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Problematizing the Intellectual Gaze of the Educational Administration Scholar

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Abstract

Whereas epistemological debates raged in educational administration during the Theory Movement, or inspired by intervention from Thom Greenfield, Richard Bates or Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski, epistemology and the quest for the scientific study of educational administration has somewhat diminished in the era of managerialism and the pursuit of research that has a direct impact on practice. Theoretically informed by the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, I seek to re-engage with the epistemological preliminaries of scholarship in educational leadership, management and administration. In doing so, I argue that administration is central to our way of seeing the social world and raise questions about the embedded and embodied nature of the educational administration scholar and what this means for scholarship. A social ‘scientific’ approach to educational administration, as advocated for in this article, must break free of the ambition of grounding in (rational) reason, the arbitrary division of the social world (e.g. administrators/non-administrators) and instead, take for its object, rather than getting itself caught up in, the struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate representation of the social world.

Keywords: epistemology, epistemological break, Bourdieu, educational leadership, educational administration

Introduction

Administration has been a central element in the trajectory of human society. As Gronn (2010) notes, above a certain numerical threshold, humans, much like many examples in the animal kingdom, tend to establish hierarchies and the self-organisation of numerous (collaborating) societal groups proves difficult. Although frequently thought of as little more than a technology of control, administration and its key activity of policy are intimately connected to our understanding of the social world. What remains rarely, if ever, addressed, at least in educational administration discourses, is the extent to which being embedded, and embodying, this world view shapes the intellectual gaze and by virtue, ‘scientific’ inquiry. In this article, I mobilise Bourdieusian social theory

to challenge the nature of scientific inquiry in educational administration. Although Bourdieu never wrote on educational administration per se, and earlier claims that his work is minimally used in educational administration despite his theoretical attention to the relationship between individual agency and structural determinism (Lingard & Christie, 2003), the increasing use of Bourdieusian social theory is part of the re-emergence of a sociological approach to educational administration (Gunter, 2010). However, while Bourdieu has been used to interrogate aspects of educational administration, such as school reform (Gunter, 2012), leadership preparation and development (Eacott, 2011), leadership standards (English, 2012), strategy (Eacott, 2010), autonomy (Thomson, 2010), educational leadership at large (Thomson, 2013) or even the intellectual field of educational administration (Gunter, 2002), the focus of this article on epistemological preliminaries through a Bourdieusian lens is rarely, if ever employed, in educational administration.

The primary point of departure I make with mainstream educational leadership, management and administration discourses is my attention to matters of epistemology and ontology or, more generally, knowledge production. The methodological perspective I mobilise throughout this article were first sketched out in a text written by Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron (1968/1991) entitled *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries (le métier de sociologue)*. My use of Bourdieusian theorising, however, is neither with utmost loyalty or reverence. That being said, this article contains a theoretical intervention informed by Bourdieu to demonstrate how attention is required into the construction and ongoing maintenance of the research object/s of educational administration as a discipline. As Ladwig (1996) argues, built within the very French, Durkheimian sociological tradition, Bourdieu's methodological stance begins from the epistemological presumption that (in Poincaré's words) 'facts do not speak'. My mobilisation of Bourdieu in this article is guided by my singular (theoretical and empirical) task of trying to describe what I see happening in the scholarship of educational leadership, management and administration.

Much of the Bourdieusian-inspired work in educational administration gives primacy to his thinking tools of *field*, *habitus* and *capital* and this is understandable given the centrality of these concepts to his theory of practice. After all, establishing boundaries for the topic (*field*), exploring the dispositions of key players (*habitus*) and the value of items within the game (*capital*) is important for building an argument. However, what this does though, is to highlight the need to engage with the epistemological preliminaries—the underlying generative features—of the work. For example, Lingard and Rawolle (2012) argue that school leaders, interpreted as principals, sit at the intersection of multiple *fields* and that the work of leaders, or leadership practice, is the mediation and expression of cross-*field* effects. Embedded within this argument is that school leaders need to be multi-lingual to engage with the discourses of multiple *fields*. Thomson's (2010) contribution, on the other hand, is that head teacher practice is caught between different social *fields*. In making this argument, Thomson articulates how the work of head teachers is both within the individual school (as a sub-*field* of the larger *field* of schooling) and beyond, where head teacher practice is about advancing—through the acquisition of *capital*—both the school and the individual in the broader social space. Pivotal to Thomson's argument is the boundary work

of head teachers and the constant negotiations in which school leaders push for greater autonomy. Both contributions add to our knowledge of educational administration; however, in advancing a theory of educational administration, I see two major limitations: first, the centrality of the principal (even if defined relationally); and second, the argument for a *field* of educational administration.

Neither Thomson or Lingard and Rawolle claim to be describing any role other than the principal; yet, contemporary thought and analysis in educational administration is that leadership, management or administration is no longer—if it ever was—the property of a single individual or title within an organisation. This challenges, if not forces, us to problematise the very concept of administration and the identification of administrators and, by virtue, non-administrators. The long-standing problematic matter of the separation—which was arguably the original stimulus for the establishment of departments of educational administration and the domain as a topic of inquiry—needs to be acknowledged and engaged with. In making an argument for a *field* of educational administration, there is the constitution of what Kerr and Robinson (2011) label an ‘elite *field* of leaders’, where a class *habitus* serves to stratify the social world through links to organisational, not necessarily social, positions. The primacy given to Bourdieu’s thinking tools in such studies, as opposed to his epistemological arguments, leads to a situation where it is difficult to get beyond the reproductive nature of the administration of schooling. Therefore, much of the Bourdieusian work in educational administration does not move beyond the role of the state in maintaining existing asymmetrical power relations of the social world, something primarily achieved through schooling (see Bourdieu, 1989/1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990).

There has been intense critique of the administration and/or policy, of contemporary Western democratic-capitalist societies, particularly in sociology, management (at least in critical management studies) and education, among other domains of inquiry. This critique, especially in educational administration,¹ has privileged the empirical problem over the large-scale theoretical problem—that is, the monopoly of legitimation of the social world—embedded in the research object. I do not mean this in the sense that invokes the (false) dichotomy of theory and practice, but rather as a means of highlighting the intimate relations of the theoretical problem and empirical object in the scientific enterprise. Through the explicit privileging of the empirical, robust discussion around the ways of perceiving the social world are censored or even dismissed as unnecessary intellectualism. Following the work of Pierre Bourdieu, it is the contention of this article that an important element of scholarship is to *take as one’s object the social work of construction of the pre-constructed object* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992/1992, p. 229). I build my argument on two key points: first, the centrality of administration in our understanding of the social world; and second, the intellectual gaze of the embedded agent, to argue for a re-thinking of scientific inquiry in educational administration. As with Bourdieu, I seek to cast doubt on orthodoxy or to make the familiar strange. This is a necessary, and important, task when working in the social world that the researcher is involved. Importantly, such a move requires explicit attention to the epistemological *break* of the embodied agent and the *construction* of the research object, rather than just the *confirmation*, or *disconfirmation*, of the

researcher's model of reality (see Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1968/1991). To engage with these issues, I do not offer a fully articulated theory, research programme or even 'how to' description; rather, I sketch an argument centred on the need to interrogate the construction of the research object as a means to extend current debates on the leadership, management and administration of educational institutions in new and more fruitful directions. In doing so, and to borrow from Berger (1966), this article is an invitation to the reader and therefore warrants a generative reading, but it will become clear that 'the reader will need to go beyond this article if the invitation is to be taken seriously' (p. 7). Therefore, I encourage the reader to think with, beyond and where necessary, against what I argue in the spirit of the scientific enterprise.

Some Preliminaries

My use of the label 'science' throughout this article is deliberately provocative. It is through the mobilisation of this label that I seek to both engage with, and contribute to, the discourses in educational administration. As with Bourdieu, I have a belief in science, but not science in the mainstream Anglophone employment of the label, mostly tied to logical empiricism and displaying an 'exhibitionism of data and procedures—where one would be better advised to display the conditions of construction and analysis of these data' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992/1992, p. 65). Rather, I align with the view of science and more specifically, scientific inquiry, as an act of *distinction* from ordinary language and the under-problematized view of the social world *as it is*. Therefore, for me, science is, and should be, the goal of all inquiry into the social world.

The labels of 'science' and 'scientific' have a long association with educational administration. The establishment of departments of educational administration in US universities aligns loosely with the publication of Taylor's (1911) *The Principles of Scientific Management* and these principles were strongly advocated for by leading figures at the time, including George Strayer at Teachers College Columbia, Edward Elliot at Wisconsin, Franklin Bobbit at Chicago and Ellwood Cubberly at Stanford.² Taylor, like other classic administration thinkers such as Lyndall Urwick and Henri Fayol, was a practitioner/researcher rather than scientist. However, the prominence of 'science' and the 'scientific' study of educational administration were at its peak during the so called *Theory Movement* of the 1950–1960s. Primarily through the work of Andrew Halpin and Daniel Griffiths, this US-centric school of thought, whose genesis was in Denver, Colorado, in August 1954 at the annual meeting of the National Conference for Professors of Educational Administration but owes many of its underlying principles to Simon's (1945) *Administrative Behavior*, marked the beginning of a systematic traditional (natural) science approach to educational administration. This new 'scientific' movement drew heavily on the (early) writing of Herbert Feigl—linked to the Vienna Circle—and sought to characterise educational administration inquiry through 'objectivity, reliability, operational definitions, coherent or systematic structure, and comprehensiveness' (Griffiths, 1959, p. 45). Interestingly, the Theory Movement sought to break educational administration inquiry away from the *atheoretical* knowledge of the practitioner/researcher, yet did this not by embedding (social)

theory *per se*, but rather by a rational technique of inquiry. In doing so, ‘science’ was constituted through the neutrality and apparent distance between observer and research object.

Twenty years later, at the 1974 International Intervisitation Programme at Bristol, England, Thomas Barr Greenfield challenged the American pragmatic empiricism of the Theory Movement and the epistemological assumptions of an objective science of administration.³ Greenfield’s core epistemological claim is that all our knowledge of reality, natural and social, contains an irreducible subjective component. That is, objectivity is a myth—in both the natural and social sciences. In arguing for a subjectivist/phenomenological approach to educational administration scholarship, he called for a ‘humane science’ (see Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993). Through the rejection of objectivity and submitting his argument to the subjectivity of social phenomena, Greenfield does, however, leave himself in a situation where anything goes—a situation which is arguably equally problematic. He was not alone in the critique of logical empiricist inquiry, as Bates’ (1980, 1983) Critical Theory of educational administration also made the claim—so too have sociological approaches to educational administration (see Gunter, 2010). Significantly, these critiques led to many believing that the pursuit of a science of educational administration was neither worth pursuing or even possible. In contrast, Evers and Lakomski (1991, 1996, 2000, 2012) have consistently argued that it is not science that is the problem, but rather the model of science. They contend that it is the narrow operationalisation of science as logical empiricism that is the problem, not the pursuit of scientific study.

What remains in educational administration, and education at large for that matter, is the canonical opposition between theory and practice, most profoundly inscribed in the division of labour between administrators/teachers, those physically located in schools and school systems and academics/scientists, those who occupy the hallow halls of the university. It is this (false) dichotomy between theory and practice and its impact on the intellectual gaze of the educational administration scholar that I seek to problematise. Particularly, my argument is that it is scientific inquiry that separates the practitioner/researcher from the scientist. That is, there is something about the way of thinking, without reducing this to an essentialist argument, which creates a distinction. It is not that the scientist and practitioner/researcher think about different things, in this case the administration of schooling; rather, my argument is that these groups—and the line of demarcation is not easily identified, or maintained—think *differently* about such matters.⁴ Importantly, scientific language, that employed by the scientist, is separate from ordinary language (and this also goes for the mobilisation of ‘science’ as a label) and therefore troubles common sense. As such, scientific inquiry is a powerful means of political intervention and the genesis of creativity and innovation. Yet, as English (2006) reminds us, intellectual (scientific) work ‘is never efficient, perhaps not even cost effective, but then, true discovery and significant intellectual and practical breakthroughs rarely are’ (p. 470). As a means of interrogating and problematising the intellectual gaze of the educational administration scholar, I build my argument around three key points: first, the embodied agent of the educational administration scholar; second, the scientific break from the pre-scientific world; and finally, the need for epistemological vigilance.

Embodied Agents

A central issue in the scholarship of educational administration is that administrators are, as are all social agents, *spontaneous sociologists* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992/1992, p. 66). This is particularly so in the professions, such as education, but also law, business, architecture, engineering and medicine.⁵ In the case of educational administration, most, if not all, academics are former administrators at school and/or systemic levels (a quick scan of recruitment advertisements will attest to the privileging of this). Further to that, many hold administrative positions in the academy, further blurring the boundary between the native (naive) perception of the spontaneous sociologist and the research objects constructed through the ‘scientific’ method of the scientist. Following Bourdieu, this does two (considerably overlapping) things: first, the *doxic* modality through which the social world is perceived is the result of the internalisation of the objective structures of the social world in the cognitive schemata through which they apprehend the social world. Alternatively, the social world exists in the body as much as the body exists in the social world. Second, there exists a belief, or *illusio*, in administration and, most importantly, the stakes of the task at hand. That is, administration functions only insofar as it produces a belief in the value of its product (e.g. policy, security, order) and means of production (e.g. governance). What I have brought to attention here is the importance of engaging with the epistemological (and ontological) preliminaries which shape and, in turn, are shaped by, scholarship in educational administration.

In relation to my first point, the *doxic* modality, there is great difficulty in studying the social world in which one is involved. The tensions of this engagement are highlighted in Bourdieu’s (1984/1988) *Homo Academicus*, among others. As noted above, resulting from the occupation of a particular position in the social (and physical) space, and the trajectory—both professional and personal—that got them there, educational administration academics are frequently, if not always, immersed in an *in situ* brand of scholarship. The individual’s social history of education, and specifically of educational institutions, and the history of the singular relationship with these institutions, significantly, often in spite of ourselves, orients our thought.⁶ This blurs the boundaries of the empirical and the epistemic, as ‘educational administration’ as the research object is the institutionalisation of a point of view grounded in a pre-reflexive belief in the undisputed value of the object itself. This brings to the fore the need for an epistemological break—a point I shall return to later—in the scientific enterprise. As Bourdieu (1997/2000) notes:

... it is clear that, to secure some chance of really knowing what one is doing, one has to unfold what is inscribed in the various relations of implication in which the thinker and his thought are caught up, that is, the presuppositions he engages and the inclusions or exclusions he unwittingly performs. (p. 99)

It is the epistemic unconscious, that which is the history—however opaque—of the individual and the intellectual *field* that shapes the scientific enterprise. Administrative theory, most of the time, aligns with a Western pattern of thought that centres on

administration (social order) and management (control) of populations and/or environments. This administration and management is exercised by more or less arbitrarily defined populations, produced through the successive partitioning of an initial category that is itself pre-constructed: ‘first-year female small school principals’, who administer or manage over more or less arbitrarily defined populations, produced through the successive partitioning of an initial category that is itself pre-constructed: ‘disadvantaged students in regional areas’.

This brings me to the second, but deeply interwoven, point of ‘investment in the object’. The original investment in, or belief in the value of, educational administration has no specific origin, because it always precedes itself. Therefore, even though the positive or negative relations that one may have with educational institutions appear to create a distance between object and subject, the difficulties in recognising this ontological complicity limits the intellectual enterprise. As it is, the academic frequently credits the research object with his/her vision of things as a result of the pre-reflexive conditioning. That is, the academic, s/he who is embedded and embodies educational administration, rarely calls into question the value of educational administration. To challenge the value, or worth, of educational administration would be to not only question the very core of the domain, but to question the value of the self and one’s role in the social fabric. The researcher, who is therefore implicated in the world, is unable to withdraw from the world in order to construct a re-creation of it through a manuscript or lecture. Furthermore, although somewhat deterministic, I would argue that education researchers, for the most part, struggle to move beyond the innate desire to ‘educate’. Therefore, much of the work in education seeks to ‘teach’ and, more significantly, pursue ‘best practice’—an implicit adoption of Taylor’s (1911) ‘one right method’—as part of the eternal quest for how best to prepare and develop school administrators for the purpose of bringing about change (generally towards some performative measure operating within the managerialist project).

The intellectual gaze of the researcher is significant here. What is arguably the *raison d’être* of the ‘applied’ domain, the advancement of practice, that which is perpetuated, in part, by the submission of many researchers and administrators to the managerialist discourses of the contemporary world and by the inertia of the academic/practical problematic handed down in the technicist classes of the contemporary school leadership preparation and development programme—whether they be based in universities or beyond—simply must be engaged with. I raise this point not as an iconoclastic attack or privileged intellectualism; rather, because I believe that, for the most part, educational administration researchers, for all their research and voluminous literature, do not ask themselves these questions. By avoiding asking oneself about the stimulation and provocation of your questioning, the individual scholar, and the domain at large, is significantly limited as to what it can say about the social world. There is of course substantial risk, at least intellectually and arguably career wise, in trying to know, and make known, what the world of educational administration knowledge may (or does) not want to know, especially about itself. In building my argument here, I contend that administration may derive its most substantive scientific work not from producing countless lists of best practice and essential traits or behaviours, but rather through a constant effort to undertake an informed critique of

its own reasoning.⁷ That is, I am stressing a critical engagement with not only the limits of thought, but also on the conditions in which that thought is exercised. Understandably, an initial question may be to ask ‘But what scientific profit can be discovered from such an exercise?’. I argue that most, if not all, educational administration researchers enter the academy to effect change, to change the way of the world toward some inherently ‘good’ orientation. Critically engaging with thought enables the researcher to break with the intimate relation that one has with the social world—at least to a certain extent—and engage with that which is opaque to us due to familiarity.

As Bourdieu (1984/1988) notes, there is a need to get ‘increasingly closer to the originary of the ordinary’ (pp. xi–xii). The educational administration researcher does not stand outside of the social world they analyse, nor do they look down on it from above. Rather, they themselves are agents in the social world and the pre-constructed notions of educational administration, the management of systems, teachers, students and buildings derive their self-evidence and their legitimacy from the actions of subjects. Following Bourdieu, the social world that educational administration inquiry deals with is something that the subject themselves make, modify and transform through their activity. The individual, or research team, who studies schools has a ‘use’ for them, one that may have little in common with the parents who seek to find a ‘good’ school for their child or the system or government looking to leverage performance. What I am doing here is not suggesting any one perspective is better than the other, although to say I am neutral here is also misplaced, but rather to stress that the internal politics of scholarship matters. For example, the Critical School, particularly that coming out of Deakin University (see Tinning & Sirna, 2011), has an explicit social justice agenda focusing on the adversarial role of education and the emancipatory power of learning/education. In what may appear similar to the novice researcher, or wider public, the School Effectiveness and School Improvement movement has a belief in the transformatory power of schooling that can be achieved through the perpetual improvement of student outcomes. However, unlike the Critical School, there is no questioning of the value of the measures (see Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). The School-Based Management movement, which is gaining renewed traction in Australian education policy, as with elsewhere, is built on a romantic belief in ‘participation’ at the local level and frequently exhibits a denial of power relations in the social, yet invokes a level of common sense logic that is difficult, if not impossible, to refute. As Bourdieu notes, in the social sciences, even the least competent and intellectually equipped scholar (Bourdieu, following Alain, actually uses the label ‘dumbest’) can use common sense and find support, especially beyond the academy (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992/1992). What this raises is the need to engage with the pre-scientific world and the construction of the research object.

The Pre-scientific World and the Break

Educational administration, like the sociologies of the professions (e.g. education), primarily owes its existence to the currency of public concern over particular social issues (e.g. schooling, education policy). Such inquiry, however, rarely achieves any

scientific status while it remains in the realm of the pre-scientific, that of public concern or technocratic management. The researcher can, and I would argue that this is common in educational administration, avoid engaging with the epistemological break required of scientific study by remaining in the pre-scientific world of the wider public. This is most overt in the solicitation of researchers for the production of marketable products such as the ‘leadership/management by ring binder’ genre (see Halpin, 1990; Gunter, 1997), that which can prove to be very profitable, materially and symbolically, for those who opt to serve the dominant vision. However, educational administration cannot claim to be studied scientifically—note that my argument is for the scientific study of, not a science of—without breaking from the orthodoxy of the pre-scientific world. This is not to discredit, or reject, the practical sense of the spontaneous sociologist, as it is this orthodoxy that is the beginning of the scientific enterprise; yet, as Bourdieu argues, the choice of problem, the elaboration of concepts and analytical categories function as a ratification of the *doxa* unless the crucial operation of scientific construction breaks with the social world *as it is* (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992/1992, p. 248). Therefore, what is required of the researcher, is submitting to scientific scrutiny everything that makes the *doxic* experience of the world possible. This includes not only the pre-scientific representation of the social but also the cognitive schemata that underlie the construction of the image.

If, on the contrary, one is to accept at face value the *doxa* to construct the research object, you can find lists, directories, role statements and capability frameworks, among others, already constituted by ‘professional’ bodies. I am well aware of the critique, often quickly invoked, that educational administration, and the professions in general, differ from the natural sciences as it is required to be accessible in a way that is not expected of physics. Yet, I am reminded here of Bachelard (1934/1984) stating ‘the simple is never anything more than the simplified’ and Bourdieu’s consistent refusal to make his work more accessible on the basis that what he was discussing is complex and to make it simple is inappropriate.⁸ The professionalisation of educational administration knowledge, however, mobilises, if not relies on, a kind of quasi-scientific rationalisation of orthodoxy—it is worth thinking through this in relation to the Theory Movement, but that is beyond the scope of this article. In this case, scientific work is little more than an instrument for legitimising power relations *as they are*. This is a particularly significant matter, given the embedded and embodied nature of educational administration inquiry and the fact that the academic is at stake in his/her own object. Therefore, if the academic seeks to construct techniques or instruments that make it possible to manipulate the social order or populations, then inquiry is in the service of ‘administration’ and academics serve that master as social engineers. The question that this raises is whether educational administration can constitute itself through a refusal to submit to social demands for instruments of legitimation and manipulation. I also want to draw attention here to the use of ‘administration’. I mobilise this term, following Bourdieu, to stress that in heavily administered societies, much like a gravitational field, even the person perceived to have absolute power—or decision-making authority—is him/herself held within the constraints of administration. That is, nobody knows anymore who is the subject of the final decision and the place of the decision is both everywhere and nowhere. This is counter to the illusion

of ‘the’ decision-maker and the countless case studies aimed at investigating how decisions came to be through merely the phenomenological manifestations of the exercise of power (see Bourdieu, 2000/2005). However, to simply denounce bureaucratic administration, or more specifically hierarchy, does not get us anywhere; rather, what we need to ask is how such a vision of the social world is possible.

What we experience in the empirical is an ensemble of administration. Often in the form of government departments, school systems, schools, faculties and so on, within which individual actors and categories of actors (e.g. bureaucrats, principals, teachers, students), struggle over a particular form of authority, that which is constituted through the power to rule or legitimise actions through legislations, regulations, policy and administrative measures.⁹ The history of such administration is characterised by a set of negotiations between rival claims of administrative control and individual agency. As such, the administration of schools, and school systems, depends on its bureaucratic past for legitimate authority while also constantly seeking to reform and renew itself. Alternatively, educational administration is a space where existing holders of the legitimacy of discourse come into direct contact with new contenders. The struggle for legitimacy, as with the researchers’ struggle with the taken-for-granted of the immediate, is always in play. To avoid inquiry becoming little more than the advancement of the current state of affairs, nothing can be defined or assumed *a priori*. That is, the popular practice, especially with graduate students, of operationally defining objects is not appropriate. In addition to being a direct rejection of logical empiricism, such a claim raises questions regarding the use of theory in educational administration, particularly if the researcher is to work with open concepts, and theory being a means of working through the empirical world. For one, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (see Eacott, 2013a), the contemporarily popular topic of ‘leadership’ relies on an a priori assumption of its existence, yet a simultaneous a posteriori labelling of where it occurs. Specifically, while there seems to be little doubt about the ‘realness’ of leadership, its identification is most frequently limited to the performative markers of the managerialist project of the state. The tautology of such research, where a site has been identified where leadership is enacted and then the findings are correlated against the very measures that we used to identify it in the first place, seems somewhat lost or, at least not problematic, for mainstream scholarship.

The use of ‘theory’—although arguably a bastardised mobilisation of such label—in educational administration is frequently limited to the representation of experimental laws, or causal relations, and the ‘research’ is constituted as a distinct part of the process, with a somewhat naive demarcation of the empirical object, theoretical problematising, construction of the research object and so on. Such research is of greater frequency in the project management style of contemporary academic life in the entrepreneurial university, as opposed to the longevity of the research programme—where one continually delves deeper into an area, not just picking up where one project or others have left off, but rather, better informed and with increasingly sophisticated ways of knowing and being in the world; scholarship is continually delving deeper into the research object, its construction and constant re-construction. In contrast, the project management approach, that which is most frequently limited to the inquiry of public concern, constitutes the researcher as a technician (e.g. a quantitative expert,

or worse still, a software package expert e.g. SPSS) who has the mobility to shift research objects according to the latest national priorities of large scale funding regimes, the whims of government or corporate juggernauts. This is an important aspect to engage with for any potential ‘scientific’ scholarship. With reduced research funding in many national contexts, many researchers or research teams are falling under the control (at least fiscal) of large firms seeking to secure a monopoly, or to use Porter’s (1985) term ‘competitive advantage’, through the commercialisation of profitable products. The relocation, or redistribution, of research funding to the commercial sector reflects administration—both at large, and specifically research—constituted in the model of the firm, embodying the market ideology or neo-Darwinism of the corporation. If we are to break from this solicitation, scientific inquiry requires, if not demands, autonomy. To sustain such autonomy, researchers need to combat and systematically resist the infiltration of ordinary language and spontaneous understanding of the social world. The common sense or taken-for-granted of the social does however consistently reappear (if it ever disappears) and there is a requirement of constant vigilance in scholarship. Such vigilance is particularly difficult in 6000-word journal articles, or 20-min conference presentations, not to mention the temporal nature—or privileging of ‘clock’ time—in university and academic ranking systems of publication output. What remains, though, is that the empirical is inexhaustible, something that objective science struggles to grasp and engage with, and theory is not something that the researcher applies to the empirical; rather, it is a way of working through and with the empirical.

Epistemological Vigilance

Epistemological vigilance is particularly necessary in the social sciences, where the separation between the everyday language and opinion of the spontaneous sociologist and the scientific discourse of the researcher is more blurred than elsewhere (Bourdieu et al., 1968/1991). It is familiarity with the social world, the ongoing struggle with the spontaneous understanding of the everyday that is the central epistemological obstacle for educational administration as it continuously produces conceptualisations (e.g. organisational structures, leadership) and at the same time, the conditions which serve to legitimise and sustain them. As a result, the inexhaustible intellectual project of getting beyond the everyday is never finally won. Herein lies a core difference between the ‘natural’ and ‘social’ sciences; although such a binary is not necessarily productive, the separation experienced between the laboratory and everyday life for the physicist is substantively more difficult—and dare I say impossible—for the social scientist. This is partially because the intellectual resources of disciplines, in this case educational administration, rarely provide the necessary tools to meaningfully break from the ordinary language of the everyday. In doing so, it is rare for disciplines, particularly those related to the professions (e.g. educational administration) to ask questions of their canonical thrusts (e.g. ‘leadership’).

All of the techniques and procedures of advanced research cannot completely overcome the embedded and embodied nature of the educational administration scholar. Due to the (social) relationship that the educational administration scholar has with

the research object, scholarship is never a pursuit of pure truth (if such a thing is possible). Therefore, it is inappropriate to craft a scholarly narrative as though it exists separate to the socio-political, cultural and temporal conditions in which it is brought into being. Neglecting to subject ordinary language, the primary instrument in the ongoing (re)construction of objects in the social world, to a rigorous and robust epistemological/ontological critique runs the risk of mistaking objects pre-constructed in and by ordinary language for data (Bourdieu et al., 1968/1991). The masking of the everyday origins of such data through the mobilisation of scientific language (e.g. the ‘quality’, ‘improvement’, ‘effective’ discourses) is infrequently called into question (except arguably in the critical stream of educational administration research) as the descriptions provided create a sense of comfort through the recognition of familiarity with lived experience. As Bourdieu et al. (1993/1999), note:

The positivists dream of an epistemological state of perfect innocence papers over the fact that the crucial difference is not between a science that effects construction and one that does not, but between a science that does this without knowing it and one that, being aware of the work of construction, strives to discover and master as completely as possible the nature of its inevitable acts of construction and the equally inevitable effects those acts produce. (p. 608)

Bachelard (1934/1984) denies science the certainties of a definitive heritage and reminds us that it (science) can only progress by perpetually calling into question the very principles of its own constructs. Similarly, English (2006) argues that advancing scholarship in educational administration requires criticism of it, philosophically, empirically and logically, suggesting that we do not search for core pillars but the contested grounds on which educational leadership is defined moment-to-moment. The arguments of Bachelard and English, among others, are significant. Historically, discourses of educational administration, primarily through the mobilisation of the ‘applied’ field label, have generated—and legitimised—the unproductive, and I would say false, binary of theory and practice. For the most part, this is justified through a desire to maintain a closeness, or relevance, to practice. Gunter (2012) contends that such labels (e.g. theory and practice) have been used and abused to shape anti-intellectual cultures within the profession and the ‘educational leadership industry’ in business and higher education. Notably, an integral feature of the managerialist project which dominates the contemporary research environment internationally is the discrediting of intellectual work (such as the critique and analysis of the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of research objects) as exotic, indulgent and not in the public interest (Gunter, 2013).

With the othering of intellectual work, often referred to as the professionalisation of knowledge production, and the embedded and embodied nature of the educational administration scholar, I argue that there is a crisis in educational leadership, management and administration as a field of knowledge production. For me, this crisis is not centred on divisions resulting from paradigmatic lens, or even intellectual traditions. As Donmoyer (2001) and Thrupp and Willmott (2003) observe, educational administration exists in a state of tacit agreement where those with whom we disagree, we

treat with benign neglect. Rather, this crisis is grounded in the relationship between the discipline as a field of knowledge production and its interactions with the wider field of education research and the field of practice. In reflecting on her career working in education administration, Samier (2013) notes:

In the field I eventually settled in, educational administration, significant changes were taking place, beginning in the later 1960s and the 1970s and accelerating throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with feminist critiques, the School of Critical Theory, the emergence of hermeneutics and phenomenology, the transformation of organisational behaviour into organisational studies as a broadly encompassing pursuit that included culture, micro-politics, aesthetic analysis, and psychoanalysis, all spilling into administrative theory as postmodern critiques appeared in English. And then ... Not nothing, as this might have been a state preferable to the rise of neo-liberalism, the New Public Management, and the market model fostered and distributed internationally through globalisation. (pp. 234–235)

If we accept the social world at face value, the orthodoxy of ordinary language constructs the research object in such a way that you find lists, directories, role statements and capability frameworks, among others, already constituted by ‘professional’ bodies. This speaks explicitly to the argument of this article, the data generated (not collected) must not be seen as independent contributors to the discourses of ‘leadership’ but rather as social constructions in the political game of knowledge creation (Eacott, 2013b). As Blackmore (2004) states, to understand how educational leadership, management and administration are ‘perceived, understood and enacted, one has to have a sense of the broader social, economic and political relations shaping educational work’ (p. 267).

There is a substantial body of work stressing that as a discipline, educational administration is not held in high esteem within the academy at large or even education as a broader field of study (Eacott, 2013a). If educational leadership, management and administration research is to acquire any level of academic credibility within both the academy and wider community, then greater attention needs to be paid to the manner in which it undertakes its inquiry. An interrogation of the epistemological preliminaries of research, those underlying generative principles, is imperative for advancing a rigorous and robust research programme. Attention to the construction and ongoing reconstruction of the research object in time and space would advance our understanding of the leadership, management and administration of organisations in new and fruitful directions. Understandably, to challenge ‘leadership’—as the contemporarily popular label within the discipline—is to attack one of, if not the, canons of the discipline. Unlike the critique of management and/or administration, not to mention the demonisation of bureaucracy, ‘leadership’ is the current sacred label of the discipline. To question its scholarly legitimacy brings to the level of discourse the very generative foundations of the field’s scholarship and practice, and for most reading this article, our identity. This is why we see numerous critiques of the various adjectives (e.g. transformational, servant, strategic, distributed, motion) used in the rapidly expanding literatures of educational administration, yet minimal, if any

critique of ‘leadership’ itself. It is as though the scholarly practice of reflexivity, or critically turning upon itself, has been neglected for the purpose of maintaining a particular relationship with practice. The argument that I am building in this article is that to engage, and arguably combat, questions of the quality of educational administration research as a scholarly endeavour, greater attention is needed to the ongoing construction of the research object and its relations with the researcher.

Conclusion

This article, and the thinking behind it, is not a case of theoreticism—or theory for theory’s sake—but rather, if I return to my original provocation, to take as one’s object the social work of construction of the pre-constructed object, then this article can be read as a Bourdieusian epistemological preliminary for the study of educational administration. That being said, it is more than merely a didactic exercise; this article is more than a mere appropriation of Bourdieu into a different intellectual space. This article, as with the Special Issue, seeks to explicitly reinvigorate the epistemological debate in educational administration. The research approach that I am advancing is easily summarised. Following Bourdieu, I am arguing for an approach to scientifically study educational administration, one that is able to incorporate the embedded and embodied nature of the ‘education’ researcher. To do this, I am asking serious questions about the epistemological break in scholarship and the construction of the research object, more so than the confirmation or disconfirmation of the researcher’s model of reality.

A social ‘scientific’ approach to educational administration, as advocated for in this article, must break free of the ambition of grounding in (rational) reason, the arbitrary division of the social world (e.g. administrators, non-administrators) and instead, take for its object, rather than getting itself caught up in, the struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate representation of the social world. Article such as this is both difficult and risky. Difficult in the sense that, as Bourdieu (2001/2004) notes, every word uttered about scientific practice can be turned back on the person who utters it. Risky, because, as with any argument that directly engages with, or challenges, the status quo, there is the very real and likely outcome that it will be rejected by the existing guardians of the domain. This goes to the argument of the article, that is, administration is frequently the site where the custodians of the domain come into contact, and frequently confrontation, with new contenders. However, my goal is not to merely write an article on the scholarship of educational administration, but to make a much more fundamental point about scientific inquiry in education administration. Although I have stressed the importance of the *break* and the *construction* of the research object, I have deliberately not provided a set of prescriptive ‘how to’ conduct research forever more. Such a claim would actually be counter to the thesis of the article. Rather, I have sketched an argument on the significance of the relations between researcher and the research object that if attended to, will advance our understanding of the administration of educational institutions in new and fruitful directions and potentially create a space for the various traditions of educational administration to find a common ground. As a result, the challenge laid out in this

article rests as much with the reader as it does with me. If but one person in educational administration engages with the ideas presented here, then this article has been successful, albeit limited, in challenging the status quo.

Notes

1. There is something of an inherent tension at work in this label. I am aware of the issue of the juxtaposition of the diverse disciplines of 'education' and 'public administration' to create a sub-unit defined as a specific domain of reality, that which primarily serves a pragmatic purpose. At the same time, there is the matter of conceiving of neighbouring sciences (e.g. administration, psychology, sociology, etc.) as border conflicts, based on an acceptance of the pre-constructed division of (scientific) labour as an actual empirical reality. Furthermore, at its most limited reading, I am aware of colleagues who would question my labelling of 'educational administration', suggesting that the area has evolved to 'management' and now 'leadership'.
2. Interestingly, Cubberly had little background in the study of education. His own professional background was geology and physical science, yet he taught a range of courses in the educational administration programme, including: school administration; school problems; school organisations; school statistics; secondary schools; history of education; and relations of ignorance and crime to education (see Bates, 2010; Tynack & Hansot, 1982).
3. Some consider Greenfield's attack to have actually begun at the 1973 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans (see Bates, 1980). This supports the argument that it is impossible to demarcate an exact point of origin for thought, as any idea, no matter how original, is little more than a reworking of previous thought in a unique time and space.
4. I do not, however, hold the assumption that all university-based faculty are 'scholarly/scientific', or vice versa. And in many ways, this is the argument of the article.
5. My choice of 'professions' is deliberate. While education is frequently, if not always, a low-status faculty in the academy—lived out on a daily basis through numerous apparatus such as research-funding regimes, journal rankings, promotion systems, research/post-doctoral fellowships—the same lowly status is rarely assigned to other 'professional' fields such as medicine and engineering.
6. My use of the collective noun (e.g. 'our') is for two reasons: first, I see myself as equally implicated in my argument; and second, it is consistent with the argument of the article that one cannot escape the social world from which they construct as their research object.
7. Although this may be read as a derivative of Weick's (1969, 1995) 'sensemaking' in organisations, I stress that my focus is on the epistemological and ontological assumptions of scholarship more so than as a framework for engaging with the behaviour of organisations.
8. There is a tension here given that in Bourdieu's later works (see 1996/1998, 1998/1998, 2001/2003, we see an explicit shift towards engaging a wider audience. He begins publishing small paperbacks that are accessible to a more diverse audience in terms of price and writing style—most being collections of interviews, short speeches and essays devoted mostly to the critique of neo-liberalism/globalisation. This strategy brings a broad readership, one beyond the academy and also sparks debate in the French media (see Swartz, 2003). Explicitly, Bourdieu sort to engage as a public intellectualism by bringing the logic of intellectual life, that of argument and refutation, into public life—but only in areas where he felt competent and preferably, on the basis of scientific research (see also Lane, 2006).
9. Given this context, the under use of Max Weber's work, particularly that on bureaucracy, in educational administration is intriguing. When Weber is mobilised, it is rarely for anything other than naming the labeller of the bureaucracy, rather than the sophisticated writings he has on the rise of bureaucracy and its function in the administration of populations. There are, of course, exceptions, and I am thinking here of Eugenie Samier, but for the most part, Weber is much under-utilised in the discussion of administration.

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