

One school principal's journey from the mainstream to the alternative

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This paper presents the story of one school principal's journey from mainstream to alternative schooling. Drawn from a larger project at the school where themes of commitment, community and culture, and curriculum connectedness were apparent, this paper focuses on the philosophies and lived experiences of the principal via a narrative method drawing from narrative methodologies, feminist and poststructuralist perspectives. School leadership is a significant factor in school success. In this case, the principal plays a crucial role in the growing story of successful alternative schooling models, and as such, the philosophies and motivations of such leaders need to be more fully examined. Given the current neoliberal climate within many developed countries driving an agenda of high-stakes testing regimes and centralised curricula, it becomes more important than ever to highlight alternative ways of approaching school leadership.

Keywords: alternative schooling; boutique schooling; connectedness; social justice

Introduction

*Harmony High*¹ is an alternative or *boutique*² metropolitan senior high school (Years 11 and 12) in Australia, with a focus on preparing students for a career in the contemporary music industry. For accreditation purposes, the school has adopted standardised, state-mandated

¹ Pseudonyms are used for the school and principal.

² This is how Neil referred to Harmony High, as a boutique school similar to the magnet schools in the US. We use it in this article as analogous to the notion of alternative schooling.

curriculum, assessment and reporting requirements. However, this accredited standard has been artfully enhanced to include alternative ways of working with curriculum and pedagogy deemed necessary to meet the individual interests and learning needs of the students. In this way the school manages to creatively ‘work within and against the grain of policy simultaneously’ (Thomson *et al.* 2012: 4). On this point, Connell (1993: 44) claims that the very concept of mainstream curriculum and pedagogy needs to be questioned in order to ‘reconstruct the mainstream to embody the interests of the least advantaged’. Investigations into alternative/boutique schooling models such as that used by *Harmony High* can provide useful insights into the potential ways that mainstream schooling might be reconstructed to be more in socially equitable and just.

In this article, we illuminate detailed facets of the origin and philosophy of *Harmony High* through a narrative study of the perspectives and ‘stories’ of Neil, the founder and principal/head teacher. In doing so, we are able to reveal many of the reconstructions from his experiences working within the mainstream adopted within this boutique schooling model and also gain insight from the particular journey taken by Neil as he sought to assist disadvantaged and disengaged students by engaging them through music.

Notably, this paper forms one part of a larger project providing a suite of different perspectives and viewpoints of *Harmony High*. In addition to the perspectives of Neil explored here, the perspectives of various staff and students are the subjects of separate papers. Combined, they form a multi-faceted or *crystallised* (Richardson 2000) inquiry, which allows us to reflect and refract on the dimensions of collected data to create a deep and complex understanding of the phenomena studied by creating different layers of understanding that will work together to help construct a bigger picture of *Harmony High*.

In order to meet the aims of the broader project, we collected a range of varied data. As we immersed ourselves in the process of interpretation, three major themes surfaced: commitment; community and culture; and curriculum connectedness. Close investigation into these themes led us to suggest that they have important implications for successful teaching and learning in boutique schooling, with lessons that can be taken for mainstream schooling. In this, we agree with McGregor and Mills (2011a: 2), who state that that such lessons can help to ‘provide an education that is more inclusive of a diverse range of students’. Lessons that might be taken from schools such as *Harmony High* include (re)engaging students who have disengaged from schooling in ways that foster a commitment to belonging to a

community of learners, as well as (re)imagining educational leadership in counter-hegemonic ways.

We focus here on Neil, as there is a compelling argument for the important role that principals play in effective leadership of successful alternative schools (Day 2005, MacNeil *et al.* 2009). Successful principals engage with complex performative tensions (Day, 2005) in a climate of neoliberal late-capitalist modernity (Apple 2004, Apple 2006, Davies and Bansel 2007, Olssen and Peters 2005). This results in an increasingly narrowed focus on schooling outcomes as measured by standardised testing regimes such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), leading to a disturbing trend that Thomson, Lingard and Wrigley (2012: 6) describe as a ‘pedagogical impoverishment where anxious teachers shift toward transmission pedagogies tightly orientated toward test items’. These neoliberal forces see education as producing human capital (McGregor 2009) for a cooperative workforce (van der Horst and McDonald 2002) in a process of conservative modernisation (Apple 2006). Thus, it seems hardly surprising that Smyth (2006: 279) describes such widespread disengagement with mainstream schooling intensifying while at the same time there have been toughening ‘educational policy regimes that have made schools less hospitable places for students and teachers’ .

For example, in Australia, the federal government’s *Education Revolution* has seen the advent of a national curriculum and high-stakes testing regime in literacy and numeracy, along with an alarming shift towards media-constructed league tables and the supposed increased accountability of schools and schooling systems measured on particular indices derived from performance in the national testing regime, where ‘opposing views about the nature and purposes of education have been silenced’ (McGregor and Mills 2011b: 3). In such a homogenising educational-political context of narrowing educational vision (McGregor 2009) it becomes important to recognise the rich learning opportunities that are made available to students through alternative schooling models and the educational leadership that is made possible in such spaces.

McWilliam and Hatcher (2007: 234) claim that there needs to be a new style of leadership in schools ‘that replaces distance with empathy, aloofness with warmth, power with partnership’. Alongside a new style of empathy, warmth and partnership, Hinton (2012: 22) asserts that effective school leaders must also attend to ‘vision, purpose and goals; a focus on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; capacity building; dispersal of leadership; and social relations within the school’. We hope to demonstrate these elements in Neil’s story,

alongside the themes of commitment, community and culture, and curriculum connectedness, while also positioning his narrative of moving from mainstream schooling to alternative schooling within a broader political context of educational leadership in the complex landscape of twenty first century schooling.

Research method

For the purpose of this paper, data were collected over the period of a year in the form of semi-structured interviews with the Principal, Neil, based on Seidman's (2006) interview series. These data were then (re)storied using a narrative inquiry approach borrowing from arts-based education research (Barone 2007, Barone and Eisner 2006), feminist poststructuralism (Davies 1994, 2004, St. Pierre 2000) and narrative research in education (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, Holley and Colyar 2009, Riessman 2008, Tamboukou 2008) that (re)tells and (re)presents stories as lived experience, shared through language and voice, where attention to subjectivity, power and discourse require carefully nuanced treatment (Clandinin *et al.* 2007).

By using a narrative inquiry approach in this study, 'the complexities of the principal's leadership practices are opened up for scrutiny' (Johnson 2009: 269). These (re)storied interview data are presented below as Neil's story, thematically grouped around notions of commitment; community and culture; and curriculum connectedness. Considerations of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin *et al.* 2007) were utilised in the (re)storying process, while combining particular vignettes taken from interviews into thematic sections. By doing so, it becomes possible to 'constructively and legitimately think and speak from multiple positions within multiple discourses' (Davies 1994: 35). This enables the speaking back to power through the destabilising of particular *regimes of truth* (Foucault 1994), in order to (re)imagine philosophies of educational leadership in contemporary schooling.

As narrative researchers, we are mindful of respect for voice, and in other cases have made a point of including tracts of direct transcript in order to allow participants to speak for themselves. Generally, minimally sized excerpts are inserted in order to make a specific point before adding our own commentary, analysis or interpretation. However, because Neil recounted his story in such articulate and insightful detail (with little prompting or intervention from us), we have purposefully included larger tracts of uninterrupted narrative. We are aware of the need to not break the flow.

Neil's story

Commitment

I did a teaching degree back in the 80s. Came out and then went straight into state schools. Did 16 years. I was actually a Physical Education teacher by trade. You come out bright-eyed, busy-tailed; you're going to save kids and you're going to teach them this, you're going to teach them that. I think that enthusiasm wore off after a while for me because we keep sacking good kids from schools. We call them naughty kids, we call them bad kids. I just call them disengaged kids.

When I was down in Logan, teaching at school, there was nothing around the local community for kids so I got together with a few mates and we kicked off a 'drop-in' centre and then that snowballed from just pool tables and Xboxes, and stuff like that, to 'Let's do some training programs'.

We got some government funding and ran a couple of what they call 'Get Set For Work' programmes. A lot of them were based around construction and horticulture and gardening and beautifying parks. We thought, well there are kids out there that don't want a manual job, that are creative kids. So we kicked off a radio station to start with and then we kicked off a youth magazine and built a recording studio where we can do stuff with music. Then that snowballed into a whole lot more programmes and we started doing alternative education programmes for Education Queensland.

One trilingual boy who could speak Italian, Polish but couldn't read or write English, came to our centre and we put him in the programme and he was doing Hip Hop and doing the rhymes. First of all he was speaking the rhymes and we would write them down for him. By the end of the six month programme he was writing his own rhymes out, and I remember he gave everyone in the room a hug the day he could read his own rhymes back to the group. That, for me, was a trigger; music's powerful because it is part of youth culture and everyone's got their own subcultures in music but the key and connecting factor is that music is the link and it gets people excited. If you've got kids interested then you can teach them anything.

I was sitting there one day and thinking, "Hang on, we're taking all these kids through these programmes, we're moving them forward, we're doing all these positive things for them, yet when they leave they don't end up with a ticket of any value to them." So I investigated what it took to start and had a look at the paperwork and was left scratching my head. At that stage the youth centre grew to a point where it was a full time job for me and about ten staff. So I left education.

I was out for six years before I started thinking about starting our own school and so I'd lost the 'education-speak', you know, the 'government-speak'. So I talked to a whole heap of people that were still in education and asked, "Can you decipher this for me? What are they actually asking?" About four years later we got a school together.

There were some hurdles to overcome. I think that by going through the process you're forced to actually ask yourself some questions and refine your process, and I guess the reason the process is there is because they don't want schools to start up and then fall over. If it was easy, everyone would be starting schools, but it's not easy. You have to actually think about why I am doing this because I can just go and get a job somewhere else. Sometimes I think about that and that would be easy, and there's a good reason behind that.

Taking from what I've learnt from teaching with Education Queensland, taking what I've learnt from running a youth centre and combining the two to contextualise the curriculum to student interest – in this case the music industry – was really the idea behind it. Because we ran the recording studio and venue down at Logan and we run a record label, it's like, okay we know the industry a bit, as much as you can, and we know kids, we know education: let's put those together and let's give this a go.

I'll be here 'til I retire. Oh, there'll be more campuses down the track, but that's what I see. I'm an entrepreneur at heart so I'm going to say that. This is the best place I've ever worked and I've worked in some good places, like some good schools with good bosses. I think it's important for me to be here for as long as I can so that the succession plan, whoever comes behind me knows the philosophy and continues that on.

Like many teachers and principals in alternative schools, Neil demonstrates a 'strong commitment to democratic pedagogies and holistic education as opposed to the dominant neoliberal discourses' (McGregor and Mills, 2011b: 5) that permeate contemporary educational systems such as that in Australia. This is shown in the vignette above, where Neil describes himself as a 'bright-eyed' teaching graduate whose rapidly lost enthusiasm in the education system was rediscovered through his involvement in alternative education programs for the state government. While his initial emancipatory politics as a public high school teacher might have suffered at the experience of working within a system that often seeks to pose students as the problem through discourses of 'good' and 'bad' students, his commitment to Deweyan notions of democratic schooling and a strong ethic of social justice (Connell 1993) set Neil up for the project of becoming an alternative schooling advocate.

Neil steadfastly demonstrates a commitment to the notion of young people as being capable, intelligent and creative. This liberal notion of the individual as being the focus for

self-determination and improved life chances is a common philosophy of educators, although Neil's perspective provides an interesting variation on the theme when considering his movement from mainstream school teacher, to running a youth centre with alternative education programmes, then leaving the education system for six years, before finally coming to start his own alternative/boutique school. He describes the labelling of mainstream school students as 'naughty kids' and 'bad kids' along with what he sees as their 'sacking' from schools, when the issue actually lies with students disengaging from their schooling. The loss of Neil's faith in mainstream schooling as a site of social improvement for those least advantaged (Connell 1993) demonstrates a particular ideology of education (Apple 2004, 2006) that has informed his current commitment to *Harmony High*.

Not everyone can take their philosophies, experiences and ideologies and start up a school; it takes commitment, perseverance and a firm belief that what you are doing is going to benefit the learning needs of students who come to the school. Neil clearly has these qualities, although he mentions them in the sense of an economic entrepreneurialism, where he explains, 'I'm an entrepreneur at heart', which is aligned with neoliberal notions of marketplace education. However, while entrepreneurialism is problematic, it seems that Neil has been able to balance this approach to 'enterprise schooling' with a clear philosophy that enables him to work both within and against the grain of policy in the neoliberal context. In doing so, Neil is able to appropriate discourses of educational leadership in new ways that provide opportunities for counter-hegemonic practice (Apple 2004, Connell 1993).

Community and culture

Music has always been a fairly large part of my life, not that I'm a musician enough to perform anywhere, but our house was always full of music. The old man couldn't sing to save his life but every Sunday he'd be up early singing or whistling or whatever, and mum was a one-handed piano player; she had two hands but could only use one. So there was always music in the house. I think that resonated with me, and I was in a garage band when I was going through college so that kind of thing was always there.

I'm really pleased that the kids want to be here.. We kick them out on the holidays, we kick them out on Friday afternoons because they just want to stick around. They work here on Saturday nights, running a venue. To me that's really gratifying and rewarding because education is for the students, not for me.

I think sometimes students have to serve the institution in other places where I've been and I think we've tried to flip that. The institution's here to serve the kids and we don't

make a lot of rules for that reason. My nephew goes to a private school and he has to have his hair a certain length, he can't dye it, he can't become an individual. Well that's not there to serve the student, that's there to serve the institution. I think self-discipline is far more important and more valuable than the discipline that's forced upon you by someone else.

The students have a massive amount of input into how we operate. We survey them every six months. We make changes based on their surveys. They are booking the bands for our venue. This is their space. We help them learn here. We're learning centred.

The other thing that we do differently from my experience is being very proactive on teacher training and professional development. When I was a teacher, if you heard 'professional development' I would cringe because it meant going to a lecture about something that I'm not interested in that's going to have no impact on me as a teacher but the principal thinks is important. A lot of it would be on how to control student behaviour. I rarely have a problem with behaviour. Whereas here we let the staff choose what they want to do and then when we can afford it we pay for that, we send them off to that and I think it's important everyone continues to learn, not just the students.

We know all the kids, we know all the parents, and we know their personalities. It's like a family here and that's got plusses and minuses. The big plus is that we do support each other. The difficulty is if there is a friction and a fracture it's actually amplified because it's a small community. Because we're so small and flexible, we can stop everything, pull us all together and say, "Let's talk about this. As a group, let's have a family meeting, if you want to call it that, let's talk about this". At bigger schools, the kids don't get to discuss that. The principal stands at the front – "You shall not." Half the kids aren't even listening.

I think 'big jug – little mug' is overrated. I remember my son coming home when he was in Year 9 and saying, "Dad, why am I writing this sort of stuff?" He showed me what he was writing and I said, "You've got to, mate. It's what your teacher wants you to do." But he said, "I can Google that. I can have that in 15 seconds. Why am I writing it out?"

I had a two year old in my office the other day with our iPad, playing games. He can't speak properly but he's fluent in iPad, knew which apps, could answer his mum's iPhone; and schools want to deny access to that kind of technology. They want the kids to put their phones away, to not have access to the internet, to block every site that's important to the kids and again, it's this fear, it's this fear of control. We allow access, we don't block any websites here, we have no porn filters or anything. We've had one kid in the 18 months that we've been operating access a porn site, because I think if you trust people they respond to your trust. If you restrict access that's when the problem follows.

It's hard to stop a kid from saying "fuck" in your class now when it's on every TV programme they watch. You turn on the TV and there's "fuck this" and "fuck that". It's like

it's part of everyday language but it would offend some people so you've got to understand when and where not to use that. But in a classroom, who are you offending? Just the teacher and the teacher gets bent out of shape about it and the kid gets penalised for using a word that their parents probably use and is all over the TV. I got my mouth washed out as a kid with soap when I said "damn", and that seems ludicrous now.

We try to build a community in the staff as well. We ran a fundraising dinner here, the teachers were involved, the students were involved. When you get a text the morning from one of your teachers saying, "I fucking love this school," you know you're onto something. I would never have texted any of my principals. You know when you're getting that kind of feedback from the staff, okay, something's happening here that's right and – from your staff, that's a terrible term – from the team, because we are a team. They have equal input. They'll tell me when we're doing stuff wrong and we'll change it and so it's an 'us' and 'them'; it's inclusive really.

I think more and more schools will start to see the value of hopefully the arts for a start, but also the levels of engagement for kids. What we're doing is not rocket science: what are the kids into? What are you interested in? Not every kid will suit being here. We've had kids come and leave and that doesn't worry us. We had one girl do a whole semester, loved it and left because she wanted to do Science at university and she needed Science as a pre-requisite and she was heartbroken that she had to leave.

Common features of alternative schools are the reduced emphasis on disciplinary processes, rules and uniforms, with an increased emphasis on student engagement with school matters (McGregor and Mills 2011b), which is clearly evident at *Harmony High*. Neil describes this emphasis in saying that the school is 'here to serve the kids and we don't make a lot of rules for that reason'. As Yuginovich and O'Brien (2009: 17) explain, the active involvement of students in school governance processes 'serve to improve students' behaviour and improve self-determination'. It is clear that Neil has little concern for students' behaviour at *Harmony High*. The active engagement of both students and teachers in the community provides testament to the high levels of engagement and buy-in to the school culture.

School climate and culture are shaped in no small part by the principal (MacNeil *et al.* 2009), while at the same time being 'connected to processes of departmental policy and accountability that impact on teachers' options in terms of behaviour management and negotiations with students' (McGregor and Mills 2011a: 4). This is a cause of particular concern in traditional schooling environments, where direct or indirectly students are taught to conform (van der Horst & McDonald 2002), which forms part of the hidden curriculum of

schooling (Apple 2004, 2006). *Harmony High* is not free of hidden curriculum, as Neil demonstrates through the metaphor of the school as a family, complete with ‘family meetings’, as well as the dialogical nature of student-teacher relationships promoted through the community and culture of the school.

Harmony High works on principles taken from participatory democracy, where students and teachers have opportunities to speak to power, reframing the school’s institutional discourses and working continually towards an ethic of social justice and care. However, Apple and Beane (1999: 10) explain that ‘democratic schools, like democracy itself, do not happen by chance. They result from explicit attempts by educators to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life’. It is through the careful leadership of Neil that such governance opportunities are made available within the school community. This is not to say that Neil works as some kind of benevolent monarch, bestowing privileges upon the students and teachers, but rather that he works in a principled framework of active participatory democracy, whether via regular surveying, family meetings, or other forms of dialogical engagement.

Curriculum connectedness

Music was kind of like the bait that’s on the hook I guess, but we’re not baiting it, throwing the hook out there, switching the bait and saying, “Haha! We tricked you!” It’s like music happens all the time around here, and pool sometimes. I think we’ve got a better chance of getting it right for kids because boutique schooling, call it whatever you like, is geared towards an area of interest.

My daughter has just graduated and it’s been heart breaking to watch her lose interest in what she’s passionate about because of the way that it’s taught at her school. She wanted to come to my school and I said no, I don’t want to teach my kid. Also, her passion wasn’t music, she’s for art, painting, drawing and design; but in hindsight, she should have come to my school. She would have actually flown at Harmony High because we are more in tune with creative minds, whereas her school is very much lines and boxes.

Our record label started in 2004, the school started in 2010 and we’re in the process of handing the label over to the students. The students bring in the bands and pitch them. They are actually putting marketing campaigns together for the artists that are on our label. So the artist will sit there in the classroom while the kids are being assessed and doing their pitch, and the artists will help assess them.

We try and make everything we possibly can as real as possible. We run a festival and the Year 12s manage it, the Year 11s are their staff. There are human resource

management aspects, operations management, and customer relations management. It is an assignment but it is also a real festival that happens for real artists with a real budget and real punters.

It's tough sometimes because the curriculum and syllabus does say you've got to cover this much. The curriculum is the stumbling block, to a certain extent. You know, we don't have enough time to teach the stuff we've got and the only criticism I would have is by adding an extra hour of English and Maths to a kid's week is not going to make them better at it. If they already hate it and they're performing poorly in it, giving them another hour is not going to help them, it's not what they need. They need some relevance.

You don't want the kid to go, "Is it going to be on the test?" You want the kid to go, "Where can I find out more about this stuff?" I had a meeting at morning tea with two kids that want their own gigs up in their suburb. That excites me because they're learning – "I want to learn how to do this in my suburb. I want to learn how to put on gigs and events." – "Okay, so you do this, this and this; let's talk about it." And now we start to set up a business model for them so they can start putting on gigs up in their area and actually make a profit. That's exciting, not, "When's this going to be over? Do we have to do this?"

We never promised to set up a school that would produce workers who were ready for the industry and they would go straight into the industry. Our promise was we would use the music industry as a way of keeping the kids engaged whilst they're at school, setting them up for some level of degree in the industry. We don't want a kid leaving *Harmony High*, going, "That wasn't what I thought it was going to be." We want a kid leaving, going, "That was awesome and I got everything that I needed from that experience."

Yuginovich and O'Brien (2009) claim that successful alternative schools should have curriculum and pedagogy that connects to the lives of its students, a position supported by the productive pedagogies project (Lingard *et al.* 2003). *Harmony High* achieves curriculum connectedness through a tailored curriculum program that connects students to their lifeworlds as well as playing-the-game of preparing for the world of work as productive, economic citizens. This is important, as Apple (2004: 39) explains, 'the school is not a passive mirror, but an active force, one that also serves to give legitimacy to economic and social forms and ideologies so intimately connected to it'. Curriculum and ideology are intimately connected; while often mainstream schooling attempts to portray itself as ideologically neutral, thus continuing social injustices and allowing hegemonic practices to go unchallenged, alternative schooling philosophies such as Neil's provide clearly articulated curriculum, and hence, ideological positions.

Neil's approach to the curriculum and pedagogical philosophy at *Harmony High* is less about attempting to change students and more about reimagining change within the curriculum and pedagogy at the school (McGregor and Mills 2011a). This is a critical point for Neil, particularly considering that as a boutique school, *Harmony High* competes in the education marketplace for students against both public and private schools. It is a 'choice' for students to attend *Harmony High*, and within the student population are a range of students who have come from low socio-economic and disadvantaged public schools, as well as students who have come from elite private schools.

Curriculum connectedness is central to Neil's philosophy of schooling, as the economic viability and sustainability of *Harmony High* as a school relies on students wishing to attend, and continuing their enrolment. As such, students' shared interests – in this case, a desire for a career in the music industry – becomes pivotal in the school's organisation and delivery of learning experiences through carefully tailored curriculum and pedagogy. To ignore students' lifeworlds, as is common in mainstream schooling where one-size-fits-all curriculum is imposed in a top-down fashion, is perilous as students who are unhappy with the learning experiences at *Harmony High* can simply return to the public or private school from which they came.

While the school-work nexus is clearly visible at *Harmony High*, Neil is careful to avoid conflating discourses of success within the school as determining students' post-school pathways. Instead, he is adamant that the school does not provide a 'promise' of employment in the music industry but can only promise to connect students' learning to their lifeworlds and provide opportunities to develop skills that are relevant to them.

Conclusion

In this article we have provided one school principal's story of journeying from mainstream to alternative schooling. In doing so, we have highlighted some considerations arising from broader themes of commitment, community and culture, and curriculum connectedness that we found to be important keystones in the philosophical architecture of *Harmony High*. Neil's leadership and vision as the school principal plays a large part in the school's emerging story as a successful model of alternative schooling in the Australian context of increasingly narrowed options under the incoming national curriculum and high-stakes testing regime. Through resilient leadership that embraces a sense of commitment to alternative schooling visions, progressive principals like Neil are able to work in counter-

hegemonic ways by creating and defending 'educational programs that are both pedagogically and politically emancipatory' (Apple 2006: 50).

We support Reimer and Cash's (2003: 11) comments that 'alternative schooling is a requirement in every community, not an option'. It seems more important now than ever before that schools such as *Harmony High* are given the opportunity to provide learning experiences for students who, for whatever reason, decide that mainstream schooling is not for them. While is obviously not a suitable senior schooling option for everyone, given its boutique nature of providing a programme tailored to the interests of young people who wish to gain employment in the contemporary music industry, it offers hope for rethinking curriculum, pedagogy and educational leadership in ways that work alongside the mainstream, contributing to the project of (re)imagining school change (Thomson *et al.* 2012).

There is a need for further story-telling in educational leadership, particularly those stories that provide opportunities to speak back to the mainstream and open up new ways of thinking about learning. We do not presume to say that Neil's story provides a roadmap for educationists who are feeling disengaged, disempowered and disaffected by their experiences to seek salvation. Our intent is only to provide one particular version of one principal's story moving from the mainstream to alternative schooling in order to illuminate some of the potentialities afforded in (re)imagining educational leadership in counter-hegemonic ways. If this provides a starting point from which other stories might be told, then we have succeeded in this aim.

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