

Empirical Findings on the Career Paths of Aspiring Elementary School Teachers

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Abstract This is a study about teacher careers to elementary school principals. The aim of this contribution is to reconstruct the strategies guiding aspiring elementary school principals in their careers and to analyse those in order to answer the question: How do elementary school teachers manage to become principals? To obtain qualitative data elementary school teachers and new principals in Schleswig-Holstein were interviewed. An ethnographic approach consisting of observational research in qualification measures for principals enabled further insights. The analysis of the empirical data was accomplished using the documentary method and the theoretical concepts of Bourdieu and Goffman. The different forms and paradigms of inner orientation of the status passage into the position of principals are analysed and condensed into types.

Keywords Teacher Careers, Ethnographic Research, Documentary Method, Typology

1999, p. 32). As early as 1997, the association presented a scheme for nationwide unitary qualifications, criticising the fact that the federal structure of education in Germany had led to the states having sixteen different school laws defining and codifying the responsibilities and duties of principals differently. They recommended the introduction of a unitary professional curriculum to train principals for all school types in all states, based on an orientation unit, supplementary training modules, a compact course immediately before entering the office, and a further course during the probationary period. This was not realised. Instead, individual states have begun offering a wide variety of options that differ in type, length, content and emphasis (ranging from e.g. mandatory one-week introductory and supplementary classes in Bavaria to a voluntary three-week preparatory course in Baden-Württemberg). The numerous changes that have been introduced in the field in all federal states over the past few years bear witness to the fact that training and qualifying principals remains a reform in progress.

This constant tinkering also indicates that the expectations of a principal and, by extension, the qualification for the position are currently being reconsidered. The question is what competences incoming principals will need to acquire to master the challenges of the future.

Over the past few years, the profile of school principals' responsibilities has changed greatly. Reforms have given schools much greater autonomy, which has translated into greater scope for decision-making (cf. Semling/Zölch, 2008, p. 213). That principal shoulder a great degree of responsibility and are centrally important factors in ensuring the quality of their schools has been shown in a number of studies (e.g. Bonsen, 2006; Busemann/Oelkers/Rosenbusch, 2007). The meta-study of learning success in pupils quotes the „managerial capacity and leadership“ of principals as two key factors (Hattie, 2013, p. 100). These competences can ensure undisturbed learning, transparent goals and „high expectations of both teachers and pupils“ (Hattie, 2013, p. 99), all of which positively influences the success of pupils.

Today, the task of the principal is no longer seen as limited to ensuring that the school's day-to-day operation runs smoothly. Rather, principals should proactively shape and

1. Research Question

Within the German school system, the office of principal is the only career option that allows elementary school teachers access to higher salaries and greater responsibilities without taking them out of the school. Unlike secondary and vocational schools, elementary schools do not offer teachers any alternative senior positions such as department head or grade level curriculum coordination.

Teachers seeking to become principals face two challenges: There is neither a formal training for the position, nor have the tasks and responsibilities ever been sufficiently codified to develop a model of the competencies required for the position. This problem has been debated since the 1990s, but has come no closer to a resolution (see e.g. Combe/Helsper, 1997). Principals' associations and their national umbrella organisation, the ASD (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Schulleiterverbände Deutschlands – Verband deutscher Schulleitungen e.V.*) have been calling for the position of principal to be recognised as a distinct profession with formal training and qualifications (cf. ASD,

guide the development of the school at every level. Since the 1990s, they have been expected to master analyses of their school's current standing, plan and implement the realisation of innovative pedagogical ideas, and evaluate these reforms (cf. Brohm, 2004, p. 174f.). However, in reality, active principals in their majority state that „only about 10% to 20% of their time was available for the pedagogical aspects of their job while 80% to 90% was required for administrative tasks“ (Rustemeyer, 1998, p. 14). In addition to this burden, principals, especially those of elementary schools, still have a considerable number of teaching hours. The exact figure depends on the size of their school and, in small schools, may reach 20 hours a week. Along with the absence of a structured curriculum of professional qualification, this combination of management and teaching tasks makes it difficult to conceptualise being a principal as the assumption of a different role. Promoted teachers do not become sufficiently aware that they are in fact leaving behind their old profession and entering a genuinely new one that is not only complex, but requires a number of different competences that their original training did not provide. Especially in the early phase of their new function, principals usually lack the time to engage intellectually with different concepts of leadership and aspects of effective school management, facing the pressure of deadlines and administrative duties (cf. Lungershausen, 2011).

This emphasises the importance of professional training prior to promotion that not only seeks to remedy immediate difficulties, but imparts the ability to manage long-term, goal-oriented development tasks.

At this time, though, the choice how intensively to prepare for this demanding task lies with the individual teachers seeking to become principals. The absence of a structured path to promotion allows and requires them to shape their own career paths. It is possible to rise to the position of principal at any age and from any position. Aspiring teachers themselves design their career paths, choose their next steps, and decide individually how to acquire the competences they consider necessary.

The aim of this contribution is to reconstruct the strategies guiding aspiring elementary school principals in their careers, uncover regularities and underlying structures, and to analyse those in order to answer the question: How do elementary school teachers manage to become principals?

2. Research Question

The notable mismatch between the increased demands made on principals and the still uneven and patchy efforts at professional qualification informs this study's aim. It is to gain insight into the way elementary school teachers seeking to become principals deal with the considerable leeway they have in approaching this career step. In its focus, the research goes beyond the willingness or unwillingness to avail themselves of voluntary qualification courses. Rather, its aim is to gain a detailed understanding of various aspects of the

teachers' career aspirations and behaviour.

Specifically, it addresses the following questions:

- What steps to elementary school teachers take to pave their way to a principal's position?
- How do others in their social environment influence them in that endeavour?
- How important is the position from which career-minded teachers begin their efforts?

This contribution will first address, in chapter three, its theoretical foundation and specifically those parts of Pierre Bourdieu's theory that are central to it. The fourth chapter will then methodically and methodologically lay out the empirical research and data evaluation methods applied. The results, laid out in chapter five, will also develop a descriptive typology from its findings. A short summary and conclusion will close chapter six.

3. Theoretical Considerations

The theoretical background to this analysis of elementary school teacher careers to principal is provided by the concept of *habitus* developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His conceptions of habitus, social field, and capital are useful tools both to elucidate the teachers' *modus operandi* (cf. Bohnsack, 2007) and to study the outside influences they are subject to. Bourdieu understands habitus as the “root of practices“ (Bourdieu, 1981, p. 187), creating the actions that typify the character of the actor. A habitus is created through experiences, seeking conditions that match its preconceptions and excluding those that do not. It is, therefore, both a “structured structure” and a “structuring structure” (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 98) interpreting daily perceptions on the basis of incorporated patterns of thought.

A social field encompasses all actors who are guided by and place value on a set of – implicitly familiar – rules. This produces a certain closure, since “the actors objectively agree to associate the same sign, speech act or action with the same meaning and the same meaning with the same sign or rather to refer their cyphering and deciphering activities to the same system of constant relations (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 51). Access to a given social field requires a matching habitus or the flexibility needed to acquire it.

In addition, Bourdieu's theory sees individuals as holding different amounts of social, economic and cultural capital. The amount of these types of capital an individual holds determines their appropriate position within a social field. In analysing professional careers, social and cultural capitals are key factors. Whereas cultural capital can be accumulated by attending formal educational institutions (in the case of principals: the professional qualification courses mentioned above), social capital results from relationships, requiring “constant relational effort in the shape of perpetual exchange acts (...) through which recognition is constantly reaffirmed” to maintain it (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 67). According to Bourdieu, all forms of capital can function as symbolic capital values in social interaction. He writes: “To be precise,

the form that each type of capital takes as it is perceived is the product of the incorporation of the structuring or contrasts that are part of the structure of its distribution.”(Bourdieu, 1998, p. 108).

In analysing the object of this study, habitus, social field, and capital must be understood as follows: Habitus produces an inclination to seek promotion to principal while also creating the patterns of thought and action that shape the career path to that end. Out empirical data has shown that key aspects of the individual career structure are the choice of qualification course, the open thematisation of career ambitions within the social field, and the pace at which steps are taken. Teachers seeking to become principals follow their individual 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 73), guided by structures of meaning that are applied automatically rather than consciously chosen. Nonetheless, they do not act in isolation, but in continuous interaction with the social field that surrounds them. All respondents pursue the same goal – promotion to principal – but in that endeavour, they have access to different constellations and volumes of capital.

4. Research Method

The empirical data that forms the basis of this study was generated in the course of the author's doctoral dissertation on the influence of gender on the promotion of elementary school teachers to principal. It was gathered through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The interviews were conducted with 15 teachers seeking promotion and newly promoted principals (under two years in office) and lasted between 45 and 80 minutes each. All were transcribed in full. Respondents were chosen according to the following criteria: They were employed at a public elementary school in the state of Schleswig-Holstein in order to ensure they had comparable career structures (these differ in other states). Further, they were to already have taken part in one of the two options for professional qualification offered by the state. Finally, the sample was selected to ensure a reasonably balanced proportion of genders. The age of respondents was between 32 and 56 years.

Ethnographic research took place over two years in the two forms of professional qualification the authorities in Schleswig-Holstein offer to aspiring principals. These are the flexible, modular course “Preparatory Training for School Management” (*Training zur Vorbereitung auf Schulleitungsaufgaben TvaS*) provided by the Institute for Quality Development at Schleswig-Holstein Schools (*Institut für Qualitätsmanagement an Schulen Schleswig-Holstein IQSH*), and a distance learning curriculum “School Management and Quality Control” (*Schulmanagement und Qualitätsentwicklung*) through Kiel University. Both are optional and not required for promotion.

The research question suggested triangulating the methods of data gathering, since observation protocols allowed more profound insight into the conception and implementation of

both qualification measures for subsequent analysis applying Bourdieu's theory. However, the observation's findings are secondary to the object of this study.

The data generated was analysed using the documentary method (cf. Nohl, 2008). According to those precepts, interview sequences were initially described and structured with no reference to theory or contextual knowledge. This requires developing categories to allow for a thematic structure for each interview. Through this structure, it was possible to access the emphases placed by the respondents which, regardless of the structure provided by the interview questions, varied considerable from person to person. Individual perceptions of relevance can be deduced from the use of 'focus metaphors' (*Fokussierungsmetaphern*, (Bohnsack, 2007, p. 123), long narrative sequences often including examples and dialogue quoted verbatim, and eagerness to elaborate beyond the boundaries of the interview questions.

This type of interpretation by descriptive formulation is not required for observation protocols since their written form already makes them interpretative. It is vital, though, for the author to make every effort to avoid extraneous interpretations and ascriptions entering into their written form.

After a thematic sequencing has outlined the issues addressed by each respondent, the mode of presentation is analysed through reflective interpretation. This approach allows us to recognise the interpretative frameworks that structure the respondents' actions. It is helpful to compare and contrast individual interviews. This helps to highlight the various backgrounds against which respondents choose to thematise their actions. IN addition, contrasting interview sequences between respondents – referred to as comparative analysis in the context of the documentary approach – also ensures research quality by reducing subjective perspective on the part of the researcher. Comparative analysis limits the determination of the researcher's perspective through the introduction of contrastive empirical data. It must thus embrace positions uttered by different respondents. “Interpretation fundamentally takes place within the comparative horizon of imagining hypothetical alternative practices” (Bohnsack, 2007, p. 195).

On the basis of this comparative analysis, a typology of respondents was generated based on homologous career patterns, their respective *modus operandi*. These shared characteristics between respondents, the 'tertium comparationis', are the four different patterns of orientation identified in their career paths: non-explicit, untargeted career pursuit, career pursuit as social distinction, career pursuit through social validation, and low-intensity career growth. In their interviews, the respondents address the topic of 'promotion to principal' in four basic variations. We will now address the characteristics of each of these types to outline both their homogenous qualities and the distinction from the respective others.

Whereas the present study focuses on the typology generated through comparative analysis, the dissertation

itself introduced a further level of analysis in a sociogenetic analysis of the influence of gender on the career paths pursued (cf. Bobeth-Neumann, 2013).

5. Findings

The four types identified in interviews and observation were classified [according to the tertium comparationis] into the categories of 'non-committal experimentation', 'social distinction', 'social validation' and 'gradual advancement'. The following table provides a brief overview of the four core categories regarding the situative context of their careers, typical interaction patterns, intentions, and consequences for the individual respondents. These characteristics combine to constitute each type: (Table 1)

We will now look more closely at the types generated from the data and their characteristics:

Type 1: non-committal experimentation

The individuals corresponding to the type of 'non-committal experimentation' – three female teachers in the sample – attended more qualification courses for aspiring principals than other respondents, but, despite having already acquired the official certificates, had not applied for a promotion at the time of the survey. Their interdependence

of a great need for social reassurance and community and their relatively undefined goals trap them in an endless cycle of qualification and certification. The result of this orientation is a discrepancy between their qualifications and the implementation of the cultural capital thus acquired. Teachers of this type fear losing their original social field – the faculty – when they display any career ambitions. This manner of not communicating their goals is documented in a statement by elementary school teacher Ms K.:

„I didn't tell anyone, (...) it really sounds like, I want to be principal, has she lost it? (...) I said I'm doing a qualification course.“(Z. 31-33)

The social capital accumulated through a good position in the faculty is worthless for future careers since its capacity to generate support and validation is marginal. Its binding character combines neatly with the type's habitual predisposition as a further obstacle to the effective pursuit of a career: Their habitus seeks “a relatively constant world of situations that are apt to reinforce its predispositions by offering the most ready market for its products.”(Bourdieu, 1987, p. 114). The hidden communication of career goals also prevents any social encouragement as it leaves the social field ignorant of the actors' actual career goals.

Table 1. Characteristics of Types

Type	Situative Context	Interactions	Intentions	Consequences
non-committal experimentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - close ties within extant faculty through assuming caring , 'maternal' functions - considerable readiness to participate in qualification and further education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - career ambitions are trivialised or hidden - strong identification as member of a collective faculty - career ambition rarely sustained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - applying knowledge gained through qualification measures in current position - numerous reasons given to delay possible application for promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - career stagnation - enjoyment of qualification and further education independent of whether career path is pursued consistently
Social distinction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - marginal role in faculty due to a tendency to seek social distinction and enter conflicts - strong confidence in own competences - targeted qualification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - open thematisation of career ambition - active networking outside faculty - external validation is immaterial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specific efforts to achieve promotion by strategic applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quick realisation of ambitions through promotion - readiness to abandon old faculty contacts
Social validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high acceptance in faculty due to professional commitment - participating in qualification measure to gain acceptance in faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - open thematisation of career ambitions to gain acceptance - seeking validation and encouragement within and outside of faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specific efforts to achieve promotion by strategic applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quick realisation of ambitions through promotion - maintaining old faculty contacts
Gradual advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enhanced position within faculty through temporary positions of responsibility - low significance of qualification measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - open thematisation of career ambition is unimportant - strong encouragement through extensive network - encouragement is vital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gradual 'growth' into senior position, not targeted career ambition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promotion is ultimately realised - ambition remains weak

The following interview sequences with elementary school teacher Ms A. exemplify both the type's caring, maternal habitus and the tendency to use knowledge derived from career-enhancing qualification courses in their current position: "Well, when it comes to the maternal thing (...) I think I manage to be the one who brings chocolate, or cleans up. (...) I think I'm a bit of the faculty 'mommy'." (Z. 262-266)

„I'd say the things I took away from the qualification courses, I try to apply that here on the small scale. I've just taken a course on team building and I thought: that's true, we aren't at all like that here. We have to do something about that.“ (Z. 112-115)

The career path of this type stalls in a cycle of repeated qualification measures. Individuals attend more 'TvaS' modules than would be required for professional qualification, but do not use them to develop contacts among other aspiring teachers or create a support network. Within the courses, individuals of this type have a marginal position often at odds with the purpose of the class. In one case, the introduction of the course met with a negative response from one participant on being addressed as "future leaders" (*angehende Führungskräfte*). The protocol records the following words:

"I don't know what all this talk of leaders is supposed to be good for. I'm not a leader and I don't know if I'll ever apply." (Z. 186-187)

The attitude of 'non-committal experimentation' also causes irritation in other participants. The respondent Ms A. reports two situations in which fellow attendees asked her rather incredulously:

"What? And then you come here? How can you do that? (...) Why would I take that time? 'Why do you spend your time here voluntarily? It's a waste of time and money.' (...) That is typical, elementary-school biddies who are never goal-oriented." (Z. 346-367)

Though outside observers see individuals of this type as caught in a trap, having spent time and effort on qualifications they are now not using to further their careers, they themselves neither consider their path a failure, nor do they give up hope of eventual promotion. They do not undertake any concrete steps towards that end, but tend to marshal arguments in favour of postponing it. Frequent reasons given are the age of their children in need of care, the professional situation of their husbands, or the criteria for positions currently vacant. "The schemes by which a habitus perceives and judges situation and on which all strategies of avoidance are based are largely the result of an unconscious and unwanted avoidant behaviour." (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 114). As the expectation of a career becomes hazier, their focus increasingly shifts to the idea of participation in qualification measures as a personally enriching experience. At the time of the interview, their aspirations were stagnant, though they had not been abandoned.

Concentrating on the accumulation of cultural capital without recognising the restrictions of the current position or acquiring social capital beyond the faculty is no viable path

to promotion, as our findings for the non-committal experimentation type have shown. Successful promotion to principal appears to depend on a variety of factors beyond participation in formal preparatory courses.

An entirely different *modus operandi* is documented in the following type, 'social distinction'.

Type 2: Social Distinction

This type represents a speedy and efficient career path to principal. In the sample, it was represented by three female and two male teachers. With regard to the need for social integration and close ties as well as consistent goal-orientation, it represents the greatest possible contrast with the type 'non-committal experimentation'. Individuals of this type tend to create distinctions and avoid close interpersonal ties in their original social field, the school faculty. This orientational pattern is clearly evident in this statement by a respondent, elementary school teacher Ms Th.:

"My colleagues are not my friends, that's clear to me, and this is my workplace and not my living room. That's it. I like them, we get along, and there isn't anyone that I can't do anything with (laughs). But they aren't my friends. That's just a simple fact. All very, er, very professional." (Z. 272-274)

The interviews further show that distancing from their colleagues goes hand in hand with a devaluation of their competences and a strongly enhanced sense of the value of the respondent's own abilities. The habitually preferred distinction of 'me' and 'them' also provides a contrast in perceived competence ("Yes, I think I do more than they and that way I have an eye on some things they overlook" Mr W., Z. 199-200) and incompetence. Individuals of this type generate capital gains from the devaluation of their colleagues whom they refer to as "jokes" (*Pfeifen*) or "bunch of whiners" (*Jammerfraktion*).

Given this precarious social position, the type 'social distinction' can expect at best limited encouragement along the career path, though the goals are clearly communicated. Our survey has shown, though, that these individuals are largely independent of the encouragement of colleagues as they quickly close ranks with other aspirational teachers in their qualification courses and actively develop networks. Their social capital is strategically accumulated with an eye for career support. New contacts at equal or higher rank are the product of "individual or collective investment strategies that consciously or unconsciously aim to create and maintain social relations which, sooner or later, can be concretely useful." (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 65).

In contrast to the 'non-committal experimentation' type, where the choice of qualification measure is fairly random, this type tends to invest time strategically. Teachers mostly prefer the newly established part-time MA curriculum over established TvaS courses. They praise their curriculum over the negatively contrasted TvaS classes:

"That's a more valuable qualification. (...) When I apply and there is competition, I can say that right here, bang, there's one more thing on my side." (Mr L., Z.117-119)

As a result, these respondents gain distinctive symbolic

capital from an as yet uncommon strategy- “The value of the characteristics that can function as symbolic capital does not lie (...) in one or the other inalienable quality of the practices and goods, but in their *marginal value* which depends on their number and must necessarily decrease the more numerous and widely distributed they are.”(Bourdieu, 1987, p. 249, emphasis in the original). In their application strategy, the valuation of symbolic capital outweighs that of the cultural kind. Considerations of acquiring it are therefore secondary, not least because their habitus already provides these individuals with a greater degree of confidence in their own competences.

Following the completion of their curriculum, individuals of this type tend to apply for vacant positions quickly. They are also the youngest among the respondents; Mr L. was 32 years old at the time of the interview. Their *modus operandi* is not guided by the logic of acquiring competences over the long term or through prolonged 'experimentation'. Rather, it is based on the pragmatic hope of promotion within a short time. Respondent Mr W. considered an even faster career track:

„If a school comes up that makes sense to me, I could see myself applying even while I'm still studying.” (Z. 55-57)

Given their marginalised position within the faculty even at the outset, the type 'social distinction' does not face the challenge of social separation.

Type 3: Social Validation

The one female and three male teachers representing this type in the sample dispose of extensive social capital within and beyond the faculty which is derived from their notable professional efforts and the general perception that they are highly qualified. This form of social capital has a strongly supportive function in that it generates validation and encouragement. All respondents report strong expressions of support from inside their social field. Thus, Mr B. quotes his former principal:

„He got me into his school and (...) he also always signalled that he wanted me to do more for the school. (...) He said to me: 'You absolutely have to do this.'“ (Z. 53-60)

The 'social validation' type depends more strongly on such support than the other three. Positive reactions from within the social field here generate actions and are elicited again and again by their interactive career strategies. Respondents report communicating their intentions early, thus facilitating “*mutual impulses*”(Bourdieu, 2001, p. 270, emphasis original). Their entire career path is informed by the quest for validation. They participate in qualification measure not so much in order to acquire professional competences as to attain validation, as part of a “structure of needs (that is) fundamentally merely the coherent choice of a given habitus” (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 589). The narrative sequences in their interviews are dominated by accounts of positive feedback and encouragement, sidelining the actual content of the courses. Respondent Ms B. recalls the following scene from one class:

“She (the instructor) gave me such a positive feedback, she listed all the adjectives, I still can't recall that fully. Well,

I was eloquent and communicative, now I can think of something else. I was made, like, made for this task. That gave me the final boost. Getting that feedback from our instructor.“ (Z. 115-120)

The accumulation of social capital here is dominant over that of an excess of cultural one, contrasting strongly with the type 'non-committal experimentation'.

Individuals of this type very actively apply for openings from their secure position of acceptance. Some respondents applied to two schools simultaneously while another immediately followed one rejection with another application. This level of activity in applications will, in turn, generate symbolic capital for the 'social validation' type by causing individuals to be viewed as having good career potential: “The chase counts (...) at least as much as the prey, if not more.”(Bourdieu, 2001, p. 309). It continually connects the idea of promotion to principal with their person.

Following successful promotion, individuals of this type – unlike those of the 'social distinction' type – tend to maintain the contacts in their original social field.

Type 4: Gradual Advancement

One male and two female respondents whose *modus operandi* was characterised by a gradual, smooth career are classed as the type 'gradual advancement'. Unlike the others, individuals of this type do not seek promotion to principal by attending qualification measures with no previous management experience. Instead, their career path is characterised by having served in management positions temporarily (e.g., as a substitute, deputy or interim principal), but also left such positions with no sense of loss or fear of career regression. Their history of temporary leadership positions means that these individuals care the oldest in the sample. By the time of their final promotion to regular principal, they were all over 50 years of age. Due to their experience in leadership positions, these individuals receive recognition and credit, enhancing their standing in the social field. They are accorded the “competence of experts”(Bourdieu, 1982, p. 121) for their ability to accumulate cultural capital successively over the course of many years. This assumption serves them in the form of symbolic capital, evoking widespread encouragement to seek promotion. Respondent Ms K. recalls such instances of validation:

“Even the school authority always said, back then: 'Please do that, It's a good thing, you know how to do it already.' The parents said 'Yes, do it. You're doing it so well.' And the teachers wanted me. And privately, everybody also said 'You can do it! Do it!'“ (Z. 75-78)

This practical experience not only motivated the social field to ascribe competences to these individuals, but also gave them a habitual assurance of their own abilities. The “practical ability”(Bourdieu, 1982, p. 121) was confirmed by no formal certificate by the time of their application. Individuals of this type do not value participation in formal qualification courses highly and usually only participate shortly before their application. In doing so, they do not hope to consolidate their professional knowledge, but merely to

“apparently meet the requirements of the official rule (...) and at the same time to gather the respect or recognition that are almost universally accorded to acts whose sole apparent purpose is to abide by the rule.”(Bourdieu, 1987, p. 200).

In contrast with the other types generated from the sample, individuals of the 'gradual advancement' do not need to confront their social field with their aspirations and develop suitable communication strategies, but rather are asked to apply for vacant positions by others in that field. Since such encouragement represents “indispensable social capital to achieve optimal returns on economic and cultural capital”(Bourdieu, 1981, p. 190), the respondents value it highly.

Despite broad positive reactions, individuals of this type neither show an express desire to rise nor an expectation of promotion. Their focus is normally the position of principal at a specific school – their own, or one they are familiar with – and they are often so late in applying that the risk of the position being given to a competitor is significant. This relaxed, patient attitude is well documented in a statement by respondent Ms M.:

„The job was advertised. Nobody applied in the first round. In the second round two people applied, but the parents rejected both candidates. Then our school authority said now Kiel (the state capital, trsl.) was to nominate someone. Well, Kiel looked for a year and found no adequate candidate, and the job was advertised again. The process starts again with the first round, which means you can't apply from within at that point. (...) In the end, the *Schulrat* asked me: 'Why don't you apply?'" (Z. 11-34)

Individuals of this type operate in superordinate, incorporated positions that provide scope for action and recognition for many years before finally being formally promoted. Following Bourdieu, we can conclude that the formal acquisition of rank “has already (...) become secondary since it has long ago come to be expected as a matter of course.”(Bourdieu, 1982, p. 383).

6. Summary

The aim of this survey was to identify and analyse the career concepts of aspiring elementary school teachers and the factors influencing them in their careers using interviews. We initially explained how future principals face a profession whose profile is unclear and a wide variety of possible qualification measures. It is they themselves who have to plan and implement key steps in their careers. This practice was to be studied with the question being how elementary school teachers design and make their way to the principal's office.

Respondents included references to their situative context, interactions, intentions, and the consequences they took in their interviews which suggested that these could be understood as key contextual variables in their careers. From their statements, it was possible to derive four types whose *modi operandi* can be considered generalisable patterns.

Their own orientations vary particularly with regard to their goal-orientation. The types 'social distinction' and 'social validation' evidence strong goal orientation while 'non-committal experimentation' and 'gradual advancement' represent the low end of the spectrum. However, our findings also show that elementary school teachers make their careers to principal from very different initial positions. The type 'non-committal experimentation' shows the closest, but also the most constricting integration into its social field. While both the types 'social validation' and 'gradual advancement' are able to accumulate supportive social capital, the type 'social distinction' cannot use that resource.

This also allows us to answer the initial question what role the initial position and contacts within the faculty play in careers. Social capital can be decisive. “The social actors (...) are situated in a specific location in social space, a distinguishable and distinctive place characterised by the position it holds relative to others (above, below, between).”(Bourdieu, 2001, p. 172). Habitual predispositions both determine the intensity of the initial integration and the need for social recognition the individual teacher has.

A second form of capital according to Bourdieu, cultural capital, is also available to individuals to very varying degrees. The broad choice of possible qualification measures leads teachers to acquire leadership competences along different paths. Our typology shows strategies of serving in leadership positions over many years prior to promotion, of time spent in redundant repetition of courses, or in the targeted use of one chosen type of qualification. These different approaches result in a wide variety of competence profiles found in aspiring principals who have both different professional experiences and different formal qualifications. Thus, this study once more confirms the fact that currently, there is no standard of competences or qualifications for principals even within single federal states.

The choice of qualification measure, however, appears to be of marginal importance: Respondents were able to gain principals' positions independent of what type of courses they attended or how intensively they prepared themselves. This diminished importance comes as a surprise when we consider that Bourdieu's theory “assumes that the form of capital required to achieve a goal depends on the structures of the respective social field“(Bobeth-Neumann, 2013, at the printers). What does this mean for educational policy? Especially in the context of schools, we would assume that the accumulation of cultural capital was pre-eminent and social capital of secondary importance. One possible explanation for the fact that this is not the case here may be found in the varied and different voluntary qualification measures and the resulting variety of career paths. It makes promotion to principal a 'lawless' grey area, leaving the school to rely on its own identification of personal qualities over institutional certification in ascribing competences to candidates.

In view of the differences between the four types identified here, a unified (possibly mandatory) qualification

for principals even across different federal states appears to be desirable. It would ensure certain homogeneity in competences across the different career paths. Personal qualities, which currently determine which competences are ascribed to an individual by their social field, might become secondary to an official certificate. However, implementing this change would also have a different impact on the various types: A unitary, scheduled qualification measure might speed the career of the 'social validation' type, allowing the accumulation of the required support in the course of the measure itself instead of having to develop such structures within the faculty. Any consequences for the type 'social distinction' would be negligible since this change would match the extant willingness to strategically acquire formal certifications. We should expect the other two types to suffer disadvantages, though. An institutional structure may well exclude candidates of the 'non-committal experimentation' type from the very beginning. It is equally possible that individuals of the 'gradual advancement' type could see the mandatory qualification – depending on its length and intensity – as an obstacle to the final step to promotion. Given the high confidence in their own competences and the relatively advanced age, no great willingness to participate can be expected here.

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