

Principals of Audit: Testing, Data and 'Implicated Advocacy'

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ABSTRACT

Historically, school leaders have occupied a somewhat ambiguous position within networks of power. On the one hand they appear to be celebrated as what Ball (2003) has termed the 'new hero of educational reform', on the other they are often 'held to account' through those same performative processes and technologies. These have become compelling in schools and principals are 'doubly-bound' through this. Adopting a Foucauldian notion of discursive production, this paper addresses the ways that the discursive 'field' of 'principal' (within larger regimes of truth such as schools, leadership, quality, and efficiency) is produced. It explores how individual principals understand their roles and ethics within those practices of audit emerging in school governance, and how their self-regulation is constituted through NAPLAN - the National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy. A key effect of NAPLAN has been the rise of auditing practices that change how education is valued. Open-ended interviews with 13 primary and secondary school principals from Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales asked how they perceived NAPLAN's impact on their work, their relationships within their school community and their ethical practice.

Introduction

Historically, school leaders have occupied a somewhat ambiguous position within networks of power. Recent shifts in the conceptualisation of education through strategies that privilege market-based reforms, competition between schools and 'test-based accountabilities' are very evident in the Australian context, consistent with international trends. This paper asks how principals negotiate this changing policy terrain with a particular emphasis on Australia's *National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) testing regime, and explores how they are paradoxically constructed as the 'new hero of educational reform' (Ball, 2003, p.219), while simultaneously 'held to account' through those same performative processes and technologies represented by NAPLAN and the MySchool website¹. Addressing the ways that principals (within larger regimes of truth such as leadership, quality, and efficiency) respond to NAPLAN and test-generated data provides a contemporary perspective on the affordances, tensions and paradoxes of neoliberal policy reform² in everyday practice.

Since 2008, NAPLAN has been one part of the ensemble of policies designed to improve education through promoting marketised solutions to education problems. NAPLAN, and

¹ The myschool.edu.au website was established in 2010 by the Federal Government. It provides public access to individual schools' NAPLAN results and enables them to be compared with those of other schools.

² In the context of this paper, we work with a definition of neoliberalism consistent with Connell: 'Neoliberalism broadly means the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market. It also means the institutional arrangements to implement this project that have been installed, step by step, in every society under neoliberal control' (2013, p. 100).

the data generated and published, signifies problems, categorises schools, leaders, teachers and students in particular ways that have resulted in 'intense compliance structures and expectations in schooling' (Niesche, 2013, p.145). Open-ended interviews with 13 primary and secondary school principals from three Australian states (Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales) asked how they perceived the impact of NAPLAN on their work. A Foucauldian archaeological analysis explored the responses, the affordances and tensions actualised and the paradoxes voiced as principals negotiate the discursive terrain of leadership in response to data.

Education, markets, testing and audit cultures

The 'audit culture' refers to a shift in the way that we understand risk; trust and are trusted as citizens; and apportion value in social and public institutions such as schools, hospitals and the public service. It 'refers to contexts in which the techniques and values of accountancy have become a central organizing principle in the governance and management of human conduct – and the new kinds of relationships, habits and practices that this is creating' (Shore, 2008, p.279). Power argues that an audit society is 'characterised by a form of institutionalised longing for audit' as institutions, and the people within them, learn to both become auditable and desire that 'becoming' (1999, p.xvii). Audit cultures rely on measures, indicators, data, targets and assessment of outputs to pass judgement on the value of the processes and the people who are located as central to those desired outputs. The types of technologies deployed frequently focus on quantitative evaluations of outputs: for teachers and principals these may be NAPLAN-style test scores; for doctors, morbidity rates; for police detectives, rates of solved crimes (Nichols and Berliner, 2007). Lingard maintains that the production of, and belief in, data as a regulatory technology accompanies the 'steering at a distance of the competition state' (2011, p.370).

Audit is not, as it is sometimes construed, an extension of Bentham's panoptic surveillance. Rather, it is of a different intensity, an incorporeal, disembodied uncertainty. The old 'someone could be watching, so I better watch myself', is overlaid by the competing 'nobody is watching me but everything I do is being taken into account' (Thompson and Cook, 2012). One of the ways that audit works is through 'the appropriation of specific forms of language. Words such as 'efficiency', 'effectiveness', 'transparency', 'accountability' and 'performance' now dominate the conceptualization of 'good' schools and 'good teaching' and are used to tell particular stories through testing data (Thompson and Cook, 2013, p.245). These stories are powerful within discursive terrains that demonstrate a clear trend in Australia 'which makes principals accountable for all school outcomes' (Thomson, 2004, p.51).

These new technologies, processes and quantitative measures augment, intersect, support and disrupt discourses of leadership as 'the performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality' and these measures come to 'encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement' (Ball, 2003, p.219). In the domain of the school,

these practices of audit can change or confirm aspects of professional behaviour, as teachers alter their pedagogy (Comber, 2012, Thompson, 2013), the patterns of relations between teachers, students, principals and parents (Jones, 2007, Comber and Nixon, 2009), and the ethical relations individuals have with their profession (Ball, 2003, Nichols and Berliner, 2007). In other words 'audit changes the way people perceive themselves: it encourages them to measure themselves and their personal qualities against the external 'benchmarks', 'performance indicators' and 'ratings' used' (Shore, 2008, p.281). Our argument is that the NAPLAN data seduces: it is difficult to resist its lure. Principals appropriate and internalise data in various ways as they respond pragmatically to the shift in logics to competition and market-based indicators of quality and improvement.

NAPLAN

This paper focuses on NAPLAN, as it seems to represent, and condense, many of the neoliberal logics through using test-based accountabilities to improve (and/or reform) education. Introduced in 2008, and superseding state-based standardised testing programs, NAPLAN is the national testing regime in literacy and numeracy, wherein each May, all Australian schoolchildren in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are tested. The results of the tests are released to school systems, schools and parents in September, before being published online on the MySchool website early the next year. The MySchool website publishes individual school results over time, as well as allowing comparison with 60 'statistically similar' schools based on those NAPLAN results. The MySchool website has been particularly controversial. On the one hand, supporters argue that it gives parents the data and information to make choices about their children's schooling, in particular regarding decisions about which school or type of school to send their children to³. On the other hand, critics argue that the publication of the data on MySchool makes NAPLAN high-stakes for schools and principals (Lingard, 2010, Lobascher, 2011), has a range of unintended consequences including narrowing curriculum, promoting test focused pedagogies and gaming of the data (Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith, 2012), only presents a limited picture of each school (Gannon, 2012) and is used by the media to rank schools (Connell, 2013) and reinforce the message that there is a crisis in Australia's schools (Mockler, 2013).

Understanding Principals' Work

The impact of audit cultures and neoliberal education regimes on the shaping of school leadership has been the subject of considerable scholarship in recent years (see, for example, Thomson, 2004, Fitzgerald, 2008, Thomson, 2009, Blackmore, 2011, Niesche, 2011). Much of this scholarship recognises the complexity and messiness of these impacts as the contemporary role of the principal is framed by regimes of audit, accountability and language where concepts such as quality, standards and quantifiable improvement are

³ Schooling in Australia is comprised of both Government and (publicly funded) non-Government schools. The non-Government sector is very broad, comprising various Catholic systems and independent schools which, usually church-based, themselves range from small low-fee community schools to large, very wealthy, elite schools.

'framed in such a way as to make any alternative agendas look to be unnecessary and, if pursued, seditious' (Gunter and Forrester, 2010, p.59). We understand the work of the principal to be complex and contested space, ambiguously located and subject to mediating factors, as the positioning of principals within audit cultures, which combine 'centralised targets and performance management requires game playing' by school leaders as they negotiate those 'contradictions and incoherence' implicit in reform agendas (Gunter and Forrester, 2010, p.66).

Principal subjectivities and identities are conceived of in this paper as fluid, multiple and shifting. Thomson, for example, argues that 'the identity of principal is itself an uneasy amalgam of teacher, leader and manager' (2004, p.46), subject to a range of discursive forces, while Blackmore and Sachs (2007), along with other feminist and like-minded scholars (see, for example, Day, 2004; Crawford, 2009), contend that emotion and emotionality play a substantive role in the formation and mediation of professional identity for teachers and principals. 'Being' a principal is thus seen as the negotiation of, and game-playing within, various social and discursive 'spaces'.

Carpenter and Brewer (2012) offer the concept of the contemporary principal as 'implicated advocate' as their positionality is 'interwoven within prescriptive, state-developed, policies, such as accountability policies, which contribute to social reproduction despite the stated goal of ensuring equity' as well as the expectation that they will be advocates 'expected to intercede on behalf of, or defend the interests of, his or her educational community even when working to dismantle the policies they are obligated to implement' (p.295). We understand this tension as a key dimension of the role of the principal. Contemporary principals are implicated in the processes and technologies of neoliberalism against which many of them struggle, simultaneously operating at different points along the auditor/auditee spectrum and occupying different subject positions accordingly. One of the key sites of this implication concerns how they respond to performative testing data, and the contradictions, negotiations and game-playing made necessary through the shaping and re-shaping of their work.

Methodology

Interviews were conducted with 13 principals in Western Australia (3) South Australia (4) and New South Wales (6) during 2013 and 2014. Western Australian and South Australian principals were recruited to the study through informal approaches to be part of a wider study about the impacts on NAPLAN on school communities. Principals in New South Wales were recruited via an informal network of schools. Participants were sought from these three relatively disparate contexts to allow for an exploration of the ways in which 'cooperative federalism' (Lingard, 2010) has played out with respect to NAPLAN and principals' work. Approval was gained from the Human Research Ethics Committees at Murdoch University and the University of Newcastle, and in line with this, participating principals provided written informed consent, and were assured of confidentiality both for

themselves and their school in the reporting of data. Interviews were transcribed and returned to participants for a 'member check' before analysis was conducted. All aspects of the ethics protocols established by both universities have been observed in the conduct and reporting of this study.

Interviews were semi-structured so as to allow for a balance between consistency across the sample and more free-ranging discussion between the interviewer and participant. The start list of questions asked principals to summarise what NAPLAN data says (and does not say) about their school, how well they feel they understand the NAPLAN reports, and the use they and others have made of the NAPLAN data. In relation to MySchool, principals were asked about their frequency of use of the website, and their perceptions of the accuracy of their school's representation. Finally, they were asked about their perceptions of the impact of NAPLAN/MySchool on their job, the perceptions of their school in the local community, the relationships within their school, and their school community generally.

Table 1 below sets out the demographics and characteristics of the 13 schools from which principals were drawn, indicating their ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage, a scale with a median of 1000 and a standard deviation of 100) within a band of 50 points, the percentage of students from families in the bottom quartile of income distribution in Australia, percentage of students for whom English is an additional language or dialect, percentage of indigenous students (all expressed in bands to protect schools' anonymity), and overall performance on 2013 NAPLAN tests as represented in the 'Results in Numbers' section of the MySchool website. We deliberately sought a mix of primary and secondary schools (noting that in Western Australia and South Australia, Year 7 is included in primary school, while in NSW students move to secondary school for Year 7), Government, Catholic Systemic and Independent schools, and schools with varying characteristics according to the indicators highlighted in Table 1.

School	State	Sector	Size	ICSEA	% bottom quartile	% EALD	% Indigenous	Overall performance	Principal
1	WA	Govt - PS	400-600	1050-1099	1-10	11-20	<5	Below	Simon
2	WA	Independent - PS	< 200	1050-1099	11-20	1-10	<5	Substantially Below ⁴	Victoria
3	WA	Catholic - PS	< 200	1050-1099	1-10	21-30	<5	Below/Close to	Amanda
4	SA	Govt - PS	600-800	1000-1049	11-20	11-20	<5	Close to	Gloria
5	SA	Govt - PS	200-400	950-999	41-50	31-40	5-10	Below	Samantha
6	SA	Govt - PS	400-600	1000-1049	11-20	11-20	<5	Below	John
7	SA	Independent - K12	1000-1200	1100-1149	1-10	11-20	<5	Close to	Malcolm
8	NSW	Independent - SS	800-1000	1150-1199	1-10	11-20	<5	Close to/Above	Bridget
9	NSW	Independent - K12	1000-1200	1100-1149	1-10	51-60	<5	Close to	Michelle
10	NSW	Catholic - SS	800-1000	1050-1099	11-20	1-10	<5	Close to	Thomas
11	NSW	Govt - SS	400-600	850-899	71-80	91-100	<5	Close to	Louise
12	NSW	Govt - SS (Remote)	< 200	800-849	61-70	1-10	61-70	Above	Mariorie
13	NSW	Govt - PS	400-600	950-999	31-40	91-100	<5	Close to/Above	Mia

Table 1: Demographics and characteristics of each school

⁴ Note: Only Year 3/7 results are reported on My School as Year 5 cohort is often too small to enable a statistical comparison

Principals' Perceptions of NAPLAN

Understanding how a centralised, mandated assessment policy like NAPLAN, 'hits the ground' (or is enacted) is a complex undertaking. While there is a simplistic view, often found in the mainstream media, that NAPLAN is either good or bad, the experiences of these principals affirm that the 'micropolitics of individual schools means that policies will be differently interpreted (or 'read'), and differently worked into and against current practices, sometimes simultaneously' (Braun *et al.*, 2011, p.586). Some of this complexity is explained by contextual factors, for example principals whose schools tended to perform better on the tests when compared to 'like' schools tended to be more positive overall in their comments about NAPLAN. Further complexity is added by jurisdictional use, as principals in those systems that used the data for principal evaluations in overt ways were more negative than others. Another layer is the position of the principals themselves as 'implicated advocates', between the world of the teacher (whom they are expected to govern and/or 'lead') and the world of hierarchical education bureaucracies (to whom they are expected to be responsive). In other words, principals are 'key actors in the policy process' and engage in decoding NAPLAN through 'creative processes of interpretation and translation, that is, the recontextualisation... of the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices' (Braun *et al.*, 2011, p.586).

Foucault's archaeological method informs our analysis of the complexity of principals' roles within the discursive production of leadership and schooling. Archaeology 'constitutes a way of analysing the superstructural dimension of language statements constitutive of discourse' (Olssen, 1999, p. 9). In other words, it is a method for understanding those statements (understood as more than what is simply uttered) as 'events of certain kinds that are at once tied to an historical context and capable of repetition' (Olssen, 1999, p. 9). Statements constitute discourse, and are central to discursive formations, which operate as the description of 'a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity' (Foucault, 1977, p. 38). Regularities are instances of the ordering of discourses, the ways in which regularity determines 'the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them etc' (Foucault, 1977, p. 46). However, like Ball (2013, p. 5) we stress that our analysis is not 'pure' archaeology, informed as it is by 'actors' accounts of the social world as the basis for interpreting and explaining the social', rather than the stricter Foucaultian interest in unconscious structures of thought.

In asking school principals what they may say about NAPLAN, we are necessarily asking how is it that the historical, cultural and contextual specificities of schooling, principalship and testing produce discursive formations that capacitate bodies in certain ways, 'allow' and/or 'forbid' certain acts of enunciation, and produce various truths. To borrow from Deleuze and Guattari, this is the imposition of order-words, or those ways that 'every act that is linked to statements by a 'social obligation'' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 79).

NAPLAN, and the data generated, is an event that intersects with a variety of 'truths' in specific contexts. The work of being a principal is always a multiplicity that produces regularities through incentives to perform the role of a principal set against those internalised 'aggregates that person envelops in himself or herself' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 36).

We have represented this complexity by organising principals' responses under three headings: affordances, tensions and paradoxes. 'Affordances' refers to the opportunities these principals see in the testing, what they like, how they use it and to what effect. 'Tensions' refers to the problems that principals see with both the tests and the use of the testing data. Finally, 'paradoxes' refers to the potentially contradictory positions held by principals as they engage with NAPLAN as one part of the wider 'performative discourse and its associated practices [that] have colonized the Australian educational landscape with particular escalation since the turn of the century' (Bourke *et al.*, 2013, p.1).

Affordances

One of the key themes that emerged from the analysis was the appreciation of many of the principals that they had data at their fingertips that they could use in a variety of ways in their school. In particular, the principals involved in this study like that they had data about literacy and numeracy that enabled them *'to pore over the data, drill down into specific pieces, talk about what we need to do in each of the various pieces as well for improvement... and that's been really fantastic'* (Bridget). Schools were using the data in a variety of diagnostic ways, to identify and correct gaps in their programming, to discuss alternative teaching strategies and many agreed *'that it gives us a common language between the teachers to be able to discuss where the children are at'* (Victoria). *'The good part,'* according to Simon, *'is that I can apply it individually, as a group, as a cohort, as a measure of the school [to] identify strengths and weaknesses in the teaching and learning programme'*.

A particular affordance that NAPLAN offered was the ability to track student performance in literacy and numeracy over time to *'identify particular students who we know therefore need a little bit extra support in particular ways'* (Thomas). As well, it was felt that NAPLAN gave teachers *'a clear understanding of what they might need to focus a little bit more on in class'* (Thomas). The longitudinal aspect of the data was seen as a positive as NAPLAN *'gives us data where we can actually see the progression of the children over the years. I think that that's a positive'* (Victoria). The data was used in all of the schools to develop the *'staff learning programming and identifying focus areas'* (Gloria).

Many principals thought that NAPLAN had re-established, or reinforced, a focus on literacy and numeracy in their school. *'I would like to think that the level of accountability that I feel towards improvement in literacy and numeracy would be as great with or without those two. I would like to think that but I also think that it brings an accountability measure that has some value for all of us in school'* (Gloria). In this focus on literacy, the fact that teachers become more accountable for their results was not always framed as a negative, because, from the

perspective of some of the principals, *'it raises the question, whether our teachers are really using student learning evidence to improve student learning outcomes. From the 18 months I have been here NAPLAN data confirms my suspicions that there is opportunity for growth of teachers to improve the learning outcomes of students'* (Amanda). NAPLAN data gave principals a new tool to understand teaching and learning, and to impact on the delivery of education in classrooms.

Tensions (or negotiations)

Principals expressed tensions around NAPLAN and NAPLAN results, including how best to use, and encourage teachers to engage with, the data. While Principals recognised the limitations of the data, there remained a desire to put the data to good 'use' within their schools, using it in 'intelligent' ways such as adjusting the analysis to account for students with recognised learning disabilities and those LBOTE students resident in Australia for less than 'three months before...the tests' (Mia). In some schools, a small group of staff was dedicated to analysing the data, sharing it with other staff, but for some, a tension remained in terms of how to 'cut through' the data in meaningful ways: *'There is a volume of information that we get which is unintelligible. You need a degree in statistics to really understand what is going on'* (Samantha). While no principals reported 'teaching to the test', or narrowing the curriculum to 'game' NAPLAN, many suggested that this was occurring in 'other' schools *'where there is obviously more pressure on the teachers within schools to make sure their kids are performing with the NAPLAN results'* (Malcolm). 'Other' schools *'particularly primary schools, spent ages drilling the kids with some past papers'* (Marjorie). One principal nominated their own school under different leadership as an example: *'before I started here ...the Head of School at the time insisted three weeks before NAPLAN that they all get into rows and practice'* (Michelle). Many shared frustration that NAPLAN is *'not a fair playing field in some regards depending on what your approach is'* (Thomas).

Teacher anxiety represented another tension, wherein teachers either *'put a lot of pressure on themselves to make sure that they are getting the children ready'* (Victoria), or systemic and public perceptions place *'a lot of pressure on some staff. Primary schools seem to be the ones that get it the most... because they feel that the school is being watched by whomever'* (Marjorie). Principals thought the origins of such pressure lay more in the public nature of the results, or teachers' own sense of professional efficacy, than in any pressure applied by them.

NAPLAN data, and its use by the media, politicians and some parents, created further tensions. Principals perceived a general lack of understanding about NAPLAN, and lamented that *'too many decisions are based on limited understanding of tools like NAPLAN'* (Bridget), and NAPLAN results are constituted as *'a simple answer to a complex problem'* (Louise). Principals expressed a view that politicians are *'so removed from what's going on'* (Mia) and that *'there is a political agenda [to NAPLAN]...that is built around ignorance'* (John). Parents were generally regarded by principals as *'a little blasé about NAPLAN results...more*

interested in their child's wellbeing during test time' (Amanda), while sometimes concerned as a consequence of NAPLAN results being used for entry to private or selective schools.

Finally, principals in WA and SA reported an increasing use of NAPLAN results for review of principals and schools, both formally and informally, with bureaucrats using '*NAPLAN results as [a] riding judgement of Principal work*' (Gloria). The '*blame game*' (Simon) of NAPLAN and MySchool was cited as a key concern in WA, where the link between NAPLAN and external review of schools made principals highly vulnerable. NAPLAN results:

can mean being at your school or being moved. Yes, and the results from that are based on the ERG which is the Educational Review team they send to schools. They look at the school web-site. They look at how your school did in the NAPLAN and one of the factors they base it on ... you didn't do very well? We are coming out to see you? What is wrong with your school? That questions the leadership and of course, the buck stops at the top. (Simon)

Paradoxes

The paradoxical or contradictory statements made by these principals are not evidence of misunderstanding or errors. Rather, they are testimony to the complexity of their roles, and how they operate within competing discourses that often require negotiations and concessions as they are 'challenged to embrace their decision-making authority' within 'prescriptive educational mandates' such as assessment policies like NAPLAN (Carpenter and Brewer, 2012, p.295). Paradoxes 'are neither appearances to be overcome, nor secret principles to be uncovered. They are 'objects to be described for themselves' because to 'analyse discourse is to hide and reveal contradictions; it is to show the play that they set up within it; it is to manifest how it can express them, embody them, or give them a temporary appearance' (Foucault, 1977, p.151).

Four key paradoxes were identified in the data, broadly held to differing extents, by each of the 13 principals interviewed in the study. The first of these related to principals' acknowledgement on the one hand that NAPLAN provides merely a '*snapshot of one day of a child's learning and if you are lucky you get everybody on a good day*' (Amanda), that NAPLAN is '*one day's story*' (Mia), juxtaposed with the way that on the other hand, principals can enjoy manipulating the data and deriving a more or less holistic understanding of their school from it: '*I love having a look at it, I love the fact that I can make groups and compare. I love the fact that I can go into weaknesses and go oh what's that about, and it links to the curriculum and...it even links to strategies*' (Mia). Another participant, Simon, expressed this paradox in terms of juxtaposing the significance of the data in terms of '*what are we doing well and what do we need to improve on and what are we not doing well*' with the idea of NAPLAN being '*basically a snapshot of where the kids are at that day and what we want to do is actually then move them forward*' (Simon). For Victoria, while recognising that '*doing a test on one day in a year is not going to improve their education*', the NAPLAN data represents an opportunity to '*make the school a better place by being able to analyse that*

data'. While for some principals the NAPLAN data *'simply reflects what we already know'*, regardless *'we go through the information that we get. There is some quality information in there that we use and...we pore over as a staff'* (Samantha).

The second paradox relates to the issue of surveillance and accountability at the hands of NAPLAN data. While principals were generally reluctant to use NAPLAN results to monitor teacher quality or performance *'simply because I don't think it is a measure of how ... certainly NAPLAN data is not a measure at all of how well a particular teacher is teaching to those objectives'* (Malcolm), conversely there were examples cited of how they might, in fact, use NAPLAN data to monitor teachers, albeit informally:

I suppose the only time that it would concern me is if we were looking at classes within our Junior School and we suddenly found that the data for one class was well below the data for another. We would then say, hang on, what is going on there? But it is not part of the formal appraisal process (Malcolm).

Similarly, principals were more well-disposed toward the idea of NAPLAN data being used as an accountability mechanism for teachers than as a proxy for school or principal performance, arguing that *'it brings an accountability measure that has some value for all of us in schools. I think measures are important and whilst we would have staff here that would see the NAPLAN measures as not related to their work ... I think accountability is a really good thing but I like a multi-measure. I don't like the fear factor that MySchool brought to the Principals'* (Gloria). Additionally principals lamented the part they play within the *'discourse of what makes a good school'*, recognising that *'as the principal I get caught up between knowing that you have underperforming teachers - and you do in every place - but also not trying to overstate the individual effect of a teacher'* (Michelle).

Principals expressed a paradoxical relationship between their understanding of *'that personal sense of responsibility'* felt by teachers in regard to NAPLAN results and their practices in relation to working with teachers to address results: *'so without over stating its importance, I still think it's useful diagnostically. So we did do a professional development session on it and I got some of the teachers to answer some of the questions in the time limits* (Michelle). While on the one hand they expressed the view that *'I don't know how constructive it is to tell people they're doing a bad job. And that's how you can use bad results'*, they also reported a desire to address these 'bad results' with at least some teachers: *'I think you can point out to people that there's a problem, and we can constructively work out how to fix the problem...I like being upfront with people, and saying can I talk to you, there seems to be a problem here. Have you thought about it? I'm here to support you let's see if we can do something about it'* (Louise).

The final paradox related to principals' perceptions of reasonable preparation for NAPLAN tests: the issue of 'teaching to the test' as contrasted with the need to ensure that students are adequately prepared for NAPLAN. As noted above in the discussion of tensions,

'teaching to the test' was often seen by principals as something occurring in 'other' schools, while adequate and responsible preparation occurred in their own. Victoria, for example, indicated that *'we don't want to prepare them for the test but we have to. We give them a couple in the week prior to it so that they are actually seeing what the test is'*, while on the other hand, *'we try to minimise it as much as possible so it's not a stressful event because our whole philosophy is not about providing stress'*. In relation to the narrowing of the curriculum, Simon suggested that *'it hasn't changed what they have taught but it might have skewed the balance of what is taught'*, continuing on to indicate that *'They still need to have punctuation, they still need to have grammar and they still need to be able to spell in everything they do'*.

Discussion and Conclusion

As Bourke and Lidstone (2014, p. 3) argue, the task of archaeology is 'defining the conditions and determining the field of events'. While NAPLAN is an annual event for these principals, each singular NAPLAN event interacts with dominant, competing and contradictory discourses and expectations in productive ways. One of the regularities in the interviews was acknowledgement of the importance of data in the construction of 'good' or 'effective' principals. This discourse was mobilised in various ways, to inform teaching and learning, to track students and occasionally teachers, to tell stories of success and failures, and to augment the ability of the principal and the wider leadership to 'know' what was occurring in each class, for each student and to intervene when necessary. There were practical affordances in respect to literacy and numeracy. Many of these principals felt that they had a focus, a target and a common objective that the school community was working towards, more so than they had in the past. Data, in this context, afforded opportunities for principals to comport themselves as leaders, professionals and responsive such that NAPLAN is reappropriated within pre-existing discursive formations. Often, data became the vehicle for principals to speak truth about their schools and practice. In this, data augments pre-existing discourses of quality, effectiveness, leadership and the purpose of the school.

Foucault's archaeological approach is interested in the "superstructural dimension" of language acts, and the ways that these dimensions are tied to historically constituted 'truth' games. In a move away from claims of a linear causality, archaeology focuses on the spatio-temporalities of discourse, and the recognition that events are always multiply situated, understood and experienced. When thinking about these principals' responses to NAPLAN through Foucault's archaeological approach, we must pay attention to the 'regularities, differences, transformations' that are accomplished by visible statements (Kendall & Wickham, 1998, p. 26). The archaeological approach is about exploring the visibility of statements as historically constituted. There are a number of regularities, the most significant for this analysis was the almost universal statement that all principals wanted, or desired, the data in order to improve, become more efficient, more professional all in the name of student learning.

The visibility of statements about the need for test data to inform practice is a productive logic. It establishes positions between subjects, between those tested (students), those about whom the data is presumed to offer some insight (teachers and students) and those positioned as responsible for that accounting (principals). Of course, these positions are fluid and dynamic, but it is telling that NAPLAN test data function as objects that re-configure what can be said, by whom, in different contexts about long-held truths of education. Even Principal John, who was most critical about NAPLAN and suggested that he was known to throw the data across the playground, would rather have the data than not have it. While criticism of the form and function of NAPLAN by these principals remains possible, desire for data as the central practice of teaching and learning seems the new 'truth'. The historicity of this is significant, the discursive formation of data speaks to Power's observation that trust in audit cultures does not disappear, it shifts from trust in people to trust in instruments of audit (like tests). Tellingly, in this datafication, many principals appeared to accept that student performance on tests constituted evidence of learning.

This regularity couples with other discourses that remain powerful markers for how it is possible for principals to speak about education. Historically powerful discourses around professionalism, leadership, quality and effectiveness remain powerful in producing the objects and subjects which they speak as truth. However, these discourses and their associated position within the archive, are becoming augmented, re-tooled and re-visioned by NAPLAN data. Thus, concepts like professionalism and leadership are becoming datafied, and this datafication changes the statements possible about professionalism. Fitzgerald and Savage's (2013) leadership as a scripted form of ritual performance needs to be read alongside this datafication. Leadership has become a ritual performance of datafication with new 'surfaces of emergence', such as data-producing technologies, data-recording moments and data-conversations, complementing, augmenting and contradicting the older discourses in productive ways. It is at the level of the statement that this transformation is visible. Where once principals were driven by democratic or social justice goals, they are increasingly induced to speak to, and of data, such as Principal Mia's statement that 'I'm data driven, I'm very clear about it,' The implicated advocacy of the principal functions through the new intensity of this datafication meeting those pre-existing paradoxes of the school principal as "agents of the state, members of the education profession, and citizens located within a democratic society" (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014, p. 295).

One example was the discourse of the principal as pragmatic problem-solver, whose response to technologies like NAPLAN was driven by professional pragmatics about getting the most benefit out of the data. Even the most sceptical principal, John, grudgingly appreciated the data for its ability to track student literacy and numeracy achievement over time and make decisions about learning programs. The enunciative modality of responsabilisation, of the principal as ultimately responsible for the stories that NAPLAN data tells, spoke to what Thomson (2004, p. 47) describes as 'the single and single-minded

principal' model of leadership common in schools. Also, as noted above, there is a general acceptance amongst principals of the use of NAPLAN in that it informs 'good' teaching, learning and leadership through data, with those practices made auditable, within those and 'situated normative ways of thinking, talking, relating and doing' that constitute the institutional life of schools (Thomson *et al.*, 2013, p.167).

A sign of this appropriation of NAPLAN within pre-existing discursive formations about principals and schooling concerned new language wielded in old ways. In a relatively short period of time (since 2008), NAPLAN has become 'normalised' as part of the work of the principal, and new languages and practices of data such as 'digging into the data', and 'data literacy' roll off the tongues of the participants in unselfconscious ways.

This supports Ozga's (2009) argument that testing data is intended to be used to steer schools and people at a distance, through articulation of self-governance and comportment through the data. The knowability of what constitutes the good, the desirable, and the purposive in education is rendered through the data. One manifestation of this is the ways in which principals have to negotiate the 'extreme pressure emerging for schools not only to perform on standardised tests, but also to be seen to perform in relation to other schools' (Niesche, 2013, p. 144). This is a powerful and complex negotiation, which can lead to iterative and educative practices, but can also lead to practices such as requiring teachers to sit NAPLAN questions under test conditions in staff meetings to promote understanding, and hopefully effect improvement.

Data is central to practices of implication and advocacy, because it is both shaped by, and shapes, discursive regularities that individual principals must respond to and structure as part of their ethical practice. Necessarily this involves making pragmatic decisions about what they understand as the affordances, offset by the tensions as they perceive them. Of course, how these articulations are enacted in specific school sites rarely plays out as policymakers intend. These tensions include problems of teaching to the test, narrowing curriculum, unfair judgement based on the data, and for want of a better description, the issue of when to emphasise and deemphasise the tests, in which contexts, to whom and for what purpose.

Based on the perspectives of these principals, we argue that NAPLAN data functions 'at the limit of discourse' in that data creates those 'objects of which it can speak... in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them' (Foucault, 1977, p. 46). In particular, data, and the narrativising or storying of the data that is undertaken at multiple levels, create specific truths that compel action. These truths encompass a range of functions and practices, from what was taught and how well it was taught, to the quality of teaching and the success, relative or otherwise, of the school as a place of learning. The discursive production of success and quality was complex for these principals: on the one hand they recognised the limitations of the data and were concerned at negative consequences caused by stress and teaching to the test

(which only happened in 'other' schools), yet on the other hand they found the data seductive, and used it in powerful ways, such as in shaping and informing programming, tracking students and using it as a measure of student learning. Two interesting things that correlate with this was that NAPLAN data generated the need for more data to check, confirm, follow up and follow through. NAPLAN tests led to the need for more tests, often presented in such a way as to alleviate the emphasis on the NAPLAN tests. The use of the data evidenced a strong policing function, as much as the limitations were recognised, the use of the data as a form of surveillance was compelling as it was seen to enable more and better intervention.

While the limitations of NAPLAN data were broadly recognised by the principals, one value that was given voice by these principals was that more and better data offered solutions to problems of student achievement and inequalities, that data like NAPLAN results were at least part of the solution to historical problems of achievement, engagement and equality. One manifestation of this was the continual reference to what Biesta (2010) calls 'learnification' or a shift in the discourse surrounding the purpose of education from notions of democratic good to instrumental effectiveness couched in the language of 'learning'. It remains to be seen how these tensions and paradoxes will play out as sites of provisioning leadership in sustainable, and ethical, ways.

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