CHAPTER FOUR

LEADERSHIP PREPARATION AND SCHOOL PLANNING

_The Trojan Horse of the State_

INTRODUCTION

Schooling has long been viewed as a key institution in the (re)production of society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and school leaders have historically been powerful definers of the culture, organisation and relative success of schooling and its relationship to wider society (Grace, 2000). However, there is little doubt that in recent times with the expansion of the managerialist project of the state reconfiguring the very nature of public administration, the *field* of education has weakened in its capacity to protect its boundaries from the *fields* of politics, journalism and economics (Blackmore, 2010; Thomson, 2010). On a global scale, change experts have found ways of entering school grounds and classrooms through reforms such as *No Child Left Behind* in the US and *Every Child Matters* in England. Managerialism serves as the mechanism through which the state has sought to reform and culturally re-engineer the public sector. This works by instilling performativity into the soul of workers (Ball, 2003). This performativity becomes the orthodoxy of school leadership and is advanced through state funded apparatus, such as leadership preparation programmes in the era of professional standards, which legitimise it as the preferred and required practice.

While populous literature in educational leadership seeks to simplify and break down the elements of practice, school leadership in contemporary times is complex. Any description of it therefore is required to be located in both time and space if we are to get to the inner workings of practice. This chapter picks up on some of the unanswered question from the previous chapter through a contextualisation of schooling in the Australian education policy context and then a discussion of school leadership preparation and strategic planning initiatives in New South Wales public schools. I also make use of some comments from principals during a semi-structured interview based study which is reported on in greater depth in chapter five. Although it is not conventional practice to use data before detailing the nature of the study, I trust that as a reader you can grant me this liberty for the purpose of strengthen the argument of this chapter without diluting it with research methods better suited to the following chapter. In making the argument of this chapter, and as noted in the introductory chapter, the theoretical resources of Bourdieu are applied. While reference to Bourdieu has
been somewhat sporadic to this point, the influence, if not centrality, of his theoretical tools becomes a feature of the rest of the text.

GROUNDING THE DISCUSSION

Michael Oakeshott (1967) suggests that the fundamental issue of education is to ‘join the conversation of mankind’ (p. 159). Bates (2006b) appropriates this into the educational leadership space, arguing that ‘to become educated is to join the conversation of the world … for it is only within such conversation that curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation – those three fundamental message systems of schools – can be properly understood’ (p. 283). Bates’ implicit conceptualisation of educational leadership preparation, or it could be argued, ‘ongoing dialogue’, provides further support for English’s knowledge dynamic. The temporal features of both the ‘conversation of the world’ and ‘knowledge dynamic’ are at odds with the quest for a standardised knowledge base in educational leadership, the contemporary professional standards agenda and the leadership capabilities frameworks of education systems and professional associations. As Bates (2006b) warns, any attempt to define the essentials of educational leadership in the mastery of an ever-changing repertoire of skills under conditions of risk, uncertainty and competition is highly problematic. This is consistent with Bourdieu who understands practice as forever incomplete, immeasurable and always in a state of becoming. As alluded to at the conclusion of the previous chapter, as my intellectual journey has changed direction and focus from what was arguably a Theory movement inspired logic (obvious in the previous chapter) through to a more Bourdieuan perspective, the nature of my discussion has shifted. While for some this may appear as somewhat disjointed and a negative aspect of the text, to me it reflects the nature of knowledge construction and the shifts, both large and small that occur as we pursue our research.

It is important at the outset of this chapter to state what type of discussion this is, and by implication, what it is not. On the basis of the high means presented in the previous chapter and the proposition that most principals, most of the time enact strategic leadership and management as described in the literature, I have a strong suspicion that leadership preparation and development and strategic planning requirements of schools play a role. Combined with this is a level of discontent with the state of educational leadership preparation and development in Australia and my unrelenting urge to disrupt the status quo. Therefore, this chapter serves the dual purposes of contributing to the discourse on strategy in education and as an intervention into the identity construction of school leaders, having implications for both the dispositions and practices of school leaders and those who engage with them in preparation programmes.

While educational leadership is widely taught in universities (Bates & Eacott, 2008), the proliferation of professional standards and leadership capability frameworks combined with an inherent anti-intellectualism is highly problematic for school leaders and, by implication, for future generations. Consistent with Gunter’s (2009) scathing assessment of the majority of work in educational