As a result, the school leadership workforce, often championed for the diversity of its membership, paradoxically, confines individual leaders to a dominant neoliberal policy script and to following heroic and masculinist models for constructing their identities and performing their work. Grace (2000) asserts, as an important constituent of critical leadership studies, 'the recognition that the paradigms and discourse of educational leadership have been dominated by patriarchal assumptions' (p. 240). These assumptions, as a form of politicised subjectivity, were noted in my fieldwork in the routine privileging and marginalising of certain gendered perspectives in leadership. Sullivan School principal Sasha alludes to this routine when she says:

> *I'm sick of the five Ps, the four Ts and the thirteen Rs of leadership … it's all patriarchal. It's all done by men. I just don't relate to it.*

Sasha also describes how matters of gender identity are clearly at work in reconciling the 'directive and political' and 'very anti-democratic project' of central policy making with the work she is trying to do to 'settle' policy within a 'learning organisation' at school level. She describes conflict brought on by disparate aspirations as emanating from gendered views of leadership:

> Men have led it [the making of policy]. The notion of leadership is a patriarchal construct.

Less explicit references can be detected in the numerous metaphoric descriptions in field interviews of the principal as 'captain of the ship' and as 'company CEO'. Following Blackmore (2005), these references 'are more often than not premised around strong and entrepreneurial models of leadership more closely associated with masculinity than femininity' (p. 184). They not only highlight the way masculine assumptions about leadership are embedded in the managerial discourse but also suggest that principals are confined to certain 'identity categories' (Youdell, 2006) as they derive, validate and perform their authority from within this discourse.

According to Sinclair (2011), the narrow and prescriptive characteristics of managerial trends enforce particular understandings of how leaders look and who they should be. Sinclair says that, while men also feel these pressures, it is 'women leaders in traditionally male-dominated environments [who] experience particular pressures to produce non-threatening leadership selves'. Sinclair further contends the effect of this demand for particular types of leadership selves forces leaders, both women and men, 'in deep and self-disciplining ways', to become 'agents for maintaining the cultural status quo' (p. 511).

Applying a paradox lens to the contradiction between the gendered leadership preferences of the managerialist frame and the need to take account of the diversity of the leadership workforce helps restore conflicting possibilities. This lens exposes descriptions of school principals that use business and industrial metaphors, and their top-down, narrow and formulaic connotations, as one-sided and duplicitous. It suggests the need for leaders to become more reflexive about the power relations that invite them to preferred identities and to the work they do on themselves to secure their authority.

From the margins of managerialist discourse, *the paradox of gender identity* admits the simultaneous presence of voices that are currently repressed or underrepresented. I claim, at these margins, the possibility of a certain reworking of notions of autonomy and emancipation. The comments that Sasha provides here (and in her 'portrait' in Chap. 7) reflect the importance of active forms of self-fashioning as an antidote to (self)disciplinary forces of subjectivation. In the language of Foucault, they provide examples of technologies of the self (see Chap. 3) that transgress and speak back to technologies of domination. Importantly, in opening more imaginative possibilities in the ethico-political work of principals, expressions of critique and counter-conduct like those that Sasha provides – and which *the paradox of gender identity* seems to invite – point to a need to surface more diffuse and specific ways in which principals might work on themselves and activate

'Foucault's idea that individuals exert a degree of autonomy in shaping their immediate conditions of existence' (McNay, 2013, p. 82).[2]

The Paradox of Team Belonging

While the language is in the formal and rational style of organisational studies, Lewis (2000) provides a useful and relevant summary of this 'identity/belonging' paradox that can be applied to the identity work of principals:

> Paradoxical tensions arise because actors strive for both self-expression and collective affiliation. Seeking to comprehend their roles in a group, organisation and/or community, members attempt to artificially distinguish themselves (e.g., differentiating personal competencies, occupational practices, or ethnic values). (p. 769)

Principals in my study appeared to experience this paradox at two different levels – as a personal conflict of identity and as a component of their personnel management responsibility.

Firstly, in terms of identity, principal participants seemed greatly enamoured with being 'one of the team'. Paradoxically, they also enjoyed depictions of themselves as leaders that pointed to their primacy and positional power, including metaphors of ship captains and company chief executives, and perceptions of their individual leadership as strong and decisive. Sasha, the principal at Sullivan School, confidently claims in interview that 'this school is absolutely run on teams', but, later in the same interview, says:

> *People need to know where the leader stands. I always make my position clear. This is what I want and if you don't like it, then you've got to convince me. It's like, 'We're going to do this consultation now'. At previous schools, you'd have the ones that sit out the back and go, 'How can we get rid of this and white ant that'. Then I would say, 'You remember democratic decision making? That's just hierarchical rubbish'. I'd say to them, 'Look this is what we'll go with, but we'll consult … we have to do it by this date and if it's not decided by then, I'll decide it'.*

Team membership and collaborative work permeated the rhetoric of principal participants and appeared to occupy large amounts of their time, both within and beyond the school. They provided various expressions of their team commitment, for example, in preferences for distributing leadership work, in championing the achievement of various individuals and groups in the school, in having an open-door policy and in looking after the wellbeing of colleagues.

Several expressed a dislike for a vocabulary that signified their power and control and a preference for descriptors such as 'influential' and 'collaborative'. These expressions appeared to denote the presence of a form of pastoral power, with

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[2] McNay's (2013) *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* works at the conjunction of Foucault's practices of the self and feminist theory to provide insights into notions of gender identity, power, subjectivity and autonomy that greatly exceed those that could be gleaned from my empirical work.

principals preferring to 'shepherd the flock' towards desired practices and behaviours rather than giving directions founded on the designated authority of their position. Rob, from Heatherbank School, in response to a question about the power of the principal, seems to allude to this pastoral function when he eschews references to his personal power in favour of what he describes as 'the power of influence, the power of facilitation, the power of enablement' (see *Portrait: Rob – The Principal as 'Captain of the Ship'* later in this chapter).

Multiple group permutations meant that the principals in my study were involved in committees, working parties, consultation groups, professional networks and learning teams. These were formed within and across schools, schooling sectors and the broader system. Imogen, principal at McCullough School, lamented the amount of time spent in meetings, saying 'they just go on and on and on' and then asked rhetorically, 'but have I really been present for staff and students and community?' In interview, several teachers commented on the mystery and frustration associated with the assorted involvements of the principal and made links to issues of workload, availability and an apparent lack of 'payoff' back to the school. The following are offered as three examples from a bigger pool:

> *I think sometimes it seems to me that they get spread a bit thin, and those of us further down the food chain get an opinion that they're not doing enough and yet when you stop to think about they've got to be here and there and doing this and that, it's just not physically possible to put as much time into everything as we'd probably like them to. (Angela, Heatherbank School)*

> *I think there's a tug of war, because I think what the principal wants is to be embedded within their own school and to be productive within that school, but there are these other constraints all the time and expectations that they are attending various meetings and even professional learning days where Belinda has said, 'It's an expectation. I have to go'. (Ellie, Lawson School)*

> *There is an expectation that the principal be seen. To be visible at events that are deemed appropriate even if not necessarily useful. Sometimes it will be networking or being visible as opposed to being productive. (Tesia, Lawson School)*

Implicit in these descriptions is 'the tenuous and often seemingly absurd nature of membership' (Lewis, 2000, p. 769) as principals feel compelled to displays of willing participation in groups and at meetings where they may feel disconnected and irrelevant. In my fieldwork, principal ambivalence to team membership was most obvious in sentiments expressed about the centrally mandated system for grouping schools into *partnerships*. Opinions about being a secondary school principal representative in a partnership related to a lack of consultation, the contrived nature of the grouping, excessive time demands and failure to establish a clear purpose. Two principals contrasted the unsatisfactory qualities of partnership membership with the productive, relevant and collaborative opportunities yielded from membership of a self-formed and self-managed alliance of local secondary schools.

Using Lewis' (2000) description of this identity/belonging paradox, it becomes possible to interpret various displays of ambivalence and enthusiasm by principal

participants for their collaborative commitments in terms of the opportunities they can derive from each to both express their individual worth and find a purpose that is personally useful. Such an interpretation speaks to the identity tension founded on the principal's desire to distinguish and assert themselves individually while simultaneously displaying loyalty and allegiance to the group.

One interesting, if somewhat narrow, depiction of this two-sided feature of principal identity is in the designation of the senior team of leaders as the 'principal team' in three of the schools in my research. While at pains to point up the democratic and equitable qualities of such groups, principal participants were also comfortable with the implication that other leaders work from their lead and are untroubled by any suggestions of paternalism or hierarchy in the choice of title. This interplay between individual and group is captured in Imogen's description of her work with McCullough School's leadership team:

> Whilst I'm leader of the staff, I'm also leader of the leaders, so I have a big responsibility in working with our leaders, particularly to ensure that we do support our whole school community and ensure that our students do achieve educational outcomes and, of course, with a focus on wellbeing as well.

The second expression of this paradox takes the clamour of the individual desire for distinction and a strident preference for teamwork as competing interests in the everyday work of principals in what is variously described as 'human resource management', 'personnel management' or simply 'staffing'. Analysis of my observation and various interview data shows that principals, as part of this responsibility, are concerned to establish, manage and sustain a wide range of groups within their schools. Group membership, whether derived from mandatory or voluntary participation, is lauded not only as a vehicle for accomplishing change and improvement but also as creating a sense of loyalty and belonging. Accordingly, as evidenced in many observations in the field, principals are regularly engaged in public and private affirmations of the work of individuals within these groups, seeking updates on progress from group leaders and resolving conflicts and problems associated with group work. While all the principals in my study made reference to the importance of this work, the structural and interpersonal complexity, from which its paradoxical qualities materialise, are perhaps best captured in Janet's description of planning for improvement at Caldicott School:

> I think one element of that is about the distribution of the leadership as well, so we have our governing council, and we've got our principal team and our learning leaders and our student services team. So all of our middle managers are involved in that work. And they are involved in all of our improvement and accountability processes, as are all of our teachers. We have a whole set of line managers who are people in designated leadership positions but that's not to exclude people who are leaders in their own right, as a teacher leader or whatever.

By considering its paradoxical qualities, such smooth and positive depictions of team belonging can also be viewed as potentially problematic and exclusive. Here, a paradox lens interrupts the unambiguous regard for the power and importance of teams to reveal how the desire of individual to 'seek both homogeneity and

distinction' (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 383) creates new ambiguities and conflicts. Using my fieldwork to illuminate this theoretical perspective surfaces questions about whether principals' altruistic reasons for participation may disguise motives of self-interest and personal advantage and raises issues, for example, about the uneven contribution of individuals, the symbolic and perfunctory components of membership and the inherent jealousies, competitions and squabbles that interrupt perceptions of smooth order. It also interrupts the logic on which teams are founded and publicly championed, thus revealing the role that membership plays in excluding those not deemed suitable and enhancing the status and personal ambition of those who 'make the cut'.

Leader/Follower Paradoxes

Leader/follower paradoxes related to principal authority are revealed by problematising a simplistic interpretation of school leadership as a top-down practice of control and coercion carried out by formally designated leaders, with followers rendered as docile and powerless. This dichotomous thinking perpetuates the idea of clear separation between leaders and followers and, in the asymmetry of its construction, fails to notice the active and influential role that followers play in constituting the leadership identity of principals. Mac, from Caldicott School, is clear about the dangers of the unfettered embrace of top-down leadership:

> *I don't like this model, this notion of giving more power to principals. I think it's a ridiculous notion. I mean, you know, there's a lot of ships that have sunk out in the ocean because nobody's prepared to actually say to the captain, 'the ship is sinking'. Now, you know, a school has got to be seen to be a community. The principal has an important role within that community, but the principal shouldn't be seen to be the captain of the ship, if you know what I mean.*

Niesche and Gowlett (2015), working from Foucault's conceptualisation of power, note that '(t)he principal is caught up in a circuitous set of power relations' where they are on the one hand the principal and leader who shapes the conduct of others but, on the other, are subject to 'complex sets of power relations from various sets of stakeholders and groups' that shape their conduct (p. 376). Evidence from my fieldwork suggests that influential amongst these stakeholders are a group that might be characterised as 'followers' – including other designated leaders in the school, teachers, support staff and students. In support of this interpretation of the multidirectional workings of power, Collinson (2005) emphasises the importance of 'followers' practices' claiming that 'they are frequently proactive, knowledgeable and oppositional' (p. 1419).

Implicit in thinking of followers as 'knowledgeable agents' (Collinson, 2005, p. 1422) is the idea that power is not just the province of the principal and other designated leaders. However, abundant images of heroic and visionary individuals feed favoured constructions of leader identities and what Roberts (2009) describes as a 'fictional belief in the self as an autonomous entity' (p. 967). This leader-centric

focus not only brings the leader/follower bifurcation into sharper relief but also overlooks the power and importance of followership. Principals are imbued with leadership identities that are individualistic, autonomous and heroic but, paradoxically, are dependent on the perceptions, 'projections and fantasies' (Sinclair, 2011, p. 510) of followers to endow an identity as leader upon them. This first *leader/follower paradox* operates in and on the broader milieu of principal 'identity work' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

As already noted at length, much of this work is bound up in the subjectifying power of discourses or, as Sinclair (2011) describes, 'the political and discursive processes by which manager and leader identities are manufactured, controlled and occasionally resisted' (p. 508). However, as the macro-political work of dominant discourses presses and cajoles principals into particular subjectivities, micro-political local and personal forces that directly implicate followers are also in play. Principals bring what Thomas (2009) refers to as the 'element of choice and intentionality' (p. 169) in shaping perceptions of themselves and their work in front of followers. Extending this idea, Sinclair (2011) describes how leaders manoeuvre the well-known 'characters and metaphors' of leadership 'to provide consistency to their conflicting leadership experiences' (p. 508). From my field observation of principal/follower interactions, this work is not just about a personal attachment to a preferred identity. It is also performative work that is designed to be recognised and admired by followers and even to present the principal to followers as 'water tight attractive' (Sinclair, 2011, p. 508). In my field data, qualities such as empowerment, collaboration, approachability and mutual respect appeared prominent markers of this local identity work. These qualities were consistently and publicly displayed by principals and widely noticed, cited and admired by followers.

The importance of this *leader/follower paradox* affecting principal identity lies in its explanatory and interpretive functions related to power. It reveals something of the circularity of local power relations and a 'micro-political conundrum' (Ball, 2012, p. 82) which has the principal caught in the tension between their own attachment to versions of themselves and their vulnerability to the opinions of others (see Collinson, 2006, p. 182). In this dynamic, a further paradoxical quality emerges when principals, in their attempts to fashion their true and stable leadership selves – and thus render themselves as 'authentic' leaders – must take account of the power of followers to endorse, modify and reject their performed identity. Paradoxically, this identity work seems more likely to reinforce the very ambiguity and insecurity they are trying to overcome.

These leader/follower paradoxes about identity also warn against a rush to recognising the practices of principals as a form of democratic leadership. Rather, ethnographic observations noting the express preference amongst principals to be seen as collaborative rather than autocratic leaders, frequent and meaningful principal interactions with other staff and displays of personal qualities of approachability, friendliness and warmth, while serving multiple purposes, are perhaps most productively understood as a form of pastoral power directed to courting and mobilising followers and to the securing of the principal's preferred leadership identity. This interpretation is captured by Ball and Carter (2002) when they describe how teachers are

'subject to the charismatic gaze' of leaders who 'project a charismatic identity in order that they get results … in terms of staff commitment, motivation and empowerment' (p. 564).

In this performance/audience consideration of the roles played by principals and followers, another *leader/follower paradox* emerges from observations of a strong attachment that some followers develop to this implied hierarchical arrangement. While principals were seen to actively promote ideas associated with shared and distributed leadership, collaboration, teamwork and flatter leadership structures, many followers paradoxically appeared to embrace certain forms of subjugation and a desire to have their 'psychological needs' met (Child, 2009, p. 502) within the existing hierarchical order. While Gordon (2011) describes 'organizational antecedents and meaning systems' that hold the traditional leader/follower power relations in place (p. 199), my fieldwork also revealed how the micro-politics of hierarchical power is utilised by followers to actively secure a particular identity within the school.

Follower identity strategies founded in existing hierarchical arrangements – which seem to partner logically with aforementioned principal identity strategies – appear to be undertaken, in part, to allow claims of diminished follower responsibility and to apportion ultimate responsibility to the principal. For example:

> *If something goes wrong it's sort of their head that's on the chopping block to some degree because you're following directions from the principal. (Bobbi, Caldicott School)*

> *Given that the buck stops with the principal I think there isn't a single member of staff that doesn't think that a principal is powerful. (Oman, McCullough School)*

> *I guess we're trying to move away from that hierarchical structure. But to a certain extent, it exists. It's going to come back down to if something goes horribly wrong then ultimately it is the principal's responsibility. (Zac, Sullivan School)*

Beyond the pragmatic advantages of holding to a lower position in the hierarchy, and depicting the principal as in command, followers also appeared to readily embrace forms of compliance in the accordance with perception of principal authority based on superior knowledge, connections and skills. For example:

> *She just has a confidence about her and she knows what she's talking about. She's very well prepared. She seems to have always done a lot of research. She just knows things, and I value that. (Georgina, McCullough School)*

> *I think it is the knowledge. As we've been saying they're privy to so much information in so many different groups and so many different areas. They have a lot of knowledge about what's happening in the school, who's doing what, then within the department. (Laurita, Caldicott School)*

> *If there are points when we don't feel confident in what we are doing, it's very easy to go and see Janet and say, 'I don't really know how to do this' or 'I've got a bit of trouble working out how to best get this across to staff', whatever the issue is, she's very willing to discuss it with us and help us think it through. (Annabel, Caldicott School)*

The *leader/follower paradoxes* described reveal the importance of taking account of the micro-political environment within which principal subjectivity is formed. They refute notions of a docile and impotent follower contingent in order to reveal the constitutive importance of follower opinions and perceptions. In the bifurcated and, I would contend, outwardly deceptive relationship, they also reveal the vested interests of both sides in the maintenance of existing leadership structures. In this way, they open to scrutiny claims of more democratic ways of leading schools and allow in dissenting opinion about current hierarchical arrangements.

Portrait: Rob – The Principal as 'Captain of the Ship'

Rob is an experienced principal who has worked for several years at Heatherbank School, a large secondary school in a relatively affluent suburban community. Rob's descriptions of his role exemplify his beliefs about the centrality of the principal in the life of the school and the complex responsibilities that he assumes as principal. Here the idea of the 'primacy of the principal', discussed earlier as a central technology in excellence and school effectiveness discourses, is the discursive frame within which Rob makes several different claims about his role and his work. As his opening claim in interview, he says:

> *The principal is a complex job and I'm the bottom line. I'm the bottom line person. Everything falls to the principal, really. I suppose I'm the custodian of the school. I'm the driver of the school. The custodian, I guess means that I'm the representative for the … the public representative that looks after the school. In terms of being the driver of the school, I'm the person that ensures that all our policies, practices, and procedures are all up to speed and operating properly. I am responsible for the learning that happens. It's very complex.*

Rob's assertions about the uniqueness and importance of the principal, as reflected in his use of familiar leadership metaphors such as 'driver', 'custodian' and 'public representative', form a particular regime of truth emerging from popular discourses affecting school leadership. This claim is most often exemplified in my research in the use of a 'captain of the ship' descriptor which appeared the metaphor of choice for staff and community members seeking to reify and amplify the principal's role. It is also embodied in Hatcher's (2005) reference to principals as 'the decisive link' which speaks of a particular identity founded in the seductive concern of policy-makers for having principals secure the commitment and compliance of teachers (p. 253).

Rob also puts significant store in his leadership of the school's vision. He says:

> *I came to this school with a very clear vision for the school. That vision has been embraced by my leadership team and they have been wonderful in working with me to espouse that vision to the staff, the students, and the community.*

Rob's fascination with his vision-making work centres largely on its symbolic importance and on his capacity to use it to create a values-driven context to which

he and others in the school community would then feel compelled to respond. His efforts to recruit others to his vision also emphasise its claim to exclusiveness and the absence of any discursive struggle over competing plans and interests:

You come to the school and you espouse a vision, but you've got to win your community over and your community ultimately are the enactors of that vision and the enactors of that purpose. All the time, it's about taking every opportunity to reinforce the vision.

As a truth regime in broader discourses of school leadership, much of this visionary work seems to adhere to heroic and charismatic representations, directed more to winning the commitment and belief of staff and other recipients than to tangible outcomes. This tendency for the principal's vision at Heatherbank School to operate more at an affective and sentimental level is supported by several comments made by staff. Michael does not provide any detail but claims, 'Yeah, the vision is massive, huge', while Serena is more pointed in saying, 'the best principals I've worked with are the visionary principals. They're not real good on detail but that's why you have leadership teams'. Even as Rob goes on to explain the meaning-making functions of his vision in everyday practice, the sense that his work is predominantly as 'the primary symbolising agent' (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 175) persists:

A day wouldn't go by when that vision or that culture that's related to how I see the school and how I want the school to operate, when we're not interacting in some way or another about the school's vision and its culture and its purpose. It has been about achievement and about kids doing their best, kids being successful. It's been a vision that has a very strong moral purpose and being very clear about the values under which we operate.

Rob's discursive framing of his positional prominence and visionary qualities appears to indicate that he is a principal who is single-minded, decisive and comfortable at the top of the school's leadership hierarchy. Furthermore, it is suggestive of a power being exercised predominantly from the top down. Norbert, a member of the leadership team at Heatherbank School, supports this view of the principal when he says:

People do look to the principal as the powerful person, they will all look for direction. I've got to convince the principal before things will change.

However, the balance of Rob's input suggests that his subjectivity is formed in a range of different and contradictory discursive regimes and that he is uncomfortable with power relations that are only expressed hierarchically.

Rob spends significant time working with others. His office is the site of almost continuous meetings, interactions with staff and parents and management of student issues. His claim, made in interview, 'that a lot of my work is about how I can get to know my teachers and my staff better' goes to a belief he regularly articulates about the importance of teamwork and collaboration. He uses his interest in working collaboratively with staff to clarify his ideas about how he uses power and how he sees it circulating through Heatherbank School:

I'd like to think it's more of the power of influence, the power of facilitation, the power of enablement. That's how I want to operate and that's how I think I model my work most of the time. There will be some people in a school this big who'll say, 'yeah, he's a principal,

just telling us what to do all the time.' But I would think, if you talk with the leadership team, and particularly the executive team, yeah, we are always collaborating and they are the eyes and ears out there that are giving us the lay of the land. We're always communicating and collaborating.

In this account, and in others Rob provides about his support of staff professional development and classroom observation, his more benevolent collaborative aspirations continue to be framed within broader discursive truth claims about the centrality and control of the principal. The following comments of staff and community members at Heatherbank add further weight to this claim:

With the emphasis on the principal, the principal has got autonomy, the principal has got to be accountable; all of these things, there's expectations politically of a principal. It takes away …from the whole team effort of the school. (Gillian, coordinator)

So principals will direct how they want things happening in the school. And different principals have different ways of doing that. Some are very directive. Some are more team-engaging, where they inspire the team to come up with ideas that they then ensure are implemented and taken forward. (Clive, Governing Council member)

At various times in interview, Rob asserts the complexity that accompanies his 'bottom line' responsibility:

The biggest pressure for me is probably time and the increasing expectation on principals and principals' accountability and just the complexity of the job and having enough time to do everything.

Observations of Rob, his work environment and the competing priorities that form his daily routine provide additional insights into this complexity. It appears to arise in part from the accretion of diverse interests and responsibilities within the school that not only layer jobs one on the other but also position Rob as a central figure in providing guidance, leadership and organisation to many separate tasks. In addition, Rob notes the increased external pressures that are brought to bear:

Ultimately, I do what I do when I can do it, but yes, there are more requirements of the system now in terms of do this, do that, have it done by this date, and report to blah, blah, and blah. I do bash myself up sometimes about how I prioritise things. I do like to think that my priority is to my people, whether they're my staff or my students, first and foremost. If something is a little bit late that the system wants, inevitably it's because I've been dealing with personnel issues here in the school.

The picture of complexity speaks loudly to claims about the competing demands, tensions and contradictions inherent in Rob's work. It also further unsettles narrow conceptions of school leadership as 'instructional', 'transformational', 'visionary' and so on and opens the way for the more nuanced account that a paradoxical treatment of principal's work provides.

Analysis and Conclusion

The *paradoxes of subjectivity and authority*, in their various concerns with the science of subjection and with making intelligible different versions of the neoliberalised principal, fix the ground rules and map a good part of a contest over principal subjectivity. They describe how a 'general politics of truth' (Ball, 2015, p. 5) provides a beguiling invitation to principals to capitulate to power. Ontological in its reach, this invitation amounts to a rendering of the soul of the principal as fully disposed to being governed. De Lissovoy's (2016) description makes clear the target of this power:

> Power works on being itself; it constitutes the ontological conditions that set the parameters of subjectivization and consciousness … it is this determination of being that is power's central purpose and triumph rather than the particular form of reason and belief that follow and express this fundamental fact. (p. 83)

Just as the limits of principal authority are framed by the politics of truth that these conditions impose, so too are the possibilities for principals to use the power of conventional truths to fashion their authoritative selves. In this politically crucial dynamic, the principal is positioned as a subject of discourse who is also conferred some authority to be a 'user' of discourse – to speak and act within its discursive boundaries (see Bacchi, 2000).[3] Introduced in this chapter through *the paradox of politicised subjectivity*, these discursive arrangements were further explored in the *paradox of system membership* and could also be detected in the enticement to gendered performance of leadership in *the paradox of gender identity*. An extension of this subject/user bifurcation was also present in the various *leader/follower paradoxes*, with performative signifiers of principal authority derived from constitutive discourses shown to both rely upon and shape local follower responses.

Each of these paradoxes indicates both foreclosure on unfettered principal agency and the remaining possibility for principals to find some capacity to act within the very discourses that define and constrain them. In support of this interpretation, Phillips (2006) usefully describes this two-sided subjectivity as suggesting a 'kind of productive tension' between the subject's 'fluidity' and 'positioning'. He further claims that, through this tension, 'we are simultaneously limited and enabled by the discourse formations within which we operate and against which we, at times, resist' (p. 310). From this suggestion of productive ambiguity, I conclude by bringing a Foucauldian theoretical perspective to the *paradoxes of subjectivity and authority* to better locate available spaces for action and to give some substance to remnant agential opportunities.

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[3] Butler (1997) adds complexity to Bacchi's (2000) subject/user dynamic. She describes a type of *performative* agency for the user of a controlling discourses and notes a reversal in the appearance of power 'as it shifts from the condition of the subject to its effects' to give the impression of 'self-inaugurating agency' (p. 16). Niesche and Gowlett (2015) provide a useful explanation of Butler's process of performative re-signification and its applications in the field of educational leadership, management and administration (ELMA).

According to Peters (2004), the shift in Foucault's work from 'regimes of truth' (e.g. Foucault, 1980a, 2008) to 'games of truth' (e.g. Foucault, 1987) marked a change in emphasis 'on how the human subject constitutes itself by strategically entering into such games and playing them to best advantage' (p. 57). Foucault (1984) locates this shift in the:

> complex and multiple practices of a 'governmentality' that presupposes, on the one hand, rational forms, technical procedures, instrumentations through which to operate, and, on the other, strategic games which subject the power relations they are supposed to guarantee to instability and reversal. (p. 338)

It is in this instability and reversal of power relations that I propose a link between the conditions of self-government that neoliberal governmentality demands and a way of playing these games of truth that involves 'an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being' (Foucault, 1987, p. 113). This involves a practicing of liberty that takes shape as a diligent scepticism about the necessity of prevailing truths. It is the progressive formation, out of what Foucault (2007) describes as 'a sort of close combat' of the individual with her/himself, of a type of 'asceticism' that is incompatible with obedience and in which 'the authority, presence, and gaze of someone else is, if not impossible, at least unnecessary' (p. 272).

The notion of an individual ascetic, imposed on the account of principal subjectivity so far provided, opens the possibility that the 'free' ethical subject – currently tied to entrepreneurial, managerial and market discourses – might also be able to enter a different truth game and comport themselves differently. This entry of principals is to interrupt their 'will to truth' (Foucault, 1981) and have them think and tell a different truth about themselves. Reliant on the interventions of various technologies of the self (see Chap. 3), it is an entry that I intend to link to the ethical project of speaking back to power and to the possibilities for principals to be more actively and productively engaged in the inevitable conflicts they encounter.

Bringing this theoretical perspective to the oppositions and contests surfaced in the paradoxes described in this chapter, I argue, boosts their prospects as a critical resource for illuminating the struggle over principal subjectivity and for prompting a stepping back to consider principal authority in a freer space. As already noted, the ontological enclosure of principals in neoliberal times elicits a compliant response, with the unintended consequence of reinforcing the effectiveness and stability of the social forces of neoliberalism (see Haugaard, 2012). Against this formidable backdrop, principals' efforts to think and talk a different truth involves, in the first instance, an inside struggle against the constraints in which they build their existing systems of authority. It is a struggle directed to revealing how dominant truth claims obscure their social construction and, thus, prevent principals from seeing and testing more agential versions of themselves. As De Lissovoy (2016) notes, the problem is 'unwinding the human body and soul from the intimate clockwork of not merely the correct and commendable, but also the apparently self-evident and inevitable' (p. 75).

Using paradox, I contend, is part of a method for this unwinding. In the simultaneity and interrelatedness of its parts, its construction holds open both the doxa and its opposites to scrutiny. In its 'warrior topos' language (see Chap. 2), it draws upon the unfamiliar to unsettle, challenge and undermine the familiar. In its capacity to reveal and make sense of often surprising alternatives, it brings new epistemological possibilities at the margins of dominant discourses. This amounts to exposing a more even contest over principal authority and subjectivity by taking account of disparate and tentative showings of resistance, ambivalence and refusal provided by principals and other research participants and working these into a more substantial opposition.

How then to execute a move from a protest against the subjectifying influence of current truth regimes, to having principals entertain a different social ontology in a space beyond the limits of neoliberal best practice? An early clue to this move, I contend, is found in *the paradox of team belonging*, where the tendency amongst principals to direct their team involvement to enhancing their personal standing and power suggests, in its paradoxy, a need to find different ways of working together. Here, the paradox points to the potentiality of a new 'democratic horizon' (De Lissovoy, 2016, p. 24) at the intersection of various principal identities. It allows for the possibility of a multiplicity of principal authorities and for engagement in a different processes of democratic leadership practice and self-formation.

It is at this intersection that the ethical project of speaking back to power and of 'speaking differently about the truth' emerges as an opportunity 'to make oneself thinkable in a different way' (Ball, 2015, p.13). In turn, giving more coherence and substance to principal opposition shifts attention to Foucault's (2007) account of an 'immense family' (p. 202) of counter-conducts and to the activation of the 'will' and 'practices of freedom' as tactics in loosening the hold of governmental power. Undeniably, such a project also entails careful consideration of the dangers of a 'certain risking of the self' which Butler (2001) claims, after Levinas, as 'a sign of virtue' (p. 22) but which, according to my field data, remains a formidable barrier to the propensity of principals to resist established truths.

The claims for paradox made to this point, in all likelihood, already exceed the reach of the resource created by using a paradox lens in this chapter. However, they do mark out the beginning of a more detailed argument to consolidate the practices of critique and counter-conduct and to appropriate the rhetorical function of paradox as warrior topos. This argument springs from Foucault's (1997b) account of 'the critical attitude' and the possibilities of facing head on the 'governmentalization' of society and individuals.[4] He describes this attitude as:

> both partner and adversary to the arts of governing, as an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting these arts of governing and sizing them up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them. (pp. 44–45)

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[4] Later in the same work, Foucault (1997b) describes governmentalization as 'this movement by which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth' (p. 47).

Directed to 'the art of not being governed like that or at that cost' (Foucault, 1997b, p. 45), my extended use of critique and counter-conduct, in conjunction with a paradox lens, is concerned with how the subject might fashion new spaces of freedom and come to question and counter relations of truth, power and subjectivity in these spaces.

I will advance, over the next two chapters, a response to Belinda's claim, made in interview at Lawson School, that 'guarding of your ethical thinking' as a principal requires that you refrain 'from actually clearly saying what you think should be happening'. I propose, instead, a form of agonistic thought and practice that aims, after Foucault (1980b), to harness the 'amazing efficacy of discontinuous, particular and local criticism' and to discover 'the inhibiting effect of global, *totalitarian theories*' (p. 80, italics in original). This is a response that asks questions of authoritative truths, and the certainty with which they are maintained, and which uses paradox to plumb principal practice in order to reveal forms of authority that work beyond and against hegemonic representations.

The ontological reading of the struggle over principal subjectivity in this chapter should not suggest separation from questions of knowing. De Lissovoy (2016) describes 'an *epistemology of emancipation* … anchored in the lives of ordinary people and drawing on marginalized perspectives and struggles' (p. 131, italics in original). Translated to my research, this equates to a knowledge project that uses paradox to posit alternatives to the epistemological enclosures and impositions in current practice. It could be characterised, following Ball (2015), as 'a confrontation of the normative with the ethical' (p. 11) or, in more Foucauldian terms, a battle between the *will to truth* and the *will to know*. While this epistemological project was underway in this chapter, it is part of a more explicit focus on principal practice in policy work in Chap. 7.

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Chapter 7
Paradoxes of Neoliberal Policy

The paradoxes of neoliberal policy draw heavily from discourse analysis under-taken in Chap. 4, where the origins and developmental arc of several of the para-doxes which follow were foreshadowed. These paradoxes use my ethnographic data to discern the presence of struggle in the interactions between principals and the policy expectations bestowed centrally. In continuing to examine the power rela-tions that mark and shape these interactions, the paradoxes are also concerned with the power/knowledge exertions of policy, including the neoliberal conceptions of the principal leadership that they advance, the will to truth they prompt in principal subjects and the governmental power they generate from their 'expert-technical' understanding of the domain to be governed (Hunter, 1994, p. 148). The paradoxes seek to interrupt the reification of these forces into singular and productive entities by exposing more fragile and contingent qualities and by revealing the simultaneous and interdependent existence of valid oppositions.

While my fieldwork revealed 'ridiculously short timelines' in adhering to staff-ing policy (Jay, Caldicott School), 'more policy than ever to be enacted' (Janet, Caldicott School) and policy documentation 'that is incredibly onerous' (Tesia, McCullough School), I have not taken these observations as exposing the most pro-ductive space of paradoxical contest. Rather, my analysis centres on the tension between centralised policy-making and dispersed local practices.

The first paradox in this chapter, *the paradox of policy implementation,* utilises a space of 'translation' (Clarke, Bainton, Lendvai, & Stubbs, 2015) between what policy-makers intend and what actually happens to policy when it is enacted in schools. This paradox draws from Ball's (1994) broadening of the definition of pol-icy to include 'what is enacted as well as what is intended' and his subsequent description of the 'wild profusion of local practices' that render policies as incom-plete (p. 10). This paradox uses field data to reveal broader possibilities for principal practice in policy enactment beyond their idealised casting as untroubled conduits of governmental aspirations. The other paradoxes in this section largely derive from the broader policy discourses of neoliberalism analysed in Chap. 4. These para-doxes of *excellence, choice and equity, principal autonomy* and *professionalism*

highlight the presence of conflict, tension and struggle in the policy work of principals. They bring the institutional logic of policy-makers into a simultaneous and interdependent relationship with a conflicting field of local needs, competing priorities and personal tensions. In doing so, they indicate the possibility of different subjectivities and policy practices.

This chapter also highlights the influential technologies of neoliberal policy, such as *standardisation*, *accountability*, and *performativity*, which work to manufacture from policy the tools of competition, comparison, success and failure and which direct principals to preferred subjectivities. These technologies are presented by policy-makers as benign and necessary drivers of improvement in schools. However, Clarke (2013) suggests they have significant constitutive power, describing how the individual is colonised and seduced by their 'totalising symbolic effects' (p. 234).

The Paradox of Policy Implementation

Policy discourses so often depicted as hegemonic and homogenous, 'given the strength of the coercive extralocal forces mobilized and channelled by neoliberalism' (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 396), may actually materialise at site level as variegated and uneven and, therefore, susceptible to local influence and interpretation (see Springer, 2012). Rizvi and Lingard (2009) identify part of this dynamic when linking the aspirations of policy-makers with the complexity of practice:

> Policy desires or imagines change – it offers an imagined future state of affairs, but in articulating desired change always offers an account somewhat more simplified than the actual realities of practice. (p. 5)

Systemically, a particular simplification is found in the casting of principals as willing and apolitical subjects, charged with the process of policy implementation at school level. The expectation that the principal will be a conduit for centrally mandated directives and work to keep the intentions of policy-makers intact is conveyed as natural and unproblematic.

Paradoxically, the primacy allocated to principals as policy subjects may actually work against desired consistency and homogeneity when precise implementation expectations come into tension with processes variously described as *translation*, *enactment* and *settlement* at site level. Principals are at once cognisant of both their systemic and legislative responsibilities and the need to respond to local mandates to adapt, diminish and even ignore central directives so that policy better meets the needs of their school. This puts principals at the centre of competing political interests where they can fashion opportunities for reinterpreting, challenging and

changing policy while necessarily espousing compliance (Berkhout, 2007, p. 408). Leanne from Heatherbank School captures the positioning of the principal neatly when she says:

> It's not the principal who is making the policies; it's their role to see how those policies are going to be enacted in the school in a way that is going to benefit all the students.

Calvin, from Caldicott School, suggests principals may need more surreptitious methods to shape centralised policy to the needs of the school:

> Quite often knowledge of methods is important, they need backdoor methods of getting things done, which I think comes from experience.

This paradox encapsulates, in practice, Butler's (1997) interplay of subjectivity and agency as depicted in *the paradox of politicised subjectivity* in the previous chapter. The policy discourses of neoliberalism cast principals in a particular and preferred mould while at the same time promulgating a range of principal subjectivities. These subjectivities are governed by seemingly unavoidable forms of disciplinary power and 'technologies of control' (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 329). However, in practice they are imbued with degrees of resistance, ambivalence and conformity as processes of translation, enactment and settlement are variously enacted and expectations of obedience are interrupted by more dispersed constitutive possibilities.

Some of the subjectivities available to principals in this space of 'creative enactment' (Webb, 2014, p. 366) are illustrated in my principal portraits. Sections of these portraits dwell in the fertile space between the macro concerns of policy (and policy-makers) and micro practices of principals in schools. This is to realise the difference between policy intentions and policy enactment and to understand the praxis of policy translation and its constitutive implications for principals in schools. For example, the portrait of Sasha which follows describes a subjectivity formed in part from her willingness to critique and resist policy directives and her commitment to policy being settled at site level. This is followed by a portrait of Janet which depicts a less critical and more compliant approach to policy work while also highlighting her interest in localising and customising centrally sanctioned policies to manage the demands on staff and to meet the needs of her school.

Thinking with Carpenter and Brewer (2014), these portraits emphasise the positionality of the principal as 'implicated advocate' and illustrate how principal subjectivities are 'interwoven within descriptive state developed policies' (p. 295). In their descriptions of 'with and against' responses to neoliberally inflected technologies and policies, the portraits also give insights into the ambiguity and tension intrinsic to their positioning. It is these responses that are key to understanding the paradox of policy implementation as imbued with power relations and as providing an illumination, in practice, of a struggle over principal subjectivity.

Portrait: Sasha – The Principal and Practices of Critique, Counter-Conduct and Transgression

Sasha is the principal of Sullivan School, a special interest school with enrolments from across metropolitan and country locations. She has extensive principal experience in multiple and diverse sites and uses her personal history to provide the following insight:

> Every place I learnt something different, built on that at the next school and refined it further. And then there was the sameness in the leadership, the style, the communication, the challenges, the resolutions, win some and lose some.

Working as a researcher with Sasha and others at Sullivan School underscored the capacity for ethnography to reveal multiple and nuanced ways of understanding the principal and their work. In particular, through each of the data-gathering methods used, my research shed light on Sasha's appreciation of the inherent politicality of her role and work and her willingness to push back against prevailing discourses and their discursive controls.

Sasha's nuanced and complex practices of resistance described in this portrait can be interpreted, after Foucault (2007), as forms of 'counter-conduct' characterised by 'a struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others' (p. 268). Sasha's engagement in this struggle is founded on a proclivity for embracing oppositional politics and mobilising relations of power and is illustrated most obviously in her distrust of central directives and corresponding defence of local policy 'settlement'. In turn, this engagement draws attention to both the alternative forms of self-hood (or subjectivity) that these counter-conducts enable in Sasha, as well as to the practices of the self they admit and cultivate – as reflected in the efforts Sasha makes at self-styling and caring for others. Death (2016) supports this productive link between counter-conduct and subject formation, claiming these 'modes of protest which form in parallel to techniques of governmentality … are deeply interpenetrated with the power relations they oppose; and … facilitate or enable the production and performance of alternative subjectivities through processes of ethical self-reflection: ways of "not being like that"'(p. 202).

This account of Sasha and her work, while necessarily partial and selective (in the way of all of the principal portraits in this book), stands in contrast to the other subject positions depicted by highlighting more dissonant and counter-orthodox possibilities. Self-described as having 'a progressive education background', Sasha makes many references to her past and current efforts to both critique and resist centrally developed policies and directives. For example:

> When we get to a position where we are told to do something that we don't actually believe in, like a focus on the NAPLAN scores will raise the educational outcomes of the children, we run into an ethical issue because it's not true … or its certainly not how I judge it. I don't judge it just because I wish to judge it like that, I've got 25 years as a principal and another 15 as a teacher behind me and all of the, you know, educational knowledge.

Sasha draws on her significant history as an educator and principal to illustrate how persistent beliefs about the impact of teaching on student learning outcomes, highlighted in a systemic push to use data to evaluate school effectiveness, have fed a tendency to blame principals and teachers for a lack of progress. Her resistance, in this case, is founded in efforts to counter the current and pervasive discourse:

> We have spent a lot of time talking … at leadership meetings about how we're going to say to the teachers, 'you're not being blamed'. Well, they are being blamed. There's absolutely no doubt about that.

Sasha is also alert to inconsistencies between policy discourses in terms of their utility and relevance to her school. She introduces her view of the policy work of principals by claiming:

> It's the role of the principal, as I always put it, to settle policy … and localise it, translate it. And those that you think are a load of crap get ignored.

Implicit in this description is Sasha's understanding of the abstract qualities of centrally developed policy and her refusal to shape her local reality in the image of this abstraction (see Bates, 2013). She further expands on the job of policy settlement:

> The policy is intended to provide guidance to how it can be put into action or guide action in the local situation. The policy makers hopefully get this. Thus the meaning of the policy is negotiated in the context of the local; what does it mean for our students, their families, the resources available to us and so on. The final settlement may look a bit different across the fields in which it is considered. This is different thinking to the interpretation of policy as instructions; 'just follow them stupid'.

Sasha illustrates themes of counter-conduct and freedom most strongly around this central idea of policy settlement at site level. She claims that, for principals, 'this is an incredible card that we have, we can settle it to suit the children in our school'. She develops this idea by describing the very positive impact she believes that a centrally developed policy called *Teaching for Effective Learning* (TfEL) has had on both students and teachers when adapted to suit the context of Sullivan School. On the other hand, she is critical of a 'whole lot of bureaucratic things' that are poorly matched to the needs of schools, either because they are not relevant to what she sees as core teaching and learning work or because they 'are pushed through in unmanageable ways' and make unreasonable demands on principals and staff. She attributes these mismatches, at least in part, to a lack of understanding of schools amongst those making policy:

> The policy is not connected to the schools at all. They have some people out there that haven't been in schools for an awful long time. Some of them have never been in schools, certainly not been principals. They have these ideas and some of them are very good, but then they have this idea that they'll give it to schools and it'll happen.

Sasha describes various ways she has resisted policies in areas such as health and safety, performance management and school accountability. For example, she describes her refusal to participate in a particular iteration of a centrally imposed accountability process:

With the self-review thing, I just refused to do it because I thought it was flawed because the rubrics were crap. I said to them, actually it was when I was at [my previous school], 'I can't put these rubrics in front of my staff. They'll just laugh at them. They're just a set of motherhood statements, and they're just impossible. You have to read sentences with 40 words in them. I'm not going to do this.'

Analysis of documents related to local processes of performance management indicates a different form of resistance. In interview, Sasha dismisses the centrally mandated policy as 'terribly flawed' and says performance management at Sullivan School, instead, uses a local policy document based on the notion of 'contributive leadership'. This local document appears to differ markedly from central policy, for example, in its emphasis on team learning, action research, innovative practice and a flat rather than hierarchical structure of administration. The development of local policy, seemingly downplayed in some other schools in this study, appears to be used by the principal at Sullivan School to both subvert broader directives and support more responsive and locally relevant practice. In the related area of managing underperforming staff, Sasha alludes to avoiding the education department's policy because it does not match the needs of the individual teacher or the school. She says it 'can bring poorly performing teachers to the door of managing poor performance procedures but is often counter-productive'. Sasha provides a specific insight into managing what she terms 'unproductive resistance':

Now dealing with resistance, what you do is you disempower. So you work to push them away and to reduce their power in the organisation. Well, that's what I do anyway and it's very, very effective. You just don't take any notice of what they say, you just push it away, you just keep holding the line … and people will thank you because they are sick and tired of their whinging.

The circulation of power and the operation of asymmetrical power relations are evident in much of Sasha's telling of practices of resistance in policy settlement. According to Foucault (1982), these practices can work as a 'chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used' (p. 780). The assumption that the power of policy-makers typically evokes a subordinate response from principals appears to underpin a certain satisfaction Sasha takes in standing her ground and refusing to be cast, along with other principals, as an untroubled conduit of policy implementation. By founding her subjectivity, at least in part, in acts of resistance and transgression, Sasha appears to gain some freedom from discursive forms of policy dominance and to hold to an ethics she describes as 'coming from what we believe is an education worth having'.

Acts of resistance and refusal also seem to distance and differentiate Sasha somewhat from a more compliant principal community and from what Bleiker (2003) describes as 'the seductive but suffocating dangers of the herd instinct' (p. 34). It is this sense of separation that prompts Sasha to express some reservations about her principal colleagues. In explaining, during a group discussion amongst principal participants, a lack of resistance by principals to policy directives, Sasha invokes the

practice of risky truth telling or *parrēsia* which Foucault (2010) describes as 'the courage of telling the truth to others in order to conduct them in their own conduct (p. 346). Sasha says:

The courage to speak fearlessly, why is it so scarce? Because the principals don't seem to have courage; a circular argument to be sure. If they don't have courage how can they lead? Do they not understand that their position, courageously stated, helps give staff courage to take on change and develop good (or bad as the case may be) practice?

In using this portrait to highlight Sasha's efforts to resist and subvert the discursive framing of much of her work, I am suggesting that it is possible to consider principals as more than 'embodied appendices of various discourses' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011, p. 1130). While Sasha's self-styled efforts to talk back to dominant and repressive policy voices suggests an interest in resistance that exceeds that of other principal participants, it also recognises her own entanglement in power relations that are potentially productive and enabling. It is this potential for opening up spaces of freedom, choice and emancipation that sees resistance shift from offstage and benign practices such as cynicism, humour, irony and scepticism – what Contu (2008) describes as 'decaf resistance' – towards practices that work beyond discursive boundaries and change relations of power that hold these boundaries in place.

Portrait: Janet – The Principal as Policy Actor and Policy Subject

Janet is principal of Caldicott School; a school of about 700 students located in a stable, affluent outer-suburban community.

Janet's input into various aspects of my fieldwork is characterised by a strong belief in the importance of school and system-wide collaboration and a capacity to sustain twin narratives about both local needs and systemic requirements. She says of her role, 'people work during the day and paperwork at night' to both indicate her belief in prioritising onsite collaborative opportunities as well as expediting a frontline human resource management responsibility in ways that maximise benefits to her school. She expands on this priority in interview:

It's the full level of people work, so some of it's about people planning, e.g. looking at your leadership structure for the forthcoming year or 5-year period. Or it might be drafting up the job and person's specifications for leadership vacancies or teacher vacancies that are coming up. It's a mixture of envisioning the future and doing the pragmatic work on a daily basis around putting the plan into place.

Counterpoints to Janet's commitment to local improvement and advantage are activities and practices she describes that have her enter and play a part in the discursive field of centrally developed policy. As for all of the principals in my study, it is here that prevailing policy discourses implicate Janet in complex power relations

with policy-makers and others, and it is here that the discursive frame of policy actor shapes and confines her policy work as principal. While all principals are charged with performing policy work in visible and accountable ways, Janet's interpretation of an 'as the crow flies' connection between the script of policy-makers and her performance as principal stands in contrast to the more critical and tenuous connections made by other principal participants.

Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins (2011) unpack the policy work of teachers by using a typology of 'policy actors' or 'policy positions'. It could be argued that principals take up equivalent positions in the work of interpreting and enacting policy in schools, for example, those described as 'translators', 'entrepreneurs' and 'critics'. Janet's positioning as policy actor appears, from fieldwork evidence, to be more akin to that of policy 'enthusiast' (Ball et al., 2011) or perhaps, more accurately, a *willing conduit* for external policy. In support of this descriptor, Isaac, a staff member at Caldicott School, notes that Janet needs to 'be that sort of middle-man with implementing policy here that is directed from above'. Similarly, Bobbi, a coordinator at the school, says, 'she gets direction from the department, of what current policies and procedures need to be, she makes sure that they are implemented, throughout the school'.

In response to a question about the need for local policy development, arising in discussion of the unique context of Caldicott School and the particular needs of its students, Janet claims:

> *We take state and federal government policy and departmental policy very seriously. We don't generally create school-based policies very often here anymore, because if there's a departmental policy, why would we create our own? Wherever possible, we use department policy and follow it to the letter as best we can. It's good to have as a guide.*

Janet provides examples of policies to further illuminate her position:

> *There are all sorts of examples of [centrally-developed] policy, such as work health and safety, suspension, exclusion, student behaviour management. Where there's an absence of specific policies, so take, for example, uniform, we have a school-based policy around that, but predominantly, we work with the department's policy or federal government policy.*

Janet says a reliance on externally developed policy is 'about being professional' but acknowledges that it can create a perception that she has 'a goody two-shoes' approach to policy work. This latter admission suggests that her determined compliance may be at odds with some principal colleagues.

Janet is enthusiastic about much of the policy that comes into the school from outside and is positive about the support that surrounds policy implementation in terms of professional development, helpline advice and site visits from policy experts. She says that the school uses policies such as the *Australian Curriculum* and the *National Professional Standard for Teachers* 'to ensure that what they're doing is appropriate'. Similarly, she describes local implementation of the education department's *Performance and Development Policy*, as 'really vital' and goes on to elaborate various aspects of the structures and processes derived from the policy:

So we've got quite well established processes now for performance planning. Every member of staff has a performance plan. Every member of staff's involved in performance review. They all have a line manager. All of our line managers have done training around performance and development. Part of the performance planning is about identifying professional learning needs, and working with line managers and myself to ensure that those professional learning needs are met. Feedback is purposeful, respectful, explicit, and managers can delve down deeply into design of assessment task and mapping of performance outcomes for students in terms of their results.

Interestingly, the perceptions of other staff members at Caldicott School about the systematic management of performance through external policy requirements do not necessarily accord with those expressed by Janet. Isaac identifies the pragmatic value of a written plan as 'a way in for a performance manager' to conduct a conversation about underperformance, while Mac describes an 'onerous' and 'meaningless' process of performance management 'that we do because we have to, not because we want to.' While the comparison is simplistic, these differing perceptions point to the way the designation of the principal as policy actor and the taking up of particular subjectivities by the principal may create a tendency to amplify the importance of policy and its impact on practice.

While Janet's responses to NAPLAN testing and the *MySchool* website are more muted, they do not generally go to critiquing these policies. For example, she does not try to identify their negative aspects or unintended consequences nor point to any incompatibilities between the broad requirements and aspirations of these policies and the unique local needs of the school community. Rather, Janet uses them to further advance a view that her policy work should be concerned with implementing what is required on behalf of the students of the school. Summarily, she captures this position by claiming:

We really should use policy sensibly to make sure we're doing what we're supposed to be doing in our site and the students aren't disadvantaged in any way through our own ignorance or lack of awareness about policy.

Janet reserves her criticism of externally developed policy to noting an intensification of policy demands and accountabilities in recent years. She says 'we could drown in the amount of policy that's there' and senses that 'there's been an increase in the amount of policy we're expected to (1) know about; (2) implement; and (3) implement well and then be able to provide evidence of that implementation or data, wherever appropriate'. In relation to policy proliferation, Janet also identifies the importance of 'not bombarding people with one thing after another' and being 'able to gauge the best timing for implementation of any policy'.

In reply to a question about the way she builds the reputation of the Caldicott School, Janet emphasises the tangible importance of student achievement data in providing a 'quality' narrative to the community:

Well, certainly, that our learning outcomes are sound and on an upward trajectory. I'd be very concerned if I thought our learning outcomes were declining, because right from the outset I believe that our message in the community needed to be about quality learning and support. So, our data needs to show that, and that's the story we want to tell.

This partial portrait, extracted from more complete accounts and observations about Janet's work as principal, serves to illustrate aspects of her policy work and, more generally, points to ways that principals and their work may be constituted through the discursive frames of policy actor and policy subject. In other parts of my ethnography, Janet interrupts somewhat my depiction of her as willing conduit by highlighting the way she factors in workload demands, policy timelines, policy relevance and variations in accountability requirements before deciding on the pace, extent and method of policy enactment at Caldicott School. Calvin, a governing council member at the school, captures this more nuanced approach in interview:

> There are some things that head office comes out with as policy statements that she doesn't agree with and she doesn't think is in the best interest of the school but we have no option about. As the Department's representative she has to do it. She tends to find the best positives she can from it and make it as painless as possible. In any bureaucracy you disagree with some of the stuff that happens. She tries to put a positive slant on things.

I will now recommence discussion and analysis of the *paradoxes of neoliberal policy* by considering the paradoxical qualities of exhortations to excellence in contemporary schooling.

The Paradox of Excellence

In Chap. 4, the neoliberal policy discourse of excellence was linked to expectations of the principal held in the broader notion of school effectiveness and in policies that value, generate and compare its measurable indicators. The chapter described a preoccupation with continuous improvement in student achievement and the principal's attendant performative work in building the school's reputation. The power of this discourse in schools was linked to the workings of a dispositif of institutional policies, as well as the self-governance requirements of the neoliberal subject, and used to explain the constant concern of principals with promoting personal excellence, motivating others to be innovative and to produce quality outcomes and generating 'a collective corporate commitment to being the best' (Ball, 1997, p. 259). Several paradoxes derived from my field data originate from, and develop within, this excellence policy discourse.

One version of *the paradox of excellence* can be discerned in the way that exhortations by principals to quality schooling, high performance, data-driven improvement and organisational excellence may actually work to narrow and undermine these ideals. Such exhortations are backed by the need for an evidence base and an attendant focus on the collection and analysis of student achievement data from standardised, high-stakes tests. This data, and the effort of ensuring that it is trending upwards, thus, comes to function as a proxy measure of excellence for students, teachers, principals and schools. The equivalence of these connections appears, in some comments made by teachers in interview, to be relatively unproblematic. For example, Jack from Lawson School takes the current preoccupation with

measurement as more 'a sign of the times' than a powerful shift in the way excellence is discerned:

> I remember my first year of teaching, one of my colleagues saying, 'We should be doing things just for fun in education'. Now very much what echoes in my mind is that unless we are able to measure it, why are we doing it? Because unless we're able to measure it, how can we see a change in success?

Oman, from McCullough School, describes the tangible link between displays of success in NAPLAN data and parental school choice:

> I am sure that principals are well aware of the fact that parents make school selections probably on the basis of that data and therefore it's probably important that that data looks really good. That's driven by that need for success. The fact of the matter is school numbers are significantly dependent upon school performance, that's the league table stuff coming in here is it not.

As further evidence of the hold of data-driven improvement, Serna provides a positive account of its application at Heatherbank School:

> Schools are getting better and better at knowing where they're at with data. We had a big focus on data and actually trying to analyse data and making sure that every teacher in every classroom knows and sees their kids' achievements over that particular term. It's shared with everybody, so there is accountability.

However, other teachers are more qualified in their convictions. Dale, from Caldicott School, dwells on the connection between data and improved teacher quality:

> I think there's certainly an increase in collection of data and data analysis and so forth, than what there was 10 years ago. Having to refer to the data more than we probably did previously… with the aim of improving teacher quality. I mean, I don't know if you can say it definitely has improved teacher quality at this stage, but teachers do use it and reflect on it. How much that changes their practice is still to be decided.

Deeper concerns arise in the contributions of principals. For example, Sasha from Sullivan School cites international data to make the argument that the conflating of NAPLAN test scores with excellence in schools serves 'the political function of justifying the shift of public funds to the private sector'. Belinda from Lawson School contrasts a commitment to 'putting your energy into everyone' with centrally sanctioned methods for lifting state-wide NAPLAN scores by focussing attention on those cohorts where the greatest improvement can be gained – which she characterises as 'just such a poor example of raising a level and making sure the state is up there'.

Seen through a paradox lens, these interview extracts bring the prominence of current accounts of excellence based on data-informed measurement into conflict with more dispersed concerns about narrowing, corrupting and simplifying the evidence base. Tellingly, in this configuration of interrelated oppositions, the currently valued preference for using test data as a proxy for excellence can be linked to risk-averse and opportunistic responses from both teachers and leaders – for example, in well-documented 'teach-to-the-test' methodologies and data manipulation

strategies – that actually work against broader and more substantial notions of improvement and excellence.

The paradox of excellence is enlarged and made more complex when emphasis is shifted to the technology of standardisation on which it relies. In the pursuit of excellence, it is a technology underpinned by attempts to rein in heterogeneity across schools and to 'reduce product variety in education' (Morley & Rassool, 2002, p. 63). Standardisation uses a range of policy instruments to pursue aspirations associated with objective school comparisons, measured effectiveness and controlled accounts of success and failure. Perhaps the most publicly visible of these instruments in the Australian context are the common and mandated Australian Curriculum and the NAPLAN. However, much of global, national and state policy development, founded on principles of neoliberalism, works to standardise and 'enclose' (Slater & Griggs, 2015, p. 440) school education. Carlo, from Sullivan School, casts the standardising and enclosing effects of NAPLAN in a broader curriculum context:

> Another constraint that I think that we get through policy is the 'reading, writing, arithmetic' constraint. I think there is a very strong voice from perhaps some more traditional and conservative parts of our community that want to constrain schools back to being places that focus on reading, writing and arithmetic as being the core of the curriculum – in a very old-fashioned and constraining way. (Carlo, Sullivan School Governing Council)

Paradoxically, in making the assumption that schooling can be reduced to a uniform set of best practices that can be applied across all settings and to all individuals, standardisation not only fails to acknowledge local diversity and the richness of local resources but also privileges narrowed learning possibilities and blunt and homogenous systems of school measurement and comparison. In short, it actively works against important aspects of the quality and excellence premise on which it is founded. In this dynamic, principals are held accountable to external conformity mandates and subject to ingenuous and unfair measures of their effectiveness.

However, in consideration of its paradoxical qualities, standardisation may also be revealed as a technology which necessitates the principal straddling authoritative performance mandates as well as local accountabilities and solutions. It may thus be cast as a site of contestation where principals shape and alter normative demands by surfacing subordinated options for advocacy, influence and resistance (see Slater & Griggs, 2015).

Another iteration of the paradox of excellence arises when the shorthand simplification and common-sense logic of calls for excellence come to count as an approximation for the school's fulfilment of its responsibility to offer quality education for all students. The affirmative and separate logics of equity and social justice here become bound up in the hopeful rhetoric of managerialism. Teachers are urged to, and are held accountable for, improved student achievement, with concern for the vulnerabilities, needs and aspirations of individuals paradoxically subordinated to the pressing demands of summative and mandated measures of excellence. This paradox is more fully explored in the *paradox of choice and equity* which follows.

The Paradox of Choice and Equity

In my analysis of neoliberal policy discourses in Chap. 4, notions of choice and equity in education, especially in the Australian context, were shown as increasingly oppositional. On one side, choice is enshrined in the Australian system by broad public/private options and reinforced by more intricate choices amongst schools based, for example, on history, location, facilities and perceived status. Choice is favoured in biased funding arrangements and given a kind of political 'bullet-proofing' through its promises of improved student and school performance.

When viewed through a paradox lens, choice and equity are in an antinomous relationship where the merits of choice, and any improvements that flow to students through competition between schools, are not available to those who need them most. Choice can only be exercised by that group with the required income, mobility and postcode. As a result, the entwinement of choice with equity – including equity of access, participation and opportunity – is one which actually (and paradoxically) produces very significant *inequities* in the Australian system, with the disadvantage of students already at risk compounded by their very limited schooling options.

In my fieldwork, the local manifestations of this paradox were most clearly observed in the school promotion work of principals. For example, in 'school of choice' marketing campaigns, schools appeared drawn to exemplifying their best qualities and to differentiating themselves from their competitors in order to appear a more attractive choice for would-be enrolments. Positive aspects of academic performance, school specialisations and quality assurance ratings were typically highlighted in processes that arguably promote very narrow notions of quality schooling. The portrait of Imogen which follows captures both the willingness of the principal at McCullough School to embrace the choice agenda and her considerable capacity to promote the school to prospective enrolments. This portrait functions, in part, as an empirical description of what Binkley (2009) describes as 'the practical, ethical work individuals perform on themselves in their effort to become more agentive, decisionistic, voluntaristic and vital market agents' (p. 62).

Sasha, principal of Sullivan School, provides a particular insight into the workings of this paradox of choice and equity when she highlights how school choice, in its reliance on data-informed comparisons of schools, deliberately tries to direct attention away from the socio-economic backgrounds of students:

> We should challenge the denial of the effect of socio-economic class on student achievement because that's the neoliberal propaganda. When they claim 'we have controlled for socio-economic factors and found it's the teacher that makes the difference', what exactly do they mean? There may be some mathematical tricks that you can use with the statistics to remove this and that factor, however, in the classroom these tricks cannot be used – the socio-economic background of the students is still there.

Sasha pursues this theme further, describing how a focus on data-driven improvement measures shifts the blame for under-achievement to teachers and principals:

> *We need to challenge the mindset that this data enables in the minds of our teachers and students. At the moment they are using this data to blame teachers and principals for lack of improvement … to say that the principal makes the difference is a lie. Like the lie that it is the teacher that makes the difference when in actual fact it is more to do with socio-economic background. It's just another version of teacher bashing. The principal could make a difference if she leads the teachers to reject the learning theories and teaching practices which reproduce the power relations that ensure the status quo.*

This discussion appears to open the way for new deliberations on the complexities inherent in relations between principal/teacher quality and student learning. It further suggests new work in (re)instating socially just and equitable classroom and leadership practices in the face of homogeneous systemic requirements for growth and achievement. In terms of shaping the principal subject, *the paradox of choice and equity* raises the possibility of multiple affiliations and an associated plurality of subject positions. It highlights how the discursive construction of school choice exposes the apparent fixity of its meaning to more critical and dispersed interpretations. Berkhout (2007) describes how this discursive construction 'opens up a critical creative space for school leaders to engage with competing discourses and narratives, in the interest of social justice and transformation, and to engage with what is vying for privilege' (p. 411).

Aligning *the paradox of choice and equity* with Berkhout's 'creative space' suggests, for principals, differently oriented work on the self as they seek to alleviate, mollify, vary and resist the effects of the market-oriented choice discourse. More productively, it opens new constitutive possibilities that reside in the contingency and variability of the process of their neoliberalisation. This is not to imagine the principal as unencumbered 'social justice leader' (DeMatthews, Mungal, & Carrola, 2015) or as fighting for equity beyond the reach of discourses of choice, marketisation and competition. Rather, it is to (i) position principals as subjects who can access and invigilate versions of themselves that rearticulate, interrupt and resist vivid and pressing neoliberal representations and (ii) privilege that aspect of principal practice that DeMatthews et al. (2015) describe as an 'ongoing struggle' focussed 'on the day-to-day realities of creating more socially just schools in inequitable societies' (pp. 18–19).

Portrait: Imogen – The Principal as Enterprising Subject

Imogen is the principal at McCullough School, a secondary school of about 600 students located in a suburban community and in close proximity to several other state and private secondary schools. McCullough School serves a local community characterised by significant variations in family income, but with a high percentage of students coming from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Imogen is in her first tenure as principal. In conversation, she makes several references to being relatively new in the job and to the way she is shaping a particular identity for herself as principal. The notion of 'the enterprising subject' appears to

function not only as an easy descriptor of Imogen's attitude and approach but also as an insistent and influential discursive force exhorting Imogen to get the best out of herself and to showing McCullough School in the best possible light.

In interview, Imogen immediately declares her enthusiasm for the role:

> *I consider being principal of the school to be an exhilarating experience. It's fun. It can be very challenging, daunting, time consuming, but, generally, it's a really exciting opportunity. So I do enjoy it.*

Observations of Imogen's demeanour in her many interactions with staff, students and community members further support her claims of enthusiasm and exhilaration. In these interactions, she seems unfailingly positive, ready to engage at a detailed level and keen to provide support and validation when others solicit it. She displays a capacity to 'think on her feet' as she deals with multiple requests and responds to a variety of issues. For example, during an early morning conversation, a staff member puts her head in the door to provide an update on a programme she is coordinating. Imogen is immediately attentive and asks questions that indicate her deep interest in, and understanding of, the programme. After the staff member has departed, Imogen shares with me her understanding of the political dimension of this type of exchange and her surprise in realising the importance that staff attach to being affirmed by the principal.

In the accumulation of data and information at McCullough School, Imogen comes across consistently as a principal who is enterprising, agile and impressive. However, beyond the descriptive force of these qualities, there is also evidence of their function as discursive influences and constraints on Imogen's identity and work as principal. Imogen's construction as an enterprising subject appears to originate from her own efforts 'to *add* value to the self and *find ways* of productive inclusion' (Simons & Masschelein, 2008, p. 54, italics in original) as well as the external pressures of policy and public expectations.

She describes deliberate and self-conscious work in shaping her leadership identity and in exercising positional power and self-responsibility. She makes reference to being 'a leader of the leaders' and 'a coach, a mentor, an influencer, a supporter' and describes in detail personal choices made to lead the professional learning of staff and 'to be visible' and 'adopt an open-door policy'. These choices are tempered by performative work in 'trying to put on a bright face the next day' while remaining concerned about not having enough energy 'to be there for staff' and needing to counter a feeling of being 'overwhelmed'. She describes her current self-improvement effort:

> *You'll notice this week I'm on a liquid diet, part of my detox and the water and so on. Next week, it will be beautiful food and trying to fit in a little bit of a fitness regime. I didn't do that before. What it means is that I'm not taking as much work home. I've made a deliberate … I'll work through lunch and recess at school, but that's when staff come and see me as well, so I do try to pop into the staff room more, so I'm making a conscious effort around that.*

Imogen also notes, with some surprise, the apparent 'power of the principal just saying something' and illustrates how, in noticing the efficacy of remarks made at a

staff meeting about her personal preferences for staff dress codes, she gained the confidence to state the changes she wanted all staff to make to their clothing choices.

When considered in the context of neoliberal governmentality, Imogen's work as enterprising subject can be seen as a determined effort to optimise and entrepreneurialise herself and her conduct. For example, her efforts to corral issues of student wellbeing and community engagement into programmatic solutions signify her desire to be entrepreneurial – to embrace current trends and to invent new and innovative solutions to problems that appear persistent and deep-seated. While these programmes are referenced in several places in interviews and school documents, they appear to function as banner headings and as proof of action, with matters of their worth and compatibility absent from any input. These performative and impression management qualities of Imogen's work extend beyond programmatic solutions, appearing to be most commonly linked to the issue of maintaining and increasing the student enrolments at McCullough School.

Imogen construes several aspects of the school's appearance, performance and organisation as responses to the declining enrolments in feeder schools and competition from neighbouring state and private schools. Interview input, observation and document analysis all speak strongly to fundamental neoliberal tenets of choice and competition. She welcomes the community feedback relayed by her line manager that McCullough School 'is the desirable school of choice … within the community' and goes on to connect the impact of a major building development currently underway to new possibilities for increasing enrolments. Her enthusiasm for this impression management work is further illustrated by her description of the interaction of her school with local primary schools:

> We're also going to be going into all of our local primary schools. We're doing it this term with our music program, but it's really too late. We're going to have a music program going into all of the schools next year. I'm looking for sharing some of our staff within our local primary schools as well. We are collaborating with our closest primary school down the road in a significant joint project. We've got a whole lot of things like that.

Other members of staff and Governing Council make more direct links between an impressive school and the viability of student enrolments, with several referring to how Imogen is positioned in this dynamic. Charlie and Leah from the Governing Council highlight Imogen's work in marketing and promotion:

> **Charlie:** It's a selling point and Imogen will unashamedly use the redevelopment of our science and technology resource centre, and the new art centre … she will unashamedly promote that use through the region as a selling point.

> **Leah:** She's very strong in marketing. Our principal is. That's a big focus for her … She is very directly involved in uniform changes, the development of the school, the grounds.

In casual conversation as well as formal interviews, members of staff express a range of views on the principal's work in impression management. Samantha, a school business manager, makes reference to how successive principals have insisted on a particular dress code, saying 'they look at the teachers and staff and how they're dressed. Let me tell you, they make comments to us'. Oman, a senior

leader, says that principals are acutely aware that parents make a choice of school for their child based on data so it is 'important that the data looks really good'. Oman also describes the principal's recent filling of an 'image consultant' position at McCullough School as symptomatic of the business orientation of schools and a matter over which staff are divided. Imogen is unequivocal in her support of the position that she describes more broadly as 'promotions person'. In interview, she expands on the responsibilities of the position by describing photographic, web development and publication work that is connected to the rebadging of McCullough School and to selective highlighting of its best features and achievements.

As an enterprising principal subject, Imogen positions herself, and is positioned by others, as the leader of this impression management work. Matters of school choice, competition and enrolment share are taken by Imogen and many teacher and community colleagues to be unproblematic or are construed as bracing challenges and useful measures of principal effectiveness. The performative work of the principal is central to these arrangements. In the context of McCullough School, Imogen's considerable capacity to promote a particular view of the school to the public, manage how the school is portrayed in the media and counter and downplay negative perceptions is widely noted and admired by those she works with.

The Paradox of Principal Autonomy

Under the managerialist leadership preferences of neoliberalism (see Chap. 8), principal autonomy flows from the decentralisation of decision-making in matters such as staffing, planning and school structures. The expounded logic is, following Berkhout (2007), 'fundamentally shaped by the neo-liberalist discourse of the free market and the power of autonomous agents' (p. 411), and it submits that these matters, managed at school level, better respond to local accountabilities and produce outcomes that are more compatible with the specific needs of the community and the school's potential enrolment market. As Morley and Rassool (2002) note, 'responsibility is devolved and increased responsiveness to clients/customers is alleged' (p. 62). When rendered paradoxically, the type of principal autonomy attached to the neoliberal policy project can be shown to have fabricated and deceptive qualities.

One of the ironies in granting apparent autonomies to principals – which has occurred in various diminished and expanded iterations in the system within which my study is situated – is that it has coincided with an extended period of unprecedented scrutiny and surveillance of schools from the central office and its agencies. Felicity from Sullivan School notes this trend and its potential to interfere with local priorities:

> *I think now is a particularly interesting time to be observing what appears to be a move towards more hierarchical models coming out of our corporate office as well as some of the approaches which seem to be more around accountability than supportive of creativity and innovation. I think we've gone for, you know, reasons that we currently understand, towards*

this model where actually all of a sudden it's about standards, it's about checking boxes, it's about being accountable and it's about answering to data and making sure we've got all of that. Some of that I think could, if you let it, if the principal let it, could actually drive the school in a particular direction.

In this reading, the autonomy conferred on principals from above is accompanied by the authoritative gaze of supervisors and a kind of mock empowerment that is bounded by systemic requirements for alignment and conformity (see Wright, 2012). Other non-principal participants in my research appeared awake to the positioning of the principal in these hierarchical arrangements.

Darius, from Lawson School, says:

Sometimes principals become figureheads of the school and it's, I guess, the absolute-ness of it … people's interpretation of our principal as an absolute authority, they're where the buck stops. When in fact, the buck stops further up the food chain. There's a whole network above that and a network above that.

Along similar lines, Angela from Heatherbank School talks about 'people further up the food chain' from principals 'dictating to them what they can do, so that they are just hamstrung in doing anything other than what's expected of them'.

Paradoxically, the ostensible divestment of new powers to the principal and alleged improvements in responsiveness to communities and customers is more likely, in this dynamic, to manifest in performative responses that cater more to the generic policy priorities of the system than to local needs. This 'steering from a distance' uses neoliberal technologies, such as centrally imposed standards and accountability regimes, to affect a fundamental reworking of relations of power, where the prima facie appearance of autonomy arguably disguises the apportioning of greater powers centrally.

Several research participants highlighted in interview the various deceptions in suggestions the principal can be rendered more autonomous in a policy environment marked by increased accountability and surveillance:

As principal, a part of doing the job well is being seen to be doing the job well because of the huge amount of accountability as a principal leading a school and student learning. I don't believe that you can separate them. (Belinda, principal, Lawson School)

It becomes the department leading the school by talking to other people beyond the school about what happens in the school. (Frank, Heatherbank School)

In the current climate principals don't want to have done something that they shouldn't have done, or spoken out of turn, or given information to the wrong people, or done it too quickly or too slowly. (Richard, Lawson School)

We get locked into a system of external accountability and once we are focusing all your energy on accountability we actually lose the ability to do creativity and innovation. We stymie everything because we've got so many rules around everything we actually stymie it. I think I've seen a real shift in the last 20 or 30 years towards that accountability piece. (Felicity, Sullivan School)

Local consequences of this partial and contingent granting of principal autonomy, noted in my fieldwork, relate to the under-resourcing of areas of increased school responsibility; the need to devise new structures at school level, especially in the

configuration of leadership teams; and the increased pressure and workload on principals. In the following two extracts, Oman, from McCullough School, observes specific examples of the pressures that confound notions of principal autonomy.

The fact that performance policy has been nailed so closely undermines to some degree the authority of the principal. I think what that does is makes the principal a focus for those negative feelings towards performance management, that's unfair given that it's directed from on high.

Over the years I reckon more and more tasks have been stuck on principal's shoulders. What's been happening, in the past few experiences I have had, is that principals live behind closed doors, they're busy working on finance, they're busy working on human resource management, they're busy working on those difficult tasks that none of us want to do.

In the more general layering of principal responsibility that 'autonomy' demands, Oman's insights also work in concert with Niesche's (2014) interpretation of principal leadership, as 'a tactic of governmentality in the governing of education at a distance' (p. 144). These consequences of autonomy run contrary to centrally sanctioned objectives about greater principal freedom and add weight to accounts given by principal participants of increased complexity and workload and more thorough surveillance.

A more intimate expression of the paradox of principal autonomy can be derived from the performative work that principals do on themselves in manufacturing an authentic persona (see Guthey & Jackson, 2005) of an autonomous school leader. While elements of the heroic or saviour leader that marble historical and contemporary accounts were sometimes detected in my ethnographic data (and are expressed through several of the principal portraits), this identity work is more directly focussed on neoliberal ideas about individual enterprise, self-possession and leader centrality. Paradoxically, performances of the autonomous self, when subject to the discourses of neoliberalism, are rendered impossible by expectations of conformance to specific norms of success as measured by pervasive accountability regimes and performance evaluations (Sinclair, 2011, p. 508). Additionally, this work, when seen as an act of performance, brings with it 'connotations of non-essentialism, transience, versatility and masquerade' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 33) and, in doing so, interrupts idealised accounts of the authentic, agential and autonomous principal.

In the politics of principal subjectivity, the neoliberal brand of governmentality renders autonomy a necessary corollary to the qualified freedoms bestowed on subjects. This arrangement prompts Rossi (2017), drawing on Foucault's work on subjectivity and power, to speculate on the possibility that 'individual freedom is nothing but a chimera projected by modern apparatuses of subjection' and that 'agency', therefore, might 'only appear as a by-product and spectre of coercion' (p. 339).

The paradox of principal autonomy infers, in its various oppositions, a different plane on which the politics of the self and principal autonomy might coincide. This is not to invoke the possibility of 'an independent subject that stands outside of

society or power relations' (Allen, 2011, p. 44), but, rather, to suggest the availability of a version of principal autonomy that is inclusive of the capacity of the principals to think critically about their subjectivity and the constitutive effects of the power-knowledge relations that are manifested in dominant discourses. I further contend that a paradox lens, in locating autonomy in a less encumbered space of freedom, allows in what Ball (2015) describes as a 'sort of agonism' as a 'going beyond', where principal subjects experiment with limits and transgression, 'thinking about how one is now and how one might be different' (p. 1136).

The Paradox of Professionalism

Principal professionalism takes on new and distinct qualities under discourses of neoliberalism and, I contend, creates an important paradox that directly impacts the constitution of principals and their work. As a preferred subjectivity of neoliberal discourse, principals are called upon to be enterprising and entrepreneurial – to shape themselves according to its policy requirements (see Chap. 4). This performative quality gives new meaning to the notion of principal professionalism. It draws on and legitimises the process and technical and strategic knowledge powerfully installed by the various technologies of neoliberal policy and, in doing so, illustrates what Clarke and Moore (2013) term 'neoliberalism's deep-seated distrust of professionalism' (p. 488). It finds in prescriptive and narrow performance processes new possibilities for expertise and responsibility (see Ball, 2013; Rose, 1996) and responds to expectations that principals produce evidence that they are getting the most out of themselves and those under their 'administrative gaze' (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 333).

Under these conditions, instead of applying their own expertise and judgement to professional matters of competence and capability, principals are drawn to an opportunist scanning of the knowledge field to find where personal and school productivity can best be enhanced. Built on discourses of enterprise, competition and efficiency, this 'new' professionalism can be cast in a paradoxical relationship with an apparent reduction in the breadth, originality and contextual sensitivity of the professional work that principals actually undertake. The words of philosopher and theorist Jean-François Lyotard (1984) resonate strongly when he says, 'the goal is no longer truth, but performativity – that is, the best possible input/output equation' (p. 46).

The outside construction of an edifice of principal professionalism is further enhanced by the codification of competencies and conduct expected of principals. Most notable in the Australian context is the development of the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (AITSL 2015) – or *The Standard* – which describes itself as 'a public statement which sets out what principals are expected to know, understand and do to achieve in their work' (p. 3). The Standard is underpinned by a generic matrix of 'leadership requirements' and 'professional practices' and pays only fleeting attention to contextual variables. Moreover, its reductive

orientation leaves out the emotional, political and contestable complexities of the actual work of principals. As Fitzgerald and Savage (2013) claim, in summary:

> This is no less than a carefully constructed script in which the actors (teachers and school leaders) must perform according to the prescribed set of rituals and routines. Wholly absent is any recognition of the complex, messy and contested environment of schools and school leadership. (p. 130)

In my fieldwork, a more visceral and personal version of this paradox was observed in the disappointment and disillusionment of several principals about a centralised policy agenda in which they had performed and invested so heavily. For example, principal participants referenced the de-professionalising effects of an increased reliance on narrow measures of school effectiveness and improvement, a propensity to access professional development from outside 'experts', mandated programmes directed to improving literacy and numeracy and the aforementioned 'partnerships' policy initiative. Interpreted paradoxically, a policy agenda which suggests quantifiable, autonomous, publicly robust and enhanced levels of principal professionalism may, more likely, return a more mechanistic, amoral and cynical interpretation of what principals are required to do in the name of professionalism.

The practical manifestation of a form of professionalism that trades practice wisdom, professional judgement and personal creativity and passion for a more singular and homogenising third-party rendition was most obviously noted in systems of performance management/development in which principals participate. Here, professionalism was considered to be scaled to individual evaluation, with the principal typically subjected to various iterations of performance management and appraisal where easy compliance involved performing to reductive signifiers and prescriptive standards. The paradoxical quality of this work emerges from the performative gilding and selecting of information by principals that works to undermine rather than fulfil the objectives of the process. A duplication, at teacher level, of this tendency to performativity is described in the *paradox of strategic planning* in the next chapter.

Analysis and Conclusion

The *paradoxes of neoliberal policy* traverse a complex terrain of subjectivity and agency in principal policy work. As such, they provoke possibilities for picking out idealised types of principals such as *policy advocate*, *policy entrepreneur*, *policy interrogator*, etc. While I resist inventing such a typology, one broad conclusion that can be drawn from the use of a paradox lens in this chapter is that it presents principals with an array of responses that are not available in normative expectations about their policy work.

Arguably the most productive of the paradoxes is *the paradox of policy implementation* which opens a promising space of creativity and imagination as principals translate centrally developed policy to fit local needs. Importantly, as various of

the principal portraits show, the pressures and logics of policy are felt and treated differently by individual principals and are enacted in multiple and heterogeneous circumstances that produce 'specific forms of indeterminacy' (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 57). While these observations prompt a wondering about the inherent disparities in principal neoliberalisation and the unreliability of principal agency, they also emphasise the importance of dwelling in the translation space that principals occupy as policy actors. Concomitantly, in this space there is a need to speculate on the choices that principals make, and those that they refuse, and to remain attentive to what Clarke et al. (2015) describe as 'the political and ethical issues at stake in translation' (p. 57).

The variegated work of policy translation was illuminated in this chapter by the portraits of three of the principals in my study, Sasha, Janet and Imogen. The portraits of the other two principals in my study, included in the previous and next chapters, add additional breadth to principal policy responses. Drawing on Dyrberg (2016), one way of thinking about this variation is to consider the determination of individual principals to make certain 'exclusions' in order 'to carve out the political field' (p. 268) of policy enactment at school level. This work can be interpreted as a form of counter-conduct directed to making the space for the requisite freedoms needed if policy is to be settled in the school's favour. The types of exclusions that can be discerned from the principal portraits – and which are most fully illustrated in Sasha's portrait – include rejecting the immutability of centrally developed policy and the hierarchical chain of command along which it passes and refuting any notion that those higher on the ladder might possess more expert policy knowledge than those enacting it on the ground. Sasha complements these types of exclusions by deliberately characterising centralised policy as abstract and homogenous in order to suggest the impossibility of it fitting the needs of her school, thus providing her with a mandate to change it.

The paradox of policy implementation opens a space of translation where principal practices can resist, change and manoeuvre centrally mandated reforms. The other paradoxes in this chapter, with their origins in the ruling policy discourses of neoliberalism, work into this space to show how the warrior topos language of paradox might render these seemingly bullet-proof reforms more fragile and contingent. Bainton's (2015) notion of 'liminal slippage' is useful here. It describes how this space of policy translation is created by shifts in context, language and meaning, so that translation of policy can become 'a struggle that opens up the potential for alternatives' (p. 169).

The paradoxes of *excellence, choice and equity, principal autonomy and professionalism,* while founded on a tangible shift in context from their site of development to that of their implementation, also highlight the potential for the language of paradox – as warrior topos – to work liminally in support of alternative interpretations of meaning and to help counter and refute dominant policy messages. Clarke et al. (2015) assert the importance of language in the work of policy translation:

> rather than translation being deterministic and unidirectional, translation should also be understood as contested, and, as such, translation inevitably includes the possibility of

retranslation, of redefining and resisting, of 'talking back' to dominant understandings, or taking back the possibility of self-naming. (p. 40)

The language of paradox tests the epistemological qualities of truth claims made in policy. It provides a resource for interrupting the taken-for-granted quality of these claims by articulating the form of simultaneous and interrelated opposites. It finds in these opposites new meaning and different ways of knowing beyond and against those officially sanctioned and implies, in practices of the self, what Foucault (2000) describes as 'a set of truth obligations' involving 'discovering the truth, being enlightened by truth, telling the truth' (p. 177–8).

From this reading, it appears that paradox language makes available to principals, as policy actors, a way of accessing what De Lissovoy (2016) call their 'epistemological agency' (p. 132) by supporting them to talk about and talk back to the truth claims in policy. Prima facie, a fairer and more open-ended contest is suggested. However, this assertion is tempered by the formidable difficulties involved in mobilising *theoretical resources* for a political struggle as *tactical practices* for resisting the entreaties of policy. Phillips (2006), in deliberating on 'subjectivity as a resource for resistance', draws from Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) to suggest that 'strategies of power are opposed by the tactics of resistance available to those who are not provided a proper place of power' (p. 319). Applying this power imbalance to the relations of policy-makers and principals helps to underscore the risk involved for principals embarking on tactics of resistance, such as the practices of critique and counter-conduct introduced in Chap. 5. Phillips (2006) is awake to these risks when he describes the consequences of 'speaking out of place':

given one's position one is entitled to speak in certain ways and about certain things, but also limited in these regards. Performing within the bounds of one's subject position provides for certain levels of social rewards, at the very least the lack of censure or disciplining, while the violation of the bounds of decorum which surround one's position can lead to various forms of social punishment. Perhaps the greatest danger in violating one's position is the possibility of exclusion and, therefore, a kind of social death. (p. 316)

The various illuminations of agentic practice, resistance and risk provided by the *paradoxes of neoliberal policy* encourage me to conclude this analysis with some observations about the political and ethical issues at stake in principal policy work. Two key concepts – *agonism* and *ethics* – are now applied in the policy context and flagged for a more comprehensive treatment in Chap. 8.

Firstly, I assert the importance of agonism as a preferred form of thought and practice in principal policy work. The argument for agonism, introduced in a section on *agnostic practices* in Chap. 5, is centred on its capacity to emphasise both the inevitability and importance of conflicts and confrontations in political activity. Its positive presence in this discussion of principals and policy can be linked to the capacity of the paradoxes in this chapter to reveal spaces of freedom, however small, afforded principals in the relations of power and to realise the value of holding the

different sides of the conflicts depicted open to scrutiny. In particular, *the paradox of policy implementation* shows there is always a certain 'room for manoeuvre' in relation to structures of power and domination in political relations and reveals the possibility of 'a vast terrain of hidden scripts and arts of resistance' (Owen & Tully, 2007, p. 285). Principal practices of embracing reasonable disagreement and participating in more open and unencumbered contests appear as more palpable in these spaces of freedom.

The case for principal practices of agonistic thought and resistance also rests on whether it constitutes a meaningful alternative to current preferences for top-down decision-making and the forced consensus this imposes on principals via its inherent imbalance of power. This is an argument for holding open a plurality of positions, including those represented in principal opinion, rather than seeking binding decisions founded in the expertise of policy-makers. Several implications follow. For example, a preference for agonism opens the case for systems and structures of institutional decision-making that are more conducive to dissenting opinions; it suggests a need for greater principal participation in decisions about policy and underlines the importance of collective principal voice in representations to policy-makers. Perhaps more importantly, in the scaffolding of any take up of agonistic thought and resistance by principals, is the prerequisite presence of what Tambakaki (2011) describes as a 'critical ethos or attitude towards … politics' which 'begins to resist, disturb and contest that which appears natural, hegemonic or final – be it rules, narratives, directorates or policies' (p. 575).

Secondly, I claim the 'dynamic and continuing activity' of ethics (Niesche & Haase, 2012, p. 277) as central to this discussion of paradox and principal policy practice. Case, French and Simpson (2011) describe an era where 'scientific' and 'value-free' methods feed positivistic knowledge about what is required of leaders. As a result, they claim leaders are ensnared by 'a utilitarian matrix of reasoning' and ethics is reduced 'to a matter of quantitative calculation' (p. 247). Given expression in abstract normative codes of conduct, ethics within the neoliberal project is a set of expected behaviours, competencies and attitudes, bounded by points of transgression and championed for their punitive possibilities and 'line in the sand' functionality. As Sasha, principal of Sullivan School, says of 'those who white-ant out the back … you could probably get them on the code of conduct'. Following Alvesson and Willmott (2012), normalised codification of ethics fits easily with the smooth, 'neutral techniques' of managerialism 'that guide and empower individual employees to work more effectively' without any direct reference to the moral commitments and ambiguities running through this work (p. 37).

Against this tendency to codification and boundary setting of expectations and requirements, I propose a different ethics. In the essay *What is enlightenment?*, Foucault (1984) invokes and connects the ideas of freedom and reflexivity when proposing a 'critical ontology of ourselves'. Organised along axes of knowledge, power and ethics, this is a mode of critique:

> conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (p. 50)

By invoking this 'critical ontology of ourselves', I surface a theme that gains prominence over the remainder of this book about the more active involvement of principals in authoring their ethical selves. Using Foucault's (1987) description of ethics as 'the deliberate form assumed by liberty' (p. 115), I seek to fashion spaces of freedom in which ethico-political responsibility can be returned to depleted neoliberal readings, practices of critique and counter-conduct can be entertained and enacted and the thwarting of principal 'freedom to choose oneself' (Pignatelli, 2002, p. 164) can be arrested.

This involves, in the first instance, highlighting to principals the defining and delimiting functions of current policy and the possibilities, in an ethical project of elaborating the self through practices of freedom, for thinking otherwise about their constitution as policy actors and policy subjects. Such a project involves what Demetriou (2016) describes as 'a constant reflection, rethinking and negotiation of the power that underlies everyday encounters' (p. 219) and that Pignatelli (2002) elaborates further as 'envision(ing) one's self constitution as an ongoing task, an achievement requiring artistry in the face of the looming, omnipresent threats to our freedom to invent ourselves' (p. 165). Beyond these more introspective qualities, it is also an ethics that takes seriously the consistent theme in my own research of the principal as influential in describing the culture and setting the direction of her/his school and in informing, supporting and shaping the work of others. Taking account of this influence requires that the critical consciousness developed by principals through a focus on the self be turned to a more public demonstration of their productive struggle against oppressive reforms and performative expectations (Cohen, 2014, p. 2).

When Dean (2010) notes 'that practices of the self can be not only instruments in the pursuit of political, social and economic goals but also means of resistance to other forms of government' (p. 21), he prompts a connection between an ethics based on an elaboration of the self and practices of counter-conduct. These practices, which Davidson (2011) claims 'add an explicitly ethical component to the notion of resistance' (p. 28), have been variously depicted in the paradoxes and portraits in this chapter, for example, as protests and complaints directed at certain policy initiatives, risk-taking in acts of disobedience and refusal and developing and sharing of perspectives that counter and defy the entreaties of dominant policy discourses. However, these counter-conducts were also often noted as dispersed, rhetorical and intermittent, emphasising their contingency and fragility in the face of imposing oppositions and formidable risks. In response, the pursuit of the theme of ethics turns, in the next chapter, to a more robust treatment of agonistic resistance by exploring its implications for principal practice – both the detachment of practice from currently favoured subjectivities and the possibilities for the production and performance of other ways of being (and being governed). The concluding chapter speculates on the new possibilities emerging from this book that support the formulation of a broader ethico-political project for principals.

The epistemological contributions of the paradoxes in this chapter are complemented by an extension of the discussion, commenced in Chap. 6, about freeing principals from the conditions of neoliberalism and the political power exerted on

their being. This chapter has provided a context for these ontological concerns in the policy influences that advance a neoliberal conception of the principal subject. It has also revealed the sporadic presence of qualities of risk and refusal that appear necessary to the aforementioned confrontation of the normative and the ethical (see Ball, 2015; Pignatelli, 2002). In Chap. 8, the *paradoxes of managerialist practice* shed further light on this confrontation by showing how the normative reach of the neoliberal project into everyday practice involves principals acting out a prescribed version of leadership that both obscures the politics of struggle and renders the necessary 'techniques of the self'[1] (Foucault, 1997, p. 154) – such as risk and refusal – as fraught and difficult to access. It is the themes of enclosure, censure and acquiescence suggested by these paradoxes that prompt a renewed emphasis, in the conclusion of Chap. 8, on the productive possibilities in agonistic thought and practice and on subjectivity as a possible site of resistance.

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[1] Foucault generally refers to 'technologies' and 'techniques' of the self interchangeably. The distinction suggested here, which is one that is sometimes also evident in Foucault's work, is to use 'techniques' to refer to more specific and localised practices (see O'Farrell, 2007).

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Chapter 8
Paradoxes of Managerialist Practice

Marlon, from Sullivan School, claims succinctly that 'leadership comes from the principal', while his colleague, Samuel, says that principals who 'lead from the front' have most impact and 'that you can't have an effective school without an effective principal'. While these confident assertions suggest a set of practices that are readily discernible as those of the leader, they are confounded somewhat by a strong tendency, amongst participants in my research, towards more nebulous descriptions of busyness and importance. The principalship was variously described as 'quite a juggling act' (Levon, Sullivan School Governing Council member), 'where all the threads come together' (Mac, Caldicott School), 'the focal point for the school community' (Clive, Heatherbank School Governing Council Member) and 'where the buck stops in actual fact' (Richard, McCullough School). More metaphorically Hillary, from Lawson School, claims:

> They've got to be policemen and social workers and CEOs and accountants and psychologists and social workers and professors in the field of education.

These descriptions allude to crowded schedules, profuse interactions and multiple responsibilities. The busy and often shambolic lives of principals are, in neoliberal conceptions, reined in and better depicted by the cleaner lines and boundaries of managerialism. To reiterate, managerialism appropriates the language and corporate principles of business management as reflected in the concerns and claims of principals and others about visions and missions, planning goals and targets and processes for monitoring and measuring effectiveness and performance. Following Grace (2000), it also works ontologically to make schools into businesses – implying their colonisation 'by marketing and managerial values' and constituting principals as business executives under 'a new hegemony in the formation of school leaders' (p. 235).

Discussed as a policy discourse of neoliberalism in Chap. 5, managerialism is taken in this chapter as privileging a particular set of leadership practices and as favouring particular forms of subjectivity. *The paradoxes of managerial practice* reveal managerialist conceptions as hiding and smoothing over a number of

tensions and contradictions in the leadership practices of principals. These are surfaced through various paradoxes associated with the structuring and delegating of authority (in *the paradox of hierarchy and distribution*) and the management of people and practices in the leading of change (in paradoxes of *stability and transformation*, *principal vision* and *strategic planning*). These paradoxes also work with the rhetoric of high performance, continuous improvement and striving for excellence that characterises managerialist aspirations, and which equate leadership quality with 'success in performative metrics' (Heffernan, 2018, p. 168). Sprouting this rhetoric – and a belief in the measures it promulgates and relies upon – is expected of designated leaders in schools, and, according to my fieldwork, principals are generally untroubled by their participation. Tellingly, it is this rhetoric that permeates many of the tools of neoliberal managerialism, such as vision and mission statements, strategic planning, goal setting, data analysis and various processes of performance improvement.

While these tools and their accompanying language were embraced and lauded by many leaders in my ethnographic study, they were often passed off by teachers as being disconnected from their professional lives and undertaken for compliance rather than improvement purposes. Mac, from Caldicott School, captures this divide in his comments about the process of performance management:

> *I think it's a process we do onerously. I think it's one that we do because we have to, not because we want to. And I think for a lot of us, the motivation to perform is a personal intrinsic motivation. We do it because we're teachers and want the best for the kids … sitting down and filling out of a form is a meaningless process. But I do know what it is that I want to be able to achieve as a teacher of 30 years standing, with the students that I have. I do know that the connection between myself and those students is absolutely essential.*

In this chapter, I contend that the paradoxical qualities of a managerial shift in school leadership are obscured by a tendency to hegemony and the attendant subjugating, ignoring and overlooking of conflicting alternatives. In this interpretation, the 'defenses and paralysis that paradoxical tensions often fuel' (Lewis & Dehler, 2000, p. 711) harden the resolve of principals to hold to the rational and authorised versions of themselves and their work that the discourse provides. This has necessitated that the paradoxes in this chapter, to a greater degree than those in the previous two chapters, have been resurrected and constructed from the perspectives provided in my ethnography and, occasionally, as those that I have judged as missing.

The paradoxes of managerial practice speak to fundamental ideas about principal subjectivity and power relations, ethical and political responsibilities and collegial and professional relations within schools. They work against the tendency of neoliberal managerialism to simplify the complexities of school leadership and towards fashioning spaces of freedom where certain techniques of the self that exceed the favoured conception of the agile and enterprising individual may be tested and used.

The Paradox of Hierarchy and Distribution

In my fieldwork much was made of so-called flatter school leadership models that purport to distribute, disperse and share responsibility and thus empower new leaders. Principal participants, in particular, were keen to emphasise a personal preference for sharing responsibility, while other designated leaders appeared to appreciate the insider position that so-called distributed models of leadership provided them. Felicity, from Sullivan School, provides an insight into reasons for this positive regard:

> By distributing leadership you actually increase the power of the leader because what you actually do is empower everybody else within the regime and within the structure to actually truly have responsibility and to truly take leadership themselves within those particular areas … the principal therefore has more, what I call power because they have significant influence but they actually have it over a willing cohort.

Notions of distributed leadership appear to underpin recent changes to leadership structures in three of the participating schools. One relevant observation in my fieldwork was the proliferation of new senior leadership positions in these schools, resulting in the creation of extended senior leadership teams and a sharpening of the leader/follower division. This is captured when Angela, from Heatherbank School, observes:

> There used to be a principal and a deputy but there certainly wasn't the spider web of underlings that there now are … the principal's minions are out there gathering the data and bringing it back.

Efforts to promote distributed leadership were shown to sharpen the division between leaders and followers. This occurred as the beneficiaries of distribution caucused as the senior leadership team (or 'principal's team', as it was called in three of the schools) and created separation from other groups by assuming exclusive privileges and responsibilities. For example, members of this team appeared to have more direct and frequent contact with the principal and to be privy to certain information that was not available to other staff. They generally led the various processes of performance management to which followers were subjected and were often allocated front-line responsibilities for whole-of-school planning priorities and, as a result, appeared more engaged and enamoured with the broader aspirations of the school.

Sold as emancipatory, empowering and democratic (see Mifsud, 2017), the current enthusiasm for models of distributed leadership evident in my data may actually hide a range of their paradoxical qualities. The first of these can be noted in the emergence of a 'Catch 22' style anomaly between claims about the favoured status of distributed leadership amongst principals and a pervasive assumption amongst almost all research participants (including principals) that the principal is alone at the apex of the school's leadership structure. Fletcher and Käufer (2002) claim that this arrangement compromises principals in their efforts to empower others. They note the emergence of a 'paradox of implementation' where 'hierarchical leaders

are charged with creating less hierarchical organisations' and claim that leaders are expected to 'both set themselves apart – and above – the group, while at the same time interact as an integral part of the group, even as coequals with other members' (pp. 24–25). Evidence gathered in the field revealed ongoing attempts by principals in my project to straddle the gap between hierarchy and distribution. For example, Janet, principal of Caldicott School, provided the following in response to a question about the power of the principal:

That's connected to empowering others. I'm not autocratic but like to ensure that we work collectively within a performance framework. I think working collaboratively in a site the size of ours is vital and that requires fostering trust, recognising skills in others and building the knowledge and talents of others and we need that to have high performance outcomes. I feel a lot like a puppeteer. I can hold the strings, guide the strings and lead exceptional performance, but each part of the puppet has to do its work and each part has an impact on the other parts as well.

In the provocation discussion, Janet continues on a similar course, saying:

I don't want someone going off at a tangent and stuffing things up, so, I use the way I work with people to be able to control the outcome.

To which Sasha adds:

I always think, 'get them to think it is their idea'.

Hatcher (2005) extends this argument about the continued prominence of hierarchical leadership by implicating it as the favoured systemic preference. He claims that the authority of the principal at the top of the school leadership hierarchy inevitably contradicts and constrains the benefits claimed for distributed leadership and that an 'authentically participative professional culture cannot be achieved within existing government-driven management structures' (p. 261).

This paradox of hierarchical and distributed leadership is imbued with power relations and, in particular, the circulation of power between principals and other would-be leaders. Sasha, principal of Sullivan School, provides a perspective on distributed leadership and the contingencies of sharing of power:

Some teachers see distributed or shared leadership as a managerial technique to shift work, responsibility and blame. Sharing infers a distribution of power, but it is more likely responsibility, work and blame. The fact is that different people will interpret power relations according to their ideological stance about power. I get the feeling that some principals don't make these issues explicit. Anyway, it's a weak word, 'share'; delegate is better because it requires negotiation, consent and the transfer of power.

Working from Sasha's observation, this paradox is distended further by the possibility that distributed leadership may not in fact divest power from formally allocated sources. The dealing out of responsibility and status to others by the principal in the name of empowerment implies, following Gunter (2001), an 'emotional connection with the leader's vision and mission' (p. 100). As a result, principal leadership, which acts under the guise of power distribution, may actually function to

further entrench the authority of the principal and exemplify the shepherd/flock arrangements of a pastoral repertoire. This interpretation of distributed leadership resonates strongly with the observation made by Ball and Carter (2002) that school leadership is increasingly depicted as 'a world of the potent and virile individualist, fighting battles for the good of others, endowing ownership and empowerment on their incumbents' (p. 553). As Hatcher (2005) succinctly claims, 'while participation is nominally inclusive, authority is exclusive' (p. 259).

This paradoxical interpretation highlights how distributed leadership, for all of its congeniality and seduction, may actually function as a mechanism of control. Sinclair (2010) sums this up in saying:

> Leadership itself is a place customarily understood to be above, and in control, of others. Despite efforts to democratise and collectivise leadership, it is often marketed as a place many people want to get to be in, precisely because it is above others. (p. 454)

The paradox of hierarchy and distribution surfaces a confusing mix of enablers and constraints for leadership actors in schools. It confounds idealised versions of distributed leadership, founded on the principle that meanings, values and beliefs are shared and that these are disconnected from issues of power, control and hierarchy. It creates a new scepticism about participation as apolitical, harmonious and collaborative, by surfacing the likely presence of the differentiated representation of personal and hierarchical interests. Taken together, these insights work to refute any conflation of distributed leadership with democratic ways of organising leadership work in schools. While they do not point to alternative sympathies with a particular 'rule by the demos' Athenian conception, they do suggest that closer attention be paid to the 'leadership configuration' (Gronn, 2010) in schools, which may include shifting the rhetoric of democratic participation and distributed power closer to actual practice.

As a prerequisite, I contend a different type of shift facilitated by the alternative propositions this paradox provides. It involves various detachments of the notion of leadership, as embodied in current conceptions of the school principal, from its narrow and insistent managerialist core. It contrives a site of struggle, one that many principals might overlook in their current circumstances, where preferences for the slick and privileging operations of business world leadership are displaced by practices and configurations that work towards more inclusive and open participation. This is a shift closer to what Serpieri (2016) describes as a 'democratic-critical discourse' that involves the 'democratisation of the idea of distributed leadership' (p. 67). While I resist further instrumentalisation, Sinclair (2010) does provide a less conventional starting point for this shift when she indicates that the critique of current leadership preferences must examine 'the inflation of the need to *be* a leader' (p. 454, italics in original). The clamouring to be part of a leaderful environment in the current mix of hierarchy and distribution must, in the first instance, be tested to see if it actually makes for better leadership practice in schools.

The Paradox of Stability and Transformation

Working from the observations of Ball (2012), the principal is cast, in models of transformational leadership and associated literature and research, as the 'one figure … invariably crucial either in initiating or supporting change in the school' (p. 78). As already noted from field observation, the principal is also deeply interested in building collegiality and loyalty amongst members of the school community and affiliation with the school. *The paradox of stability and change* works from the inherent tension between the change agenda that principals seek to enact and a workforce that, by virtue of long-established loyalty and organisational identification, is resistant to the change and more wedded to the status quo.

While the presence of this paradoxical conflict was detected in my data, its construction draws heavily from the now famous research of March (1991) into the tension in organisations between what he termed 'exploitation' and 'exploration'. Succinctly put, March claims that *exploitation* – the short-term operational work of organisations expressed in 'the refinement and extension of existing competencies, technologies and paradigms' – is at odds with *exploration*, the longer-term, innovative work associated with 'experimentation with new alternatives' (p. 85). March contends that both exploitation and exploration are necessary for organisational success but that there is a tension brought on by the incompatibility between the quick gains and efficiencies sought in exploitation and qualities of exploration, such as variation, risk taking, trial and error, flexibility and discovery.

This tension is often masked by an orientation to the more comfortable and familiar preferences of the parties involved. Data gathered in my study suggests that staff direct their work to an understanding of what the principal wants and that this has an iterative and self-reinforcing effect as the principal provides affirmations of that work. My field observations suggest that such a process provides obvious benefits in terms of motivating teachers to accomplish tasks and contribute to broader organisational objectives. At a more personal level, it may raise levels of comfort and work satisfaction while building deeper loyalty to the principal and identity with the school. In interview, these claims that the principal's change agenda is best executed by a satisfied and affiliated staff were widespread. The following are included as examples from a larger collection:

> There's an expectation from people these days, rightly or wrongly, that the leader loves them. There's a caring thing going on. I do think that principals have a role in showing that this is a good place to be and we are going to be here together. (Frank, Heatherbank School)

> For an organisation to function well and when you're moving in a direction you want people to come with you and not resist you. Part of that is building that culture within the school. (Mali, Heatherbank School)

> You get the best out of employees, whether they're teachers, whether they're non-teachers, whatever their role might be within an organisation, in particular schools, you get the best out of them if they feel they're valued and that they are making some kind of progress and they're happy in their job. If you can make teachers feel that they are valued, that you actually care about what they're doing and what they produce, then teachers will be happy. (Richard, McCullough School)

Interpreted into the work of principals, this preference for the comfortable and familiar amounts to a way of mobilising the existing staff to effect short-term change and improvement or, in the vernacular of organisational research, exploiting 'the information currently available to improve present return' (March, 1991, p. 72). Principals create the parameters within which staff execute agreed and known tasks. The mutually beneficial outcomes of those tasks become part of a cumulative loop of feedback and accomplishment. For the teachers, this brings certainty and reliability to their work and, by extension, helps define and cement their relationship with the principal. For principals, this orientation plays to an express concern, often noted in my fieldwork, with the quality of their relationships with staff. It supports their use of team and familial metaphors about staff cohesion and loyalty and the uniqueness of the group and the school environment.[1] It also provides a context for showings of praise and regard and helps legitimise claims about individual competence and school achievement.

My analysis of the performance plans of principal participants, for example, revealed various 'improvement priorities' related to building relationships with, and between, existing staff. These priorities ranged from direct interventions via the creation and maintenance of new teams, the formulation of team charters and the recognition of expertise in allocating leadership responsibilities to the implied attention of principals to personal interactions, such as those associated with committee work, classroom visits and social events. In interview, Sasha, principal at Sullivan School, emphasised the importance of this team commitment:

> You have to guide colleagues to meet their accountabilities and focus on what matters. I think it's important to support and guide individuals privately but to support teams publicly. So really focus on teams and commitment to teams.

However, a number of limitations are revealed when the stability inherent in exploiting the known is considered against the need for change or, in March's (1991) words, 'the exploration of new possibilities' (p. 71). While exploitation may yield short-term success, limitations of current knowledge and expertise narrow the possibilities for new ideas and innovation. Levels of comfort gained through mutuality and familiarity may morph into complacency and to what Watson (2013) describes as 'stagnation and lack of adaptability to new situations' (p. 259). March's work emphasises the interplay of exploitation and exploration and the need to maintain an appropriate balance between the two.

In relation to the constitution of the principal, this paradox is made more relevant by focussing on a principal preference for stability and for the relationship benefits derived from it. The courting and championing of current staff as the key to the success of the school may, paradoxically, actually work to limit success by stultifying new possibilities and privileging comfort and mutual admiration over risk and dissonance in working relationships. An obvious reversal of this paradox can also be

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[1] I noted, in observation, a tendency amongst principals to differentiate their schools as unique and different from any other. In interactions with staff, this expression of uniqueness appeared to have extended use as a subtle form of individualisation and as a vehicle for making staff feel 'special'.

discerned in a preference for change over stability. While I have concentrated on the possible deceptions in stability, *the paradox of stability and transformation* also suggests that the innovative and risky work of exploration must also be subject to closer scrutiny. While not explicitly evident in my data, innovations such as major shifts in pedagogical practice, experimentation with new technology and rearranging the school's leadership structure, while designed to gain advantage, may, in reality, be shown to be frustrating, time-consuming and subject to failure.

The paradox of stability and transformation is a practical illustration of leader/follower dynamics, previously explored in Chap. 6. As such, it surfaces the power relations circulating through the pastoral practices of principals associated with building loyalty and affiliation that are, more generally, rendered as benign and apolitical. In the depiction of a political struggle over principal subjectivity, the importance of this paradox transcends previous observations about the mutuality of leader and follower needs by suggesting a more tangible space for the local shaping of change and innovation. It warns of the consequences for schools of principals favouring one side of the paradox over the other, while also suggesting advantages in holding open its competing sides so that their separate merits and interrelations can be used to local advantage (see Clegg, 2002).

Paradoxes of Principal Vision

Linked to the primacy allocated to principals under conditions of neoliberal managerialism is an expectation that the principal assume responsibility for transforming the school by generating (1) a vision for change and (2) a followership that builds and sustains commitment to the vision (see Gunter & Thomson, 2009). The notion of the visionary principal is tied closely with a preference for leaders who project a 'charismatic identity' (Ball & Carter, 2002, p. 564) and 'who can be heroic and transformative' (Fairhurst, 2009, p. 1619). Oman, from Sullivan School, observes, 'I've been with a number of principals and they bring a vision with them … It's interesting, because if you come with a vision, you need to come with the charisma to actually carry the vision off'. More pointedly, Darius from Lawson School claims that 'the vision is the vision of the principal, not the vision of the school'.

The assumption is not only that principals will have a vision for their school but also that, as a visionary leaders, they will articulate their vision, oversee its morphing into a 'shared' vision and ensure that it becomes a positive determinant of the future of the school and of all of those who work in it. Christos, from McCullough School, takes this work to be relatively unproblematic:

> It's more, these are the policies, these are the values of the school, this is the direction of the school, this is where we're moving as a group, and I want people to fall into line and agree that this is the direction that we're moving.

While the discourse of visionary leadership appears to enjoy elevated and largely uncontested status in leadership literature, my ethnographic work revealed the

principal's vision setting/vision building role as complex and contingent. Three *paradoxes of principal vision* were discerned from analysis and interpretation of my data.

The All-Knowing, All-Seeing Principal

Principals, like the other educators around them, are trapped in particular belief systems and ways of thinking. They enjoy professional and political affinity with some groups but not others and possess knowledge and understanding of their school that is limited by their own history and paradigmatic thinking. The notion that the vision of one individual can speak to and speak for many others gives rise to a fundamental paradox. Simply expressed, the great store placed on the all-encompassing quality of the principal's vision may actually work against the broader interests of the school because the principal cannot be all-knowing and all-seeing. These shortcomings were not directly acknowledged in my data; however several interviewees highlighted complexities in the process:

> I think the skills of a good leader are being able to get what you want but if you have to go the roundabout way of getting them, that's what you need to do. If you've got a vision that you're going to take your school to be the best school … how do you go about doing that? And there's more than one path. (Ian, McCullough School)

> Having that vision also means working out which path you're going to take to get there. And all paths can intertwine. (Olivia, McCullough School)

Imogen, principal at McCullough School, also provided an insight into the difficulty of finding a mandate for her visionary work, even when this work is clearly expected of a newly arrived principal. She described how she used a private, externally administered quality assurance process to help:

> [It] provided a really useful construct, if you like, and provided me as principal with permission to actually bring on some things within the school. As a new principal, wouldn't you love to be able to go into a school and to review the vision, the guiding statements. That was one of the things they expected would happen within the first year.

The Principal's Vision for Change

A second 'vision' paradox relates to principal efforts to bring about change in schools. Privileging the principal's vision for change points to 'the automatic necessity of a single person in charge' (Gunter, 2009, p. 52) but paradoxically renders the principal impotent without the support of followers in any subsequent operationalisation of the change. The tension here is between the principal's capacity to directly control the aspirations of the school and the extent to which their leadership must also include and empower others in order to bring agreed aspirations to fruition.

Clive, Governing Council member at Heatherbank School, provides an insight into the way principals manage this tension:

> *So principals will direct how they want things to happen in the school. And different principals have different ways of doing that. Some are very directive. Some are more team-engaging, where they inspire the team to come up with ideas that they then ensure are implemented and taken forward.*

The following exchange, from an interview with two teachers from Caldicott School, captures something of this leader/follower dynamic in the work of school change:

> **Chris:** *Would you say the principal was a powerful figure?*
>
> **Bobbi:** *Yes.*
>
> **Oliver:** *Yes; not necessarily, in a physical or personality sense, but they have a lot of power to control the vision and direction of the school, to some extent.*
>
> **Chris:** *Where is that power derived from?*
>
> **Bobbi:** *I guess as staff you give them that respect and they have that power through respect you give them I suppose.*
>
> **Oliver:** *Historically they've always been people that you do respect and you follow their lead.*

An extension of this paradox is detected when, in the name of transformational leadership, the principal commits to building consensus in the form of a shared vision built on inclusive input, collaborative endeavour and agreed values. Imogen, from McCullough School, ties her capacity to influence others to getting them to agree to her vision:

> *I think that to be able to influence people effectively, it's … It comes back to, I think, the work around being able to articulate the vision and being able to articulate a really clear vision and direction for the school and then to be able to encourage people to come on board. That might be through professional learning or staff meetings or just sharing research. You have a whole range of different ways.*

Paradoxically, the processes for creating a shared vision marginalise and leave out those views that do not fit the prevailing consensus. Morrison (2009) points to the failure of shared approaches to address or even recognise '*dis*sensus' (p. 7, italics in original), while Lumby (2006) goes further, referring to 'shared vision' as 'an optical illusion', an exclusionary tactic 'where deletion of the "other" is disguised as values-based inclusion and democracy' (p. 2). Failure to secure agreement may also put the principal's aspirations for change at risk, as following exchange, from an interview at Heatherbank School, highlights:

> **Chris:** *What about the principal who has a vision that isn't in keeping with that of some other key stakeholders?*
>
> **Norbert:** *They will struggle. I've seen that in my past.*
>
> **Michael:** *Conflict.*
>
> **Norbert:** *Conflict, not bringing everyone on board, it creates issues for the principal when they want to be able to achieve things. Priorities basically get thrown out the door.*

The Vision as Idealised Description

In my fieldwork interviews, teachers routinely proclaimed the importance of their principal's vision and of their capacity to share and mobilise it. When pressed, however, few could say exactly what their principal's vision was or, in fact, whether it was being enacted in the school. Leaders often articulated their vision through catchy slogans and in key ceremonies and appealing stories, pointing to an elevated symbolic function of the principal's visioning work and diminished attention to its practical application. While 'talking up' the vision appears to build loyalty and identity amongst followers, it creates, paradoxically, idealised descriptions of the organisation that are difficult or impossible to realise in reality (see Storey & Salaman, 2010, Chap. 3).

The portrait of Rob, in Chap. 6, contains an extended example of his descriptive visionary work and his attachment to the contents of his vision. However, the paradoxical qualities of idealised description are perhaps better captured in the many vague references to this vision by teacher participants from Heatherbank School where Rob is principal. Such references indicate an abstract appreciation of the vision and the work of the principal, but scant understanding of what it says and does:

> *If you have an ethos right in the school there's this swell of common thinking and agreement. This is the right thing to do, and these are achievable goals and achievable challenges. (Norbert)*

> *I guess the vision filters through at each level. The common thing there is the publicity of it and the emphasis on it as being important. I think staff pick up on that vibe. (Michael)*

> *The vision has a ripple effect downwards that directly influences the instruction within the school. (Lillian)*

> *The principal has a bit of a conceptual vision that may not necessarily be completely articulated, but I think a leader can create provocations for thinking around what that vision might be about. (Ursula)*

The symbolic quality of the principal's visionary work encapsulates broader messages about leadership practice under the discursive watch of neoliberal managerialism. It posits principal leadership as elemental in describing a school's preferred future and evokes images of charismatic and transformational work that is separate from, and above, the 'tangible outcomes' and 'bottom line' concerns of others (Fairhurst, 2009, p. 1613). It assumes that the belief and commitment of the principal stands as a beacon to which others should be drawn while packing away or modifying their own ideas as they move towards it. Even in their intangibility, these appear as controlling and surveillant qualities.

Other deceptions arise in more material manifestations. An analysis of the vision statements of participating schools in my research showed they vary significantly from conveying rather homogenous and predictable sentiments to providing detailed explanatory information about the particular directions the school intends to take. Valuable content notwithstanding, the tendency for the vision and its

accompaniments (in the form of mission statements, prospectuses, messages from the principal and assorted local policy) to be conveyed beyond the school in an impressive, business-oriented package, speaks quite directly to their market-oriented functions related to choice and competition. As Slater and Griggs (2015) note, 'visions of social possibility are painted with an economist's brush' (p. 455).

The paradoxes of principal vision suggest a different set of symbolic and material possibilities for the visioning work of a school. They articulate, in their various oppositions, the importance of shifting this work out of its confinement as a practice of leaders and towards a broader and more participatory process. Given the necessity to include stakeholder views and opinions into 'shared' visioning work, paradoxes of principal vision raise further questions about whether the narrow, linear and time-bound planning documents that typically flow from the vision are adequate to the task of setting coherent and inclusive directions.

The Paradox of Strategic Planning

Emblematic of managerialist claims for school leadership as a rational and technical discipline is what Eacott (2012) describes as 'the means-ends reasoning … [that] presents strategy to school leaders as a mechanistic pursuit towards the production of a plan' (p. 4). In schools, strategic planning is the predominant process for formalising, documenting and plotting the organisation's change aspirations. It is marked by what Morley and Rassool (2002) describe as 'a rationalist epistemology of change' (p. 62) and by a taken-for-granted uniformity that demands that schools, and leaders in particular, invest 'in the belief that a system or process can be developed that can be adopted in each and every school for the achievement of some predetermined goal' (Eacott, 2012, p. 76). In practice, strategic planning may manifest as multiple documents and assume a kind of quasi-scientific status seemingly removed from its utilitarian efforts to plot a way forward. Imogen describes some of the planning documentation at McCullough School:

> We've got our vision, and then our motto. Then we've got some things that we really strive for. That's what we're focused on just here. In terms of the guiding statements, you've also got your site improvement plans. You've also got the action plans that sit behind that, all of those sorts of things.

Janet, principal at Caldicott School, adds to this picture of a plethora of plans:

> There are also other areas where you can go overboard with policies. If you look for instance at improvement planning – the school has a three-year plan, but then we are expected to have an annual plan, and then I'm expected to have a performance plan. Which I consider the three-year plan is really my performance plan, but I have to write another performance plan. And the annual plan is just a sub-set of the three-year plan, it's a bit more specific, but essentially, it's still the same plan just regurgitated three ways. So I do find that frustrating and unwise use of time.

The symbolic, technical, rational and homogenous qualities of strategic planning, when examined in practice, can be shown to confound and stifle the very change processes they are ostensibly designed to support. These paradoxical qualities are drawn from at least three different sources.

Firstly, as a tool of managerialism, strategic planning (along with vision/mission statements, data analysis and processes of performance appraisal) at school level is generally acknowledged by designated leaders as promoting a change process geared to improved performance and higher standards. However, strategic planning is often perceived by teaching staff as irrelevant in their professional lives, undertaken for compliance purposes and, paradoxically, disconnected from the actual work of school improvement. For example, in interview, Mac, from Caldicott School, responded to a question about whether the school's plan influenced teachers' work:

> *You're talking about the cellular level. I'd say no. I mean because, you know, you'd be hard pressed to ask anybody here to tell you what's in the site plan. You'd be hard pressed to even ask that question.*

An interview exchange with two teachers from Heatherbank School also suggests a certain disconnect:

> **Sylvie:** *We've lived through a few strategic plans over the years, haven't we?*

> **Ruth:** *Recently it's been more ongoing … not repetition, but you think all right, that's another strategic plan and there's changes. They're not coming from the staff; they're coming from the top.*

Secondly, at what might be termed the *extra-local* level, the emblematic and ambitious qualities attached to the process of strategic planning by its advocates evoke a range of performative responses from leaders that open the process to allegations of facadism and exaggeration. As evidenced in my analysis of planning documents and a range of interview responses, leaders are often concerned to create an impressive and self-contained planning document that is suitably compliant and publicly accessible, but less enamoured with the long-term realisation of its documented aspirations. Paradoxically, in performing a largely symbolic function, the actual content of the plan – with its goals, targets and actions – may be more easily put aside, lost in a profusion of daily priorities or rendered as outdated.

Thirdly, the preference at a systemic level for a single planning process across schools is secured by attendant processes, such as external inspection and performance management, which draw information directly from the site's strategic plan. The effect is one of narrowing and confinement, as the aspirations of schools are imbricated with broader system-wide objectives and leaders are encouraged to construct local priorities for change in the improvement language and effectiveness measurements of the corporate mission. The paradoxical effect is that the plan, despite its homogenous origins, takes on disjointed and compromised qualities as it fails to fully acknowledge local priorities for reform and surrenders claims to informing local practice.

Portrait: Belinda – The Principal as Responsible Agent of Change

Belinda is in her second tenure as principal of Lawson School. She was previously the school's deputy principal. About 800 students from culturally diverse backgrounds are enrolled at Lawson School. According to the system's classification, Lawson School is considered one of the more socio-economically disadvantaged secondary schools (i.e. it is generally termed a 'low SES' school).

One of the subject positions that appears most prominent in Belinda's input, as well as in other components of my ethnography, is that of self-directed and responsible change agent. In interview, Belinda quickly asserts her 'complex but very strategic aim' to 'ensure that all students at the school achieve learner outcomes and achieve those outcomes at a high level'. Given her characterisation of Lawson School as 'a low-achieving school', this is an early insight into the 'change-oriented persona' and 'can-do' approach (Gunter & Thomson, 2009, p. 473) typically associated with neoliberal calls to enact central policy imperatives by taking individual responsibility and autonomous actions. She provides some insight into why she is so attentive to improved achievement at Lawson School:

> I had a moment where I looked at our results and the very bright kids of the school, we'd fail them. The very kids who were going to go to university, they did really poorly in their exams. I thought, I'd sack myself if I knew this because this is not okay. It really wasn't okay. I just said I didn't want any surprises. I didn't want to be a head of a school and not know in a timely fashion what was happening in the learning.

It is from a self-described position of 'a knowing and influential principal' in a complex local setting that Belinda has developed a range of practices that align with her desire to lead a transformation of the student achievement outcomes at Lawson School. Belinda's initial preoccupation is with practices of direction setting and building and communicating a shared vision. She talks about the importance of understanding the direction in which she wants to take the school or what she calls 'outcome intent'.

> I think that without that strategic direction, I would find myself fumbling through systems and operations within the school when I may not necessarily know what the outcome is going to be. I have an outcome intent and I share that with the staff of the school.

The direction she articulates is that of 'high aspirations', claiming that an assumption that such a direction should naturally be in place is flawed if the pervasive philosophy of the school is that 'we can't achieve because we have complexity'. This sets up Belinda's visionary work where she describes going 'underneath' the complexity to make changes to the pedagogical practice of teachers. Jack, a teacher at Lawson School, recalls Belinda's work in creating this focus on high aspirations:

> She said 'We want our students to flourish. We don't want them to survive just to get by, especially as they're from some families of intergenerational unemployment. They need to flourish. They need to do their very, very best in a time of change. We cannot be apathetic as teacher leaders … we have to set high expectations of our young people to do their very, very best, and to be resilient in that process'.

In gaining traction for her vision, Belinda stresses the importance of supportive research, compatibility with broader regional directions, use of 'inspirational' outside personnel and bringing other influential staff on-side. Her confidence in this visioning work, and the implicit putting aside of alternatives, is evident when she recalls at a staff meeting presentation, 'asking the staff to reflect back to their own classroom to see whether what I'm saying to them and what they're doing matches'.

This account of Belinda's precursory work in the change process concentrates the response to patterns of low achievement at Lawson School on the willingness of teachers (and later on the capacity of students) to change the ways they work. It looks away from pervasive social and institutional issues linked with socio-economic disadvantage, to rely instead on inducing the self-responsibility of individuals. Here the congruence with neoliberal logic is most noticeable in Belinda's efforts to fashion her work as self-directed leader and have teachers align with a particular vision as a form of personal commitment. Both Belinda and the staff are compelled to make themselves more entrepreneurial in order to contribute to the realisation of the vision, with broader system-led discourses of continuous improvement and high achievement seeming to permeate this work in natural and unproblematic ways.

Two other technologies typically associated with the discursive logics of neoliberalism – performativity and accountability – are prominent in the balance of Belinda's commentary and in site observations and the transcripts of interviews with various staff and community members. The complexity of leading significant site reform to improve student achievement in a low SES school is described in the performative work that Belinda and other designated leaders in the school undertake. Belinda observes that students 'probably were at a heightened point of unteachable' when she first mooted the push to 'high achievement'. She then makes reference to leading various processes of observation, evidence-gathering, gap analysis and consultation to get students 'in a compliant state to actually sit and learn'. She outlines specific initiatives such as literacy improvement, differentiated learning and targeted professional development and links these to both cultural and pedagogical change.

That Belinda's subjectivity is significantly formed within discursive neoliberal logics about personal responsibility becomes even clearer in her insights into how she is called to account – and calls herself to account – for this performative work. She makes direct links between the quality of her leadership and the success (or failure) of her school and understands that *being seen* to do her job well, under current accountability regimes, is an important part of doing her job well.

The notion of being seen to do the job well accords with Belinda's interest in creating and analysing multiple data sets and circulating these to staff, broader community and system-level audiences. Belinda commences an extended explanation of the use of data at Lawson School by saying, 'to measure student effectiveness, or our school effectiveness, we take measurements'. She goes on the describe data sets for student achievement, retention, student pathways and destinations, student wellbeing and school culture. Belinda, and many other staff and governing council members involved in my research at Lawson School, put significant store in the capacity of this data to portray the desired progress. The accountability element is

thus in 'the visualisation of constant progress' (Maguire, Hoskins, Ball, & Braun, 2011, p. 605) – in *showing* that things are heading in the right direction.

For Belinda, this amounts to more than publishing favourable data in newsletters, or reporting it to governing council, or discussing it with subject teachers each term, or using it to plot future directions with other school leaders at the beginning of the year (all uses of the data that are variously reported and observed in my ethnography). Data also functions, perhaps most tellingly for the principal, as an artefact for establishing the level of accord between the school's performance and the aspirations of policy and policy-makers. In keeping with this function, Belinda's representations of data are shaped to test favourably against homogenous standards, animate a narrative about continuous improvement and survive and thrive in the spotlight of centralised processes of quality assurance and review.

At the intersection of discourses of data-driven improvement and accountability, the discursive constitution of the principal as subject is also at work. Here the principal is measured, judged and disciplined. Power arrangements that create constraining normative boundaries and what Butler (1993) terms 'principles of intelligibility' (p. 35) are used to convey to principals what can and can't be said – what should be privileged and what should be left out. Within this confined space, Belinda seeks to fashion herself and her work in entrepreneurial and creative ways. She uses the tools that attend conventional school improvement initiatives to impose some order and structure over the complexity of the change at Lawson School. Building on the considerable merit she sees in visioning and creating strategic directions, she adds an array of school and personal plans, planning processes and local accountabilities. At one point in interview, she outlines the merits of a methodical approach to the implementation of differentiated learning in classrooms:

> I would go to some of our best classrooms and look at some people who have actually differentiated. Gather information through our own staff about what they mean by differentiation, and then set up a plan for it. Working with a curriculum senior leader, I would then work out over how many months are we going to unpack this and then, along the way, have some measuring sticks to say what is working and what's not.

While the perception of Belinda's work as change agent at Lawson School is often that of local autonomous leader, various data suggest that Belinda must also work from an outside script about measurable achievement, setting of targets, meeting of standards and the gaining of substantial and verifiable improvements. This script is made intelligible, for example, in the ways that Belinda and others describe change and improvement at Lawson School and in the language that permeates a myriad of school planning documents as well in conversations amongst staff and members of the school community.

This account does not attempt to cloak Belinda in the normative straightjacket of change management or transformational leadership theory, but rather links Belinda's interpretation of her pragmatic, problem-solving work in a low SES setting to the various discursive calls and incentives enmeshed in the neoliberal policy discourse that implore principals to enact a particular reform agenda. While much of Belinda's work can be shown as compatible with the aspirations of centralised policy, it does

not mean that she is insensitive to the operation of power relations and power differentials in her dealings with systems-level policy and its makers. In the provocation discussion with other principal participants, she laments the cost to her school of an ongoing tendency to concentrate power centrally. Later in the same forum she talks, somewhat reluctantly, about 'guarding' her ethical thinking in interactions with central office personnel and about the difficulty in speaking up when you think something 'is not a good use of our time and energy'. She concludes that this tendency to want to protect the ethics that guide her local work prevents her 'from clearly saying what she thinks should be happening'.

The Paradox of Technological Change

In an entirely different tenor, and perhaps more as a footnote to discussion about change management, is a possible paradox related to principals and their computers. In my fieldwork, I noted in observation of all five principal participants, a predisposition to spending the great proportion of office time on their computers. A variety of computer-based tasks were noted, with email correspondence within and beyond the school the most regular and time-consuming. Principals in my study treated working at the computer as a default activity and connected their accessibility and availability via the Internet and email to a variety of workload issues. These included:

- Increased central office demands and shorter turnaround times for data and information
- More requests to complete surveys and provide online feedback
- Stronger expectations that principals will complete a substantial amount of their work at home
- A propensity for staff and parents to use email to manage interpersonal conflict, often resulting in an escalation of the conflict

The paradox of technological change suggested here is that the freedom and flexibility promised principals through the shifting of many tasks to their computer and the online environment may, in fact, cause an increase in workload, higher stress levels and reduced availability for face-to-face contact. More broadly, this paradox links to the easy shift, noted in the literature, to consideration of principals as *leaders* and the corresponding denigration of *manager* and *administrator* labels. The principal leader, trapped in front of their computer for long hours, could be considered somewhat paradoxically as more inextricably bound to management and administrative tasks than ever.

This brief example of a paradoxical quality of technological change in schools serves to indicate that this area, while not a central focus of my own study, presents a potentially rich field of future research in which a paradox lens could be productively applied.

Analysis and Conclusion

While I have contended throughout that paradox requires the sides of conflict to be held open and that undecidability be tolerated rather than overcome, I also hold that paradox offers a productive space of action[2], what Platt (2016) calls 'political wriggle room' (p. 12), rather than confinement to a benign 'politics of inaction' (Stevens, 1996, p. 207).

I, therefore, conclude this chapter, not by rehashing the paradoxes under discussion, but rather by examining the possibilities they present for action and the barriers that stand in the way of principals who want to act on and against their orthodox sides. In support of this focus, Niesche and Gowlett (2015) claim that Foucault's (1978) insights into the relational character of power reveal 'a multiplicity or plurality of points of resistance' (p. 376–377) and thus make available the possibility of analysing power via practices of resistance. They add that '(t)his would then entail researching how leaders work with and resist particular discourses and practices in their daily work. It is at these points that they become subjects and form a space for analysis' (p. 377).

Focussed as they are on the local practices of principals, *the paradoxes of managerialist practice* describe productive possibilities within and beyond current managerial conceptions of school leadership. In general, they suggest the need to be sceptical of the received wisdom of managerialism within the neoliberal policy project. More pointedly, they highlight a powerful form of neoliberal governmentality and the reach of its ambition to make principals, and have principals make themselves, agents of the school market. In this, the paradoxes demonstrate, amongst other things, a shaping of the principal as more technicist and opportunist, a potential divide between principals and staff, a change to the language of in-school collaboration and a closing of the spaces of variety and dissension. These are paradoxes that explicate the intimate and visceral workings of managerial leadership on principals by showing that they are both subjects *of* and subject *to* relations of power.

The *paradoxes of managerialist practice* in this chapter illustrate, in different ways, Foucault's general conception of power relations as all-pervasive and allude to the formidable power the managerialist discourse exerts over principals. They return my discussion to the question posed in introducing the deployment of a paradox lens in Chap. 5 – 'how can principals detach themselves from existing forms of subjection?' However, they enlarge the field of responses to this question by directing thinking towards practice and the performative requirements of detachment that need to be summoned in pursuit of the 'art of not being quite so governed' (Foucault, 1997, p. 57).

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[2] In support of a link between paradox and action, Derrida (1988), reflecting on his own work on undecidability, claims that 'undecidability is always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations (for example, discursive-syntactical or rhetorical – but also political, ethical, etc.). They are *pragmatically* determined … not at all some vague 'indeterminacy' (p. 148, italics in original).

It is in Foucault's (1982) claim that power is exercised only over free subjects for whom there are a field of possibilities (p. 790) that I seek a corollary to power's omnipresence and an opening for critical work. In this chapter, possible spaces of freedom emerge, for example, in the paradox of principal practices associated with deployment of leaders and allocation of responsibilities, the balancing of site stability and innovation and the conducting of visioning and planning work. The multiplicity of possibilities for working against the constitutive forces of managerialism, I contend, support my already established preference for a form of agonistic thought and practice as the type of politics that needs to be reclaimed in these spaces. To further my argument, I will expand on earlier references to agonism by suggesting a line of sight to its deployment in principal practice.

Wenman (2013) brings agonism closer to the language and componentry of paradox when he says, 'we might think of agonism as a form of rivalry that ought to be characterised by a persistent disequilibrium of roughly approximate forces' (p. 47). This definition reveals two ways in which the *paradoxes of managerialist practice*, as well as many of the paradoxes described in the previous chapters, are compatible with deployment of agonistic practices.

Firstly, towards *persistent disequilibrium*, the paradoxes provide a resource for countering the current hierarchical distribution of power and the general tendency to use the homogenising operations of powerful neoliberal discourses to smooth over and suppress oppositional voices. As such, they support two key principles of the agonistic critique that I am advising, (1) that power is always political and contestable and, therefore requires decisions to be made in an undecidable terrain (see Mouffe, 2013, Chap. 1) and (2) that conflict has positive value and is necessary and important to political debate and democratic aspirations (see Wenman, 2013, pp. 35–36).

Secondly, in the restoration of *roughly approximate forces*, the paradoxes work to correct current asymmetries. They actively work against both the forces of domination that seek to shut down conflict using the smooth logic of hierarchical rule, as well as antagonistic forms of hostility that lead to the mutual destruction of contending parties (see Wenman, 2013, p. 46). The concomitant implication is that principals engaged in agonism as a type of 'rivalry' are provided, through paradox, with a language (earlier construed as a 'warrior topos') needed to enter the debate and to help mitigate the risks many currently shy away from.

To gain, through theory, some idea of how this agonistic practice might be deployed by principals, I join Foucault's (2000) understandings of 'thought' and 'stepping back' with Colie's (1966) 'epistemological paradox'. Foucault (2000) notes:

> Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem. (p. 117)

Stepping back is, therefore, to create a space at the site of principal subjectivity, but separated from current practice, in which principals could think about how they have become who they are and how they would like to be. These twin notions of thought and stepping back enjoy remarkable resonance with Colie's (1966) earlier claims for 'epistemological paradox'. Colie says:

> Operating at the limits of discourse, redirecting thoughtful attention to the faulty or limited structures of thought, paradoxes play back and forth across terminal and categorical boundaries – that is they play with human understanding, the most serious of all human activities. (p. 7)

Following Colie and Foucault, I contend that paradox furnishes principals with a resource for thinking about their selfhood, not so that it might be tethered to an external mooring free from the coercion of current neoliberal politics, but rather so that it might be deliberated on as an ethical project within and across the terminal and categorical boundaries imposed by dominant discourses. This reading extends the discussion about technologies of the self, commenced in Chap. 3, to include a form of agonistic practice that responds to a reasonable expectation of conflict. Founded on an impatience to act on and against the status quo, and the courage to overcome the risks of a less-constrained freedom, this agonistic practice is to engage principals in games of truth and power that are played with the real possibilities of freedom and as little domination as possible.

Niesche and Gowlett (2015), in analysis of Butler's (1997) work on alteration of the constraints of discourse, usefully describe 'the plurality of discourse and our operation at any one moment in time through an array of discourses' (p. 381). Translated to my use of a paradox lens, this interpretation not only supports consideration of principal subjectivity as influenced by multiple and intersecting conflicts, contradictions and ambiguities but also posits the possibility of principals using paradox as a resource in the agonistic practices of reworking and exceeding the intelligible spaces that dominant discourses provide. These paradox attributions are well captured in De Lissovoy's (2016) metaphorical observation that 'knowing grows out of the dirt of cracked pavements' (p. 24).

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Chapter 9
Generative Possibilities

In *Paradox and the School Leader*, I have taken the constitution of principals under conditions of neoliberal governmentality to be fixed by the ontology, epistemology and practice of principal subjectivity. I have, subsequently, asserted that this subjectivity, when understood as a variegated process of neoliberalisation, becomes the site of a political struggle for the soul of the principal. Obscured by the rationalist truth claims of positivist accounts of school leadership and carried out in a predetermined field of power relations, the current rendition of this struggle has been revealed as asymmetric in its formulation – pushed to the margins by the portentous public demands that policy makes for performative acquiescence in principal practice. In turn, this acquiescence has been shown to stand over and against diffused points of agonism and possibilities held in principal self-reflection and caucusing of the like-minded.

In conclusion, I will describe several generative possibilities that emerge from the theoretical and empirical concerns of this book. The aim is not to tie up loose ends or provide solutions to persistent tensions, but rather to proffer a set of possibilities for action, curated and moderated from the position that principal involvement in a political struggle over their own subjectivity is both necessary and productive. More reflexively, I note the worry of instrumentalisation that Medina (2011) signals in interpretive practices that re-describe and negotiate 'current visions of the future' from 'the vantage point of the present'. Medina makes the telling claim that '(w)e can do harm to past subjects by instrumentalizing their struggles, by co-opting their voices and experiences and using them for our own purposes' (p. 27). The following are, therefore, offered as ideas founded more in Foucault's (2000a) notion of 'curiosity' – and 'the care one takes at what exists and what might exist' (p. 325) – than in confident assertions of new truths and better arrangements. I seek to propose some ideas that move forward the arguments of previous chapters in useful ways while avoiding the tendency to instrumentality and certainty.

A Pedagogy of Paradox

The first, and most extensively covered, of the generative possibilities that make up this concluding chapter emerges from distilling and epitomising, as a series of learning functions, the understandings gained from my development and application of paradox in this book. The following is a somewhat schematic account of what I term *a pedagogy of paradox.* This account brings my discussion back to the premise described at the beginning of this book about using paradox as an intervention in the constitutive politics of principals. As such, it shapes the last part of my argument for capturing and comprehending the complexity of the struggle for the soul of the principal in its paradoxy rather than in currently favoured positivist accounts of the making of enterprising and self-governing principals.

Gallos (1997) argues, in an editorial in *the Journal of Management Education*, that embracing diversity in the workplace 'requires a strong *pedagogy of paradox* – methods to engage the incongruities and contradictions in the work itself' (p. 153, emphasis added). Gallos briefly develops this idea by focussing on understanding the human response to paradox and the learning possibilities that would enhance its productive embrace. These ideas are further explored by Lewis and Dehler (2000) who propose 'a pedagogical strategy for exploring contradictions and complexity' (p. 708) which advances the simulation of organisational complexity in teaching and learning settings in order to help students develop a capacity for paradoxical thinking.

These examples are indicative of an interest amongst organisational studies scholars in *apprehending* and *managing* paradox. In proposing my own *pedagogy of paradox* based on findings from my research, I shift the emphasis to *learning with* paradox. This shift looks to bring a particular curiosity to populist renderings of pedagogy as concerned with the art and science of teaching and learning. Drawing from Foucault's (2000a) deliberations on 'the eternal questions of philosophy' (p. 327), it is a pedagogy that is expanded by a curiosity about the relationship of individuals to truth and which asks questions about whether learning with paradox might enable a detachment of the individual from accepted truths and received values in order to 'think otherwise' and 'seek other rules' (Foucault, 2000a, p. 327). As such, this is a pedagogy that draws closer to the interests of critical pedagogues in 'helping to make people more critical in thought and action' and in developing 'a critical consciousness of their situation as a beginning point of their liberatory *praxis*'[1] (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 51, italics in original).

A pedagogy of paradox brings my efforts closer to those of Schad, Lewis, Raisch and Smith (2016) to both 'sharpen the lens' and 'broaden the tent' (p. 10) for the application of paradox in critically oriented work. It thus poses questions about how

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[1] This use of 'praxis' references the work of Paulo Freire, an author strongly associated with the critical pedagogy tradition. Freire (1970) says that resisting the forces of oppression 'can be done only by means of the *praxis*: reflection *and* action upon the world in order to transform it' (p. 48, emphasis added).

the learner might apply paradox to existing conditions of conflict and struggle (i.e. to sharpen the lens) as well as how paradox may yield expanded learning opportunities (i.e. to broaden the tent) in and beyond existing conditions. For example, the first pedagogical category, *representation*, asks (1) 'how does paradox support the learner to represent conflict and struggle?', and (2) 'what are the learning opportunities created by these paradoxical representations?'

This schema looks to offer possibilities for learning with paradox and to argue the efficacy and functionality of the different categories of learning proposed. It also solicits questions about its audience, the breadth and limitations of its application and possibilities for future development. As such, it completes my response to a challenge posed in Chap. 1 about giving paradox sufficient theoretical heft and girth to be more generally applied in the field of critical leadership studies. *A pedagogy of paradox*, which is summarised in table form on the following page, is organised in five categories

Representation

As an extension of thinking with paradox, the capacity to be able to *represent* struggle and conflict in terms of its paradoxical qualities is a fundamental and underpinning learning in this model. To reiterate, the interrelatedness and simultaneity of paradox componentry means that it suggests a more complex representation than that provided by accounts of dichotomies and binary opposites in dilemmatic descriptions (see Chap. 2). As Lewis (2000) notes, paradox enables the 'move beyond oversimplified and polarized notions' in order to 'recognise the complexity, diversity, and ambiguity of organizational life' (p. 760) (Table 9.1).

In the field of management and organisational studies, macro-level assessments of increased complexity, ambiguity and plurality in the workplace and a concomitant intensification of contradictory demands on leaders (e.g. Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Storey & Salaman, 2010) suggest an elevated importance for effective representation of struggles and conflicts. Leonardo (2010) supports this claim in the context of educational research in saying:

> Contradictions and tensions are part of intellectual work. They are not an annoyance to wish away but opportunities that present the researcher with a glimpse into the order of things. To live without contradictions is to exist with one eye closed, missing a full view of the panorama called education. (p. 155)

Using a paradoxical representation enables significant learnings that otherwise may not be available. Extrapolating from my efforts in Chap. 2 to imbue paradox with added 'theoretical content', it highlights the need to see conflict in its different iterations and to hold open its sides to scrutiny. In doing this, it works to resurrect and legitimise perspectives that may have been suppressed or forgotten, while at the same time, testing them against their oppositions. Representation also undergirds subsequent learning in *sense-making* and *deciding* by testing the antinomous

Table 9.1 A pedagogy of paradox

(i) *Representation*
Learning with paradox (i) restores complexity to representations of struggle and conflict, (ii) highlights the different iterations of conflict and the need to hold their sides open to scrutiny, (iii) triggers new and different ways of thinking by reversing common meaning and transgressing common sense and (iv) positions the learner in a broader field of possibilities

(ii) *Sense-making*
Learning with paradox (i) explains and accounts for the asymmetrical construction of contradictory demands, (ii) makes sense of how paradoxes arise and are reinforced in the workplace, (iii) helps account for the 'disappearance' of paradox resulting from a preference for simplified solutions and (iv) invites the learner to restore complexity by constructing these demands paradoxically

(iii) *Deciding*
Learning with paradox (i) takes ambivalence and indecisiveness as useful and, at times, preferable to clear and decisive solutions, (ii) highlights the dangers in deciding too early that we know how to resolve a conflict or manage a complex issue, (iii) acknowledges the difficulty of perplexing choices by valuing ongoing dialogue, delayed decision-making and strategies and solutions formed from diverse perspectives and accumulated knowledge and (iv) takes doubt as an opportunity to learn

(iv) *Self-understanding*
Learning with paradox (i) illuminates the constitutive shaping of individual subjectivity, (ii) reveals this subjectivity as constituted in a competitive, messy and unstable network of dominant and subjugated forces and (iii) brings a play of opposites to the discursive shaping of individuals which allows different possibilities and alternative conceptions of available subjectivities

(v) *Critical engagement*
Learning with paradox (i) emphasises the importance of comprehending the politics of subjectivity, (ii) seeks insights into the deep intrusions of power relations into available subjectivities, (iii) alerts the subject to current struggles over what they will accept and what they might change and (iv) encourages an understanding of current constitutive forces on a thought-critique-action continuum that involves four components of 'critical engagement':

▼	▼	▼	▼
Recognisery	*Revelatory*	*Critique*	*Agonism*
Works to alert its audience to different and contrary ways of thinking so that new ideas may enter the same realm as those already accepted as 'valid' or 'true'	Encompasses qualities of surprise and wonderment that, in turn, create heightened levels of engagement and prompt more serious speculation on new possibilities	Uses the maintenance of simultaneity and the delaying of resolution as opportunities to reveal, interrogate and resist the status quo in practical, open-ended and diverse ways	Supports adversarial challenge to the rationalism of prevailing discourses by informing the political work of resisting domination, mobilising democratic aspirations and struggling for freedom

qualities of a paradoxical rendition to discern the 'true paradox', with its equally legitimate and entwined sides, from the conflict that collapses or disappears under close scrutiny.

In contrast to a pragmatic treatment of paradox, anchored in studies of the workplace, Colie (1966) highlights the capacity of paradox throughout history to entertain, amuse and 'arouse the admiration of an audience' (p. 3). She describes its 'exercises of wit', 'duplicitous intent', its imposition of an 'antic decorum' (p. 4) and the way the apparent self-contradictory qualities of paradox 'surprise and dazzle' by their incongruities (p. 8). While Colie's accounts based on Renaissance paradox recall a lighter mood, her descriptions also suggest several new cognitive possibilities in 'an encounter with doubleness' (Platt, 2016, p. 4) that otherwise would not be accessible in simplified and orthodox descriptions. Firstly, her accounts highlight how new and different ways of thinking may be triggered from the reversal of common meaning and the transgression of common sense. Secondly, they suggest heightened engagement in learning when the 'contrariety' of human experience (Platt, 2016, p. 3) is revealed and described and the learner is invited to position themselves in a broader field of possibilities. Finally, translating Colie's treatment of paradox to the present day highlights the importance of an audience to the author's representations. While they may be for the private enlightenment of the individual, paradox representations of struggle and conflict can also inform a broader understanding in others. It is from notions such as *enlightenment* and *understanding* that the pedagogical function of *sense-making* emerges.

Sense-Making

There are many references in previous chapters to conflict, tension and struggle being detected in accounts provided by principals in fieldwork. Looking with a paradox lens helped make sense of these references by providing glimpses into what Tracey and Creed (2017) describe as the 'strangely imperceptible fault lines in a deceptively common-sense world' (p. 162). In learning with paradox, *sense-making* involves both explanatory and interpretive components, as well as implicating the researcher in a process of paradox construction. In my research, new learning emerged not only in understanding the nature of contradictory demands felt by principals but also in explaining the relative importance principals attached to their various sides, the reasons why some oppositions enjoyed prominence while others were suppressed and the effects of temporal and spatial variations on how these demands were perceived and apprehended.

In management and organisational studies, sense-making using paradox generally works from representations of paradoxical demands into explanations of how they arise and are reinforced and to interpretation of their impact in the workplace (e.g. in Lewis, 2000; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Stoltzfus, Stohl, & Seibold, 2011). In this field, as in my study, the absence of explicit acknowledgement of paradox in practice puts an onus on the researcher to construct these demands paradoxically so

that they make more sense. This process of construction, defended in the conclusion to Chap. 5 as a necessary adjunct to data analysis, works from the detection of contradictory demands and their manifestation in conflict, tension or struggle, to surface their components as those of paradox. The simultaneous presence of equally valid sides and the interrelatedness of those sides can then be used to open new learning possibilities that help make sense of these demands. My own analytical work drew on paradoxes 'constructed' by authors from the field of management and organisational studies. For example:

- March's (1991) pioneering study of the 'relation between the exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties' (p. 71), when applied in my study, supported the building of paradoxes to explain the struggle for both stability and transformation in schools and to interpret popular leadership models.
- Paradoxes arising from high levels of organisational identity (see Fiol, 2002) were linked directly to explaining the tension felt by principals in recognising that cultivating high levels of loyalty amongst staff may actually work against their receptivity to new ideas.
- Lüscher and Lewis (2008), in describing paradoxes of *performing*, *belonging* and *organising*, created rich learning possibilities for explaining and interpreting principals' work, through construction of paradoxes associated with performance management, system priorities versus local imperatives and the vision and planning aspects of change management.

In contrast to management and organisational studies, the sense-making pedagogy of paradox is more conspicuous by its absence from educational leadership studies than its prominence. Understanding how paradoxical demands on school leaders 'tend to disappear from view' (Collinson, 2014, p. 39) is an important part of the explanatory or sense-making function. Several questions arise in accounting for this disappearance: Why might principals display a preference for simple over complex solutions? Why might they be drawn to hasty resolution of tension and conflict? Why do they overlook or fail to see competing interests, conflicting demands or problematic qualities? In short, why might they construct situations as dichotomous and immutable rather than paradoxical and open-ended? These questions point to *deciding* as a pedagogy of paradox that builds from the understandings gained in sense-making.

Deciding

With its defining quality of two-sided (or multi-sided) conflict, it is understandable that paradox should be imbricated with making decisions. In management and organisational studies, for example, the productive resolution of tension, conflict and struggle is generally viewed as fundamental to an organisation's performance and success (see Lewis, 2000; Lucas, 2006; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Thus, as Lewis (2000) notes, much of the literature about managing paradox in the

workplace is taken up with profitable ways of deciding between 'acceptance, confrontation and transcendence' (p. 764). While self-help texts lean towards providing ways of resolving paradoxical tensions (e.g. Storey & Salaman, 2010), many researchers are concerned with the possibilities in resisting processes of synthesis, consensus and rationalisation in order to capture the 'enlightening potential' and to 'profit from the tensions and the anxieties they provoke' (Lewis, 2000, p. 763–4).

It is this trend in organisational and management studies to resist resolution and to hold open the learning possibilities in paradox (e.g. Engeström & Sannino, 2011; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2013; Lewis & Dehler, 2000; Lucas, 2006) that is my stepping off point for establishing the pedagogy of *deciding* as a vital component in the contribution that paradox might make to critical leadership studies. A response to the question of how learners can apply paradox to making decisions about tensions, conflicts and struggles is more likely, in the field of critical leadership studies, to draw on philosophers and theorists like Derrida and Foucault and the support their work provides for *not* deciding. In Chap. 2, Derrida's notion of 'undecidability' as a response to the impossibility of foreclosure in the aporetic experience of paradox was linked to the possibility of new ideas emerging from what Lather (2006) calls 'stuck places' (p. 45).

Applying paradox to decision-making practice involves understanding both the practical and political advantages in keeping opposites in play, and the costs of quick and decisive resolution. In this, the paradoxes identified through data analysis in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8 have yielded significant learning about these advantages and costs. I noted, for example, the meritorious claims of opposing sides in *the paradox of stability and transformation* and the desirability of holding their sides open in order to learn from multiple perspectives as well as to have one side shape and influence the other. In *the paradox of individual identity and team belonging*, I recognised that identities are neither consistent nor fixed and that an understanding of the perspectives they embed in a school is impeded if their multiple iterations are removed from consideration. *The paradox of policy implementation* introduced practices such as tolerance of uncertainty, delayed decision-making and deliberate ambivalence towards directives, in order that policy be made to work appropriately at site level. All of these qualities required determined holding open of a paradoxical perspective and the resisting of normative pressures to decide.

While Burbles (2000) claims that undecidability in paradox takes 'doubt as an opportunity to learn' (p. 171), accounts collected in fieldwork also revealed that it carries a personal and political risk for principals in perceptions of weakness, ambivalence and 'people-pleasing'. Principals, and many other participants in my study, showed a preference for decisions made without delay or equivocation. They equated ideas like 'knowing where the leader stands' (Sasha, Sullivan School), 'leading from the front' (Samuel, Sullivan School) and 'making decisions as a political and professional imperative of the principal' (Belinda, Lawson School) with notions of strength and appropriate performance of the role. These ideas suggest a formidable political interest in the way decisions are made in schools. As such, they convey something of both the risk and difficulty in holding to a paradoxical

perspective and the need to more fully engage with the operations of power if more productive learning possibilities in paradox are to be realised.

Self-Understanding

The pedagogy of *self-understanding* relies on paradox being useful in revealing the constitutive forces shaping the subjectivity of individuals. It applies Foucault's (1972) archaeological insights into discourse and contradictions and revives previous claims about the discursive origins and boundaries of paradox. In doing so, this pedagogy responds to Koopman's (2013) assertion that 'knowing *how* we are furnishes us with the resources for thinking about the sorts of selfhood we would continue to inhabit' (p. 528, italics in original).

Foucault (1977) complicates the 'author function' by rejecting the idea of the individual being the author of her/his own identity and arguing, instead, that 'it is a matter of depriving the subject … of its role as originator, and of analysing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse' (p. 221). However, Foucault's interpretation is not construed as some smooth and mechanistic cause and effect process. In the 'Contradictions' chapter of the *Archaeology of knowledge* (1972), Foucault points to the instability of discourse and how an analysis of its working practices shows how it emerges and 'speaks' in order to 'translate' and 'overcome' contradiction (pp. 150–151). Working from Foucault's insights, and the oft-mentioned constitutive interpretation of paradox as forming and developing in discourse, the pedagogy of self-understanding uses paradoxes to illuminate the competing constitutive influences at work on the individual. It helps reveal subjectivity as constituted, not in agreed, singular and cemented-in discourses, but rather in a competitive, messy and unstable network of both dominant and subjugated forces.

The five *paradoxes of subjectivity and authority* in my study (see Chap. 6) bring a paradoxical play of opposites to the discursive shaping of the subject. They work against accepting fixed and natural versions of the self to reveal different discursive possibilities and bring thought to bear on alternative conceptions of available subjectivities. In terms of pedagogical possibilities, this reading is a broadening of the 'tent' of self-understanding, as it surfaces learnings about the forces that are rallied and hidden in the political plotting of subject formation. As Weedon (1997) argues, in a precursor to the next section on paradox and *critical engagement*, only a 'conscious awareness of the contradictory nature of subjectivity can introduce the possibility of political choice' (pp. 83–84).

Critical Engagement

In my analysis of policy discourses (Chap. 4), the governmental rationale of neoliberalism was shown to implicate the principal in its ambitions and technologies by providing a type of script formed in the circulation of specialist discourses that frames what knowledge is considered valid and true at any one time and who can legitimately understand and speak it. As both a target of government policy and the embodiment of its aspirations, I argued that principals are shaped in particular ways which are not natural, necessary or essential but entirely contingent upon their discursive circumstances (Gillies, 2013, p. 25). The pedagogy of *critical engagement* emphasises the a priori importance of comprehending the politics that make certain subject positions more attractive, legitimate and accessible than others. It seeks insights into the deep intrusions of power relations into available subjectivities and the asymmetrical struggle between dominant scripts and different ways of knowing and being.

Foucault (1997) says that the 'political dimension' of the analysis of subjectivity, 'relates to what we are willing to accept in our world – to accept, to refuse, and to change, both in ourselves and in our circumstances' (p. 152). As a tool of learning, critical engagement draws on paradox functions of critique and resistance to elucidate this political dimension. However, engagement requires in the first instance deep consideration of how paradox might alert the subject to current struggles over what they will accept and what they might resist or change. As Mumby (2013) contends, 'people don't challenge or resist their social reality because they often lack awareness of the contradictions on which it is based' (p. 168). In Foucault's (2000b) conceptualisation of problematisation, he claims that 'to step back' and make oneself 'the object of thought' is essential to creating the freedom necessary to turn givens into questions and to find diverse solutions (p. 117). In consideration of the pedagogy of critical engagement on a thought-critique-action continuum, two stepping back functions that underpin practice are proposed – the *recognisery* and the *revelatory* functions.

Recognisery

The *recognisery* function is founded in the ways paradox alerts an audience to different and contrary ways of thinking so that new ideas may enter the same realm as those already accepted as valid or true. This is rarely a straightforward matter of describing inviting alternatives, as questions arise over what these alternatives are and how they come to be *recognised*. Nicholas Burbules (2000), in his interpretation of Meno's paradox,[2] provides a useful insight when he invokes the componentry of

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[2] Meno's paradox, though quite extensive in substance and reach, hangs most famously on Meno's questioning of Plato's assertion that 'it's not possible for someone to inquire either into that which he knows or into that which he doesn't know? For he wouldn't inquire into that which he knows

paradox to argue that recognition depends on 'seeing one thing in terms of another' – that 'one recognizes the unfamiliar so that it becomes familiar. One re-cognizes, thinks again, thinks in a different way; and moves toward insight and understanding' (p. 177).

Burbules' claim that a contrary position is only recognised when thought is brought to bear on previously unnoticed contradictions is further illuminated by rhetorical paradoxes so popular in the Renaissance. These paradoxes took the form of a defence of an unexpected or unworthy subject, often one officially disapproved in public opinion. Designed so that audiences would recognise unorthodox and unpopular perspectives, they also sometimes highlighted a moral dimension and prompted thinking beyond the boundaries of the paradox (see Colie, 1966). Ortensio Lando's *Paradossi*, for example, is a collection of 30 paradoxes characterised by arguments against received opinion and in praise of contrary and generally disagreeable positions. The virtues of poverty, ignorance, weeping and living in exile are all argued over their more sensible and publicly acceptable alternatives. As well as the clever oratory used to make the case, Lando's paradoxes are chiefly concerned with socio-economic status and the moral condition. Following Colie (1966), his defences do recognisery work by their 'unspoken rejection of normally worldly opinion to make the moral point that … goodness and salvation … do not rest upon received opinion of what goodness and salvation are' (p. 463).

Revelatory

The second stepping back function – the *revelatory* function – builds from recognition of contrary perspectives to allow further speculation. The Macmillan Dictionary defines revelatory (2019a) as 'providing information that was previously secret, hidden or not known', while the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019b) says that revelatory means 'making something known: revealing something in usually a surprising way'. Combining these definitions, I use revelatory to contend that inherent qualities of intrigue and surprise in paradox create the possibility of a type of wondering – a heightened level of vivification and engagement that prompts more serious speculation on the importance and use of newly recognised possibilities. It is this revelatory function that precedes and lays foundation for the critical and political functions of paradox that follow.

Linking engaging qualities of paradox to more serious purposes is a consistent theme across historical periods. In *Paradoxia stoicorum*, an influential collection of ancient paradoxes written about 46 BC, Cicero emphasises the importance of presenting paradoxes in rhetorically effective and captivating ways. He sets out to argue the resolution of a series of Stoic paradoxes, not because he disagrees with the

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(for he knows it, and there's no need for such a person to inquire); nor into that which he doesn't know (for he doesn't even know what he'll inquire into)' (Fine, 2014, p. 83)

logic of the Stoics, but rather because he thinks 'they prick away with their narrow little arguments … [so that] even those who assent are not changed in their hearts and go away the same as when they came' (Cicero, in Englert, 1990, p. 124).[3] Platt (2016) underlines the substantial work of Renaissance paradox beyond its capacity to surprise. He cites the claims of Italian author and translator Ortensio Lando about the virtues of paradox over more conventional thinking in making truth 'more cleere and apparent', in prompting people to seek and debate their arguments more 'diligentlie and laboriously' and in bringing more comfort to the spirit than 'whatsoeuer is common and frequent to our iudgements' (Lando, in Platt, 2016, p. 25). Collie (1966) adds that 'paradox dazzles by its mental gymnastics' but then highlights the other side of what she calls a 'double aim' when she attributes to Renaissance paradox the work of 'stimulating further questions, speculation, qualification, even contradiction on the part of that wondering audience' (p. 22).

This highly selective and eclectic mix of past judgements on the merits of paradox finds contemporary backing in a number of places closer to my own project. In a healthcare study, Hofmann (2001) describes 'the surprising and amazing characteristic of the paradox' as functioning 'to arrest attention and provoke fresh thought' (p. 369). From the field of management and organisational studies – a field not prone to claims of surprise and wonderment – Rosoff (2011) provides the following advice for business leaders:

> One path for leaders to follow is paradox. They can illuminate paradoxically what is otherwise difficult, if perhaps not impossible for you to know and see at first glance: the opportunity in uncertainty, ambiguity, and complexity. The way paradox works for, not against you is to awaken you. (p. 3)

In educational literature, Charteris (2014), working in an early childhood context, advances the concept of 'epistemological shudder'[4] which she says describes 'a paradox that opens up possibilities for sense making'. The shudder metaphor, she claims, denotes a type of dissonance that serves as a catalyst for decontextualising taken-for-granted assumptions and illuminating new understandings (p. 13).

A final example of this revelatory function is from my own research. In a formal interview, one of the principal participants had strongly asserted her commitment to shared leadership in her school. She made several claims about her proactive work in delegating responsibilities, giving people new opportunities to exercise authority and leadership and providing this broad group of leaders with positive feedback. In a more casual forum, sometime after the interview, I suggested that these efforts could also be construed as ways of controlling an influential group of staff. I added that shared leadership may in fact be explained as a way for the principal to support and promote those who are supportive of her vision, marginalise those who are not

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[3] According to Englert (1990), Cicero kept the Stoic arguments in the background in favour of 'various means of arguing which were more effective at grabbing the attention of Roman listeners, gaining their assent, and moving them' (p. 131).

[4] In a similar vein, Platt (2016) describes, in reference to the effect of Shakespearean paradox, 'a paradigm shaking encounter with philosophical doubleness' (p. 8).

and, somewhat paradoxically, apportion more rather than less power to her as principal. These remarks evoked an initial defensive and somewhat dismissive response. However, the following morning the principal confessed to a night of deep thinking on the subject and the gaining of new insights into her methods and motives for sharing leadership. She indicated she was surprised to have only contemplated such an important topic after she had engaged with my alternative interpretation.

This example gives some insight into how the revelatory function is linked in practice to the pedagogy of critical engagement. Here it prompted a breakthrough or 'ah-ha' moment that led to an expanded understanding of the meaning of shared leadership in practice. By extension, it may conceivably allow speculation on the alternatives that do not surprise or engage or, in fact, do not even surface but remain hidden or subjugated by more powerful discourses. Importantly, the centrifugal push of neoliberal policy logics operates to peripheralise alternatives and discredit concerns about the shaping work of discursive practices on the subjectivity of principals. It enforces conformity to a set of idealised and constructed accounts and shuts down revelatory new thinking. The pervasiveness of neoliberalism is reminiscent of Butler's (2004) 'context where obedience is required'. She says that it is here that Foucault locates 'the desire that informs the question about "how not to be governed?"' and that this desire, and the wonderment that follows from it, forms 'the central impetus of critique' (p. 311).

Critique

In Chap. 1, I positioned this book inside of Popkewitz's (1999) 'critical room' and proffered the field of critical leadership studies as the 'corner' where it is more precisely located. In describing this field, Collinson (2011) makes implicit but very supportive links to the work of paradox in critique when he argues that studies 'emerge directly from that which is underexplored or missing in the mainstream orthodoxy' (p. 181). *Critique*, in the pedagogy of critical engagement, is a function of paradox that works at the margins of dominant discourses to revive and resurface that which has been forgotten, ignored or suppressed. Following Suri and Clarke (2009), it highlights the 'cracks, tensions and fractures' in our understanding while remaining sceptical about 'totalising grand meta-narratives' (p. 404). It therefore turns away from dichotomous interpretations and one-sided truth claims and towards more ambiguous positions that keep paradoxes in play, make calls to equivocation and lend a more profound importance to the possibilities of thinking otherwise.

In explicating this function of critique, raising the alert about current struggles through recognisery and revelatory functions now gives way to applied and practical learning about *how* to be critical, *how* to think differently and *how* to think otherwise. This orientation can be illustrated by the following example, drawn from my research, which surfaces local perspectives from macro/micro influences on the implementation of policy. Several principals, in response to interview questions about systems of performance management for staff, extolled the virtues of the

current system as described in centralised policy and as translated into their schools. They described positive features such as consistency of process, opportunities for feedback and links to whole-of-school work in strategic planning and professional development. By contrast, many staff interviewed described a system based on compliance that served little useful purpose and, paradoxically, failed to pick up on important aspects of the individual's work. Based on staff perceptions of its time wasting and surveillance qualities, some described the policy as having a negative impact on performance.

When interpreted as a dialectical problem that stems from different perceptions of the policy (and the problem it seeks to address), follow-up discussion and disputation would, most likely, lead to the pursuit of a compromise solution. However, when paradoxical qualities are introduced to this dialectic, its boundaries are blurred as the merits of oppositional perspectives are retained and ways forward are sought in the interrelatedness and simultaneity of opposing sides, as well as in other claims made on the truth. In this case, new learning opportunities may arise in challenges to orthodox interpretations of performance and the systems of management that underpin them – opportunities to critique the status quo in ways that open up new and diverse possibilities. Three useful, and more widely applicable, sites of learning can be gleaned from this example.

Firstly, after Bainton (2015), a learning space can be identified in the 'liminal slippage' that occurs between the intentions of policy and its enactment into practice. As in this example, slippage occurs in the process of policy translation to reveal a paradoxical space as a site of struggle 'that opens up the potential for alternatives' (p. 169). Secondly, in reference to power relations, critique works to uncover paradoxical tensions that may be obscured or downplayed. This is especially true when power differentials allow vested interests to advocate one-sided solutions. As Rappaport (2002) asserts:

> The action part of our job is then to confront the discovered paradoxes by pushing them in the ignored direction. To take this seriously means that those who are interested in social change must never allow themselves the privilege of being in the majority, else they run the risk of losing their grasp of the paradox. (p. 123)

Rappaport's (2002) concern is with diligently restoring and maintaining the antinomous qualities of the true paradox and the pedagogical possibilities arising when one-sided interpretations are eschewed in favour of holding in place valid and entwined opposites.

Thirdly, by virtue of its contradictory but valid and well-grounded parts, the antinomous qualities of paradox mean that it is resistant to easy resolution. Quine (1962) posits that antinomy brings on a 'crisis of thought'. He gives it a 'paradigm-shaking' quality when he says it 'contains a surprise that can be accommodated by nothing less than the repudiation of part of our conceptual heritage' (p. 88 cited in Platt, 2016, pp. 8 & 31). Almost 60 years on, Quine's observations are prescient in shifting the pedagogy of critical engagement to a form of reflexive critique at the site of the self. Beyond the call to discover paradox and push it into less fashionable perspectives (Rappaport, 2002), Quine's assertion suggests bringing the capacity to

rethink personal standpoints and reconsider conventional subjectivities into the pedagogy of critique. This implies working in less definable and more uncomfortable learning spaces emerging from examination and possible repudiation of existing values, beliefs and ethics.

In its call to equivocation, the criticism often levelled at paradox is that it delays or even excuses the need for action – that its persistent preference for ambivalence and complexity creates a type of perpetual fence-sitting that renders it impotent as a tool of political persuasion. As Stevens (1996) notes, paradox 'functions with surprising consistency as the telltale trope of political quieticism' (p. 207).

The relationships of truth to paradox, and of truth to politics, appear beset by awkward and seemingly oppositional qualities. While Lando claimed paradox made truth 'more cleere and apparent', discussion on this point has highlighted how paradox holds open apparent contradiction and slows and interrupts the path to a single truth – qualities that have been depicted as positive and useful. However, this delaying tendency, and an apparent preference for ongoing ambivalence, leaves the operations of paradox open to accusations of passivity and paralysis. By contrast, the reductionist qualities of politics eschew uncertainty and demand that a position be taken and that truth be given a political role by privileging and defending a chosen position. These different perspectives on truth appear to marginalise the capacity of paradox to do productive political work.

I will now try to counter these allegations of procrastination and political quieticism by outlining a function of paradox that utilises the resonance of opposites to actively challenge orthodox understandings and build confidence in holding in place the simultaneity of contradicting truths. I describe this last paradox function, within the pedagogy of critical engagement, as *agonism.*

Agonism

In Chap. 5, Wenman's (2013) description of *agonism* was used to introduce a tactic that principals might deploy in a struggle against the dominating tendencies of governmental power. Selective deployment of the work of Chantal Mouffe subsequently established both the importance and inevitability, in any democracy, of confrontation between political adversaries. Working from these descriptions, the choice of agonism as a functional component of the pedagogy of critical engagement is to suggest the political possibilities for paradox in circumstances of conflict, struggle and resistance. More particularly, it is to chart a connection between paradox and agonistic practices that may (1) support adversarial challenge to the sedimented, common-sense order of the dominant neoliberal hegemony and (2) inform the political work of self-formation and the struggle for freedom that seeks to transgress the subjectivities imposed by dominant power/knowledge relations.

Colie (1966) appears to support my connecting of agonism with paradox when she says that all paradoxes have in common 'their exploitation of the fact of relative, or competing, value systems'. In this way, paradox is always 'challenging some

orthodoxy' and making 'oblique criticism of absolute judgement or absolute convention' (p. 10). Alluding to its subversive potential, Colie returns to the definition of paradox and, more particularly, its challenge to 'doxa' or orthodox opinion. In this reading, the apolitical qualities of paradox appear to give way to its work in informed critique and agonistic practice – to making the existing order, following Mouffe (2013), 'susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices' (p. 2). This move to act on and act against the rationalism of prevailing wisdom exemplifies not only the political possibilities in paradox but also the learning resources that paradox may provide to practices of agonism.

In my own study, several of the paradoxes originating from and developing in the policy discourses of neoliberalism suggested openings for agonistic practice. Each of these paradoxes, in resurrecting and exploring alternative positions, shifted thinking to the margins of dominant discourses and to the detection of an agonistic struggle between adversaries. For example, *the paradox of excellence* and *the paradox of choice and equity* not only posed alternatives from their contradictory sides but also rendered the status quo more vulnerable and contingent by citing 'moments of agonistic engagement' (Smolović Jones, Smolović Jones, Winchester, & Grint, 2016, p. 434) provided by participants in my fieldwork.

When Colie (1966) says that 'paradox does not commit itself, nor does the paradoxist', she is referring not to political inaction but to the 'breaking out of imprisonment by disciplinary forms' and to the quality of paradox that denies limitation to single autonomous alternatives (p. 38). Colie's assertions bring paradox closer to an agonism that Foucault (1982) describes between 'power relationships' on the one side and 'the recalcitrance of the will' or 'the intransigence of freedom' on the other. This shifts the battle of ideas underpinning agonistic democracy towards 'mutual incitement and struggle' in the relations of power, knowledge and subjectivity that is presented as a 'permanent provocation' to the agonistic self (p. 790).

A permanent provocation in agonism, according to Foucault (1982), is not 'a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides' (p. 790) but rather one which continues to acknowledge the intransigent human capacity for freedom inside complex relations of power. This reading locates the 'prison break' qualities of paradox as a pedagogy founded in the strategy and tactics – the counter-conducts – needed to explore a field of possibilities and to resist the domination of hegemonic oppositions. It also suggests learning directed to new and more autonomous subjectivities through a styling of these possibilities into what Munro (2014), in locating resistance in Foucault's work on ethics, describes as 'alternative forms of active ethical subjectivity' (p. 1135). This pedagogical territory is further defined by Bernauer and Mahon (2006) who take Foucault's ethics as 'an invitation to a practice of liberty, to struggle and transgression, which seeks to open possibilities for new relations to self and events in the world' (p. 162).

While new pedagogical possibilities appear to reside in the struggles and transgressions of agonistic practice and in fashioning new subject positions within

polemical contests, the inherent strife[5] in agonism also poses formidable risks, impositions and limitations. In my study, one of the observable differences between principal participants was in their willingness to take up an adversarial position against the orthodoxy of centralised policy or to conceive of versions of themselves from outside of those imposed. While challenges to the orthodoxy were evident, for example, in the surfacing of competing local and community needs, reviving social justice and equity discourses on behalf of students at risk and keeping in play purposes of schooling made less visible by narrowly focussed curriculum and testing regimes, these were rarely expressed in agonistic language.

Acts of recalcitrance, refusal and resistance, while viewed as admirable in others, were generally conceived as difficult, professionally risky and neither valued nor welcomed by people further up the hierarchy. Most principals in my study felt they lacked the support, confidence and resources to undertake this type of work or to embrace what Demetriou (2016) describes as a 'minority subjectivity' with 'the constant reflection, rethinking and negotiation of the power that underlies everyday encounters' that this entails (p. 219). Based on these observations, the precarity of the subject, along with variations in individual values, capacities and confidence, appeared to regulate the possibilities for paradox as a critical resource and to attenuate the learning in agonistic practice.

However, agonistic practice in my interpretive work (e.g. in Chap. 8) was also revealed as necessary and demanding. In this context of important work and reluctant uptake, it is useful to make two further points. Firstly, treating the subject as centrally important in using paradox to support agonistic practice must involve a return to the centrality of the 'wonderer' and to emphasising the need for the audience of paradox to see and admire its merits. This means the wonderer – as a learner utilising the pedagogy of critical engagement – must be enticed to both thinking about the utility of paradox in political work and using it as a resource to overcome their circumspection. Secondly, it is important not to read hesitancy in the face of agonistic practice as a lack of passion in the subject brought on by a more pressing need for rational consensus. Rather, in taking agonism as functional in a pedagogy of critical engagement, passion is thought to be awaiting sublimation and mobilisation 'towards democratic designs' (Mouffe, 2013, p. 9), and paradox, again recalling Kierkegaard (1985), is taken to be working beyond epistemological spaces and pushed towards its political limits as 'the source of the thinker's passion' (p. 37).

To supplement my shaping of agonism inside a framework of paradox learning possibilities, I return to the 'warrior topos' language of paradox, first advanced in Chap. 2. In 'exploring the critical consequences that complexity holds' (Woermann, 2016, p. 3), the relevance of thinking with paradox is here shifted to the constitutive possibilities in using a paradox language to narrate the politics of an agonistic opposition to the status quo. The warrior topos proposes ambitious, but still relevant and transferrable possibilities in a paradox language that directs leaders away from

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[5] Wenman (2013) says 'the term agonism comes from the Greek *agon* meaning contest or strife' (p. 28, italics in original).

reductive and simplified problem-solving logic and supports strategically challenging the current orthodoxy, troubling one-sided interpretations, seeking creative alternatives and keeping options open by delaying the rush to resolution.

To conclude this overview of *a pedagogy of paradox*, I note in its explication a capturing of a good proportion of my efforts to apprehend the language, theory and praxis of paradox from beyond established boundaries of the critical leadership studies field. Its narrow underpinnings in historical and contemporary research, and observations from my own project, mean that it offers up a model as a work in progress that is both experimental and speculative. However, in trying to discern a contribution to the critical leadership studies field, I contend that the twin objectives of applying paradox in existing conditions of tension, struggle and conflict, and of creating expanded learning opportunities within and beyond these conditions, are usefully pursued in the model and that they make available to the learner new ways of thinking and understanding.

On a more reflexive note, *a pedagogy of paradox*, as a component in the conceptual framing of this book, effected a telling shift in my own subjectivity towards that of the critically oriented researcher. It helped free me from the confines of an objective and neutral stance. Using the insights of Žižek (1992), it supported me to 'look awry' and to take a 'distorted view' in order to render 'visible aspects that would otherwise remain unnoticed' (p. 12). It distilled my practical application of a paradox lens into a pedagogical model that illustrated new levels of compatibility between paradox and the critical field and, arguably, wider application of paradox beyond the parameters of my own research.

New Possibilities in Principal Neoliberalisation

The second of the generative possibilities in this concluding chapter builds from the processual qualities of principal neoliberalisation introduced in Chap. 4 and expanded more fully at the beginning of Chap. 5. Understanding neoliberalism as a process derives from the field of geography and its interest in 'the processual character of space and time' (Springer, 2012, p. 135) and 'the problematic of variegation' (Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2010, p. 182). In Chap. 5, working from this understanding, I interpreted the uptake of neoliberalism in schools as uneven, mutable and inconsistent. I apprehended the term 'neoliberalisation' (Peck & Tickell, 2002) to work against the monolithic and totalising accounts of a coherent global policy logic flattening everything in its path. While I acknowledged these 'bulldozer readings' (Larner, 2003, p. 509) as useful in understanding the generic features and hegemonic tendencies of neoliberalism, I tried to temper them with local accounts of variable take-up and effects.

When joined with Foucault's (2008) identification of a reconfigured relationship between governing and the governed under conditions of neoliberal governmentality, the possibility emerges for applying the process of neoliberalisation to the principal subject – for understanding how principals might be 'neoliberalised' from the

outside by policy discourses and, at the same time, take responsibility for their own neoliberalisation. I offer three generative possibilities to the broader field of critical leadership studies that derive from my development of a processual understanding of neoliberalism and the rendering of the principal as a neoliberalised subject:

Firstly, *a processual understanding complicates accounts of neoliberalism as a universal and inevitable force by providing insights into its local constitution, variability and politics.* Rendering neoliberalism as contextual and contingent highlights its complexities and contradictions. As Larner (2003) claims, it 'allows us to think about the multiple forms that political strategies, techniques, and subjects take' (p. 511). This understanding engages analysis of neoliberal policy with the internal ambiguities, lines of weakness and contradictions that reside in hegemonic conceptions, and foregrounds, revives and imagines other discourses that might work to unseat its dominance. In interrupting the 'fatalist politics' (England & Ward, 2008, p. 251) of neoliberalism in favour of more nuanced accounts, a processual understanding keeps open and speaks up for the diffuse and local politics of difference and slows the trample of homogenous accounts and the politics of similarity they imprint on individual subjects.

Secondly, *linking the process of neoliberalisation to the constitution of the policy subject allows in more fine-grained, variable and locally responsive accounts of subject formation.* In the empirical work cited in this book, this link was probably best exemplified in the portraits of the principal participants in Chaps. 6, 7 and 8. Applying a processual understanding of neoliberalism to principal subjectivity supported me, for example, to account for differences in the priorities and perspectives of the designated leaders in my study and in speculating on variations in their intervention and compliance in policy work. Cast more broadly, consideration of the subject as formed in a variegated and uneven process has individual principals occupying a more *or* less distinct position in the discursive realm. This means that each subject is taken to be differently influenced by the discourses in play and that the truth claims of the dominant discourses of neoliberal policy may be diminished and interrupted by other discourses from outside.

Thirdly, *neoliberalisation makes available a multiplicity of subject positions and, subsequently, helps interpret subjectivity as a resource for resistance.* In raising the prospect of a multiplicity of subjectivities, a processual reading of neoliberalism also keeps alive the possibility of principals choosing into 'minority' and even 'radical' subjectivities (Demetriou 2016) formed in the risky politics of counter-conduct and in practices of opposition, refusal and resistance. Nicoll and Fejes (2008), after Foucault (1982), mark out this agonistic territory when they claim that 'there is always on the one hand an incitation to act in a particular way and on the other the possibility of acting wilfully in disregard of this incitation' (p. 10). However, the field data I have cited throughout the book shows this possibility as exceptional in take up and sporadic in execution.

To better link neoliberalisation with resistance, I draw on a theoretical resource proposed by Phillips (2006) for enhancing the possibility of meaningful challenge.

Phillips describes a 'rhetorical manoeuvre' that is 'performed at those moments when we choose to violate the proscriptive limits of our subject position and speak differently by drawing upon the resources of another subject position we have occupied' (p. 311). This 'manoeuvre' fits usefully with a variegated and contingent reading of the discursive effects of neoliberal policy and the subsequent production of multiple subject positions. It invites principals to exploit the processual character of their neoliberalisation in order to remember, re-establish and reinvigorate other versions of themselves and to talk inside of discourses other than those that anchor them to the hegemony of the neoliberal project. In this conception, Phillips notes, 'the notion of the "self" is a constantly changing object crafted and re-crafted out of the points of identification provided in the exterior fields of power and knowledge' (p. 310).

We Always Have Something to Do

The remaining generative possibilities are grouped as more speculative and 'dangerous' practices in the constitutive struggle for soul of the principal. This struggle has been characterised throughout as a lopsided contest, with the authorised and seductive shaping work of neoliberal policy discourses dwarfing sporadic and dispersed practices of critique, counter-conduct and agonistic resistance. It has also been depicted as struggle that is obscured and diminished by the efficacious work that dominant discourses do to hide their hegemonic aspirations and present themselves as self-evident and natural. In the shift to empirical analysis and interpretation, the use of a paradox lens worked to reveal the terrain of this struggle, to surface some of its key contests and to try to correct the asymmetrical effect of dominant ideas.

I will conclude by connecting this struggle to the generative possibilities for principal practice suggested in the 'permanent provocation' of an agonistic subject. Here, the risk of asking principals to engage in a struggle both within and against the orthodox expectations of the system to which they belong (and which employs them) is set against the potentially hazardous confinements of apathy and inaction. Foucault (1984a) famously captures this tension when he says:

> My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. (p. 343)

Negative Capability

The first of my efforts to 'do something' inside of this dangerous frame involves linking paradox with a series of capabilities that appear to be pilloried or neglected in favoured views of school leadership. This work is informed and strengthened by

what nineteenth-century poet John Keats described as the '*Negative Capability* ... that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason' (Keats, 2010, p. 492). Keats' negative capability, when applied to contemporary school settings, suggests a set of practices, after Ou (2009), that resist 'the instinctive clinging to certitude, resolution and closure' allowing principals to remain 'open to the actual vastness and complexity of experience' (p. 2). The links to paradox are found in those capabilities that allow principals to contain contrary ideas in their minds, to delay decision-making by holding open conflicting sides for scrutiny, development and transformation, to resist the tendency to disperse into defensive actions and to create the epistemological and interpersonal spaces in which a new thinking may emerge.

In Keats' negative capability, the word *negative* is invoked productively rather than pejoratively. Applying negative in this way challenges the value proposition currently attached to school leadership by opening up new possibilities for working in conditions of complexity and ambivalence. As Simpson, French and Harvey (2002) note, it critiques current preferences for conceiving leadership 'in terms of *positive capabilities*, those attributes and abilities that allow the individual to promote *decisive action* even in the face of uncertainty' (p. 1210, italics in original). Its negative qualities prompt a reimaging of practices such as suspending judgement, delaying decisions and remaining undecided. Instead of being taken as signs of indecisiveness, weakness and fence-sitting, these practices are attributed additional weight as they prompt the emergence of new perceptions, different ideas and alternative positions.

Negative capability, I contend, offers a promising contribution to the struggle over principal subjectivity and adds much needed practical support to the rhetorical notion of paradox as warrior topos. It counters some of the strictures and fictions of favoured managerialist leadership models and, by suggesting a change to what we value in leaders, works to loosen the current hold of these models. Additionally, it takes a more comprehensive account of the contradictions, oppositional forces and the heteroglossia of voices and perspectives that continually intrude into the working lives of principals. It thus adds weight to Lather's (2003) claim that 'indeterminacy and paradox' can 'become positions of affirmative power by undoing fixities and mapping new possibilities for playing out relations between identity and difference, margins and centers' (p. 105).

Future Research: An Ethico-political Project

As already cited, Belinda, the principal of Lawson School, described in interview the guarding of her ethical thinking as a defensive response to the fear of speaking out against policy directives she perceived as wasteful or ineffective. Belinda's reference to ethics gives some insight into how 'practices of freedom' (Foucault 1987) might play out as one dimension of a struggle that is imbued with relations of power and authorised subjectivities and where efforts at self-determination and productive

influence of others are muted by the authority of 'true' discourses and those who are expert in them. It also points to the need, arising from my own study, for a more thorough excavation of the ethico-political positioning of principals in the struggle over their subjectivity. This is the 'patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty' that Foucault (1984b) describes in forming an understanding of 'the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them' (p. 50).

In this vein, I offer three areas for further research that arise from the themes of this book. Each can be detected in the analytical work in previous chapters; however, the strictures of space and/or a lack of prominence in perspectives collected in the field has prevented their more comprehensive representation.

(1) *Taking account of the affective domain:* Staunæs (2011) describes the 'concepts of affectivity' as 'an additional ramification and complication of critical studies of educational leadership and governmentality' (p. 233). In using a paradox lens to counter rational and totalising accounts of neoliberalism and mark out a political struggle over the subjectivity of the neoliberalised principal, my study revealed that governing the soul of principals in a competitive and distrustful policy environment inevitability evokes a range of emotions. Brief comparison was made, for example, between the seduction and satisfaction of successful participation in the school market and feelings of envy, insecurity and anxiety brought on by the demands of competition, impression management and public accountability. Future research in critical leadership studies might usefully leverage from this type of underdeveloped observation to give a more complete account of the emotion, affect and feeling that accompany the process of neoliberalisation and which shape and animate leader's reactions, decisions and relationships.

(2) *Caucusing for political purposes:* Several of the principal participants in my study made passing reference to their membership of a local principal groups and alliances. These references, while separating more autonomous local collectives from other centrally mandated groupings, did not dwell on the possibilities of caucusing for political gain or of engaging in counter-conducts that challenge specific forms of authority (see Demetriou, 2016, p. 221). I suggest that this theme could be usefully extended to consideration of the power of the group both as an antidote to individuation and its attendant vulnerability and as a 'chemical catalyst' (Foucault, 1982, p. 780) to more productive apprehension of power relations. Again, this is work directed to agonistic thought and action. It is guided by what Myers (2008) describes as the 'counter-power' of 'pluralistic association' (p. 125) and is focussed on the galvanising of productive resistance, rather than reduced to the fragmented 'discontents, murmurings, indifference and disengagements' (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 150) of disaffected individuals. I also contend that this political work remains paradoxical, given that it is the very efforts to homogenise schooling and standardise practice in neoliberal times that allow individuals to caucus around 'a common' (see Slater & Griggs, 2015) and to devise their collective responses, including those that run to the counter-conducts of subversion, resistance and refusal.

(3) *Democratic practices of school leadership:* When Sasha, principal of Sullivan School, describes 'democratic decision-making' as 'just hierarchical rubbish', she points to the tendency to append democracy to ways of leading that are, more likely, quite undemocratic. One of the possibilities emerging from my research is to imagine, in both systemic and school-based iterations, practices that amount to more democratic ways of working. While my study aspires to 'democratic designs' (Mouffe, 2013, p. 9) on agonistic thought and practice and critiques the apportioning of democratic qualities to the notion of distributed leadership and leader/follower relations, these ideas would be usefully set in a broader and more imaginative consideration of democratic leadership. I take this future research possibility to involve both development of 'serious organisational democracy within schooling' (Grace, 2000, p. 238) and possibilities for democratising the policy process itself through broader engagement of local expertise and acceptance of local solutions.

The foregrounding of agonistic thought and practice in the principal subject appears to accord with Rose's (1999) support for an 'infusion of ethical discourse into politics' (p. 192). It speaks directly to an ethico-political project for principals founded at first in the ethical work, after Foucault, of interventions directed to self-improvement and the improvement of others. Additionally, it involves the adoption of less guarded and more public principles of freedom, solidarity and responsible participation and the associated practical strategies for realising the political potential of the principal position. A more detailed connection between agonism and this ethico-political project can be discerned in Medina's (2011) claim that Foucault's genealogies contain an underlying and provocative '*guerilla* pluralism' that might be directed to particular forms of resistance:

> It is not a pluralism that tries to resolve conflicts and overcome struggles, but instead tries to provoke them and to re-energize them. It is a pluralism that aims not at the melioration of the cognitive and ethical lives of all, but rather, at the (epistemic and socio-political) *resistance* of some against the oppression of others. This is a pluralism that focuses on the gaps, discontinuities, tensions and clashes among perspectives and discursive practices. (p. 24)

This book has tried to reveal some of these gaps, discontinuities and practices that might form the focus of agonistic thought and practice: to name a few – centralised policy that is a poor fit to local needs and an anathema to the broader purposes of schooling, punitive testing regimes that make narrow and unfair judgements of quality and excellence, quasi-marketisation measures that demand performative participation in the politics of school choice and competition and systems of accountability that render principals as watchful technicians and surrender the deeply personal matters of professionalism and ethics to third-party renditions of the 'effective' principal.

This is not to naïvely imagine the easy availability of a better truth or an emancipatory field of action separate from the operations of power. Rather, it suggests contemplation of different power/knowledge arrangements which interrupt and deny existing discourses, reveal new subjectivities and give the ethico-political

work of freedom and democracy a firmer hold. *Paradox and the School Leader*, in revealing the struggle for principal subjectivity through analysis of the policy discourses of neoliberalism and deployment of epistemological paradox, has endeavoured to provide a stepping off point into this 'undefined work of freedom' (Foucault, 1984b, p. 46).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Anonymised List of Schools and Research Participants

Lawson School
Belinda: Principal
Darius: Coordinator
Ellie: Senior Leader
Hillary: Teacher/Governing Council
Jack: Teacher
Tesia: Deputy Principal
Caldicott School
Janet: Principal
Bernadette: Senior leader
Bobbi: Coordinator
Calvin: Coordinator
Dale: Senior leader
Isaac: Year-level manager
Jay: Coordinator
Mac: Student counsellor
Oliver: Coordinator
Sullivan School
Sasha: Principal
Carlo: Parent/Governing Council
Felicity: Deputy principal
Levon: Parent/Governing Council
Marlon: Coordinator
Odette: Parent/Governing Council
Samuel: Coordinator

Seb: Parent/Governing Council
Zac: Coordinator
McCullough School
Imogen: Principal
Charlie: Parent/Governing Council
Christos: Coordinator
Georgina: Teacher
Ian: Teacher
Leah: Parent/Governing Council
Olivia: Coordinator
Oman: Senior leader
Richard: Deputy principal
Rita: Student counsellor
Samantha: Business manager
Veronica: Senior leader
Heatherbank School
Rob: Principal
Angela: Teacher
Clive: Parent/Governing Council
Frank: Senior leader
Gillian: Coordinator
Leanne: Coordinator
Michael: Coordinator
Norbert: Senior leader
Serena: Deputy principal
Ursula: Senior leader

Appendix 2: Provocations

Principal participants in my research were invited to respond, in a group setting, to a series of 'provocations'. This 'provocation discussion' was a follow-up to more comprehensive data collection in my ethnographic fieldwork and represented a deliberate attempt to examine and develop some of the paradoxical tensions that had begun to emerge, from both my theoretical and empirical work. The following provocations are from a handout provided to principal participants in my research prior to the meeting of the group for the 'provocation discussion' (see Chap. 5 for a detailed account).

Provocation 1: The Principal as Subject

In our interviews, many of you mentioned the demands and complexities of the principal role and how these could force you to put aside personal priorities and interests. Gill and Arnold (2015) describe the role of principal as 'a complex amalgam of person and position' and go on to say that principals need 'not just to do their job well but also to be seen to do so and to have their achievements registered in the current tally of the bureaucratic system, as well as by the whole school community' (p. 11). On this theme, Cohen (2014) provocatively asserts that 'principals are kept in subjection' (p. 17). The forces that shape the work of principals are essentially disciplinary, and leading can only occur in the context and confines of power relations exerted from outside. From this perspective, the principal performs a role and 'presents themselves as other than their real selves' (Gill & Arnold, 2015, p. 13). As a result, the role is compromised and homogenised, leaving little room for personal style, thoughtful resistance or unorthodox solutions to local problems.

Provocation 2: Shared Leadership, Empowerment and Control

Many of you spoke in detail during our interviews about the importance of your school leadership team and the value you place on the empowerment of others through models and structures that share leadership responsibility. However, as Gronn (2010) contends, models of shared and distributed leadership are not all that they seem, and the 'cult of exceptionality' surrounding the principal is now more entrenched than ever (p. 418). School leadership is increasingly depicted as 'a world of the potent and virile individualist, fighting battles for the good of others, endowing ownership and empowerment on their incumbents' (Ball & Carter, 2002, p. 553). 'Empowerment' through the sharing of responsibility, while sold as emancipatory, is in fact more likely to be a control mechanism 'as it is about the individual's emotional connection with the leader's vision and mission' (Gunter, 2001, p. 100).

Provocation 3: Corporate Culture and Personal Values

In the interviews I conducted with staff and governing council members in your schools, the principal's role was often likened to that of a company CEO, with several people providing extended corporate and business metaphors and making references to functions such as marketing, client satisfaction and image management. The shift to a business and corporate culture in schools, with its marketing and managerial values, means that the principal's role is 'becoming far removed from the day-to-day work and lives of educational leaders themselves' (Niesche, 2014, p. 148). This means that principals forsake personal values and professional inde-

pendence as they are drawn and even seduced into shaping their work according to centralised directives and policy. In this arrangement, their capacity to make fair and ethical decisions based on local needs (including the needs of the most disadvantaged and at-risk students) is compromised.

Provocation 4: Ethical Standards, Resistance and the Self

What does it means to act 'ethically'? Has ethics been undermined and institutionalised by codified and standardised ethical practices? Ibarra-Colado, Clegg, Rhodes, and Kornberger (2006) claim that 'when ethics is invoked in organisations as an attempt to govern the behaviour, comportment, or even attitudes of employees, such an invocation is less about ethics and more about attempts to determine (or at least limit) individual opportunities to think and act' (p. 48). Educators do not behave ethically because of the standards imposed by external policy documents. Instead, these documents strengthen orthodox positions and impose arbitrary limits on the capacity to think and act freely. We need to take greater account of what principals do 'in order to construct themselves as ethical subjects' (Niesche & Haase, 2012, p. 276). Such a position demands that principals reflect critically on their actions and may require them to take up contrary, oppositional or resistant positions. It certainly suggests adopting 'a disposition of continual questioning and adjusting of thought and action in relation to notions of good and harm. It entails work on the self and consideration of 'how to be and act in relation to others' (Christie, 2005, p. 40).

Provocation 5: Neoliberal Policy and the Role of the Principal

In our interviews, a range of policy positions that could be said to form part of a 'neoliberal' policy agenda were discussed. Typically included were policies (1) that promoted school marketing, competition and parent choice; (2) that were associated with centralised accountability and surveillance processes; and (3) applied at individual, site and system level to promote improved performance and outcomes. Neoliberal policies give precedence to the principal as the key architect and driver of school effectiveness and improvement. In doing so, policy contributes to 'overly heroic and exaggerated views of what leaders are able to achieve' as the leaders' contribution 'is inevitably somewhat constrained and closely tied to external factors outside a leader's control' (Collinson, 2011, p. 184). This policy agenda also demands that the principal's role must be performed 'according to the prescribed set of rituals and routines' and is increasingly tied to making sure 'agreed outcomes are met through careful adherence to the script'. What is overlooked in this rendering of the principal's role is 'any recognition of the complex, messy and contested environment of schools and school leadership' (Fitzgerald & Savage, 2013, p. 130).

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