Language games played in the processes of co-construction

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The article will explore the language games implicit in the interaction between researchers and school principals in the process of co-construction. It will examine how 'rules' that structured interaction between researchers and school principals were established and sustained, and the discourses that were drawn upon during interviews. The article is divided into four main sections. First, we argue that analysis of language games within our interviews has the potential to illuminate the processes of co-construction. In the second we explore the relationship between narrative and identity, and discuss the implications with particular reference to the texts that are emerging from our interviews with school principals. The third section takes up some of these issues, and illuminates them by looking at the use of language in two of our interviews with school principals, one from England and the other from Norway. In the final section we conclude the paper with some discussion of the implications for the project's methodology. We argue that power is a particularly salient issue for us to address, and that analysis of language games inherent in our interviews may shed light both on our methodology and on issues of contemporary school leadership.

INTRODUCTION

In UK, Denmark, Ireland and Norway recent reforms have meant that school principals have become targets as well as agents of change in a drive for improved standards in schools. A situation with a new interplay of accountability and autonomy in schools seems to give new conditions for school principals' construction of professional identity. This is the background for a comparative study that was launched by a research team from UK, Denmark and Norway in March 1999. In January 2000 Ireland was included in the project.

The study aims at investigating how school principals frame their professional identities within different local and national contexts. In the study we have chosen a life history approach in getting a better understanding of school principals' professional lives and their sense of identity.

The importance of teachers' professional lives has been acknowledged lately by a growing number of researchers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, Goodson 1992, 1995, Huberman, 1989, Kelchtermans, 1993, 1994, Sparkes, 1995). This perspective is characterised by several features. First, it has an emphasis on the subjective, narrative form in which the respondents present their career experiences. Second, the respondents will actively construct their experiences into a story that is meaningful to him or her, and the personal construction is influenced by the interaction between the researcher and the respondents. Third, the story will always be presented in a social, cultural and institutional context. Finally the approach will include a temporal and dynamic dimension. The actual thinking constitutes a fragment in a continuous process of assigning meaning to the experienced reality (Kelchtermans, 1993).

In our study we have above all been inspired by Goodson (1992, 1995) who argues that teachers (and school principals) should analyse the relationship between their individual biographies, historical events, and constrains imposed on their personal choices by broader power relations, such as those of class, race and gender. He also makes a distinction between life story and life history. A life story is the story we tell about our life, but a life history is the life story located within its historical, cultural and political context.

We have chosen approximately 12 school leaders in England, Ireland, Norway and Denmark, four in each of the categories: early career (up to three years), mid career (4 – 15 years) and late career (more than 15 years). Both genders are equally represented. We chose a group of interested and active school leaders. The rationale being that we wanted to interview leaders who would willingly enter into a project that would take a fair amount of time and effort.

Most of the school leaders were chosen from the researchers knowing them: from being students at our university courses, from having participated in school development projects or other projects. In getting the life history we assumed that it was important to build on and continuously to develop trust relationships.

In order to get broad accounts of how school leaders tell their life histories – and thereby recollect and construct their professional identities – we set out to carry through a series of interviews with samples of leaders. All our interviews were recorded and transcribed. In the first round of interviews we asked school leaders to tell their stories in their own ways. We tried to provide what Atkinson (1998:41) calls a 'green light and a listening ear' with a minimum of questions to help the story along.

Although our intentions were to minimise our influence on the interview situation and the life stories, we acknowledge that the situation itself shapes what takes place during the interview. The relations in the field shape the interviews. Both agents utilised

it for their purposes. In the second and third rounds of interviewing we are inviting school principals to discuss our initial analysis of the stories they have told. In this way we are trying to ensure that the school principals are involved in the construction and reconstruction of the life histories.

The variations in the participants' sex are likely to yield certain gender differences in ways of telling the stories. So will probably cultural belonging. It should, however, be noted that we cannot present general claims on gender variation or different nationality based on the stories collected in our study.

In this article we explore the language games implicit in the interaction between researchers and school principals in the process of co-construction. We will discuss the implications for the texts that have emerged, and how language games seem to have influenced the scripting of school principals' life stories.

LANGUAGE GAMES IN CO-CONSTRUCTION

The life story is a personal reconstruction of experience, in our case by a school principal. In the shift from life story to life history the nature of our collaboration changed. Although telling stories remained central to our relationship, the school principal became more a co-researcher (Goodson, 1995). Likewise, we as researchers, became more than listeners of stories. We were both actively involved in textual and contextual construction, and both school principals and researchers had voices in this collaborative process.

Given the emphasis of our project on co-construction it seems essential that we should reflect critically on the processes through which school principals' life histories were elicited and scripted. We have described our strategy above, and explained how we were inviting school principals to tell stories about their work and to reflect upon them with us. In this section we consider how the use of language, by both the school principals, and ourselves may have shaped our interactions and the texts that are emerging from it.

Jensen (1989) has argued that more attention should be given to the linguistic and communicative features of the discourses that qualitative methods produce. He suggests that interviews represent a form of interpersonal communication in which the interviewer and respondent negotiate an understanding of the subject matter in question. Language is seen as a *basic tool* (that is used to offer commentary, questions and preliminary interpretations) and as a product (in the form of tapes and transcripts) for further textual analysis and interpretation. Jensen has argued:

> It is especially important to assess the relative contribution of interviewer and respondent to the interaction. To what extent are new conceptual distinctions and relations introduced by the respondent, and in what way are the concepts elaborated in the following turns of the exchange? (ibid: 102)

Observing that it is rare for qualitative researchers to analyse the language of their materials, he comments on the implications for the texts that they produce:

> Very often the interviews only appear as quotations illuminating the researcher's own narrative, so that the reader is left wondering how the discourse of the interviews was transformed into the discourse of the report (ibid: 100).

In a project where 'co-construction' is cited as a fundamental principle it seems particularly important to pay attention to the way language is being used during interviews, and to explore critically how the narratives of the interviews are transformed into research reports. Critical exploration of the language, however, demands that we take account of context. Wittgenstein (1953) has argued that we cannot step outside of language, and that meaning is embedded not only in vocabulary, but also in the conventions and rules that govern the use of language. He considers, for example, (ibid: 10) how builders might use the words 'Five Slabs' as a *report* of the number of slabs in a pile, or as an *order* to bring five slabs. The meaning of the words, 'five slabs,' is determined not only by the words but also by the conventions or rules that are acknowledged to be applicable in the context of their use. In this sense, the use of language can be seen as the playing of games, which have the capacity to change and develop:

> There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call "symbols", "words", "sentences". And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. [...] Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that *speaking of language* is part of an activity, or a form of life (ibid: 11).

Wittgenstein suggests that, in order to understand what is meant, our concern should be with language in use rather than with the definition of words:

> Anything-and nothing- is right. - And this is the position you are in if you look for definitions corresponding to our concepts in aesthetics or ethics. In such a difficulty always ask yourself: How did we learn the meaning of this word ("good" for instance)? From what sort of examples? In what language games? (ibid: 36)

Lyotard (1984), drawing on Wittgenstein's concept of 'language games', argued that their rules must be established by a contract, either explicitly or implicitly. He emphasised how in 'the ordinary use of discourse' the rules of the game may change from one utterance to the next. Lyotard, however, made a distinction between ordinary and institutional discourse. Institutions, he suggested, impose limitations on the kinds of statements that are admissible, and thus constrain the way that language-games are played out. He emphasised that the limitations imposed by institutions are:

> Never established once and for all (even if they have been formally defined). Rather the
> limits are themselves stakes and provisional results of language strategies, within the
> institution and without (ibid: 17).

This argument highlights the significance of power in relation to the way the rules and
conventions of language games become established and contested. Fairclough (1989) was
particularly interested in how power is embedded in the use of language. He has argued
that discourse should be viewed as a social practice, that 'orders of discourse' are
determined by sets of conventions associated with social institutions, and that these
'orders of discourse' are shaped by power relations, in social institutions and society as a
whole. Fairclough's central interest is in the way discourse influences and is influenced
by power relations and he proposes 'Critical Language Study' as means of:

> Helping people to become conscious of opaque causes and consequences of their own
> discourse (ibid: 42).

He makes a distinction between 'power in discourse' and 'power behind discourse'. The
former refers to how powerful participants control and constrain the contributions of the
less powerful, and it can be seen as a site for struggle in which power can be held, won
and lost. The latter is concerned with the relationship between discourse and the whole
social order, and it may be viewed as a stake in power struggles that offers the potential
for control over orders of discourse.

It seems appropriate for us to reflect on the language games that are being played out
as we interview school principals, and as we try to involve them in the co-construction of
their life histories. We have found it helpful to focus our reflection on the rules and
conventions that are negotiated during interviews. 'Power in discourse' and 'power
behind discourse' are concepts that have helped us to think about how we and the school
principals have used language to constrain the content of the interviews and the relations
between 'interviewer' and 'interviewee'. We have found it helpful to speculate about
how social relations and institutionalised expectations of what is admissible in research
interviews have influenced our interactions. In particular, the status and position of
school principals, researchers, schools and the academy, in relation to educational
research, seem to be significant for the way our interviews are being conducted and for
the texts that are being scripted. So, we have been asking ourselves:

- How are 'rules of the game' being negotiated between school principals and
  researchers during our interviews?

- How are conventions surrounding research, schooling and interviewing
  influencing the language games that are played?

- How is the social positioning of participants (as school principal/university
  academic, interviewer/interviewee) shaping our interaction and the texts
  arising from it?

- What is at stake for the researchers and the school principals; for whom and for what purposes are they participating in the interviews?

Below we use examples from two interviews to illuminate these issues. First, though, we want to connect our arguments about language games in interviews with another key aspect of our project, school principals' identity, through exploring the relationship between identity and narrative.

NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994:416), narrative is both a phenomenon and method: "It is equally as correct to say *inquiry into narrative* as it is to say *narrative inquiry*. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the"patterns of inquiry for its study." And to preserve this distinction, they call the phenomenon story and the inquiry *narrative*. In other words, people tell stories of their lives, and narrative researchers describe such lives and write narratives of experience. In our project, whilst we have tried to ensure that the school principals construct their own life-*stories*, we are also trying to involve them in the co-construction of the *narratives*.

Through stories people try to interpret experiences and make their meanings explicit, and the stories they tell about themselves, are important in terms of how they come to understand themselves and act as embodied beings in the world. Giddens (1991:80) argues that narrative is at the core of identity. He suggests that identity should be seen as an increasingly reflexive project. Within this perspective the idea of identity involves sustaining a narrative. Identity is not something you are born with. Neither is it determined by society. It is a way of making sense of yourself.

We have heavy historical ballast of individualism when we talk about identity, but identity cannot be defined outside the cultural practice. In one way the stories are shaped by and reflect the perspective of the teller, but this in turn is shaped and structured within a wider socio-historical, political and economic framework (Connelly and Clandinin, 1998, Norquay, 1990, Sparkes, 1995). In addition the stories told by the school principals in this research project are shaped by the relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee. For instance the way the interviewer acts, questions, and responds, will influence the ways the school principals give their accounts of experience.

When people tell their life stories, they reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. It is likely that people are constructing a number of narratives as they are positioned in different discourses. Each story will be positioned and presented from the perspective of someone with certain intentions at a specific moment in historical time. And it is situated in expectations about who could be in the audience (Eisenhart, 2000). The story tells something about the relationship between the individual and the society, and individuals have multiple subject positions from which they make sense of the world. Our identities include our ability and our inability to shape the meanings that define our communities and our forms of belongings. For instance the process through

which school principals work themselves into positions in mainstream society as "a normal school principal"may entail silencing and forgetting of experiences in their lives that do not fit the position they strive to maintain.

Within this view the social construction of identity must be seen as multiple, shifting and contradictory (Norquay, 1990), and the concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual (Wenger 1998). That means each can be talked about in terms of the other, and the focus in the analysis of identity must be on the process of their mutual constitution. According to Wenger (ibid) we define who we are within the activities and the institutions, and we negotiate who we are. The negotiation processes need to be highlighted, and these processes are not only cognitive. They are processes where emotions and questions of power play important parts. Building an identity as a school principal consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. In one way Wenger's perspective seems similar to Giddens' perspective on identity construction. However, Wenger emphasises that identity is neither only a reflexive project, nor does it exist only in the narratives. He argues:

> We often think about our identities as self-images because we talk about ourselves and each other – and even think about ourselves and each other – in words. These words are important, no doubt, but they are not the full, lived experienced of engagement in practice. […] Identity in practice is defined socially not merely because it is reified in a social discourse of the self and of social categories, but also because it is produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities. What narratives, categories, roles and positions come to mean as an experience of participation is something that must be worked out in practice (ibid: 151).

How a school principal experiences his or her job, how he/she interprets his/her position, what he/she understands about what he/she does, what he/she knows, does not know – are neither simply individual choices nor simply the result of belonging to the social category "school principals". In the course of doing the job and interacting with others they are negotiated. But school principals' identities are also a matter of their position and the position of their communities within broader social structures.

ILLUMINATING 'RULES OF THE GAME'

In this section we explore the use of language in the first interview that John, the researcher, conducted with Paul, the school principal of an English primary school, and the first interview that Jorunn, the researcher, conducted with Vivian, the school principal of a Norwegian lower secondary school. In an article such as this it is not feasible to undertake a detailed textual analysis of whole transcripts. By looking at some aspects of the text we are able, however, to argue that the text to emerge from the interview was influenced by both parts. The way the researcher and the school principal were positioned within the interview, the moves they each made to influence its form, and their sense of audience influenced the "life as told".

Interview with Paul, an English school principal

Paul has been the school principal at his school for 21 years. John has had some previous contact with him, and the other teachers in his school, though they do not know each other very well. The interview was arranged when John contacted Paul by telephone. This followed a letter that had been sent from the English project team to potential participants to ask them if they would like to take part in the project. The interview took place in a room in the teachers' centre where Paul was working during a part-time secondment.

As we have explained above, during the first interview we hoped school principals would tell their stories in their own way and that the researchers' influence on the stories and their telling would be minimised. Analysis of how much was said by John and Paul, based on the number of lines of transcript, indicates that Paul did most of the talking (92%). On the face of it this suggests that Paul had space to tell his story in his own way. Looking more carefully at their interaction, however, highlights some ways in which Paul may have been constrained.

Once the audiotape was running John asked the first question of the interview:

"Can you tell us about being a Head and becoming a Head?"

This rather ambiguous question was followed by a response that covers two and a half pages in the thirteen-page transcript. Paul, it seems, had no difficulty in providing an answer and, given the openness of the question, it may seem there was lots of scope for Paul to determine the form and content of his story. Interaction between John and Paul prior to this question was not recorded, so there is limited scope for analysis of the way John introduced the interview to Paul. John's memory is that they exchanged greetings and pleasantries, John checked if Paul wanted any clarification about the project or the interview (which Paul said he did not need), and checked Paul was willing for the interview to be tape-recorded. It was inevitable that this was not recorded but it is also unfortunate because it is difficult to judge the effect on Paul's response to this first question. Though we cannot look in detail at how John framed the interview before the tape was turned on, analysis of the letter of invitation that had been sent to Paul and other school principals may illuminate the context for Paul's response. In particular, it sheds light on how Paul and John were positioned in the interview, and the way the researchers' expectations were communicated to the school principals. The apparent openness of John's initial question perhaps masks a more restricted frame within which the question was asked and then answered.

The letter included a description of the purpose of the project:

To develop understanding of how school leaders construct their leadership identity. We will conduct a series of open-ended interviews, in which school principals will be asked to talk about how they came to be school principals, about what their work is like now and about things in their lives that have influenced them in their work. The reason for choosing this method is that it gives good opportunities to come close to school leaders' development from their point of view.

Here the researchers seem to be making a move to gain control over the agenda for the interview. John is positioned as the 'conductor' of the interview – the one who will ask the questions - whilst Paul is positioned as the one who will answer them. Furthermore, the areas of questioning are specified in advance and, whilst the rationale for the method is explained, Paul was not encouraged to discuss it or suggest alternatives. At the same time, the letter emphasises that the school principals' perspectives are to be paramount – the interviews are to be 'open-ended' and researchers indicate that they want to 'come close to school leaders' and to see things 'from their point of view.'

Later in the letter the researchers reaffirm their control over the project's agenda by taking to themselves the right to make the initial analysis of the interview transcripts. Making themselves responsible for recording and transcribing the interviews, perhaps, reinforces their position as the organisers and driving force behind the project. They offer assurances to the school principals (which seem designed to make them feel secure about participating) suggest they will not be inconvenienced, and signal that their views will be treated seriously:

> We will record interviews and send transcripts to you for amendment and approval before the next interview. One interview will therefore be able to build on another. All the data will be confidential and everyone will be made anonymous in whatever way we publish our findings. We will make sure that you are kept up to date with our emerging ideas and we hope to be able to invite you to discuss them at meetings, which are convenient to you.

The letter represents an *invitation* to the school principals to participate in the researcher's project. Though it emphasises the importance of the school principals' perspectives it positions them as respondents to the researchers, who are cast in the roles of questioners, project organisers and principal analysts. In this way the use of language helped to shape the relationship between researcher and school principal even before the interviews took place. Paul, like any of the school principals, could have declined the invitation, but in accepting it he was going along, for the time being at least, with the implicit power relationships embedded in the text of this letter. In terms of 'power in discourse' this letter can be read as a move in a language game in which the researchers sought to establish their position vis-à-vis the participating school principals. In terms of 'power behind discourse' it may be necessary to consider the relative positions of academics and school principals. A Professor in a University School of Education had signed the letter. This provides some legitimacy for sending such invitations and also, perhaps, legitimises the expectation that the researchers should be in control of the research questions, the research methods and the initial analysis. At the same time the school principal, as a 'gatekeeper' needs to be assured that neither he nor his school will be adversely affected by participating in the project, and the letter recognises this in referring to anonymity, confidentiality and checking/amending transcripts. The invitation to the school principals can also, then, be read with reference to the relationship between schools and universities with regard to educational research, and what are taken

to be the obligations and expectations of school principals and academics. In this sense the sending of an invitation to participate, and its form and content, seems to conform to established convention. This may have helped to frame the interaction in the interviews themselves. In the sending and acceptance of this invitation both John and Paul acquiesced with established ideas about the roles and responsibilities of researchers and school principals with regard to educational research.

It is maybe not so surprising that Paul responded at length to such an ambiguous first question. He had already been positioned as the one to answer questions and tell his story, and the relevant areas to be covered had already been set out. John did not need to say very much for Paul to answer his questions because the frame for his responses was already in place. Paul also recognised that the game he had been invited to play, and in which he had agreed to participate, meant that he should do most of the talking and that John should not influence what he said. Towards the end of the interview Paul made this understanding explicit when he asked John:

> Is there anything else you could think of? I mean is there anybody else you've talked to or things I might have missed you know, or *do you not want to put words in my mouth?* (Emphasis added.)

So far we have argued that the apparent openness of John's initial question masks a more restricted frame within which the question was asked, which was itself embedded in conventions and expectations about schools, school principals and researchers relationship to educational research. Paul's response, and indeed John's question, was constrained by the way each were positioned in the interview. Despite this, there is some evidence that Paul and John had different ideas about the way the story should be told and that each tried to ensure that the form of Paul's responses conformed with their own expectations.

Throughout Paul seems to have wanted to use the interview as an opportunity to comment on and give his opinions about schooling and the role of school principals. Much of the time his narrative took the form of a commentary on what has been happening in schools and the implications for school principals, rather than a personal story about his own life as a teacher and school principal. For example, as part of his response to John's first question Paul commented on changes in educational policy in England:

> I think there have been a lot of change in the last, oh since 1988, that's when the national curriculum came in, or even before that. Which has perhaps brought increasing pressures in schools, taking heads away from perhaps a role as monitoring and delivering the curriculum to be more managers delegating these responsibilities to other members of staff.

Here, as in much of the rest of the interview Paul talks not about himself specifically but about school principals in general. When he includes details of his own experiences in his

narrative these often take the form of short vignettes that are used to illustrate more general points that he wishes to make. In the following example Paul first makes a general point about decisions school principals have to make about admission of pupils with Special Educational needs, and then follows it with an account of his discussion with a potential parent, which is almost in the form of a play:

> I think another criteria heads may make a decision on, and I know some heads are making a decision on, is admitting children who may have special educational needs. I had a mother, and I said this to some parents, I had a mother who came in, rang me up and said,
>
> 'Mr ***** I'd like my child in your school.'
>
> And I said, 'Oh yes, fine. What year is it?'
>
> And she said, 'Year 6.'
>
> So I said, 'Right well there may be room.' I never say there is or there isn't. I say 'There may be'. So I then said, 'And sort of how's your child doing at school?'
>
> And she said, 'Oh she's on Stage 3 of Special Needs'.
>
> Now my first thought was, 'I've got enough Stage 3s, I'm not taking any more.' Now I would never have thought like that but because I'm conscious of the SATs results and my position in the league table. And I think that is a moral decision we are having to make now, not on educational reasons, not because we feel we should care for children, nurture children, but we are looking at children who are succeeding in schools.

It is interesting to see the way Paul moves from this vignette in which he describes his own meeting with a parent to a commentary where (by using 'we' rather than 'I') the moral dilemma is presented as one which is common to school principals rather than particular to himself. Throughout the interview Paul tended to distance himself from the tensions and dilemmas of principalship by making school principals in general the subject of his comments. John's questions, however, often demanded the use of the first person and sometimes succeeded in prompting Paul to present a more personal narrative:

> John: When you were kind of at that stage of being Second Master of a Primary School and then you applied for these three principalships, what was in your mind when you were thinking about applying for principalships? What made you want to do it?
>
> Paul: I'd always wanted to be head of a school. I'd always wanted perhaps, and this sounds terribly conceited and pompous, to be able to do something about making learning enjoyable for children. That sounds awful. I'm probably not putting it very well. And I feel I'd like to have some role to play in it. I'd seen children in some cases get the rough end of the stick and until I went to my present school I'd never worked with children from good backgrounds. I'd always worked with children from poor

backgrounds, deprived backgrounds. And I think somehow I wanted to see, you know, if I could change things and make things better because I think there were things wrong.

Paul seems to indicate that he is not entirely comfortable with the form of response that John's question demands. He fears sounding 'conceited and pompous' and feels that he is 'probably not putting it very well.' Frequently during the interview Paul would initially respond to John's questions with accounts of personal experiences and feelings in the first person but usually Paul would very quickly return to the use of a more impersonal form. One way, then, of reading the transcript is as a struggle in which John tried to push Paul towards a very personal narrative whilst Paul tried to sustain the use of a more impersonal form.

Another interesting feature of this interview is Paul's sense of audience. Paul, at different moments in the interview, seems to have had at least three different audiences that he was addressing. First he was talking to John, a university academic and, to some extent, a teacher colleague. Second, he seemed sometimes to be addressing himself and using the interview to think things through and clarify his own ideas. Third, Paul showed awareness of a readership beyond the two actually present at the interview and seemed to recognise that in some ways he was addressing academic and professional communities. Almost at the start of the interview Paul said:

> As you know, I'm head of a primary school with juniors, infants, nursery and a diagnostic assessment centre.

The words 'as you know' indicate that the remarks are addressed directly to John. On the other hand we might ask why, if John knew this, Paul should tell him at all. It may be that Paul was simultaneously addressing a wider audience and recognised that the game being played in this interview requires certain key facts to be included in the record. 'As you know', is perhaps a way for Paul to signal to John that he is aware that John knows what he is about to say, and then both can accept it as a legitimate part of the game. Perhaps this sense of getting things 'on record' in the text goes some way to explain Paul's apparent preference for a narrative form in which critical commentary on current issues is emphasised. Perhaps the interview and the project provided an opportunity for Paul to have a say about educational policy and a means to influence, if only in a limited way, the policy context in which he must work. It is clear in the interview that Paul regards expressing his views as an important aspect of his work as a school principal. On a number of occasions he referred to conferences he has attended and what he said at them. He also talked about knowing influential individuals, such as the leader of one of the school principals' trades unions, and expressing his views to them. Towards the end of the interview he said:

> Sometimes I'm seen as a bit of a loud in the authority. I'd like to think I'm not a loud mouth just for opening my mouth and mouth letting my tongue blow in the wind but because I feel strongly about things and I'm quite happy to stand up and be counted.

Maybe Paul saw the interview as an opportunity to 'stand up and be counted' and that the sense of audience that lay beyond the two physically present in the interview helped to shape the form in which the story was told.

At the same time there are indications that John himself was a significant audience for Paul's comments. It is evident, for example, in the assumptions he makes about the vocabulary he uses. He talks, for example about 'SATs', 'Stage 3 of special needs', 'ITA', 'Nuffield Science' and 'Fletcher Maths', assuming that John, as an ex-teacher and member of a university education department, will be familiar with these words. Perhaps, if the interview had been 'conducted' by a researcher with no background in education Paul would have felt a need to explain some of these terms. Further evidence of Paul being aware of John as an audience is in the one question he asked John during the interview, about whether there were things that other school principals had said that he should cover in his comments. This was clearly directed specifically at John and shows Paul's awareness that John was also interviewing other school principals, and would inevitably compare their different stories. To some extent, then, Paul's story was addressed to John, and we wonder how that may have influenced the way in which it was told. It seems likely that Paul would have told the story differently to other audiences, for example his wife or a close friend. Another school principal interviewed for the project was explicit, during her second interview, that her interview would have been different if John, and not one of his colleagues, had been the interviewer:

> School principal: I just want to say that when I talked to you about being, you know the fact that you did the interview with me, how it would compromise objectivity and things like that...

> Interviewer: Yes, indeed.

> School principal: But the other side of it would be that if somebody like John Spindler for instance, just as an example had come, I don't think I would have said what I said. I might have done slightly with Colin because I know Colin *but I could never have done it with anybody else*. (Emphasis added.)

During the interview, then, Paul's sense of audience seemed to include both John as a particular individual and John as a conduit to a wider audience of professionals, academics and policy makers. At times, though, the transcript suggests that Paul was using John as a sounding board for his ideas and means to help him clarify his thoughts and feelings for himself. For example, when Paul starts to give his views on discipline in schools he starts by expressing his views uncompromisingly and apparently directed them at a wide audience. As he talks, however, the form changes to one where he seems to be debating the issues with himself, even using direct speech to represent the views of imagined others:

> And that, of course, the control, the discipline angle, to me I think has been a great help that in the decline of schools, because there's no sanctions now. And the sanctions that

they sometimes impose on children and the sanctions... For example I would a stop a child going to a Christmas party, the child I'd stop would probably need to go to the party and I have nothing else. Or stop them going to camp, well I take special needs children with me to camp. Give them a good hiding, they come to camp and it's an experience they've never had. Now that's a moral dilemma. And my deputy sometimes says to me,

'You've said you'll not let them go but you eventually do.' And I know I do, but I think the benefit outweighs, you know, what I'm doing. Where before I smacked them, or I'd cane them, and they'd know it was over and done with so I wouldn't have to hang it over their head like an albatross [Unclear] And morally I find that, I find that very difficult. And the parents will say,

'Give them a good hiding, Mr *****.' [...] And I think caning sounds terrible, 19th century sort of stuff. But when I used it, rarely did I use it. But the kids knew if I used it. You know, it spread like wildfire and this would be after [Unclear] violence and bullying, you know. I don't think they should be doing this, and people are saying, 'Well you're treating violence with violence.'

It seems clear that Paul told his story in the way that he did with particular audiences in mind. With other audiences the story would have been different. It is not entirely clear from the transcript how he came to address himself to these particular audiences. John's physical presence is probably sufficient explanation for his becoming one audience. Perhaps Paul's perspectives on the role of the school principal, educational research, and educational policy making explain why he also addressed a wider professional and academic audience. In that sense the explanation lies not only with Paul but also with assumptions about research and schooling that are embedded in the social order.

This is an important point about the whole interview. To claim that Paul could tell his story in his own way has some validity, but it is important to take account of the particular context in which that story was told. The fact that the narrative was constructed within a research interview, that was part of a specific project and was conducted by a specific individual, created a set of expectations and conventions which Paul could not ignore. Though Paul had both the opportunity and capacity to make moves that shaped his interaction with John, the way he was positioned within the interview and the moves that John made also had an impact on his narrative. In the final section of this paper we consider the implications of this for the validity of our project and our emphasis on co-construction. We also explore the implications for the relationship between narrative and identity. Before that, however, we further illuminate some of the issues by looking at an interview with a Norwegian school principal.

An interview with Vivian, a Norwegian school principal

Vivian has been a school principal at a lower secondary school for twelve years. Her school is situated in a nice neighbourhood. Both the parents and the students are very ambitious. The researcher met her when Vivian participated in a leadership course more

then ten years ago. At this course the researcher had an advisory position. During the 90s the researcher had met her briefly some times. Vivian's participation in the project was agreed on the telephone, and afterwards the researcher sent her a letter with more information about the comparative research project. Like the English part of the study, the letter included the project's aims and methodology.

The letter represented an *invitation* to participate, but since it succeeded a telephone call, acceptance was informally confirmed. On the telephone they also agreed upon conducting two days of observation, one day after the first interview, and one after the second interview. The reason for doing observation, was to get a snapshot of what kind of school she was a head of, and what kind of relationship she had with her deputy heads. However, it was underlined in the letter that the most important methods of collecting data were the interviews.

The interview took place at Vivian's school at her office. Before the tape was turned on in the first interview, Vivian wanted to state a mutual contract for participating in the project. She wanted to make sure that all her information was treated in a proper way. She had previous experience of a researcher quoting her in a way of which she did not approve. The researcher promised all the data would be handled confidentially, and everyone would be treated anonymously when findings should be published. She would also have a chance to read and negotiate what ever we decided to publish. She then stated that she was exited about participating in the project, and that she trusted the researcher.

Here Vivian is making a move to gain control over the use of data. Even though assurances concerning confidentiality had been given in our invitation letter, Vivian wanted to have further reassurances and this opening of the first interview contributed in shaping the relationship between the researcher and Vivian as a school principal. Later the researcher learned that Vivian was married to a lawyer, and her father had also been a lawyer. Maybe this made her particularly aware of her rights and power in a relationship like this. But it also to some extent restricted the analysis later, because she turned out to be very clear on what she did not want to make public. For instance during the interview she could suddenly say, "I am telling this to you, but I do not want to be quoted on it. I'm just telling you this so that you can understand the context."

The first question intended to give Vivian space to tell her story in her own way:

Jorunn: Please, tell me about your life as a Head.

Vivian: Do you mean one specific day, or more generally about being a Head?

Jorunn: You might choose your own way.

Vivian then started talking about what is enervating in her job as a school principal; small things that are enervating. There are so many things to be done, and so much undone. But at the same time she loves the job. She compares working as a school principal or a teacher with being a circus artist, and she enjoys "the dance". She states that she could never have been a secretary. Jorunn asks her to give examples of what is enervating, and

receive a long list of things she could have done better. She is not good enough in initiating changes in school, she compares herself with a colleague at another school, and the comparison is in Vivian's disfavour. She had to write a report to the Chief Education Officer about in what shape the building is. She does not have enough time for the real important things in shaping the relationship between teachers, she has failed to do some following-up work and so on.

Listening to her story the researcher is a bit surprised, but she tries not to show it. Vivian is known in the district as a good school principal. Reading the transcripts afterwards the researcher became aware that she contributed to a focus on all the small things that are enervating in the job by asking for examples. The following excerpts of questions show it:

> [Vivian tells that they have elected some of the teachers to take care of development projects, and as a school principal she takes part in their meeting. However, she does not play a central part, as she probably should do.]

> Jorunn: You say that you are not satisfied with the way you are participating in the project group. Please, tell me, how would you describe your leadership role in connection to that?

> [Vivian tells that she does not give feedback on teachers' plans, a task she should have done.]

> Jorunn: But what are you doing with these plans?

> [Vivian tells about all the expectations from the municipal level, and how difficult it is to cover all the tasks that should be done. She is always on the run]

> Jorunn: If you think of all your tasks, which one could you label as "this is not important"?

> Vivian: What could that be? I really do not know. I cannot decide what tasks can be done in an easy way. I try to do everything, and during the last year I have been behindhand with everything. I am not in control. However, in some area I am able to do things in time. It comprises administration of examination before end of term.

In the last part of the interview it became clear to the researcher that an hour before the interview Vivian had had a conversation with her Chief Education Officer and she was kind of disappointed. She did not think he was able to understand her situation properly. However, she had not during the conversation made this clear to him. It seems like Vivian used the interview as an opportunity to comment on what the municipal level required from school level, but at the same time she connected the comments to her personal story about her life as a school principal. The researcher's questions also demanded the use of the first person and asked for a personal narrative. Only when she talks about what goes on at the meetings with her deputy heads she use 'we' rather than 'I'. Observing their meetings later confirmed an impression of a collaborative culture within the leadership team.

After finishing the first interview, the researcher suggested some time for reflecting about the interview. Both the researcher and Vivian as an interviewee wrote individually down their reflections. After five minutes the tape was turned on, and they shared their reflections:

> Vivian: I think you have asked important and inspiring questions. Now and then, I wanted to ask for your opinions, what do you think of that situation. I wanted to have a dialogue more than a monologue. But I had to keep to 'the rules' of an interview. But the way you framed your questions made me reflect and it went beyond the answers I gave. I do feel comfortable with having a chance of bringing some reflections to the surface. I feel I have learned something today. You frame your questions in a very direct manner, but it does not intimidate me, and it does not feel invading. To me this has been a very personal conversation, and I do hope the information will be taken care of. In this project I have decided to tell a personal story, or else what is the point with these interviews. I think it is inspiring to have a talk like this, and I would like to continue in this manner.

> Jorunn: I am glad you feel it that way, because this way of conducting interviews is also new to me, to organise and interview so open-ended. Sometimes during the interview I have asked myself, am I able to follow the track, be following up a clue, or do my questions distract you. When listening to the tape and transcribing this interview I will examine our dialogue carefully in order to know.

> Vivian: In a way I have a feeling that I during this interview have got more feedback that during the ten years I have been working as a school principal. When you started to ask questions about a developmental project I initiated some years ago, I realised that this is really an exiting project that I ought to defend. No matter if the Chief Education Officer is more critical about it.

These last comments when both the researcher and the school principal are reflecting on their conversation, leave space for evaluating what has been going on, renegotiating 'rules of the games', and also contribute to shaping interaction in the next interview. Vivian's comment about feedback surprised the researcher. Going back to the transcripts, she realised that she twice had given a comment instead of raising a new question, for instance after Vivian had told about the developmental project she had initiated, the researcher said, *"This sounds like an important project"*. Then Vivian went on elaborating on it and told that the Chief Education Officer had a different opinion. And after Vivian told about how she planned to follow up a new project, the researcher said, *"This sounds exiting"*. Vivian then said that a colleague (school principal at a neighbour school) had raised critical comments towards it, but she really believed in it.

This is an example how having a researcher whom she trusted as her audience probably influenced her narrative. The social positioning within society of both the school principal and the university academic probably shaped what was told. It is also important to take into account the particular context in which her story was told. She had just returned to school after having a disappointing talk with her boss, and in the

researcher she got a listener. Maybe she also looked at the researcher as an 'alliance' in her 'game' with her boss. She had read books and articles the researcher had written, so in one way one could say she had more or less an opinion about the researcher's view of educational leadership.

When the researcher arrived at the school to conduct the second interview, Vivian stated that she was surprised when she read the transcription of the first interview. It gave a wrong impression of the way she looked upon herself as a principal. The interview started with her comments:

> Vivian: What struck me is the way I make statements about my situation. In a way I use these big words "I want to throw up" and so on. I don't know how it is to listen to words like that in a conversation, but when you read it in a text, it gives a severe impression. Things are not as severe as that. The other thing that struck me when reading the first interview, is that I focussed on stories about what is enervating in my job as a principal; small things that are enervating. For instance I told you that I felt so released every time I had finished meetings with the school's shop steward (union). I told you about the difficult part of being a principal. I wonder why the interview turned out to be like that. In one way I think it has something to do with modesty. I think I am afraid of boasting. Maybe it doesn't have to do with modesty, but it is a form of securing. If I tell you about all the things in which I am successful, you might listen to other stories from other people. Maybe you talk to some of the parents, and they will tell you another story. I do not want to be caught red-handed. ... But why I mostly talked about the enervating things.... If I didn't know me as a person and a read this first transcription, I would say, woo, she has a tough time at job. But that is not true. In many ways I love my job. It is not untrue what I told you, but it struck me that it is important to be more easy-going ...[...] I really felt I had to tell you another story after reading the first transcription.

This excerpt shows that Vivian in the second interview reconstructed her story as a school principal. This reconstruction is important because it stands opposed to the one given in the first interview. But she did not connect the content and tone in her first interview with her meeting with the Chief Education Officer, which was the researcher's interpretation. Her story as a school leader is modified and almost created as a new one in the second interview. It is an example that shows how Vivian is negotiating the meaning of her experiences, how her identity as a school leader is becoming, that the work of identity is ongoing and pervasive. The words and the tone she used in the first interview are important in order to tell something about the way she frames her leadership identity, but they are not the full, lived experienced of engagement in practice.

CONCLUSION

It seems clear that we, as researchers, and the school principals we interviewed each brought our own perspectives and purposes to the project, which have influenced the interactions between us, and also the stories that were told and scripted. We can also see how the perspectives of both parties involved are embedded in discourses concerning

research, schooling and leadership. In this way our social positioning as school principals and researchers has, also influenced our interactions, and the stories that have emerged from them. We realise that the stories could have been told in other ways and that, in other contexts and with other audiences, the school principals would tell their stories differently. This has important implications for our methodology. How can we develop our understanding of school principals' identity when the stories that we are collecting are significantly influenced by the research context, and are changing as the project progresses?

In responding to this question we need to take account of how we think about identity. Gidden's notion of identity as a reflexive project highlights the fluidity of identity. We should not be surprised, therefore, if school principals' professional identities are changing and developing during the project and if their participation in it should influence the ways in which they are constructed. This highlights the futility of trying to capture and fix an individual's identity. An advantage of our approach is that it allows us to describe and represent changes and development in the professional identities of the participating school principals, and helps us to recognise their complexity.

A limitation of Gidden's argument, however, is that he views identity in terms of a *single narrative* that is constructed and sustained by an individual. In this paper we have argued that the school principals are constructing their identities through a *multiplicity of narratives* that are embedded in a variety of discourses. We might argue that a fuller understanding would emerge if a variety of methods were used in order to understand the different ways that school principals construct their life stories in different contexts. Observation, in particular, would seem to offer a useful addition and might have the potential to reveal what Wenger refers to as 'identity in practice'. So far we only have the school principals' own stories about to what communities of practice they belong, as full members or in more peripheral ways. They have told us about their learning trajectories, how their identity is becoming and changing, how their identity combines multiple forms of membership through a process of reconciliation across boundaries of practice, and so on. We have started to wonder if we need to take more account of the varied ways, *beyond language*, in which stories and narratives can be constructed. Though we need to consider this more carefully, it leads us to think about the extent to which *seeing* 'practice' as a narrative form may open up approaches to analysis which would be useful in exploring the complexities of identity.

We should recognise, though, that whatever methods we use, we can never capture 'the whole story'. Indeed the idea that there is a meta-narrative, that can unambiguously inter-relate and explain the different stories that an individual school principal might tell, is suspect. Whilst our project is yielding particular kinds of stories, they nevertheless offer a helpful perspective on contemporary school leadership. Furthermore, we can approach analysis of the stories in a variety of ways. In this paper we have focused on

language games and the way they were played out in the first round of interviews. Paying attention to the form of the interviews, and the use of language has offered us some interesting insights about what was important to those of us who were involved and how we were placing ourselves within some of the discourses in which we are enmeshed. This, we argue, illuminates the professional identities of the school principals we interviewed, but it also sheds light on the values and identities of the researchers.

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