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Chapter 3

Re-Figuring the World of Educational Leadership

– struggles with performance, disenfranchisement and critical consciousness

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Introduction

In this chapter I explore the responsibilities and performances of educational leaders against a backdrop where the English education setting has been undergoing a reconceptualisation that renders political thought, creativity, and a curriculum which 'lives', a dangerous and indefensible 'other' that must be stopped at all costs. I propose that such an approach to education results in a paucity of thought that is reductive in nature and anti-inspirational leaving individuals feeling isolated and vulnerable. Utilising the lens of 'figured worlds' (Holland et al, 1998; Urrieta, 2007), I examine the voices of educational leaders from schools and higher education to consider the ways in which educational leadership identity is framed by a number of competing pressures. I assert that severe accountability agendas place educational leaders in an unenviable position whereby they face huge tensions in conceptualising ways of working which attempt to negate risks of compromise to their core educational beliefs, whilst at the same time address the needs of their educational masters, particularly where their perspectives of educational practice are tightly bound to professional identity (Cribb, 2009). This leads educational leaders to experience some very uncomfortable compromises, a loss of stability, shifts in identity and rising levels of stress (Lewis, 2004), with implications for both educational experience and staff well-being. I thus raise questions about educational practices that are being 'taken for granted' and challenge educators to resist the loss of what Freire (1985) describes as 'critical consciousness'.

I begin this chapter with a contextual overview, discussing how notions of figured worlds may facilitate us in gaining insight into leadership practices and briefly setting the scene around educational practice in England. I will then explain the ways in which data were drawn together in order to engage with the voices of educational leaders from schools and higher education to inform this discussion. Through the novel use of the lens of figured worlds in unpacking educational leadership data, I move on to discuss three key factors arising in conceptualizing educational leadership. Firstly, the issue of educational leaders performances encompassing how they are presenting themselves and taking responsibility for their organisation, colleagues and communities; I then discuss the ways in which educational leaders have potentially become disenfranchised from the educational beliefs and the values that motivated them to inhabit their leadership posts; finally I consider the extent to which critical consciousness has played an active part in leadership identity. These issues are important because they demonstrate the ways in which the figured world of educational leadership is shifting, to some extent unconsciously, beyond the control of those individuals populating that world. I thus argue that we should welcome educational leadership that celebrates creativity and political thought in ways that enlivens education and the experiences of learners.

Understanding Figured Worlds

Drawing on the work of Bakhtin, Vygotsky, Foucault, Habermas amongst others, Holland et al (1998) developed the notion of Figured Worlds as an approach to explicating the ways in which people enter into, identify with and help shape the communities within which they operate. This lens facilitates a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which people negotiate their identity in particular circumstances and within particular groupings. Holland et al point to the ways in which identity is improvised in relation to any given grouping (understanding that people populate multiple figured worlds) drawing upon customs, practices

and histories whilst at the same time engaging to greater or lesser degrees with shifting societal needs and demands. Thus people *perform* roles, presenting themselves and interacting with others in their group whilst reflecting upon and adapting this performance to ensure that they fit into the parameters of acceptable conduct and understandings. Further, people adopt roles within figured worlds through the use of imagination and fantasy. In other words in order to enter a figured world, people must first imagine and then enact the role that they need to play to be successfully accepted and integrated into this world. This facility for imagination is important moreover for enabling people to envisage other ways of working and behaving that can facilitate change within figured worlds. However, inculcating change is likely to encompass struggle in convincing others to leave behind previous practices and embrace new ones, particularly in periods where activity has become habitualised. This may poaition particular individuals as part of a counter-identity where they need to gather support to challenge and shift current traditions and attitudes.

People continually negotiate their identity through their presentations of self which they then assess in relation to others in their world. Moreover, the expectations of others both influence and are influenced by the actions of the individual (Stryker, 1980). Herein lies a danger however. It is possible to unthinkingly adapt to fit into a figured world without acknowledging the implications of such adaptation. This can mean that the actions and performances engaged upon within a figured world become automatic and do not reflect the individual as they envisaged or intended themselves to be. Once exposed, disjunctures between original intention and reality can make the person uncomfortable, particularly if this adapted identity is one that has compromised on values or positions that they thought important. Such tensions can also take place where external demands for shifts in practice are at variance with previous understandings and codes of conduct prevalent in that figured world. In order to facilitate acceptable change and shifts in practice it is important therefore to understand the shared

meanings and understandings within the figured world concerned rather than impose change from the outside with little or no understanding of how this world operates. Where this doesn't happen it may result in stress and confusion (for example in the figured world of educational leadership where requirements to meet government assessment agendas and targets do not appear to relate to teacher understandings of a wider educative process).

Holland et al (1998) add further complexity to this picture when they discuss the operation of relational power. Because significance and meaning are derived from activity within a figured world, when the concept of relational power is added to this understanding it becomes apparent that people can be both constrained and/or empowered within a figured world dependent upon their relative power or lack of power in relation to others. Such relational power determines the extent to which any one person's voice is listened to and acted upon with subsequent implications for individual agency. In addition as Urrieta (2007) argues, people get sorted into "landscapes of action" (p. 108) related to their position within their figured world and where they work, shape and are shaped in relation to it.

It is these notions of complex figured worlds where performance, identity, power, and imagining become tools by which to unpack the presentations of educational leadership experiences held within the data discussed below. Thus this chapter focusses on the ways in which educational leaders come to understand and /or present themselves through the ways in which they *figure* themselves into the worlds within which they operate (Urrieta, 2007).

The Context of Educational Leadership in England

In line with the arguments about figured worlds the role that a leader plays can be understood as an amalgam of the models of leadership they have been exposed to, their experiences of leadership, their sense of what is expected of a leader, together with the influence of societal expectations of that role (thus it meets the criteria of a figured world). Moreover, as Cribb

(2009) argues, acting as a professional within an educational setting carries with it notions of what people see as intrinsically worthwhile about the role combined with engagement in what is valued and rewarded in society more widely – such as successes in attainment. Further, Samier (2002) points out that because educational actors are themselves part of the values systems that comprise education, they need to take responsibility for and act to support values that they deem important to education and oppose those that they don't. This then is a call for those working in the figured world of educational leadership to be critically conscious, reflecting on their values, their actions and the implications of their activity to their field. Thus as Starratt (1991) argued, education must be inspired by a moral purpose involving nurturing the growth of the personal, intellectual and social. So a removal or distancing of the link between education and sense of civic value could be argued to effect a sense of isolation and loss of purpose. This then presents us with a view of the figured world of educational leadership as one based upon the importance of a set of educational values around developing the intellectual and social aspects of people that should be defended.

Education reform runs alongside specific demands for educational outcomes and performance because, as Smyth and Wrigley (2013) argue, capitalism demands a skilled and compliant workforce. Thus this is a figured world over which party politics has a significant influence, albeit as external imposition. Additionally high-stakes government –led accountability has had the effect of quashing resistance, leading to educators in the English context that have on the whole acted to comply with demands made of them (Leaton Gray, 2013). The net effect of such accountability is a fear of risk taking, which can lead educators to become disenfranchised from their jobs (Inglis, 2000). Moreover, a powerful rhetoric of self-evaluation means that educators are gathering specific pieces of government identified data which they then utilise as a tool for self-governing to meet external targets. In this way, educators become their own mechanisms for controlling and constraining education as they strive to meet assessment requirements

(Ozga, 2009) and the underlying assumptions that competition inevitably leads to improvement go largely unquestioned. So this is a figured world where a fear of penalty has been introduced from the outside to shift the landscape of actors within this world in order that they conform to government agendas which do not sit easily with the core values held within this world. Freire (1985) argued that it is necessary to develop levels of critical consciousness in order to transform and emancipate individuals as it provides opportunities to think and imagine different ways of working and different outcomes. In other words, people should not allow themselves to become unconscious of the contradictions and tensions they are facing. If, however, educational leaders are continually constrained and moreover loaded with continual change management, then time to step back, evaluate and develop such critical consciousness is likely to be compromised.

In both higher education (HE) and in schools in England, the role of leader has been subjected to recent and dramatic shifts. Leaders at all levels are increasingly responsible for influencing and ensuring that colleagues shift to new ways of working and thinking about education that is grounded in a sense of markets and financial viability in ways that are affecting morale (Evans, 2000). The effects on morale (which could be interpreted as shifts in the values and traditions within this figured world) are related to wider accountability agendas which do not sit easily with educators' traditional values-driven understandings, where the educative process is reward in and of itself, and where the ability to engage in the learning process is the goal sought. However, when this is challenged by dominant and pervasive discourses around 'efficiency as progress', 'commodification' and 'neoliberal globalisation' (see Barber, 2007), then it becomes possible to persuade some leaders of the virtues of instrumental rationality that replaces the more carefully articulated and educatively-focussed visions of educational philosophy. Giroux (2010) suggests that in HE, the neoliberal offensive has resulted in 'bare pedagogy', 'a market-driven competitiveness and militarised goal-setting whilst critical pedagogy with its emphasis

on the hard work of critical analysis, moral judgments and social responsibility withers' (p. 184). Moreover, in schools, Seddon (2008) is sceptical that coercive educational strategies driven by targets, have achieved improvement in assessments other than those delivered through teachers learning to 'teach to the test'. Seddon moreover accuses the authors of such strategies as "tampering on a massive scale" (p. 118) with no understanding of the impact.

Approach to data collection

Over a period of time I have been involved in gathering data from educational leaders in different educational phases. One of the key issues of interest to me has been that of educational values and how educational leaders enact these or alternatively feel them to be under threat. Given the shifts in educational policy outlined above, I re-examined data collected over a period of three years (2010-2012) to consider how both school and higher educational leaders were feeling and acting in relation to the educational policy environment. I wanted to ascertain from the narratives collected how educational leaders were figuring the world of educational leadership and the extent to which there might be a sense of shifting agendas and challenges to the ideals that they felt had attracted them into education. Data were in the form of either written statements or semi-structured interviews. Respondents' views were garnered on their approach to leadership; what were the key educational values that they held; and what were the biggest tensions that they faced in the educational setting. Data presented here represent 12 HE middle and senior leader responses, 12 primary school headteacher responses and two high school headteacher responses. HE respondents were from education departments in three different universities and all school respondents were from separate schools although all data gathering was situated within the Midlands and Northern regions of England. Fictional names have been given to all respondents and any identifying information removed. Table 1 gives an overview of the participants involved, however, no information that would allow individuals to be

identified is provided. Data are provided for the purpose of opening up questions for further investigation rather than to make any specific or definitive claims.

Table 1 approx here

As these data were already available to me, respondents were simply asked for their agreement that the data could be re-analysed. Data had previously been subject to verification by the respondents and in revisiting this information, an interpretivist approach was taken. Mind-mapping techniques were employed (Buzan and Buzan, 1996) drawing out key themes from the data in relation to how educational leaders presented themselves and world in which they operated. Data were further verified through four separate presentations of the developing interpretations to educational leaders who were invited to respond to the issues raised. The debate arising from these data were both strongly recognised and verified by others working as educational leaders across all sectors discussed.

Figuring the world of educational leadership

Individuals are influenced and persuaded by a variety of discourses that affect the ways in which they behave in the worlds they inhabit. The figured world of educational leadership is explored through an examination of the voices of educational leaders through the key themes of performance; disenfranchisement; and critical consciousness.

Performing educational leadership

One of the major threads running through these data relates to the presentation of self by educational leaders. It quickly became apparent that in this figured world communication through a performance of strength and decisiveness are of key importance. Leaders talked of the importance of appearance such as being seen to be strong, fair and decisive, a person who communicates well and empathises with people. They described themselves as being,

A highly visible headteacher, happy to communicate the good news and the not so good news takes time, energy, humour, broad shoulders and thick skin-all of which should be on the person specification for any Headteacher appointment. (Sam - primary school)

…It is vital that all involved have faith and trust in my decision making and leadership... (Karen - high school)

Within education, strong leadership is required, and in with many problematic situations, such as during a crisis or when dealing with people, one cannot afford to appear unsure ... (Jen - HE middle leader)

Thus the figured world of educational leadership involves a sharp recognition of the mediating and decision-making roles which form an 'image of strength' and authoritativeness as part of leadership identity (Stryker, 1980). This was common across the interviews although in schools headteachers were particularly focussed on their image in relation to the external world (parents, Local Authority, inspection teams) whereas the HE responses were more focussed upon reputation and standing within the organisation. This is an interesting divergence perhaps illustrating the direct link between schools and their communities and the need in HE to impress each other first and foremost. In addition and perhaps in contrast to this image of strength looking at the ways these leaders were performing also communicated a sense of fragility within this figured world, as if this image might be destroyed at any point and the leaders' credibility lost. This was displayed clearly when these leaders reported the emotional toll that their work had upon them.

I went through a period of extreme stress … I was stressed, tired, I isolated myself from others and my interpersonal skills reduced, I struggled to see the bigger picture and felt overwhelmed. (Jen – HE middle leader)

I try and avoid reacting instantly and immediately since the challenge to values often generates an emotional response within me. These issues sap an immense amount of emotional energy and do impact my personal well-being. Ultimately they are what makes the job difficult! (Jim - high school)

Sometimes there are difficult decisions that have to be made and carried out and it does affect your personal life and your well-being… (Liam - primary school)

These responses were representative of all respondents with the exception of Mike, a HE senior leader who claimed to be pragmatic rather than stressed but who was also the only one who verbalised a conscious distancing between himself and his work – perhaps acting on the periphery of this figured world (Mike was also nearing retirement). Moreover, these leaders were becoming exhausted as they attempted to negotiate new ways of working to suit a changing landscape. Therefore underneath the performance of strength, these leaders were falling victim to shifts that they felt were out of their control, rather than actively resisting or shaping the figured world of educational leadership in a more positive way. There was evidence that the demands of the job don't go away even when these leaders were not at work.

There is a real pressure to ensure you answer any emails as soon as possible, even after 9pm and on weekends… (Justine HE middle leader)

In terms of effecting my work life balance, I feel I have had to 'protect' myself at times. (Alex - primary school)

The *performance* of educational leadership thus involves the need to be on duty constantly as part of this figured world where educators are driven by responsibilities to students and colleagues in ways that tie them emotionally to the work that they undertake. This was all-encompassing and difficult to leave behind and relax and

compounded by a sense that many leaders wished for the approval or sanction of colleagues, which was particularly evident in the HE responses.

> A further challenge is that of "doing a good job" and wanting to do that well to "please some judge out there / seek approval " ... (Sally - HE senior leader)

> … we all scurry around like headless chickens trying to do something about [the issues raised] regardless about whether it's appropriate… people fear angry emails, people fear not being taken seriously... (Bill – HE senior leader)

These HE responses gave a sense of people battling against an organisation so much bigger than themselves and not geared to accommodate them as individuals and they were concerned that their performances met with approval. Moreover, in all responses there was a sense of instability, shifting identity and stress as a result of this.

One school leader stood aside from the rest and demonstrated through his response that the influence of market ideals were now part of his understanding of his figured world and which illustrated his rejection of the notion of education as inherently political.

> I see pupils as clients and as a professional my relationship is with my client…If I turn my attention to local or national government I have to turn my back on the pupil. I don't see myself as an agent of government or an agent of social change. This view puts me out of step with many colleagues as a significant number seem to be motivated by politics or religion at school. Hugh (primary school)

This quotation is interesting as it appears that Hugh sees pupils as clients (a market-based perspective) and wishes to be freed from political pressures (he has assumed that this is both possible and an ideal). He contrasts this with the views of other educators

who, he believes, engage more in the politics of education thus expressing a disjuncture between what he perceives to be the figured world of educational leadership and what he believes it should be (i.e. values neutral). This was a performance of strength demonstrating independence whilst at the same time being unconsciously tied to and constrained by a market. Moreover, as Freire (1985) argued, education is a political process.

The Disenfranchisement of educational leaders?

Given the challenges outlined above it was interesting to understand whether educational leaders were becoming distanced for their core beliefs and whether this was negatively affecting the way they saw their work. In other words were they becoming disillusioned and disenfranchised? In the data the figured world of educational leadership was clearly outlined as one where values around educational practices were linked to improving life-chances, developing fascination with the world and raising expectations for learners.

> I still believe the ambition would be to walk into that school, wherever that school is and try to make it a better organisation for the children (Jack - primary school)

> Equality in opportunity, fairness, consistency, effort and encouragement are all primary values for me.... (Jen – HE middle leader)

Thus educational leaders identified operating within a figured world where the value of developing others intellectual and personal capabilities was paramount. However, as the narratives unfolded they revealed challenges to these sets of espoused values involving a complexity of tensions faced by educational leaders where the issue of pragmatism came to the fore, an issue that Giroux (2010) argued to be a result of market competitiveness.

> I suppose, as a head you have to be a visionary, but you have to be a realistic visionary and you have to say to yourself … if I stick my neck out too far here is that going to affect my school in a very negative way (Elaine - primary school)

> You've got to be realistic and pragmatic about what you can do and what you can't do. (Mike – HE senior leader)

It was striking that so many responses were about being pragmatic and making compromises, but in a culture of blame perhaps this is an understandable reaction (Keddie 2013). What does such an attitude say about educational practice? It appears to indicate the extent of the shift to compromise in the underlying nature of this particular figured world which is the reality of the effects of the market (Samier and Lumby, 2010). Educational leaders expressed a sense that they have no option other than to mediate what is happening around them. One head exemplified the ways in which she acted to implement imposed agendas.

> It is really challenging if the change is forced on an organisation from external sources and is not firmly based on personal principles. As a leader I try to introduce those changes that I and my team believe will benefit the experiences and attainment of our pupils and minimise change if it goes against my personal values. (Christine - primary school)

Further, a HE leader stated that,

> The dilemma is I cannot change government policy. I can only find creative ways to ensure I am sticking to my values. (Nicky – HE middle leader)

The notion that core educative values might be under threat if one took a pragmatic approach to everything and that this would shift the rules of engagement in education, did not appear to surface explicitly in what was said but there was a clear discomfort that these school leaders

were forced into a position of pragmatism. Moreover this indicates the shifting nature of the figured world of educational leadership and that these shifts are directed from external sources with the inhabitants of this world simply acting to alleviate the worst of these changes rather than engage in resistance. One comment illustrated why this might be the case.

> If I'm honest I'm terrified of failure and the punitive approaches that the Government set for school inspection /improvements… The wrong decision can result in litigation at worst or criticism at best… I think it is easy to forget what your educational values are with the maelstrom of decisions that we have to take... Paul (primary school)

Demotivation and disenfranchisement is likely to be the result of living in such a threatening and market-driven environment (Power and Fandji, 2010; Smyth and Wrigley, 2013). So whilst these practitioners work in a figured world that encompasses a strong educative values system, they also are compelled to engage in oppositional governmental and accountability agendas in order to protect their organisations, themselves and their colleagues, with their best solution being some kind of mediation activity. This is therefore not a comfortable world to inhabit.

Frustration with this position came across particularly strongly in the responses from HE leaders where, alongside statements about being decisive, respondents also demonstrated feeling disempowered.

> it's a top-down management model, we do have some freedom …but basically its fairly grungy … (Gerry - HE middle leader)

> However uncomfortable (and even angry) I have been, I too feel charged with towing the 'party line' … the dominant view leads the rest of us to be silenced. (Sarah - HE middle leader)

… There's a lot of 'compliance with dumb insolence'… (Bill - HE senior leader)

As Samier and Lumby (2010) argued, a lack of what individuals perceive as purposeful activities can lead to disengagement with educational values and thus may lead them to become disenfranchised with a figured world that they see as no longer representing the values which attracted them to it in the first place. Schools expressed similar challenges but in terms of governmental demands upon them. "When I say autonomy it's autonomy within parameters, obviously... not many of us have real freedom..." (Nigel - primary school). These educational leaders were struggling with upholding their beliefs (as Samier, 2002 has urged them to do) in the face of non-educative pressures. The pressure for compliance within the figured world of educational leadership is clearly gaining power.

The critically conscious educational leader?

Not all leaders were unconsciously complying with unwarranted and unwanted shifts to the figured world of educational leadership. One primary school leader was beginning to consider that things had gone too far.

> … I'm quite concerned for the profession as things stand at the moment if we
>
> don't also try to support those teachers positively…. (Jack - primary school)

This leader had a sense that the time had come to challenge the shifting landscape. A HE leader expressed similar concerns but also reflected on her own responsibility within this.

> Where that [policy] conflicts with core values … where do I stand? Have I sold
>
> my soul to the world of management? Joined the dark side? (Sally - HE senior
>
> leader)

It was clear that irrespective of a sense that educational leaders needed to take a stand, they were conscious that they were facing a particularly difficult period where they are being asked

to compromise and mediate change in ways that make it difficult to resist or to foreground best educational practices as the driver of their decision-making as Samier and Lumby (2010) warned. One HE leader discussed the need for courage.

> I think people talk very much about we want people to be innovative, we want them to think for themselves … what they [policy-makers] do then is put in a load of legislative changes that in fact detract from that process and everybody gets involved in putting that legislative process in place and the creativity is lost… unless you have a courageous leader. (Jane – HE middle leader)

The need for a courageous leader was interesting as it appeared to suggest that in order to be creative and innovative and/or break free from educational directives it takes courage – and yet freedom to innovate is something that successive governments have argued that they have encouraged. As Holland et al argued, in order to shift the way a world is figured it takes strength and it can't be done alone. Thus in order to take responsibility and re-direct the ways in which the figured world of educational leadership is changing, the people within it need to share their imaginings of what is possible and act to redirect and reshape their world in ways that suit their needs, rather than allow it to be re-shaped through external demands that are in tension with the core purposes of this world. Therefore whilst the critical consciousness referred to by Freire (1985) was evident to some degree, as yet the people within the figured world of educational leadership seem largely to be unthinkingly reshaping and reforming themselves to comply with externally imposed agendas, albeit painful and fraught with tension.

Summary

One HE leader stated,

> People are enthused by being able to question what's going on around them, question the literature that's out there, question the practices that they've gone in for … (Jane - HE middle leader)

This is an interesting notion to keep in mind as we explore the concluding section of the chapter. I have raised three issues for consideration when examining educational leadership as a figured world of working practice. The first issue posed from this work is whether educational leaders are taking responsibility for their actions through their performances of their roles? The data demonstrates that these educational leaders are still very committed to their work and that they feel the sense of undertaking their role to further the educative experience of others through appearing strong and in control. Nevertheless, behind narratives of strong performances where they demonstrated confidence and direction, there was a clear sense of vulnerability underlying these stories and a sense of stress and workloads that were difficult to manage. Moreover there were demonstrations of the impact of the emotional toll of their work, together with high stress levels and a fear of being seen to fail in these responses. What was evident were their feelings of pressure over which they felt little control or power. As Ball (2012) indicated, the autonomy offered to educators in England by the government is clearly circumscribed by a regime of heavy accountability. There was an example of market-based language being adopted by one educational leader and all indicated a fear associated with demonstrating non-compliance (see Smyth and Wrigley, 2013).

The second issue begs the question, are educational leaders becoming disenfranchised from the figured world of educational leadership? The frequent stories of compromise, pragmatism left the impression that educational leaders are seeing some actions as non-negotiable where all they can do is moderate the worst effects of poor educational policy-making. This is facilitating *external others* in shaping the figured world of educational leadership rather than educational leaders shaping it themselves. Thus whilst these leaders are not as yet disenfranchised, there

are a number of ongoing challenges that potentially threaten this finding and deserve reflection upon on the part of policy-makers if they are to maintain an enthusiastic and committed educational workforce. As Samier and Lumby (2010) argued, compliance will lead to cynicism and disenfranchisement from educational values.

The third issue raised is about whether educational leaders are critically conscious? These data indicate some degree of critical consciousness but that this is threatened by high levels of fear, accountability and workload demands that restrict and reduce the time educators can spend on critical reflections about policy direction and to contribute to new, creative or innovative thinking about ways forward. It is vital that educators have the space to be recognised and appreciated as professionals and shape their figured world in ways that relate practice to core values and purposes. In order to achieve this it would seem sensible and indeed a duty for all educational leaders to be posing a number of questions to themselves such as, can I live with this decision; is this activity/decision aligned with my beliefs about education; is this worth fighting for; which battles do I take on and which can I leave to one-side? Asking such questions may make it more difficult to adopt a pragmatic stance in every circumstance. It is also worth considering to what extent pragmatism leads one to 'chip away' at educational values that are held to be important.

It is important therefore, to consider the extent to which we are all culpable and complicit in the erosion of creativity, innovation and an education system that is firmly rooted in educational values. In other words as part of the figured world of educational leadership we have a responsibility to creatively and sympathetically reshape and redefine it in ways that align with our beliefs about educational purposes. Given the responses highlighted from these data, there is a sense for many that these responsibilities are escaping the control of educational leaders which have led to feelings of stress and frustration which has taken a toll on these leaders. So becoming more critically conscious of our role is likely to sharpen the knowledge that we

should hold ourselves responsible, culpable and complicit in the formation and reformation of our figured world. Having a clear knowledge of the educative purposes of your role and the educational values that you hold allows each of us to make courageous decisions about where to set our boundaries.

Finally, we should consider whether it matters that we act with critical consciousness or not? For me the answer is yes, hugely. Whilst pragmatic solutions may allow educators to meet the requirements placed upon them, surely there should still be a place for idealism? This is the imagination described as such an important part of any figured world as from there comes new ideas and innovative practices. In fact values and ideals are crucially important, as Giroux (2010) states. They enable people to gain a sense of purpose and achievement. In giving educational leaders time to digest and negotiate demands we give them the respect as intelligent human beings trying to do a good job that they deserve. I care very much about the future educational experience of our students and staff. The way to negotiate how education moves forward is to re-capture the solidarity that is under threat and build a figured world where discussion of educational issues is important in order to consider, to resist, to innovate and to create a values-based educational experience for others. Moreover a figured world that lives, is actively negotiated and empowers people, will support the development of increasingly critically conscious educational leaders who can ask difficult questions of both themselves and others. Rather than view activism as a threat, this entails openly welcoming political thought, creativity and a living and organically growing curriculum. That would be a figured world of educational leadership worth fighting for.

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