Strategy and the Principal

Mr Scott Eacott
BTeach/BSocSci GradCertPTT MLMEd MACEL

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Faculty of Education and Arts
The University of Newcastle
Newcastle, Australia
November 2008
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, the greater part of which was completed subsequent to admission to candidature for the degree.

Scott Eacott, 19 November 2008
I would like to acknowledge the people and organizations whose assistance made this research possible. Firstly, I thank Associate Professor James Ladwig, for his advice, assistance, encouragement, support and honest feedback in successfully completing this project. His insights ensured that I achieved my goal, but also learnt and enjoyed the process.

Secondly, I would like to thank the participants in this research who gave up their valuable time. Particular mention must go to John Mather (Regional Director for the Hunter / Central Coast) for giving me access to public primary school principals through their regular meetings and supporting this research in his weekly newsletter to staff.

Experiences such as this do not come about without the support of an extended group of people, a number of whom are fellow doctoral students on similar journeys. This support and my thanks also extend to Professors Terry Lovat, Phil Foreman and Jenny Gore for their unquestioned support during some of my toughest days of candidature. Additional thanks to the academic and administrative staff of the School of Education, particularly Alison Russell and Susan de Sain, whose assistance made the process all the more smooth.

I would also like to thank my parents, Robert and Margaret for instilling in me a love for reading and learning. But most importantly, I thank my wife Amy for her patience and understanding in this and previous academic endeavors which have brought me to this point. Finally I would like to acknowledge my children, Daniel and Madelyn who have yet in their short lives to experience a dad who does not tuck them into bed, kiss them goodnight and then get to work on the computer, typing away into the night.
# CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY .................................................................................. iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................... iv

LIST OF TABLES ...................................................................................................... ix

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................... xi

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................ xii

CHAPTER ONE ......................................................................................................... 1

  Strategy and the Principal .................................................................................. 1
  The Evolution of Strategy in Education .............................................................. 6
  The Purpose of this Thesis ............................................................................... 9
  What, Who, How, When and Where to Study? ............................................. 10
  Additional Matters of Scope ...................................................................... 14
  An Overview of Succeeding Chapters .......................................................... 14

CHAPTER TWO ....................................................................................................... 18

  Theory on the Strategic Role of the Educational Leader .............................. 18
  Establishing a Knowledge Base ................................................................... 20
  Scholarship Informing the Knowledge Base on the Strategic Role .......... 27
  Theory and Strategy in Education Research ............................................... 34
    Theory Development and Strategic Role ................................................... 35
    Streams of Influential Theory .................................................................. 37
    Conceptual Features of the Knowledge Base ......................................... 48
    Possible Theory Developments within Strategy in Education .............. 61

CHAPTER THREE ................................................................................................... 72

  Methodological Issues and Strategy in Education Research....................... 72
    Current State of Empirical Strategy in Education Research .................. 74
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Methodological Developments on the Strategic Role of School Leaders</th>
<th>79</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is more than just a DET Story</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing a Model of the Strategic Role of School Leaders</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Features of the Study</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Features of the Study</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data source</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study / Instrumentation</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Instrument Statistics</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Matters</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Constraints</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do public primary school principals display strategic leadership and management?</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do demographic variables (personal and school) moderate the strategic leadership and management of principals?</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the Strategic Role of the Public Primary School Principal</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures and Theoretical Structure</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of the Data</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancing the School’s Purpose</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the School’s Unique Context</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping the Direction of the School</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through Leadership Behaviors .................................................. 184
Additional Information .............................................................. 187
Summary .................................................................................... 199
Validating the definition .............................................................. 200
Implications ................................................................................. 207
Conclusions ................................................................................. 208
CHAPTER SIX ............................................................................... 209
The Strategic Role as a Disciplinary Practice .............................. 209
Foucault on Strategy ................................................................. 211
The Panopticon and Disciplinary Practices .................................. 215
How Disciplinary Power is Enacted within the Strategic Role .... 217
Surveillance and Public Mistrust .................................................. 228
The Production of Individuality .................................................... 230
Back to the Beginning ................................................................. 234
The Empirical Implications .......................................................... 237
Conclusion .................................................................................... 240
CHAPTER SEVEN ......................................................................... 242
Positioning and Framing .............................................................. 242
Positioning ................................................................................... 243
Framing ......................................................................................... 246
Conclusion .................................................................................... 254
REFERENCES ............................................................................... 255
APPENDICES ............................................................................... 278
APPENDIX 1: SLQ (PRINCIPAL VERSION) .................................... 279
APPENDIX 2: SLQ (RATER VERSION) ........................................... 282
# LIST OF TABLES

1. Quality forums for educational leadership scholars
2. Incidence of empirical / conceptual work over time
3. Articles cited more than three times in the sample
4. Books cited more than five times in the sample
5. Representative definitions of strategy from the fields of education and strategy
6. Representative definitions espoused by four sets of boundary-spanning scholars (taken from Nag et al., 2007, p. 946)
7. Types of causal models
8. Summary of conceptual features present in the knowledge base
9. Theory recommendations for research on the strategic role of school leaders
10. A sample of literature and its conformity to the proposed model of the strategic role of the public primary school principal
11. Sampling strategy applied in the literature on the strategic role
12. Sample size by data source
13. Data sources over time
14. Comparison of similar studies of data sources in strategy research
15. Methodological recommendations for research on the strategic role of school leaders
16. Overview of demographic variables and their measures
17. Factor loading and scale statistics from the SLQ pilot study
18. Descriptive statistics of respondents’ career path
19. Distribution of sample and region by school size
20. Factor loading and scale statistics from the SLQ main study
21. Comparison of means for self-reporting principals and self plus others (scales)
22. Comparison of means for self-reporting principals and self plus others (items)
23. Comparison of means between self and others at the scale level
24. Descriptive statistics of questionnaire
25. Highest scoring items on the SLQ
26. Lowest scoring items on the SLQ
27. Pearson product-moment coefficients of correlations between demographic variables
28. Scale scores by gender
29. Comparison of item means for implement scale by gender
30. Comparison of scale means by age group
31. Scale scores by tenure
32. Pearson product-moment coefficients of correlations between means for scales and the principal’s career path
33. Scale scores by the presence of a teaching principals position
34. Scale scores by time spent as a medium sized school principal
35. Scale scores by level of formal education
36. Comparison of scale means by school size
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Scale scores by socio-economic status of the school</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Scale scores by presence of students from disadvantaged backgrounds</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Overview of analysis by demographic variables</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>The distinctive lexicon of the strategic role</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Forms of professional learning undertaken relating to the strategic role</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Cross-tabulation of data set</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Logistic regression analysis of 883 educational leadership articles and the model proposed for the strategic role of the principal</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Validation of predicted probabilities</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

1 Percentage of works on strategy / quality of forum 27
2 Upper echelon theory adapted from Hambrick and Mason (1984) 105
3 Causation models for the strategic role 179
4 The implicit consensual definition of the strategic role of the public primary school principals 199
5 A planning model provided by the DET 227
This thesis builds on and contributes to work on the strategic role of educational leaders, and particularly public primary school principals. Although some in the field (Bell, 2002; Forde, Hobby, & Lees, 2000; Kelly, 2005) have questioned the utility of strategy as a concept, particularly with its ties to economics, marketing and capitalist ventures, there has not been an explicit research focus of what strategy means in educational leadership. As such, this thesis provides additional insight by taking stock, assessing and integrating the existing body of literature on strategic leadership and management in schools and by going beyond what is already known and setting forth new frameworks, perspectives and researchable questions. The analytical focus on the strategic role, and not merely strategic management or strategic leadership enables another contribution. Multiple modes of inquiry were used in constructing the arguments of this work.

Through a theoretical and methodological analysis of the discourse on the strategic role in 18 prominent educational leadership journals over a 27 year period (1980-2007), a model for the strategic role was developed. This model was tested on a sample of public primary school principals in the Hunter / Central Coast region of New South Wales, Australia. The results of this questionnaire based study prompted further inquiry as to what the ‘strategic role’ means to practitioners. A framework was developed from the transcribed texts of interviews with principals. Many similarities existed in this framework and the literature derived model, however the framework developed from practitioner responses gave greater attention to the social forces that act upon the strategic role, supporting the criticism directed at the utility of the narrow view of strategy as planning to the educational context.
Theoretically informed by the work of Michel Foucault, a proposed alternate lens for the analysis of the strategic role of school leaders is presented, showing that as a result of increased participation in school governance and accountability regimes, principal actions are constantly under surveillance. While not being the first to bring Foucault into the educational leadership discourse, the proposal of the strategic role within a social space is something that has been missing from the discussion on the strategic role within the field. The Foucauldian frame sheds need insight into the strategic role of the public primary school principal and highlights the significance of the role within the field of educational leadership. Overall, this thesis is intended to provide a new platform for theory and research on the strategic role of school leaders. As with Anderson and Grinberg (1998), this thesis argues for Foucault’s concept of disciplinary practices as a metaphor for the field of educational leadership. It is argued that by positioning the strategic role within the broader social space, further inquiry can help provide a fundamental understanding of how and why educational institutions behave the way they do.