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

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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

[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).

[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 paradoxy 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 paradoxy 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

[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 agonism 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 paradox, 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, listening 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 principal participants and, by extension, central to an understanding of the constitution of principals and their work. In this way, without 'going after' a paradoxical understanding, 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 representation 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 tendency, 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 perceptions, that paradox reveals a bigger space of possibility by halting the tendency to rational reconciliation of competing sides. Paradox leaves open multiple alternatives 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 sophisticated 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 philosopher 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 pluralism in paradox but use 'the gaps, discontinuities, tensions and clashes among perspectives 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 participants 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 portrait 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 opinions 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 ethnographic 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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