# 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).

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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 'wondrer'[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 wondrer 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 'wondrer' 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).

[1] The 'wondrer', 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 'wondrer' 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 wondrer 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 compartmentalisation 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, conflict, 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 concerned 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 inconsistent 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 elements' (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 'opposing 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 tension and conflict as disconnected contradictory parts. Instead, I contend, important theoretical content is added to paradox by revealing, through its componentry, qualities 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]

[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).

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

[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

[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

[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

[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-

[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

[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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