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What Do You Mean Your Staff Is Like Family?
Que voulez-vous dire par « Mes employés sont comme des membres de ma famille »?

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WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOUR STAFF IS LIKE FAMILY?

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ABSTRACT. This article explores the potential for critical discourse analysis to provide insight into the language principals use to describe the adult relationships within schools. Unpacking the discourses of leadership may shed some light on how language strategically shapes the thoughts and actions of principals. In particular, the invoking of "family" to conceptualize staff relations is analyzed from a critical discourse analysis approach. Drawing on this analysis, the author offers cautions regarding how such poignant metaphors can serve as control strategies for sanctioning teacher behaviour.

QUE VOULEZ-VOUS DIRE PAR « MES EMPLOYÉS SONT COMME DES MEMBRES DE MA FAMILLE »?

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cet article, les auteurs explorent le potentiel de l'analyse critique du discours comme outil permettant de mieux comprendre le vocabulaire utilisé par les directeurs pour décrire les relations prévalant entre les adultes dans les écoles. Déconstruire les messages de leadership peut apporter un éclairage intéressant sur la façon dont le langage façonne la pensée et les actions des directeurs. Plus précisément, la référence à la notion de famille pour décrire les relations du personnel est analysée d'un point de vue critique, en utilisant l'approche d'analyse critique du discours. Se basant sur cette analyse, les auteurs invitent à la prudence, soulignant que de telles métaphores poignantes peuvent être utilisées comme stratégies de contrôle pour sanctionner le comportement des enseignants.

INTRODUCTION

During a focus group session designed to examine twelve principals' perceptions of their schools as professional learning communities, four of these experienced administrators referred to their teaching staffs as being very closely knit in terms of their professional relationships (Cranston, 2007). The metaphor that these principals used to describe the nature of the professional relationships among their staff was not that of community; instead, the relationships were described as resembling the kinds of bonds found in "family" (Cranston, 2007). As I listened to the participants speak, I began to wonder, what do participants mean when they refer to their teaching staffs as being

like "family"? And how does this discourse inspire, structure, or limit the ways in which people think and act in schools?

Simply understanding what the term "family" may connote in any context is a complex task. While it is questionable whether the "crisis of the family in Canada is one of monumental proportions," as Conway (2003, p. xiii) suggests, it is evident that the makeup and notions associated with images of the traditional nuclear family are undergoing considerable and rapid change (Conway, 2003; Milan, Vezina & Wells, 2007). For example, data from the most recent Canadian census of 2006 illustrates the demographic changes to the composition of the enumerated 8.9 million Canadian families (Milan, Vezina & Wells). For the first time in Canada, the number of families comprised of couples without children (42.7%) has outnumbered the families comprised of couples with children (41.4%). Secondly, the average Canadian family size has decreased from 4.3 persons in 1921, to 3.7 in 1971, to 2.5 persons per family in 2006. A third point indicates that the number of one-parent families is increasing. Interestingly, the number of lone-parent families that are headed by men increased by 14.6% during the five years prior to 2006; more than twice the growth of lone-parent families headed by women, which grew by 6.3%. Finally, the number of same-sex couples grew 32.6% between 2001 and 2006, more than five times the growth observed for opposite-sex couples, which was 5.9% (Milan, Vezina & Wells).

Just as the Census data illuminates trends and changes in Canadian society that might otherwise go unappreciated, and assists us in recognizing re-orderings of the understandings of what constitutes "family," judicial bodies have had to address contemporary understandings of what constitutes "family status." The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2006) defines "family status" as "being in a parent and child relationship" (p.17). But the Commission goes on to indicate that this definition needs to be broadened to include a parent and child "type" of relationship. This expanded notion embraces a range of circumstances that include relationships without blood or adoptive ties but with similar bonds of care, responsibility, and commitment. The Commission provides examples of this broader understanding to include: parents caring for children by foster- and step-parenting, adults caring for aging parents or relatives with disabilities, and families headed by lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered-persons.

While it is well beyond the scope or intention of this paper to outline or fully engage the complexity of the demographic or notional changes to traditional ideas of the nuclear family, clearly the demographic composition of families and how Canadians conceive of notions of family are changing. However, these changes seem not to be reflected in common understandings in education, whereby principals continue to use the metaphors of "schools as families" or "staff as family" to denote particular connotations for the relationships in

which they themselves are, to greater or lesser degrees, the authority figures. The multiple constitutions and changing definitions of "family" provide the impetus to more critically examine what it might mean for organizational members to be referred to as "family."

If we consider the invocation of family as a metaphoric referent in principal-staff relationship, we can analyze the resulting discourse that constructs and potentially frames how principals think, act, and ultimately control the behaviours of staff (van Djik, 2001; van Leeuwen, 1996). In analyzing usage in this way, we will especially want to consider the potential of such language to alienate and exclude those individuals whose experiences with family have not aligned with traditional notions. What is the "default" image invoked in any individual's mind by the invoking of the term "family" to describe their work relationships? And how does that differ from what its organizational use tends to assume or point to? Laidlaw (2006) contends that

> [The] dominant discourse around "family," often evident in social institutions such as schools, goes something like this: Families are biologically related, families include both a male and female parent, families always have children, families live in one place, families share the same ethnic/cultural/religious background, extended family members live elsewhere, and so on. (p. 43)

This "dominant discourse" constitutes part of a "normative narrative" that can define the possibilities of meaningful existence at the same time as it limits them (Clegg, 1989). Thus, the discourse does not simply describe the social world of schools, but may be the mode through which the world of "reality" emerges (Macleod, 2002). As van Dijk (2003) contends, while critical discourse analysis may be "theoretically and analytically quite diverse," most approaches "ask questions about the way specific discourse structures are deployed in the reproduction of social dominance" (pp. 353-354).

I contend that references to staff as "family" are highly problematic given today's demographics and notions of what the term may in fact represent to many of those who work on school staffs. For example, the use of the term "family" to imply some desirable group that should be emulated or replicated may be alienating or exclusionary for those from dysfunctional or nontraditional families. In fact, an essentialized, single notion of family as being constituted as a traditional, positivistic nuclear unit unproblematized by notions of conflict and distress may not only be inappropriate or presumptive, but also could be used to control the behaviours of organizational members. Having a colleague in a superior rank draw such an analogy between working members of a staff could simply be, for some, overbearing. Depending on who utters the term, the invocation of "family" as a metaphoric referent can also be perceived as paternalistic, and therefore, instead of having the desired effect of drawing a staff together, its use may perpetuate or even instigate all sorts of ways of being and acting that may not, in fact, work to the common good.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

School leadership – what leaders say and do, and how others describe what leaders do – is regularly expressed through metaphors (Earl & Katz, 2006). Thus, it might be argued that discursive analysis provides access to actual theories of leadership "in use" (Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith, 1985). Discourse analysis may open a window into experiential approaches to leadership, as school leaders implicitly or explicitly define their own leadership through language, which in turn begins to structure the relationships and actions of staff members. In uttering, "my staff is like family," there is what van Leeuwen (1996) describes as an implied "possessivated relational identification" of "kinship" and of "belonging together" between the social actors found in schools. Such an utterance connotes both the inclusion of who is "in" while simultaneously pointing to who is "out" of the family. Furthermore, the use of this metaphoric referent provides insight into who possesses the possessed and in doing so it actually further delineates lines of authority (van Leeuwen).

The metaphors that are used to describe organizational life can lead people to see and understand organizations in distinctive ways that are far from impartial (Morgan, 2006). Morgan contends:

> Metaphor is often just regarded as a device for embellishing discourse, but its significance is much greater than this. For the use of metaphor implies *a way of thinking* and *a way of seeing* that pervade how we understand the world generally. (p. 4)

The Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis suggests that language affects how people perceive reality, and that language coerces thought (Whorf, 1956). Additionally, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose that metaphors may actually be people's primary mode of mental representation.

Invoking the term "family" to describe staff therefore sets up a tension between a principal's understanding of the relationships they experience and a principal's potential for creating or conserving an organizational reality steeped in particular and/or essentialized notions of what it means to be "family."

Aristotle (1984) argued that the natural social progression of human beings emanates from the family via small communities to the polis. According to Aristotle, the government of a household is a monarchy since a single ruler governs every house. From this perspective, supporters of monarchist rule, patriarchies or matriarchies, argue that the state should mirror the family, where individuals obey the king or queen as children would obey their father or mother. While perhaps this specific application of an Aristotelian view of organizational hierarchy is extreme, the notion of patriarchal or matriarchal rule by a principal over a staff is somehow more likely or possible when the dominant narrative employed is that of staff as family, from which "staff as my family," is not a far stretch. Morgan (2006) contends that in many formal organizations one can find individuals deferring to the authority of another

exactly as a child defers to parental rule. Clearly the family as a societal unit, at least as traditionally defined, has been historically, and continues to be, a primary locus of socialization and conduit of cultural values and traditions (Todd & Garrioch, 1984), and thus is heavily laden with potential symbolism which principals hope to derive meaning from in their invoking the term.

It is worth noting, at this point, that there are certainly abiding qualities to be found in the language of "family" as a way to describe the close relationships that may occur among staff. According to King (1983), family strengths may be defined as those relationship patterns, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and competencies, and social and psychological characteristics that: (1) create a sense of positive family identity; (2) promote satisfying and fulfilling interaction among family members; (3) encourage the development of the potential of the family group and individual family members; (4) contribute to the family's ability to deal effectively with stress and crisis; and, (5) function as a support/network to other families. Unfortunately, though these relationship patterns could describe many different kinds of family formations, such as a single mother with three children who together work to deal effectively with stress and crisis, it is likely that when "family" is invoked as a metaphoric referent by principals, the underlying image is derived from a more singular notion of what constitutes a traditional nuclear family.

Even if we could define what a traditional family is, and could ascertain every staff member's notion of family as being constituted traditionally, there would be a potentially dim underside contained in this figurative language of family. Family is, structurally, an ideological mechanism governing the reproduction of specific values and ideologies demonstrated in behaviour modification (Todd & Garrioch, 1989). Behaviours deemed to be "good" by parents get rewarded, while those considered to be "bad" are to be extinguished. The relationship between family and control is therefore highly paternalistic as the father/mother/parent/leader is deemed to be the appropriate authority for making decisions on behalf of the rest of the family and is allowed to sanction, punish, and/or grant benefits accordingly. The rights of those taking on the role of "children" in a family structure to criticize or question authority, or to suggest different approaches to the leadership of that unit, is at best limited if not non-existent. Given that Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that the metaphors through which people verbalize abstract concepts influence the ways in which they understand them, it may not therefore be particularly beneficial to the professional relationships of those who work in schools to be constituted as "family."

Against this backdrop of discourses of "staff as family," it is worth noting that some authors (e.g., Cranston, 2007; Hargreaves. 2007; Hord, 1997, 2004; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, 2001) suggest that nurturing a school as a professional learning community holds the greatest promise for the kind of sustained

school improvement that can lead to better student outcomes school-wide. According to Hargreaves (2007), strong and sustainable professional learning communities are,

> Characterized by strong cultures of trusted colleagues who value each other personally and professionally, who are committed to their students, who are willing to discuss and disagree about evidence and data that can inform them about how to improve their practices in ways that benefit their students – and who are willing to challenge one another's practice in doing so. (p. 188)

Indeed, the use of a metaphor of staff as family may work against the promotion of factors essential to a professional learning community, such as critical dialogue focused on improving teaching and learning, the right to question assumptions about teaching and learning, the promotion of inclusive leadership, intelligent inquiry that could lead to risk-taking and innovation, and "thinking outside the box."

THE POWER OF DISCOURSE

We have seen with Lakoff and Johnson (1980) the potential for metaphor to construct by expanding or by limiting our notions of reality. Sikka (2008) posits that language and discourse are not transparent or neutral means for describing or analyzing the social and biological world. Rather, Sikka suggests, language effectively constructs, regulates, and controls knowledge, social relations, and institutions. Van Dijk (2001) proposes that a powerful approach to analyzing social power in organizations can be found through the use of critical discourse analysis.

A starting point for understanding critical discourse analysis, but far from the only starting point, might be found in the definition provided by Stubbs (1983) which suggests that discourse analysis is: a) concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance, b) concerned with the interrelationships between language and society, and c) concerned with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication. Furthermore, Van Dijk (2001) argues that critical discourse analysis provides useful insight into organizational realities and abuses of power because "managing the minds of others is essentially a function of text and talk" (p. 302).

By problematizing through critical discourse analysis the notion of "family" as an appropriate description of staff by those in positions of leadership, we begin to move beyond the boundaries of this single utterance and start to see the interrelationships that coalesce because of this defining statement. Doing so uncovers how fleeting moments of discourse have the potential to make that which is actually based on ideology appear "neutral" and "commonsensical," or "natural" and "quite acceptable" (Stack, 2000; Van Dijk, 2001). Such an analysis of family is critical because it allows for an exploration into how

language can yield abstract insights into such things as status and the distribution of social goods and power in organizations (Gee, 2005).

The invocation of "family" to refer to staff may provide a unitary frame of reference that serves as an organizational ideology that supports management's right to manage, guide and control the members of an organization towards what management proposes is the "common good" (Morgan, 2006). Furthermore, this kind of power imbalance, like the prolonged dependency of a child upon a parent, fosters a relationship between principals and staff in which staff look to the leader to initiate action in response to problematic issues (Morgan). The analysis of leaders' discourses may provide insight into how principals' language limits the acts and thinking of those with less formal power in schools, namely teachers (van Dijk, 1997, 2001).

PRINCIPALS' DISCOURSES OF "STAFF AS FAMILY"

My interest in the invocation of family as a metaphoric referent began during a focus group session related to a study[1] on the constitution of professional learning communities when four separate principals in very distinct school environments described the professional relationships between staff members as being like that of family. Sally Guerin[2], a veteran middle school principal, stated, "A lot of my staff have been here a long time, and we consider each other like family. We are more than a staff. There is this special bond between us. It helps our development as a learning community." After listening to Sally speak, Anique Delaire, a principal of a suburban school in a Francophone community with an enrolment of 205 students and a teaching staff of 13 teachers, smiled and commented, "My teachers are like that also. We are like family. I think it is because our school is so small it's not just a community." Looking at Sally, she continued, "It is much more like a family. There are no cliques and no subgroups."

The conversation continued for a few minutes and then Sam Dodger, principal of a large urban high school noted for the cultural diversity of its over-1700 students and teaching staff of approximately 70, commented, "Sometimes rather than staff being like a community, it's much more like we are family." With a slight laugh he continued, "At some points in the year, I spend more time with them then I do with my real family. I think about staff like family because, in a family, not everybody gets along well with each other at the same time. It's normal. But, like in a family, you will do anything for these people. You will go to the wall for them. What binds us together in difficult times is that we are a family."

In a separate interview, Mike Stevens, a principal of an urban Catholic kindergarten to grade 8 school of about 220 students, stated, "Yeah, we really are a big happy family that, at the same time, is one heck of an awesome profes-

sional learning community." In another individual interview, Sally Guerin reiterated her view of staff as being like family when she said, "My school is like a second family. It's a home away from home. I love my staff. They're like family to me."

As they spoke, I began to ponder whether these principals were aware that by invoking the term "family" to generalize a particular view of organizational life, they were illustrating their own beliefs about schools as social hierarchies, which in turn could rationalize and legitimate their roles as leaders. Moreover, could their use of "family" as a metaphoric referent in regards to their staff provide insight into their conscious and unconscious notions of power? By applying a metaphor of "family" to staff, were these principals expressing an ideological framework that would ultimately replace other metaphors? Could language indeed structure the role, and therefore the actions, of staff within the school while perpetuating the principals' own power relationships as formal leaders (van Leeuwen, 1996)?

The following analysis uses excerpts from in-depth interviews and focus groups to explore conceptualizations of principal leadership. Notions of leadership are explicated through an analysis of staff as family metaphors and the relational and power implications inherent in these metaphors (Forward, 2001).

FAMILY DISCOURSE AND PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

While metaphor has been largely neglected in "mainstream" critical discourse analysis (Hart, 2008), Charteris-Black (2004, as cited in Hart) states, metaphor is "central to critical discourse analysis since it is concerned with forming a coherent view of reality" (p. 28). Forward (2001) contends that metaphors can reveal a deep consciousness that "highlights certain aspects of experience, mutes other aspects of those same experiences, and functions as a prescription for acting in particular ways" (p. 154).

Principal Sally Guerin was the first person to introduce the metaphoric language of staff as family during one of the focus group sessions.

> SG: A lot of my staff has been here a long time and we consider each other like family.

Perhaps it is true that family metaphors are commonplace in contemporary culture (Rigney, 2001). Lakoff (2002) suggests that individuals implicitly understand and relate to issues of power and politics within organizations in terms of family metaphors.

Green (2005) states, "Power and its source are important factors in leadership. The nature and use of power, influence, and authority often determine the effectiveness of the leader" (p. 26). Power is about relationships and referent power, one form of power, is closely tied to a leader's ability to influence individuals'

behaviours based on subordinates' affinity and identification with the leader (Green; Hoy & Miskel, 2007). Having interpersonal relationships with staff that extend over long periods of time is a fundamental condition to nurture referent power because, as Hoy and Miskel explain, referent power relies on a personal loyalty to the principal that only grows over a relatively long period. However, while referent power may be legitimate, the family metaphor may also veil a leader's desire to nurture relationships so as to have staff surrender themselves to a leader's authority and may create an implied condition of "us versus them" based on family affiliation (Rigney, 2001).

> SG: We are more than staff. There is this special bond between us.

Organizational leaders may represent parental figures and their actions may be guided by how they and others believe a "good" parent should act and how a "good" family should be organized (McAdams, Albaugh, Farber, Daniels, Logan, & Olson, 2008). According to McAdams et al., for those who tend to be politically conservative "the good leader is like the strict father, and the good family is organized in terms of a strict-father morality" (p. 979). By contrast, McAdams et al. contend that those who are politically liberal believe that good parents are nurturant and "that good families are organized in terms of a nurturant-parent morality" (p. 980).

However, irrespective of political orientation, simply labelling staff as family does little more than create the delusion of equal participation in family life by men and women (Rosenblatt, 1994). For example, in the context of the language of family, gendered roles of familial relations would be replicated as normative in the culture of a school. After all, our notions of "mothering" and "fathering" are by no means equal. "Mothering" is less about the act of bringing a child into the world and is more about the act of caring for a child, while "fathering" signifies the act of begetting a child (van Leeuwan, 1996). The simple illusion of staff as family and an accompanying "domestic script" hide the extent to which there has been a division of labour in education whereby women have been responsible for the caring of children as teachers, while historically kept out of positions of authority and power in educational leadership (Shakeshaft, 1999). Thus, here, the invocation of staff as "family" could be seen as preserving the status quo of dominant associations regarding gendered roles in families, and mapping those onto a school's culture.

Moreover, it has been suggested (Tagiuri & Davis, 1992; Fukuyama, 1995) that dominant familial goals and values by and large nurture, develop, and support family members, and when a metaphor of staff as family is invoked, these underlying values can be used to shape the culture of an organization. Sanday (1981) suggests that most matriarchies, while a rare phenomenon in Western cultures, seem to rule their societies peacefully through power of attraction with a priority placed on social peace among followers. Matriarchal leaders do not hoard decision-making power unless it is seen as absolutely

necessary to prevent social dissension (Sanday). In Western cultural contexts, paternalism is viewed as being synonymous with authoritarian leadership (Pelligrini & Scandura, 2008). While there may be cultural variations that inform explanations of this kind of leadership, paternalistic leadership is typically viewed negatively in Western societies (Pelligrini & Scandura, 2008). Paternalistic leadership has been defined (Farh & Cheng, 2000, as cited in Pelligrini & Scandura, 2008) as "a style that combines strong discipline and authority with fatherly benevolence." (p. 19).

Though the matriarchal model may provide a more democratic seeming approach to leadership, either form of this type of parental leadership when practiced in the extreme does little to build the interpersonal capacity required for a school to develop as a professional learning community or to minimize hierarchical mechanisms of control (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, 2001). The evocation of family can be used to dismiss the necessity for the kind of critical questioning, and at times unlearning, of ineffective past practices required by staff as they become collectively committed to improving student achievement school-wide (Cranston, 2007).

> AD: We are like family. There are no cliques and no subgroups.

It has been argued that the metaphor of family obscures the extent to which organizational members may compete intensely for resources, may have extremely different values and needs, and may experience the organization very differently (Rosenblatt, 1994). The metaphor of family implies conformity and homogeneity and conceals real differences that exist among organizational members who vie for authority, power, and the ability to control finite resources (Rosenblatt). In a school context, it is highly unlikely that the metaphor of family will lead to the kinds of decentralized decision-making and shared leadership that are hallmarks of professional learning communities (Hord, 1997, 2004). Professional leaning can require discussion, debate, and oftentimes involves conflict (Cranston, 2007). Attempts to render staff as uniform, without subgroups or cliques, promote a false impression of like-mindedness among staff, which can lead to a false sense of consensus or, even worse, instill a sense of "groupthink" that leaves people uncritical of current practices, even when these practices are ineffective (Hoy & Miskel, 2007).

> SD: It's much more like we are family. You will go to the wall for them. What binds us together in difficult times is that we are a family.

The power of the family metaphors reside in their capacity to call forth idealized and comforting images of warmth, safety, loyalty, and love (Rosenblatt, 1994). As Rigney (2001) suggests, the metaphor of family seems to conjure up images of "a dependable source of sustenance and stability, protection and mutual aid in the face of danger and hardship – in short, a haven in a heartless world" (p. 15). A particular image of parent as benevolent protector and all-knowing sage is clearly embedded in such a notion of family. The positivist notion of

the selfless, faultless leader who stands beyond criticism and has everyone else's best interests in mind may be just what a particular principal hopes to invoke when referring to staff as family. Also, there lies in the admission that the principal would "go to the wall for them," the unspoken expectation or tacit agreement that staff would just as likely and just as appropriately "go to the wall" for the principal. A principal behaving in unprincipled ways, but on the record as being willing to "go to the wall" for his or her staff, could subtly prevent or weaken dissenting voices as staff might be reluctant to seem less dedicated to the "cause" of the family than the principal reports to be. Finally, it might sometimes be advantageous for a staff to see themselves as being bound "together in difficult times," especially when facing external challenges, like budget cuts or contentious policy issues. However, being expected to be bound "together in difficult times" while facing internal challenges issuing from the behaviour or attitudes of individuals on staff or the principal could create a truly dysfunctional climate.

MS: We really are a big happy family.

The family metaphor, as an abstraction, challenges notions of responsibility and blame making all in the organization potentially responsible for the actions of each other, while at the same time absolving individuals from being held accountable for their own actions (Rosenblatt, 1994). Gibbs-Dyer (2003) writes, "Because fathers and mothers see the success of their offspring inextricably connected to their own success and sense of well-being, who you are, is often more important that what you do" (p. 408). In addition, the sentiment of a staff as a "big happy family" may arguably be more proclaimed than achieved, romanticized and selectively remembered (Rosenblatt). As Coontz (1992, 1998 as cited in Rigney, 2001) contends, it may well represent "the way we never were" rather than the way we ever were.

Furthermore, from an organizational context, the notion of a staff as a "happy family" dismisses the fact that some degree of conflict is not only central to but also a natural part of community. This rosy view also does not address how teachers manage conflicts, whether they suppress or embrace their differences, how they work to define the community borders and ultimately commit to the potential for organizational learning and change (Achinstein, 2002). The "happy" family metaphor does little to stimulate the development of the individual and organizational capacity required in a professional learning community (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001).

DISCUSSION: FAMILY DISCOURSES AS CONTROL MECHANISMS

The notion of family, traditionally defined as "a unity of interacting personalities" (Hess & Handel, 1994, p. 1), was refined by Hess and Handel to conceptualize family as "a unit, a system formed by its members – not merely the aggregation of its component dyadic relationships" (p.1). This more devel-

oped understanding recognizes the multidirectional and mutually influencing nature of the human interactions among the individuals who form the family unit. It also recognizes that the unique traits of any individual will exert an influence on the totality of the family as a whole. It is in this latter notion of family relationships and issues of reciprocity that organizational behaviour may be better understood because, as Bossard (1956) states:

> Whenever a number of people are in continuing association with each other, differences in the part that each plays in the common life manifest themselves. These may be differences in the tasks that each performs, or differences in other contributions which each makes to the group. (p. 201)

Authors like Sergiovanni (1992, 1994) and Starratt (1990) favour a metaphor of a school's staff as being like "family" over other metaphoric abstractions employed in management or organizational behaviour literature because, in their estimation, institutional factors such as size, influence, and focus mean schools more closely resemble families than do large corporations. Sergiovanni (1992) suggests that,

> The idea of a school as a learning community suggests a kind of connectedness among members that resembles what is found in a family, a neighborhood, or some other closely knit group, where bonds tend to be familial or even sacred. (p. 47)

To Starratt, the kinds of norms, as found in a family structure, explain what a school's teaching staff does, how they do it and why they do it. Sergiovanni (1992) advocates for familial norms to inform the adult relationships at school and become compass settings or road maps that guide a staff's journey to become a professional learning community.

Furthermore, drawing from the work of Bourdieu (1986), it may be argued that there is a "cultural capital" that comes along with the application of the metaphor of "family" to a school's teaching staff. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital can be expanded to suggest that, similarly to how cultural habits and dispositions can be inherited from the family, a process of assimilation within a school staff is fundamentally important to an individual's success in the school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu (1986) defined "capital" as those resources whose distribution defines the social structure and whose deployment figures centrally in the reproduction of that structure. Such resources are not just economic, but also social and cultural. It has been argued (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) that schools are essentially institutions that utilize particular linguistic structures and authority patterns that are laden with the social and cultural experiences of those in power. Therefore, when applied to schools, the metaphor of teaching staff as "family" may be used to draw boundaries around, and limit, larger concepts of the school as community.

The word family, when used to describe the closeness of individuals in organizations, is often viewed as a forceful term to describe "the strength of people's feelings and sense of connection to others" (Newman & Grauerholz, 2002, p. 4). While the term family is typically used to present "a stable, conflict-free happy image in public" of human relationships, the image offers "a somewhat unrealistic portrait" of human interaction and can, in fact, be used to obscure a very different organizational reality (Newman & Grauerholz, p. 82). Similar to the complexity of relationships within a large family system, in most organizations the role that an individual holds is regulated relative to her or his position within the group, as attributed to her or him by the other group members in their reciprocal relationships (Bossard, 1956).

If Sergiovanni's (1994) proposition that thinking, language, and practice are intimately related, then it follows that the application of "family" as a metaphor for teaching staff, specifically when it is used to describe the closeness in the professional relationships among staff, may impact deep structures of thought which can guide a principal's actions. The discourse of "staff as family," replete with ideological and historical assumptions around the nuclear family, may become a mechanism to govern and control teachers' behaviours and diminish the type of collective teacher agency required in a learning organization (Senge, 1990). In addition, Mitchell and Sackney (2001) are highly critical of the negative effects that power relationships established in the current educational hierarchy have on the abilities of schools to operate as learning communities. Indeed, the discourse of family that continues to focus on the father or mother as provider/leader can in fact perpetuate paternalistic and hierarchical relationships rather than foster the horizontal power stratifications advocated by those who promote the development of professional learning communities (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, 2001).

CONCLUSION: THE PERILS OF COLLEAGUES AS FAMILY

Discourse analysis challenges us to move from seeing language as abstract to seeing our words as having meaning in a particular historical, social, and political context (McGregor, 2003). The choice to use the metaphoric referent of *family* in discourse by school leaders may indicate more about these principals' thinking than it does about the actual nature of the adult relationships in the school (McCourt, 1997). But, from what is known, principal leadership to nurture a staff as a learning community should center on the kind of relationships required to shape teachers' beliefs to support students' opportunities to learn, and should allow for the kind of disagreement and disequilibrium that comes with critical questioning and debates of best practices (Cranston, 2007). As evident in this discussion, the discourse of family may in fact contradict and stymie this opportunity as principals consciously or without due reflection invoke the metaphor of staff as family as a powerful mechanism to control staff's action and cognition.

The professional learning community concept emphasizes that principals should attempt to minimalize their own need to control everything that happens in the school (Crow, Hausman & Scribner, 2002; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, 2001). The notion of a professional learning community requires a "fundamental shift in the ideology that shapes the understandings of schools" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001, p.6), and this is not an easy endeavor. Professional learning communities require principals who are willing to lead from a web of interpersonal relationships, and not from the apex of the organization (Murphy, 2002). Against this backdrop, an important understanding of the "family" metaphor may be found in the mental roles it creates for self, and for others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Principals need to confront and critically analyze the personal narratives that shape and constrain the ways they view their staffs. This in turn should lead to reflection on and analysis of their own leadership roles and their use, and potentially abuse, of power (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). The invocation of the phrase "like family" appears innocuous on the surface, but its over-riding consequences of structuring the relationships and solidifying relational identifications and organizational realities found in schools may in fact constrain those relationships, creating or perpetuating leadership and organizational practices that inhibit growth and exclude staff (van Dijk, 2001, 2003; van Leeuwen, 1996). The concept of "family" is ultimately so laden with powerful and unwieldy symbolism, and this power is so likely to potentially include or exclude unfairly, that much more thoughtful caution ought to be exercised in its use to describe staff by principals. In a diverse and globalizing world, phrases "like family" and the underlying structure they presume are ineffectual as they convey too many meanings to too many people. School leaders, as reflective practitioners, should explore the language they use to become more aware and critical of the underlying theories that inform their understandings of the world (Reagan, 1993;Terry, 1993).

NOTES

1. The Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba approved the study.
2. All of the names used in this article are pseudonyms.

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