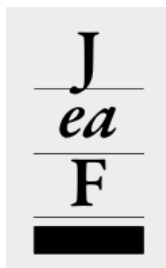


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Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations

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Advancing the Relational Research Program

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Abstract

As a field of study educational administration has a reputation for talking past one another. In this paper, I endeavour to pick up on some matters raised across the special issue with the explicit intent of advancing the *relational* research program. Due to the limitations on article length, but also the depth of some of the queries raised, I am unable to attend to all matters raised. I will be thinking through all matters and these will be presented in other forums. For this paper, my attention is limited to: the intellectual project – or social epistemology – that generated this special issue, the notion of productive theorizing, matters of context, what is a relation, and the audience or audiences of educational administration scholarship.

Keywords: relational approaches, relations, methodology, epistemology, parallel monologues, social epistemology

Introduction

In this paper I take up the opportunity to respond to the commentaries provided in the preceding four papers. In an ideal world, it would have been nice to afford the contributors the opportunity to respond to my response and keep the conversation going – and that is an opportunity that I hope to take up in other forums. To begin with I need to express my sincere thanks to Augusto Riveros, Dawn Wallin, Izhar Oplatka, and Megan Crawford for the care and thought they exercised in engaging with *Educational Leadership Relationally* (Eacott, 2015) and contributing to a project that is increasingly uncommon in the literatures of educational leadership, management and administration. Within the confines

of this paper I can only take up a few of the many useful points they raised but I will be working through each one as I seek to advance my *relational* program. Before moving onto the engaging with ideas I want to make some comments regarding the intellectual project that is this special issue.

The Intellectual Project

A number of years ago while reading for my doctorate two exchanges inspired and frustrated me in an enduring way. In short, they sparked my intellectual curiosity. The first was a series of exchanges between Peter Gronn (1982, 1984, 1987) and Ross Thomas (1986; Thomas, Willis, & Phillipps, 1981) regarding the value of observational studies. Making

public the disagreements between academics on how best to study, theorize, and argue educational administration was exciting. It set up my expectations for academic conferences and reading journals – a primary concern for the debating of ideas. That said, educational administration and leadership research conferences and journals have not lived up to this expectation (at least for me) as there is little dialogue and debate and more talking past one another or to a sympathetic audience. To some extent, this talking past one another played out in the Gronn and Thomas discussion as neither altered from their original position as a result of the dialogue. The second example appears in the (ongoing) work of Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski. Following their germinal text *Knowing Educational Administration* (Evers & Lakomski, 1991) there were special issues of *Educational Administration Quarterly* (volume 32 issue 3), *Educational Management and Administration* (volume 21, issue 3), some dialogue in *Journal of Educational Administration* (volume 32 issue 4), and the reproduction of these exchanges as a section in *Exploring Educational Administration* (Evers & Lakomski, 1996). After originally advancing their naturalistic coherentism research program by articulating what they saw as flaws or limitations in alternate positions, Evers and Lakomski recognized that to convince others of their evolving framework they needed more evidence, argument and examples on what their alternate approach would look like. To achieve this they sought to strengthen their framework through debates against critics. These debates helped to shape the program by encouraging – if not forcing – greater clarity and substantial extensions to the work. Embodying an openness and ongoing approach to scholarship, matters that could be defended were retained (although arguably changed as a result of the exchange) and those that could not be defended were refined or left behind. This engagement with others, and thinking programmatically rather than from project-to-project was central to my coming to understand what scholarship is and can be.

Moving beyond parallel monologues and explicitly engaging with alternative approaches is central to asking questions about knowl-

edge frontiers, building on their successes, and pushing those frontiers further. As I have argued elsewhere:

To overcome potential scepticism about new claims and/or substantial departures from the orthodoxy, arguments need to be grounded in the logic of academic work – argument and refutation. If we embrace the notion that scholarship is pedagogical, then the publication of an argument is not the end of it. Publication serves, as Berger (1966) argues, as an invitation – an invitation to think with, through, and where necessary against, in the spirit of the scholarly enterprise. Through the composing of a systematic argument others can engage with your knowledge claims to support, extend or challenge them. This is only possible through engagement. By engaging with counter claims, refinements lead to greater clarity. With greater clarity come advances in knowledge. If educational leadership aspires to advance knowledge and not simply produce more, then it is imperative to engage with the other and move beyond parallel monologues. (Lakomski, Evers, & Eacott, 2017)

This brings me to the intellectual project that is this special issue of *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations*. Taking inspiration from Evers and Lakomski I have sought to have fellow scholars explicitly engage with the ideas I presented in *Educational Leadership Relationally*. What I was after, and all of the contributors delivered on I might add, was a critical engagement. Overly complimentary papers that do little more than back-slapping was not going to advance my work (and potentially the work of others). To that end, I engaged with colleagues from different theoretical positions who I respected and trusted to generate quality work. The intent of this process was to elicit insights that would challenge my thinking and extend the work.

Although it may be contested as to whether educational administration and leadership literatures are devoid of dialogue and debate (Bush, 2017), there is a long history to this argument (Donmoyer, 2001; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), not to mention the difficulties

for marginalized voices (Blackmore, 2010; Wilkinson & Eacott, 2013) – a point made by Wallin (this issue). Even special issues frequently lack a critical response and instead opt for a concluding or summative paper by a sympathetic reader. The contribution, and intervention, of this special issue is as a model of scholarship – a social epistemology. I put out an argument in the form of a book, some peers have challenged, refuted, sought clarity in relation to that argument and I have sought to justify my position or extend it via argument. There is little, if anything, to suggest here that such an intervention will scale up in the literatures of educational administration and leadership. Editors and reviewers are to some extent the custodians of a field's traditions, challenging prevailing views and trends is difficult (Natriello, 1996). I include ways of doing scholarship as a prevailing view or trend. Arguably the most exciting ideas are not taking place in the center of a field but at the periphery. As James Ladwig (1998) notes, “expanding field dynamics mean that it is quite possible (and plausible) to see alternate stances take up position on the periphery of a field at the very same time as the core or center changes very little” (p. 35).

Who is able to undertake the work of disrupting the status quo is a matter that Wallin raises in her paper. In particular, she argues that as an “increasingly prominent male scholar” I hold a privileged position to be able to speak out, one that is not afforded to others – notably feminist (and arguably more broadly, female) scholars. This is a thought provoking observation, and supported by empirical examples, of the gendered organizing of an intellectual community. As a white male scholar located in a developed nation – one with an intellectual history of producing educational administration scholarship – I did not sufficiently acknowledge the *trajectory* to think with Doreen Massey (2005) of my intellectual lineage. Nor did I acknowledge the gendered organizing of educational administration as a field of knowledge production. That said, the *relational* approach that I am advancing is at the periphery. There is a reason that *Educational Leadership Relationally* was published by Sense – a publishing house considered by many to be of inconsistent quality. Although

I do declare that the follow-up book is under contract with Springer, for *Educational Leadership Relationally* I could not get a major publishing house interested and/or they wanted me to produce a very different book. Nor can I get many educational administration and leadership journals willing to publish a piece either. There is an explicit desire for me to locate my position within a particular school of the zombie cannon – the key criticism being ‘what theorist are you using?’. In the book I address this. On page seven I declare that despite obvious trajectory in Bourdieusian social theory, my use of Bourdieu is without utmost loyalty or reverence. This was central to my naming of Lisa Adkins as an academic mentor. While I take on board the critique from Wallin regarding my dismissive tone to Adkins’ work, it is actually the way in which Adkins engages with Bourdieu that was most interesting. Rather than simply appropriating a piece of the zombie cannon, she worked beyond him. Our ideas are the product of lineage – a trajectory of ideas – they are not entirely original, but then again, neither are they merely appropriation, replication or reproductions.

It is also important to stress here that I am not arguing for a centralism of knowledge production. My advocacy of engaging with alternate stances is about argument and refutation. To think with Luc Boltanski and colleagues (Boltanski, 2009/2011, Boltanski & Chiapello, 1996/2005, Boltanski & Thevenot, 1991/2006), it is about being able to justify one’s position in the face of critique rather than recast all scholarship within a single version of how to do things. To move beyond novelty and make a contribution to knowledge, scholars need to create distinctions with those that have gone before and these distinctions can only be made through awareness of others and the critiques in which they would raise. In other words, the intellectual project is about the other and therefore requires multiple voices in the interests of knowledge production.

Productive Theorizing

Both Wallin and Riveros pick up on my assertion to deliver a productive rather than merely critical theorization of educational administration. This is an important observa-

tion and more a reflection on my loose use of language than my position. It is disappointing given my attention to the epistemological break and moving beyond the ordinary language of the everyday that I fell into the same trap, not to mention constructing a binary (productive/critical).

As Riveros and Wallin both point out, the *relational* research program is not incompatible with the critical/Critical project. The somewhat forced distinction I was seeking to create spoke more to the mobilization of critical resources for thinking through educational administration. The intention of the fifth *relational* extension (In doing so there is a productive – rather than merely critical – space to theorize educational administration and leadership) was to express a desire to move beyond being critical for the sake of it and/or not offering anything beyond the critique. As an example of the latter, countless appropriations of Bourdieu can show how reproduction plays out in education. Similarly, Foucault can be used continually to argue against the managerialist project and the increasing surveillance and governmentality achieved through various accountability regimes. This is why I prefaced the claim with “it seems unproductive to engage in a power explanation whose mechanical utilization risks crushing the narrative prior to any data being generated” (Eacott, 2015, p. 4).

My intention was to move beyond the overlaying of theoretical resources (e.g., the appropriation I mentioned above) and leave the object intact. What I see as a flaw in the appropriation approach is that the theoretical resources and the research object are conceived as separate entities – something that I am explicitly seeking to overcome with the *relational* approach. Furthermore, this separation stems from an *a priori* decision, and a conception of scholarship that is not too inconsistent with a systems theory perspective. In doing so, the research object does not alter and it is the manipulation of variables (hence the link to systems thinking) that constitutes the argument. For examples, claims that the introduction of strategic plans suddenly make school administrators under the surveillance of the systems and accountable to publics, assume that previously there was little or no oversight of schools. This is not to denounce the changes

taking place through the expansion of the managerialist project, but to not overstate the issue. The nostalgia of the free educator able to do as they please – similarly the projection of a utopian future – arguably does not, or ever did, exist. If these are the goals of scholarship though, the freedom of the individual, then it is quite plausible that what one finds are the enduring tensions of the educator against the system. Bureaucracy becomes demonized and oppression is found everywhere. The structural constraints of education become a cage.

The opposing agency argument is equally problematic. As I demonstrated in my critique of the Australian contribution to the *International Successful School Principals Project* by David Gurr, Lawrie Drysdale and colleagues, and Stephen Dinham’s *An Exceptional School Outcomes Project* (AESOP), the overlooking of power and politics in the agentic agenda limits what one can say and any utility that has with the lived experience of many practitioners. Just as the critical becomes stuck within the confines of critique, the agentic overtly privileges the individual (e.g., *great man* or *turnaround* rhetoric) to overcome contextual conditions. I return to the underlying causal principles of context based arguments in the next section.

What I see as two errors I make in my choice of language and argument are concerned with the binary that I construct (productive and critical scholarship), and the attempt at distancing my program from the critical. My overarching goal was to make visible the underlying generative principles of scholarship – those of ontology and epistemology – for the purpose of productively engaging with the other. The absence of this articulation leads to the superficial dismissal of scholarship that does not align with your own position. The exchanges reported in the opening sections of Martin Thrupp and Richard Willmott’s (2003) *Educational Management in Managerialist Times* demonstrates how the School Effectiveness and School Improvement movement and the mostly social critical school of thought struggle to engage with one another.

In attempting to move beyond binaries – although carelessly creating a new one in doing so – my goal was to locate empirical examples in spatio-temporal conditions. This

I saw as a productive space for theorizing. It was something that was not reducible to the critique of education as strictly reproduction and administration as a technology of control. Instead, I sought to privilege describing the work of organizing activity in education. My articulation in *Educational Leadership Relationally* does however have Marxist traces in the focus on organizing and recasting administrative labor. The observations of Wallin and Riveros now push my thinking in new directions to create greater clarity in my argument around productive theorizing and the distancing of my program from the critical. Matters that remain central to my advancing position are moving beyond the overlaying of theoretical resources and leaving the object intact, to grounding description in spatio-temporal conditions.

Furthermore, Wallin and Riveros have drawn my attention to a major error on my part of being loose with language. This is a matter that I will endeavour to address in forthcoming work. That said, I stand by my point. There are only so many times that we can write articles demonstrating the performativity of managerialist regimes, the cultural duping of the practitioner, and the doom and gloom of structural approaches to the organization of education. In seeking to make the underlying generative principles of research visible my goal was to facilitate purposeful engagement across research traditions rather than ignoring or talking past one another. Knowledge production is arguably enriched through a diversity of thought and engaging with the other is crucial to that.

On the Matter of Context

The theorizing of context is picked up in a number of contributions. Riveros notes that context is not synonymous with local and Crawford interprets my work to mean that relations constitute contexts. These are however smaller parts of their observations about *Educational Leadership Relationally*. In contrast, Oplatka's contribution focuses explicitly on the matter of context. In particular he asks questions concerning my argument for the particular grounding of practice. Oplatka argues for the universality of education and the

need for educational administration and leadership literatures to move beyond the local and speak to the global audience.

My desired goal in *Educational Leadership Relationally* was to move beyond an argument based on layers – local, global – and binaries – universal and particular. Oplatka makes many interesting points regarding the consistency of patterns in educational administration globally and much of what he argues is consistent with the central thesis of the book. In thinking through the matters raised by Oplatka, and to a lesser extent Riveros, it has raised questions for me regarding the causal mechanisms of context. Although this is somewhat tangential to the matters raised by Oplatka, I see them as central in trying to come to understand what we mean when we mobilize the term context and its implications for understanding educational administration.

The uncritical acceptance of the importance of context in educational administration literatures means that the very idea of context is rarely challenged or interrogated for its underlying generative principles. To do so, and as a basis for my claims, I seek to highlight the causal logics of various positions on the relations between context and practice. This is important as the underlying causal logics of scholarship, whether theoretical/conceptual or empirical, are the basis of arguments. Even when not made explicit, causality is implied and therefore a constant in the ways in which organizing is conceptualized.

A common approach, although infrequent position in educational administration literatures, is the dependent logic. This approach is core to structuralist accounts of practice where form follows function (e.g., Talcott Parsons). It can be described as:

- (1) Context (social structures) → practice. In this instance, sometimes referred to as a deterministic logic (Depelteau, 2013), practice is dependent upon – or determined by – social structures. As noted previously, form follows function. To bring this into conversation with educational administration, and particularly the effective schools literatures, this logic is central to claims of schooling as reproduction (e.g., Bourdieu

& Passeron, 1970/1977). Bureaucratic accounts that stress the downward linearity of policy and constraints of environmental factors are aligned with this logic. As an approach, it is not particularly common in educational administration literatures as to align with this position would require recognition that there are significant limitations on what can be done. In other words, the explanatory value of school leadership (and schooling for that matter) is insignificant when compared to external social structures. This is one major critique that is raised against John Hattie's (2009) work and his explicit overlooking of the role of context in the improvement of learning outcomes.

The counter claim to the dependent logic is, not surprisingly, the independent. In this case, unlike the foregrounding of social structures in the dependent, there is a privileging of the agency of the actor (both individual and collective). This directly overcomes claims that structuralist accounts, especially those of the social deterministic kind, overlook the agency of actors to influence the world around them. To express it differently:

(2) Practice (agency) → context (social structures). Not surprisingly, the literatures of educational administration are littered with accounts of the ability – often heroic – of great leaders (usually men) to overcome social structures and “turnaround” schools (e.g., Day & Gurr, 2014, and Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). In this agentic logic, the strong leader, usually an individual, is not confined by his/her context and through the exercising of agency facilitates performance that is beyond expectations (for that context). This causal logic is foundational to notions of management and manipulation – not necessarily a negative – of environments and populations. After all, the pursuit of a controllable and predictable outcomes (some might say, a future) is a driving force for organizational studies (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004).

An alternate approach to the dependent and independent logics plays off both, arguing that practice is both dependent and independent at the same time. A recursive position

where practice is produced by and also producing of itself (Drew & Heritage, 1992). In *Educational Leadership Relationally*, this was the position I held, and it can be expressed as:

(3) Practice (agency) ↔ context (social structures).

However, while the double-headed arrow begins to conflate practice and context it does not overcome the original separation of the two. In a similar case, Francois Depelteau (2013) also identifies a hybrid form of this conflation that is based on analytical dualism. It can be expressed as:

Context (social structures) → (+/-) practice (agency) → transformed or reproduced.

Both (3) and (4) move beyond the opposing ends of a structure-agency continuum, yet continue to construct practice and social structures as separate *entities* or to think with Emile Durkheim (1982), social facts. While (3) recognizes reciprocity, in (4), both context and practice become moderators. The relations, or reciprocity, in (4), both context and practice become moderators. The relations, or really relationships, in these substantialist causal logics are conceived of as what Harrison White (1992) labels *measurement constructs*. This conceptualization enables the mapping of ties and chains of interactions between individuals and/or institutions that can be codified and visually portrayed. The relations between the constructs (e.g., practice, social structures) are thought of in such a way that they can be conceived of and then measured for direction and strength. This conceptualization of relationships is consistent with the statistical analysis of various relational/social network analyses (e.g., Liou, Daly, Brown, & del Fresno, 2015) and the structured equation modelling frequently found in the school effectiveness and school improvement literatures (e.g., Chapman, Muijs, Reynolds, Sammons, & Teddlie, 2016; and Creemers, Kyriakides, & Sammons, 2010).

Irrespective of the above causal logic mobilized, contemporary thought and analysis in educational administration relies on a separation of context and practice. This is not overly surprising given that the genesis of organizational theory is arguably built upon

the construction of entities (e.g., the organization). Popular forms of causality, in organizational sciences and beyond, rely on (stable) entities/social facts. The logic of if X then Y, if not X then not Y (see Gergen, 2010), needs to be rethought in a relational approach. The increasing critique of arguments that essentialize *organizing* as an entity (or attribute) in person/s or situations (Crevani, 2015) call for something of a rethink of causality, organizing and relations. This is not to endorse the abandonment of causality, rather a reorientation beyond causal determinism. Taking context to be the ongoing configuration of temporal and spatial conditions provides the basis for an alternate conceptualization of context and causality. The enacted nature of organizing as a relational construct shifts attention to the unfolding description of practice and greater theorizing of spatio-temporal conditions – relating activities to one another rather than necessarily applying a linear cause and effect set of claims.

To achieve a *relational* understanding, there is a need to go beyond the artificial partitioning of the social world and the construction of external knowable entities. Arguably findings roots in Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) layered ecological model, and taken up with greater frequency with the expansion of globalization, educational administration studies often discuss context in a layered form. The local, national (or regional) and international are common in a (at least) three-tier layering of contexts. There are of course many versions of the layers, what I am highlighting is the very conceptualizing of contexts as layered. The partitioning of levels, the hierarchies of scale, and the relationships between layers is only possibly with entities. While consistent with classic organizational theory in educational administration that build upon entities (e.g., the school, and context), and the stratification of organizational actors (e.g., bureaucratic accounts of organizational roles), a layered approach is inconsistent – and incoherent – with a *relational* approach. A shift to relations is therefore not just epistemological, but ontological. This raises some serious questions for scholars of educational administration, and notably school leadership.

Calls to contextualize practices are not new (Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2010), but what it means to do so have rarely been articulated. Arguments stressing the need to bring back space in organizational theory (e.g., Kornberger & Clegg, 2004) go part of the way, but are often decoupled from temporality, and vice versa (e.g., Duncheon & Tierney, 2013). Core to my claim that organizing is context is recognition that relations are the object of analysis and a framework (theory) for inquiry. In doing so, I move beyond the attribution of causation in contexts (as per structural accounts) and the conflation of context with time and place. I have sought to advance an argument built upon the relations of temporality and space where actors generate rather than interact with, context.

The questions raised by Oplatka, Riveros and Crawford around context have forced a significant rethink of the role of context in educational administration. Challenges to overcoming a separation of practice from context and the construction of a layered reality have proved useful for thinking through how a *relational* approach can advance knowledge. Moving beyond orthodox versions of temporality and space opens scholarship in educational administration to new possibilities that may prove fruitful. While the space available in a journal article has limited my treatment here, these are matters that I will be further developing in the next book and ongoing work.

But What is a Relation?

There are many who identify with some form of relational scholarship. This a positive reflection of the increasing interest in relational approaches, but also a complexity as to what is meant by relations, relationship, and relational scholarship. Interest in relational approaches emerged from a dissatisfaction with substantialist accounts of the social world. To that end, relational scholarship is about a way of thinking about the social. It is not about the demarcation of what is a relationship and the measurement of that connection for direction and strength. The requirement for explicit parameters and operational definitions is not only unnecessary but contrary to the *relational* approach I am advancing. To make a universal

statement as to what is, and by virtue of is not, a relation would be to outline a static and immovable object. What I am arguing for is an openness to scholarship and inquiry and this is why relations rather than relationships are focal. As a consequence however, scholarship becomes a little fuzzy. Given my trajectory in Bourdieusian social theory, I am drawn to the opening passage of James Ladwig's (1996) *Academic Distinctions*:

In the mist of a very academic lecture and debate which took place in the Social Science Building on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, Madison on 4 April 1989, Pierre Bourdieu was questioned about the degree to which his sociology provides a fuzzy picture of the social world. The questioner clearly did not see this fuzziness as a virtue. But in response, Bourdieu explained that while he generally declines from making universal proclamations about how sociology ought to be conducted (forevermore), there was one tenet he himself tried to follow. In Bourdieu's words, when constructing his sociological accounts, the one rule he has tried to follow has been, "Do not be more clear than reality." (p. 1)

A fundamental question remains – "what is a relation?" A key insight here is provided by Pierpaolo Donati (2015) when he argues that society does not have relations but *is* relations. Following Donati, I argue that we cannot have a relational approach to educational administration (or any field of inquiry) unless we see the relation as an emergent of the social world. From this point of view, a relational approach is a way of seeing and knowing the social world.

To this end, it is not possible to articulate in advance what is, and is not, a relation. To do so would be to construct the relation as an entity, an approach that would fall into the measurement construct critique, and be contrary to the initial stimulus for relational scholarship. Instead, a relational approach uses relations to understand. The research object is located relationally in time and space. Even the construction of the research object is related to the observer. A relational approach mobilizes relations throughout the entire scholastic enter-

prise. There is no stepping outside of relations. This sits outside the *a priori* of the rational and the sensory experiences of the classic empiricist. There is much to be written on this matter, and I will take this serious as I continue to advance this work.

Audiences

Crawford (this issue) raises the theory and practice issue with specific reference to matters of translation or application. For me, the central issue here is one of audience. Rather than fall into the binary of theory and practice, the examples Crawford uses to outline her claims concern the accessibility of my argument to a specific audience – those working in schools. There is no doubt, at least to my knowledge, that *Educational Leadership Relationally* was written for scholars. It is a text that delves into theory and methodology and pays little, if any, attention to matters of translation and application. This is not to say that the *relational* research program does not offer anything for those working in educational organizations, rather the text *Educational Leadership Relationally* did not set out to deliver a guideline for practice. This has not stopped me from using the *relational* approach in classes and workshops with school leaders or multiple doctoral candidates mobilizing the approach to investigate various empirical problems. In short, *Educational Leadership Relationally* provides a methodology for thinking through practice rather than findings for practitioners.

A challenge for educational administration literatures is the legitimacy of multiple audiences, or more specifically, that not all pieces of scholarship need to speak to all audiences. The increasingly common inclusion of "practical implications" in the structured abstracts of journal articles and the professionalization of graduate programs in educational administration legitimizes the belief that all research should have an applied end. This actually speaks to the claims of *Educational Leadership Relationally*. The underlying generative principles of research, notably those of ontology and epistemology, are silenced in the literatures. The research object is rarely brought into question and is instead uncritically accepted in the pursuit of how to do it better.

A second, but somewhat related, matter that Crawford raises is solicitation in educational administration research. In the professions, or applied fields, notions of solicitation have been enduring. In the broader context of the social sciences, Pierre Bourdieu (2001/2004) notes:

As for the social sciences, one might imagine that since they are not in a position to provide directly usable, that is immediately marketable, products, they would be less exposed to solicitations. In fact, however, social scientists, and especially sociologists, are the objects of very great solicitude, whether it be positive – and often very profitable, materially and symbolically, for those who opt to serve the dominant vision, if only by omission (and in the case, scientific inadequacy suffices) – or negative, and malignant, sometimes even destructive, for those who, just by practising their craft, contribute to unveiling a little truth of the social world. (p. viii)

Educational administration, as a social science, is in a unique location in relation to this debate. Whereas sociologists may not have directly marketable products, the technicist / functionalist stream of educational administration research does seek to produce marketable products. To think with Halpin (1990) and Gunter (1997), this is the *management by ring binder* approach to educational administration. The type of research that is called upon by politicians, the media, and to some extent education systems, are centrally concerned with *how to do things better*. In times of increasing fiscal pressure, the neo-Taylorism of such research is overlooked through the privileging of translation and/or application. Scholarship which does not fit or align with the ideological position of the powerful (or even majority) is marginalized, labelled as antiprogress and/or left wing idealism. As Gunter (2010) argues, (social) theory only seems to matter if it can be directly translated into decisions to be made at 9:00am Monday morning. Theoretical work, which travels across borders (both physical and symbolic) better than empirical examples (Eacott & Evers, 2015) is labelled exotic and not in the public interest (Gunter, 2013).

This does specific things to dialogue and debate in a discipline. As Maggie MacLure (2010) reminds us, it is theory that stops us from forgetting that the world is not laid out in plain view and thinking that things speak for themselves – the data, practice, the pure voice of the previously marginalized. The uncritical acceptance of the ordinary language of the everyday is generative of the approach I am advocating. In particular, drawing on a rich intellectual trajectory from Gaston Bachelard through Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu, the *relational* approach provides the theoretical resources to interrogate the claims of the solicited and challenge them on the underlying principles rather than on a disagreement on the ends. The source of debate becomes the why not the what. This is crucial to productive theorizing.

Scholarship can arguably make contributions in multiple ways: theoretically, methodologically, and practically – to name a few. A question that has plagued me is how can we seek to improve leadership in schools and other educational organizations without a serious dialogue and debate about what it means to lead? Without explicitly articulating what we mean all we are left with are the individualized narratives of how one believes things ought to be. Although at a certain level there may exist some patterns, the legitimized relativity of such a model for knowledge production results in substantial talking past one another. Alternate arguments are dismissed due to a lack of coherence with pre-existing orientations. The *relational* approach provides the intellectual resources to improve the robustness of knowledge claims through attention to the underlying generative principles. Does this resolve the matter of solicitation – no, but it does facilitate a potential discussion.

Conclusion

The intellectual project that I sought in curating this special issue was to advance the *relational* research program by making public the dialogue between myself and fellow scholars. I cannot hide from the matter that the special issue is somewhat self-serving. After all, the very topic of this special issue is my own book and therefore this reflects an implicit

marketing strategy. The engagement of the contributors with my work helps me to clarify my own thinking and advance my agenda. The choice of an open access journal further enables me to share the papers and the work in a way that traditional publishing outlets do not. This increases the scope and reach of my book further again. I cannot hide from these personal gains. That said there was a risk involved. It was possible that the critiques punched too many holes in the work – potentially devaluing my argument and causing irrefutable damage to my research program (especially given the open access of *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations - JEAF*). Possibly I had seriously overlooked matters. Maybe they picked up on typographical errors such as referring to Mary Uhl-Bien as Mary Ulh-Bien on page six, or Karen Seashore Louis as Karen ‘Seahorse’ Louis on page 61. Potentially my ideas were not as robust as what I had thought or simply a rehash of previous work. These were all risk. However, it would be contradictory for me to argue for a more open version of (social) science for educational administration and then hide behind covers.

The logic of scholarship – argument and refutation – I seek to embody. The dialogue and debate included in this special issue is just part of an ongoing agenda centrally concerned with advancing scholarship. Having others critically engage with your work and then thinking through how you would respond definitely strengthens and extends your own capacities. While this approach is absent in the vast majority of the literatures of educational administration, I applaud the *JEAF* Editors Paul Newton and Bonnie Stelmach for their support of this project and encourage others to do the same. As I frequently do when signing off on work, I encourage you to think with, through, and where necessary against what I have put forward in the paper (and issue) in the interests of advancing scholarship.

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