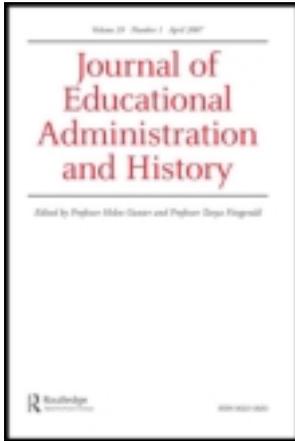


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Preparing ‘educational’ leaders in managerialist times: an Australian story

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The preparation of educational leaders is a global phenomenon. Education systems have developed numerous means by which current and aspiring leaders are prepared for the role. Through the example of a large public school system in Australia, this paper argues that the doxa of school leadership establishes a particular identity of the principalship. One which constructs the principal as the deliverer of state initiated reforms. Theoretically informed by Bourdieu, this paper argues for an alternate way of thinking about leadership preparation, one based on introducing participants to the conversation of the world.

Keywords: educational leadership; principal preparation; Pierre Bourdieu; Australia

Introduction

Michael Oakeshott suggests that the fundamental issue of education is to ‘join the conversation of mankind.’¹ Bates appropriates this into an educational leadership space, arguing that ‘to become educated is to join the conversation of the world...for it is only within such conversation that curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation – those three fundamental message systems of schools – can be properly understood.’² Bates’ implicit conceptualisation of educational leadership preparation, or it could be argued, ‘ongoing dialogue’, provides further support for English’s knowledge dynamic.³ The temporal features of both ‘the conversation of the world’ and ‘knowledge dynamic’ are at odds with the quest for a standardised knowledge base in educational leadership, the

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¹Michael Oakeshott, ‘Learning and Teaching’, in *The Concept of Education*, ed. R.S. Peters (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 59.

²Richard J. Bates, ‘Presidential Address: Public Education, Social Justice and Teacher Education’, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 34, no. 3 (2006): 283.

³Fenwick W. English, ‘The Unintended Consequences of a Standardized Knowledge Base in Advancing Educational Leadership Preparation’, *Educational Administration Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2006): 461–72.

contemporary professional standards agenda and the leadership capability frameworks of education systems and professional associations. As Bates warns, any attempt to define the essentials of educational leadership in the mastery of an ever-changing repertoire of skills under conditions of risk, uncertainty and competition is highly problematic.⁴ This is consistent with the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who understands practice as forever incomplete, immeasurable and always in a state of becoming.⁵

It is important at the outset to state what type of article this is, and by implication, what it is not. This article emerges from a discontent with the state of educational leadership preparation and development in Australia and a desire to disrupt the status quo. It serves as an intervention into the identity construction of school leaders, therefore having implications for both the dispositions and practices of school leaders and those who engage with them in preparation programmes. While educational leadership is widely taught at universities,⁶ the proliferation of professional standards and leadership capability frameworks combined with an inherent anti-intellectualism is highly problematic for school leaders and, by implication, for future generations. Consistent with Gunter's scathing assessment of the majority of work in the field,⁷ much of the work advanced by professional associations and education systems is prone to populous faddism, under-theorised rhetoric and appeals to common sense. This context needs to be robustly challenged. Engaging in such a polemic argument requires a level of reflexivity to avoid promoting a simplistic polarisation between theoretically embedded and practically orientated programmes. In order to avoid this modernistic dualism, every attempt is made to problematise both positions. Herein lies a significant issue for this author. I am acutely aware of an underlying privileging of university-based, theory-rich programmes (I do not however hold the assumption that all university programmes are theory-based, or vice versa); as a scholar researching and teaching exclusively in educational leadership I place a certain value upon the work I do and expect likewise of others. If not, there would be an ethical issue in relation to my work and particularly students paying to undertake my courses. This awareness of place making and privileging is imperative if a coherent and rigorous argument is to be put forth.

⁴Bates, 'Presidential Address', 277.

⁵Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1977); *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990); *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

⁶Richard J. Bates and Scott Eacott, 'Teaching Educational Leadership and Administration in Australia', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 40, no. 3 (2008): 195.

⁷Helen Gunter, 'Book Review: Teachers in the Middle, Reclaiming the Wasteland of the Adolescent Years of Schooling by Smyth and McInerney', *School Leadership & Management* 29, no. 3 (2009): 333–4.

Following the work of Pat Thomson, Shaun Rawolle and Bob Lingard,⁸ in this article I draw on Bourdieuan social theory to argue that the preparation of principals in the New South Wales public school system is evidence of the diminished strength of the field of schooling to refract interference from other fields, particularly the economic and political fields. As such, the preparation of principals is little more than part of the managerialist intervention of the contemporary state in the public sector. This neo-liberal regime constructs and communicates a doxa, or self-evident truth⁹, of good leadership practice and uses structures (e.g. school-based planning, merit selection promotion, leadership capability frameworks, and competitive enrolment in leadership programmes) to legitimise it as the preferred or required leadership practice. These structural arrangements seek to establish and maintain a particular logic of practice or leadership habitus in aspiring principals. That is, those aspiring to the principalship are disposed through their positions as aspirants and their life-histories of playing the educational game to act according to its rules and internal narratives of truth.¹⁰ The central thesis of this article is that if school leaders are to reclaim their radical past and engage in public intellectualism, an alternate leadership habitus, one built on educational problem posing and contestation as opposed to organisational problem solving, is required.

Australian policy context

The structure of the Australian education system is complex. With six states and two territories, Australia operates as a federal system, however, this federalism works politically as well as constitutionally. While constitutionally the six states have responsibility for education, due to the idiosyncratic character of Australian federalism, the Commonwealth has the fiscal capacity to make policy and ideological interventions into education. This vertical fiscal imbalance is very important in understanding the nature of relations between Federal and State levels of politics in relation to schooling. At its most basic level, the fiscal imbalance establishes a degree of dependency of State education systems upon Commonwealth funding. Therefore, despite not possessing constitutional responsibility for education, the Commonwealth has the means of intervening through either the offering of additional or the threat of withholding funds.

⁸For example, see Pat Thomson, 'Headteacher Autonomy: A Sketch of a Bourdieuan Field Analysis of Position and Practice', *Critical Studies in Education* 51, no. 1 (2010): 5–20; Shaun Rawolle, 'Cross-Field Effects and Temporary Social Fields: A Case Study of the Mediatisation of Recent Australian Knowledge Economy Policies', *Journal of Education Policy* 20, no. 6 (2005): 705–24; Shaun Rawolle and Bob Lingard, 'The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and Researching Education Policy', *Journal of Education Policy* 23, no. 6 (2008): 729–41.

⁹Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Helen Gunter and Gillian Forrester, 'New Labour and the Logic of Practice in Educational Reform', *Critical Studies in Education* 51, no. 1 (2010): 55–69.

¹⁰Pat Thomson, 'Headteacher Autonomy', 14.

Further complicating the situation is the presence of National policies,¹¹ different to Federal and State, which are agreed upon by all State and Territory Education Ministers. The most significant national policy is the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young People (MCEETYA). The first goal of this declaration is that ‘Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.’ This goal is couched in the language of both social (equity) and economic (excellence) reform. In contrast, the current Rudd/Gillard Federal Labor government has education within the ‘productivity’ agenda and policy reforms within the ‘Education Revolution’¹² directly measure educational outcomes in numbers. Data are collected centrally through a national testing regime, where results are publicly available through the MySchool website,¹³ where schools are compared with ‘like schools’ and national averages. The ongoing tension in the policy agenda of Australian education between social and economic foci plays out in the daily practices of school leaders.

The inherent managerialism, with an economic focus, of Federal intervention in education policy since the 1980s and 1990s has largely been charged with bringing about the cultural transformation of the public sector and particularly professional identity within schools. It is based on a market ideology and shifting the focus of school leadership and management to be more responsive to client demand and external judgement. This market ideology is based on what Apple refers to as ‘thin democracy’ based on individual consumer choice, rather than ‘thick democracy’ based on full collective

¹¹National policies in schooling expanded during the Dawkins period (1987–1991) and are part of a post-Keynesian framework restructuring the Australian economy in the context of internationalisation and global market ideology. See Bob Lingard, Paige Porter, Leo Bartlett, and John Knight, ‘Federal/State Mediations in the Australian National Education Agenda: From AEC to MCEETYA 1987–1993’, *Australian Journal of Education* 39, no. 1 (1995): 41–66; Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young People* (Melbourne: 2008).

¹²The ‘Education Revolution’ was a significant election platform for the Kevin Rudd led Federal Labor party during the 2007 election campaign against the incumbent Howard conservative government. This platform includes, among other things, the provision of laptops to all students in the final years of high school, a comprehensive building program, and a National Partnerships agenda with targeted schools (categories include centres for excellence in quality teaching, and schools needing support in literacy and numeracy outcomes). Kevin Rudd was replaced as leader of the Federal Labor party on July 24, 2010 by his deputy, and education minister, Julia Gillard (who became the first Australian female prime minister), who was instrumental in the delivery of many initiatives of the so-called Revolution.

¹³This website (<http://www.MySchool.edu.au>) is a federal government initiative designed to support the ‘choice’ agenda for parents and caregivers as part of the ‘Education Revolution’. However, as with most education policy derived by those outside of education, the measure of success is reduced to the lowest common denominator, in this case, standardised test results.

participation.¹⁴ The market favours those who are already advantaged while simultaneously discouraging alternatives and increasing the power of the dominant modes of operating. This policy context, which rewards the ‘what counts’ of education, has been a key mechanism for political intervention in schooling through the cultural re-engineering of school leadership and the embedding of performativity in the leaders’ soul.¹⁵ However, while school leaders work and practice leadership within a context full of dilemmas and paradoxes between Federal, State and National policies, the either/or choice of social or economic reform is somewhat of a false dilemma. Although Federal interventions have shifted foci from social to economic reform, National policies, which all States/Territories and Federal governments have committed to, remain focused on both social and economic reform. The political nature of the Australian education policy context, evident in this brief overview, highlights some of the complex influences on school leadership and what Bourdieu refers to as a ‘double bind’. That is, the means by which school leadership effectiveness is measured in the performative culture of Federal and State education policy is not wholly reflective of their own evaluations of their practice (couched in the social and economic pursuits of National policies), while at the same time the performative both impacts and changes their practice.

Bourdieu as a theoretical resource

Bourdieu was intensely interested in, indeed fascinated by, the role of schools in advancing capitalist societies.¹⁶ He sees schooling as a (re)productive mechanism for the existing social order. That is, schools are a material and symbolic support for the social divisions of society by embedding such divisions in the objective distributions of resources and subjective classifications of individuals.¹⁷ Of particular note for this article is that for Bourdieu, everything is essentially political and what he sought was not just political emancipation but emancipation from thinking and seeing the world in a certain way. This is pivotal to a discussion on school leadership preparation and goes to the central assertion of this article that school leaders need to engage in the

¹⁴Michael W. Apple, ‘Producing Difference: Neo-Liberalism, Neo-Conservatism and the Politics of Education Reform’, in *Re-reading Education Policies: A Handbook Studying the Policy Agenda of the 21st Century*, ed. Maarten Simons, Mark Olssen, and Michael A. Peters (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009), 625–49.

¹⁵Stephen J. Ball, ‘Education Reform, Teacher Professionalism and the End of Authenticity’, in *Re-reading Education Policies: A Handbook Studying the Policy Agenda of the 21st Century*, ed. Maarten Simons, Mark Olssen, and Michael A. Peters (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009): 667–82.

¹⁶Agnes van Zanten, ‘Bourdieu as Education Policy Analyst and Expert: A Rich but Ambiguous Legacy’, *Journal of Education Policy* 20, no. 6 (2005): 671–86.

¹⁷Lois Wacquant, Preface, in Pierre Bourdieu, *State Nobility* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997).

conversation of the world, not just acquire the technical skills judged by an external body as vital to undertaking the role, frequently perceived as taking place in a somewhat static environment.

One of the key requirements of making this argument is an explicit articulation of the location of school leaders in society. This paper advances the idea that school leadership practice sits at the intersection of,¹⁸ or is caught between,¹⁹ different social fields. For Bourdieu, a field is a relatively autonomous social world whose properties contribute to its reproduction over time. They are sites of ongoing struggle and the winners of such struggles are those who possess the requisite resources or ‘capital’ deemed of greatest value within the field. A field’s autonomy is illustrated by the way it generates its own values and markers of achievement.²⁰ Therefore, the extent of a field’s autonomy is reflected in the strength of its capacity to refract interference from other fields and in particular, the political and economic fields.²¹ In a recently published special issue of *Critical Studies in Education*, Jill Blackmore concludes:

There is agreement across the papers with Bourdieu²² that the field of education is weakening in terms of its capacity to protect its boundaries, language and, indeed, practices from fields of politics, journalism and economics as the language of markets and managerialism has penetrated into core educational discourses.²³

Whereas others argue that school leadership is a field in its own right, this erosion of boundaries and the infiltration of economic and political discourse raise questions concerning the agency of school leaders²⁴ and whether they simply mediate cross field effects or instead are located between multiple social fields.

The principalship is located in a unique social space in which the role itself has competing underlying principles. Firstly, there is an inward-looking perspective, focused on educative practice for the purpose of education; devel-

¹⁸Bob Lingard and Shaun Rawolle, ‘Principal Leadership and Straddling Fields: A Bourdieuan Account’. Paper presented at the annual conference for the Australian Association for Research in Education, Melbourne, Australia, November 28–December 2, 2010).

¹⁹Thomson, ‘Headteacher Autonomy’.

²⁰Karl Maton, ‘A Question of Autonomy: Bourdieu’s Field Approach and Higher Education Policy’, *Journal of Education Policy* 20, no. 6 (2005): 687–704.

²¹Bob Lingard, Shaun Rawolle, and Sandra Taylor, ‘Globalizing Policy Sociology in Education: Working with Bourdieu’, *Journal of Education Policy* 20, no. 6 (2005): 759–77.

²²Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York: The New Press, 1996).

²³Jill Blackmore, ‘Policy, Practice and Purpose in the Field of Education: A Critical Review’, *Critical Studies in Education* 51, no. 1 (2010): 108.

²⁴This loss or lack of agency raises the question as to whether it is possible to talk about a social field if there is no agency available to those within an apparent field. For this note I am deeply grateful to an anonymous reviewer who provided substantial stimulus around this very question.

oped over time, the set of dispositions embodied through exposure to particular educative experiences constructs an educator or teacher habitus. Secondly, an external-looking perspective, focused on economic and political measures of success. Although social fields are not static and the ongoing tensions of a field can be sourced from both external and internal forces, the increasing definition of what is of worth, or the capital, of school leadership by political and economic means reduces, if not removes, the ability of school leaders to define their own markers of achievement and refract external interference. This has a significant impact on the practice of school leaders. As an individual evolves from a teacher towards that of a principal their field location shifts. Moving from the field of schooling into a position caught between multiple social fields (e.g. economic, political), the habitus, which is revealed and only exists within and through practice, is divided against itself and in constant negotiation of itself. Therefore, the dispositions of the school leader, or their habitus, are somewhat doomed to a kind of duplication, or a double perception of the self, with allegiances to multiple identities.²⁵ The case below provides empirical support for this argument.

The case of New South Wales, Australia

The NSW public school system is the largest in Australia and is run under the auspices of the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET). Around 740,000 students are taught by over 50,000 full time teachers in more than 2200 schools (including both primary and secondary). Currently, the DET offers a range of leadership preparation programmes for aspiring, newly appointed and experienced school leaders. Examples of programmes include the ‘principal preparation programme’, ‘highly effective leaders’, ‘great leaders, great teams, great results’, and they are offered in a variety of modes including face-to-face workshops, online learning modules, travelling scholars seminars and self-taught CD ROMs. Much of this structure emerged following Scott’s *Learning Principals*.²⁶ In this report, Scott declares: ‘the school leadership pressures currently experienced, not just in Australia but internationally, might be systematically and comprehensively addressed using evidence-based strategies derived from robust research.’²⁷ A couple of notable phrases within this quote require further analysis. The first is the need for ‘evidence-based strategies.’ Much of what is referred to as ‘evidence-based’ finds its historical roots in Taylor’s *The Principles of Scientific*

²⁵Pierre Bourdieu, *Weight of the World* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²⁶Geoff Scott, *Learning Principals: Leadership Capability and Learning Research in New South Wales Department of Education and Training* (Sydney: NSW DET, 2003).

²⁷*Ibid.*, 52.

Management,²⁸ later appropriated by Deming in his quality systems and most notably, total quality management.²⁹ Most frequently linked with the epistemology of the school effectiveness and school improvement movement, evidence-based practice is critiqued for its failure to problematise the measures of school success and even who decides. While some have questioned the utility of evidence-based practice,³⁰ English takes the critique further to argue that evidence-based decision-making actually dumbs down schools.³¹ Central to his argument is the reduction of teaching and learning to numbers, where decisions regarding what is important are actually decided by the choice of questions asked, irrespective of what data are collected. This narrowing of questions also limits the range of potential solutions. The field of schooling, at least in the specific local context of NSW public schools, establishes and supports the rules of evidence-based decision making. To be a player in the game of school leadership, one must learn or be habituated to the rules of the game. A game couched in economic language with frequent intervention, or interference, from those beyond education. Within this game, 'certain knowledges and capitals are privileged, providing a common sense or orthodoxy that Bourdieu calls doxa.'³²

A second and interrelated element of evidence-based strategies is the rationalisation of decision-making processes. In this context of evidence-based decisions, there exists a legitimising of techno-rationalist approaches where improvements are made through a series of logical increments. This doxa of school leadership fails to adequately engage with the complexity of social life and the ebbs and flows of human and organisational interaction. However, it should be noted that many have argued against the proliferation of a techno-rationality in policy, the over-representation of a 'problem solving' approach in the educational leadership literature, and the preparation of leaders based in the 'management by ring binder approach.'³³ The existence of the bias towards techno-rationality in the literature does little more than reinforce the work of Callahan on American education in the first half of the 1900s.³⁴ That is, education has become less about the 'educational' and more about the pursuit of efficiency in school management. As school leaders are disposed through their

²⁸Frederick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1911).

²⁹William E. Deming, *Out of the Crisis* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982).

³⁰Theodore Kowalski, 'Need to Address Evidence Based Practice in Educational Administration', *Educational Administration Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2009): 391–410.

³¹Fenwick W. English, *The Postmodern Challenge to the Practice of Educational Administration* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd, 2003).

³²Jill Blackmore, 'Policy, Practice and Purpose in the Field of Education: A Critical Review', *Critical Studies in Education* 51, no. 1 (2010): 102.

³³Helen Gunter, *Rethinking Education: The Consequences of Jurassic Management* (London: Cassell, 1997).

³⁴Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962).

positions to act in the interests of their schools, and by virtue themselves,³⁵ a general principle of practice is to maintain, and advance if possible, the relative position of the school/individual through the acquisition of capital. Given that the defining of such capital is increasingly expressed in economic language as governments have turned their attention to education as a space for social democratic reform promoting a meritocratic vision of society,³⁶ the habitus of school leaders is in constant tension between the educative and economic/political assumptions of practice. While professional associations and systemic authorities continue to support and disseminate the work of educational entrepreneurs, the access to robust research that engages with the complexity of school leadership practice is too infrequent. As Gunter argues, much of the work in educational leadership is 'intellectually and professionally impoverished.'³⁷

According to Scott, one of the key elements of an effective leadership preparation programme is that it 'consistently links theory with practice.'³⁸ In particular a programme that makes direct reference to research on effective workplace practice in the area and providing access to improvement solutions that exist beyond the immediate experience of participants. The goal of linking theory and practice suggests that they exist separately. In addition, the type of theory that this statement refers to is a professionalisation of knowledge and problem solving tool for educational managers, not theory-focused on understanding the phenomenon of leadership in schools. This is arguably the result of the underlying assumption of the binary of theory and practice. Leadership preparation in this paradigm is (re)productive for the system in sustaining existing power relations. Exposure to a narrow form of theory embedded within the evidence-based paradigm of management removes any chance that leaders will resist neo-liberal and neoconservative reforms, or worse still, create and enact counter proposals. Scott names the measures of success for the linking of theory and practice as when theory is 'clearly relevant', 'feasible', and 'demonstrably effective in adding value to student learning and outcomes.'³⁹ Once again we have the educational outcomes measured in economic terms. The contemporarily popular 'value-added' obsession obscures the reduction of schooling to numbers which can be compared like barrels of oil on the stock exchange. The literature on educational leadership is filled with stories of heroic leaders who turn schools around. However, as

³⁵For a discussion on the links between school and principal identity see: Pat Thomson, 'Severed Heads and Compliant Bodies? A Speculation about Principal Identities', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 25, no. 1 (2004): 43–59.

³⁶Maton, 'A Question of Autonomy'.

³⁷Helen Gunter, 'Book Review: Teachers in the Middle, Reclaiming the Wasteland of the Adolescent Years of Schooling by Smyth & McInerney', *School Leadership & Management* 29, no. 3 (2009): 333.

³⁸Scott, *Learning Principals*, 52.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 47.

Gunter and Fitzgerald argue, the self-reverence of a person's story of their victory in turning around a failing school does little to explain who determines whether a school is failing and for what reasons.⁴⁰

The legislative stance

In NSW, legislation dictates that the principal is the individual responsible for the effective and efficient running of the school. Once again, a policy statement couched in economic language. Despite the rhetoric of participation and distributed leadership in schools in the literature, legally, the ultimate accountability for the operational management of the school rests with the principal. *Leading and Managing* is the official document outlining the responsibilities and roles of the principal in NSW public schools.⁴¹ The introductory text of the document declares:

The principal occupies the pivotal position in the school and is accountable for leadership and management consistent with relevant State legislation and the policies and priorities of the NSW Government. The task is complex and requires the principal to be the leading learner in the school, and a role model to staff and the community.

The principal is accountable to the Director-General for the quality of outcomes achieved by students. The principal's accountability is exercised within the context of the community in which the school is located and the total resources allocated to the school.

This text explicitly names the principal as the deliverer of state policies and priorities. Such priorities and policies are outlined in the NSW State Plan which is a policy statement outlining how public funds (including those acquired from the federal government) are to be allocated. The leadership of schools doxa present in the managerialist project structures the principalship with a delivery disposition.⁴² This disposition requires a surrendering of the public intellectualism inherent in school leadership as the principal becomes little more than the local face of the systemic agenda. The embodiment of the school leadership doxa serves a reproductive purpose for the system as aspirants are habituated into the deliverer role. Secondly, the following paragraph outlines the chain of command in the education system. A tension exists

⁴⁰Helen Gunter and Tanya Fitzgerald, 'Educational Administration and History Part 1: Debating the Agenda', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 40, no. 1 (2008): 5–21.

⁴¹New South Wales Department of Education and Training, *Leading and Managing the School: A Statement of the Key Accountabilities for Principals in the Effective Educational Leadership and Management of NSW Government Schools* (Sydney: NSW DET, 2000).

⁴²Gunter and Forrester, 'New Labour and the Logic of Practice'.

between the policy statement and the practice of the accountability regime. In the contemporary performative state, the 'quality of outcomes achieved by students' remains measured in standardised test results. This is particularly true as Australia has adopted a national testing program. These test results, which are little more than proxies for practice, as performance indicators are increasingly being judged out of context despite the policy statement. While the federal government's MySchool website lists the level of socioeconomic advantage/disadvantage of the school (based on the postal code of the suburb of the school, not necessarily the families of the student body), there is no reference to the level of funding/resourcing made available to the school and through what sources.⁴³ Through many recent reforms including, but not exclusively, a national testing regime, a forthcoming national curriculum and the establishment of the MySchool website, the state has sought to standardise the educational product and gain greater control of the core practice of schools, teaching and learning.

The professional standards agenda

Further attempts by the state to standardise the educational product and gain greater control of education are evident through the professional standards agenda, developed at the state level through the legislative authority of the New South Wales Institute of Teachers and forthcoming at the national level from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.⁴⁴ Australia is following the lead of many other countries in this respect. A representative sample of the leadership standards at the state level includes:⁴⁵

6.4.4

Critically review research on best practice in teaching and learning to assist colleagues to further develop their teaching expertise.

6.4.8

Make a significant contribution to educational policy and practice at the school and in wider professional contexts.

⁴³There is a long standing debate in Australian education, particularly following the election of the Howard government in 1997, on the divisive funding arrangements of the government, in particular the increased funding of private schools at the expense of public schools, although the term 'state' school has become more popular in Australia in recent times.

⁴⁴This dual (arguably soon to become 'duel') regime of professional standards is evidence of the political nature of Australian federalism.

⁴⁵See <http://www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au/Main-Professional-Teaching-standards.html> for a more detailed outline of the standards. 'Professional leadership' is the highest of four levels within the standards framework, the others being 'graduate teacher', 'professional competence', and 'professional accomplishment'.

7.4.6

Take a leadership role in presenting a positive image of the school in all communication and interactions with parents, caregivers, colleagues, industry and the local community.

The first example highlights the legacy of Taylorism in educational discourse through the use of ‘best practice.’ The critical engagement with research is constrained through the points raised earlier regarding the type of theory that is of interest to the ‘practitioner.’⁴⁶ The second example suggests that leaders play a role in policy. However there exists a body of literature that indicates that school-level leaders play little, if any, role in policy debates other than to be the local face and deliverer of systemic reforms.⁴⁷ Given that contemporary education reforms have taken a neo-liberal approach, the third example highlights the uncritical adoption of market ideology. The maintenance of school image has long been a part of the principalship, however the marketisation of education and the subsequent economic measures of school image frequently lead to under theorised views of participation,⁴⁸ school-based management⁴⁹ and the ambiguous notion of ‘stakeholders.’⁵⁰ This somewhat sociologically naive perspective of the education marketplace is supported in the professionalisation of knowledge, the professional standards agenda and the current legislative framework of the principalship. Through the delivery of a national curriculum,⁵¹ professional standards for both graduates and initial teacher education programmes, and the public dissemination of school results in standardised tests, the managerialist project of the state in education is all but complete. As with Bourdieu’s writing on education, the notion of school autonomy is little more than a deceptive device that helps legitimise domination by dissimulating the relation between school processes and the aims of the

⁴⁶There is a certain discomfort with using the term ‘practitioner’ here. My personal attempts to avoid creating a scholar/practitioner binary are significantly challenged, so for the reader I would like to draw attention to this challenge while at the same time contributing to it. Somewhat like the ‘double bind’ of which Bourdieu writes, where the ways in which roles are constructed are not reflected in my own experience of the roles.

⁴⁷See Hoffman, ‘Educational Leadership and Social Activism’.

⁴⁸Gary L. Anderson, ‘Toward Authentic Participation: Deconstructing the Discourses of Participatory Reforms in Education’, *American Educational Research Journal* 35, no. 4 (1998): 571–603.

⁴⁹John Smyth, ed., *A Socially Critical View of the Self-Managing School* (London: Falmer Press, 2003).

⁵⁰Helen M. Gunter, ‘Labels and Labelling in the Field of Educational Leadership’, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 25, no. 1 (2004): 21–41.

⁵¹The first versions were released on 1 March 2010 for a 2011 implementation, however continued debate has scaled down the start date to partial implementation even as late as 2013.

state and dominant groups.⁵² The question that remains is, where will any form of resistance come from?

The New South Wales academy

Australia has 39 universities for a population of just over 22 million. Every major university has offerings in educational leadership. Eleven universities are based in NSW, mostly based in and around the capital city of Sydney (Macquarie, NSW, Sydney, University of Technology Sydney, Western Sydney and Australian Catholic University) but some are more regional (Charles Sturt, New England, Newcastle, Southern Cross and Wollongong). Within the Australian academy, educational leadership has a low status within many schools/faculties of education. Unlike the US, there are no departments/faculties of educational administration; the closest is the National School of Educational Leadership at Australian Catholic University. There are however other developments occurring in educational leadership in Australian higher education. The University of NSW has established the Office of Educational Leadership under Colin Evers; the University of Wollongong has The Australian Centre for Educational Leadership (directed by Narottam Bhindi); and Australian Catholic University has the priority research centre called Creative and Authentic Leadership Flagship. The University of New England was the original host institution (which it continued to serve as until 2007 when Wollongong took over) for the *Journal of Educational Administration*, one of the field's leading journals. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that many tenured academic positions advertised in educational leadership and management are either re-advertised or filled by those from much broader research and teaching backgrounds. While this diversity of scholarly background is to be embraced on one hand, it does house potential issues in relation to the provision of robust Australian research on educational leadership. Although educational leadership is part of the discipline of education, a deep engagement with the historical development of the knowledge dynamic of educational leadership and its relationship with the big questions pushing the edge of knowledge is imperative if research is to be more than just ahistorical school management problem solving work. While providing an overview of Australian research on educational leadership, Mulford notes:

In the last five years (2002–2006) only 2.3 percent of Australian Research Council (ARC) funding for Discovery grants, and 4.1 percent for Linkage grants went to the field of education. Less than 5 percent of all grants awarded in the field of education went to educational leadership research and related areas. The average annual amount invested by the ARC in educational

⁵²van Zanten, 'Bourdieu as Education Policy Analyst', 672.

leadership research in Australia over the last five years was in the order of a miserly \$52,000.⁵³

The offering of educational leadership courses at all major universities and the developing/maintenance of research hubs at particular universities are positive signs for educational leadership in Australia. However, the minimal funding for research from the largest provider of research funds is problematic. Educational leadership is a scholarly domain maintained by stories which legitimise existing policies and practice while concealing the dominance of particular groups, such as the state.⁵⁴ The lack of funding to support robust research significantly hinders the potential for aspiring and current school leaders to engage in theoretically informed – which does not have to mean dense and inaccessible – knowledge to advance the discipline. While lesser scholarships provide a sense of certainty in uncertain times, the simplification of the complex social activity that is school leadership does our schools, and by default, our children, a considerable disservice.

From rules to strategies

The office of the principal is situated in the social space of education and owes a number of its most distinctive properties to the set of relationships it holds with other institutional/systemic based personnel, other institutions and society at large. This is why Bates strongly argues for the consideration of the educational leadership/society relationship in the scholarship of the field.⁵⁵ That is, it is impossible to extract the practice of leadership from the social space in which it occurs. Consequently, the modernistic research program of educational administration, most strongly linked to the Theory Movement, but still evident in the scientific stream of research in the field, is fundamentally misplaced. Any attempt to objectify and/or de-contextualise leadership practice destroys that which it attempts to explain. Leadership is a social practice, it is not static, it is defined moment-by-moment in the interactions between organisational/group members.

Leadership welcomes complexity and ambiguity and cannot be represented in a neat framework. This is a central underlying assumption in Samier and Bates' critique of authors who claim to have the 'seven simple steps to reforming education' or use snappy acronyms or mnemonic devices to sell their latest

⁵³Bill Mulford, *Overview of Research on Australian Educational Leadership 2001–2005 (Vol. 40)* (Sydney: Australian Council for Educational Leaders, 2007), 19.

⁵⁴Jacky Lumby and Fenwick W. English, 'From Simplicity to Complexity in Leadership Identity and Preparation: Exploring the Lineage and Dark Secrets', *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 12, no. 2 (2009): 95–114.

⁵⁵Richard J. Bates, 'Culture and Leadership in Educational Administration: A Historical Study of What Was and What Might Have Been', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 38, no. 2 (2006): 155–68.

fads or 'adjectival' leadership.⁵⁶ In addition, the vast majority of leadership preparation programmes continue to advocate for a rationalisation of leadership practice.⁵⁷ However, even when practices appear as rational to an observer who may possess all of the necessary information to reconstruct them as such, rational choice is not their principle.⁵⁸ The required conditions for rational calculations are almost never obtained in practice where time is scarce, information is limited, alternatives are ill-defined, and practical matters pressing. The educational leader, or 'educational strategist' demonstrates a practical sense or 'feel for the game' by understanding that the context of their practice is constructed rather than fixed.⁵⁹ Therefore, to understand the context in which they work, leaders must have an understanding of the collective unconscious assumptions of their work, the value placed on their work by a diverse range of societal forces, and power relations. This involves leaders using and interpreting multiple sources of information, evaluating alternative points of view, and developing a reasoned and defensible argument for practice. This requires a critical reflexivity to distinguish the persuasive educational assumptions which inform educational leadership.

The teaching of educational leadership need not be about the 'one right method' and nor should it fear the contestation of knowledge claims. A programme based on contestation challenges the homogenising effects of market ideology and seeks not to conform but to lead, assuming that which it espouses. Leading involves risk-taking and leadership by definition is about innovation and fluidity. It engages actors in critical debate and challenges the underlying assumptions of practice and policy. This is part of ongoing identity construction and most importantly, contributing to the conversation of the world. English argues that the most vibrant educational leadership preparation programmes should be characterised by:

...internal contradictions, antinomies, circularities, and contested intersections. In short, a cutting-edge, research-centred preparation program would reflect the knowledge dynamic at work in which it is embedded.⁶⁰

⁵⁶Eugenie Samier and Richard J. Bates, *Aesthetic Dimensions of Educational Administration and Leadership* (London: Routledge, 2006). This comment is a direct critique of the work of K. Leithwood, C. Day, P. Sammons, A. Harris, and D. Hopkins, *Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership* (Nottingham: NCSL, 2006), and other related publications from this project.

⁵⁷Eugenie Samier, 'Managerial Rationalisation and the Ethical Disenchantment of Education: A Weberian Perspective on Moral Theory in Modern Educational Organisations', *Journal of Educational Administration* 40, no. 6 (2002): 589–603.

⁵⁸Pierre Bourdieu, 'Vive la crise! For Heterodoxy in Social Science', *Theory and Society* 17, no. 5 (1988): 773–87.

⁵⁹Scott Eacott, 'Strategy as Leadership: An Alternate Perspective to the Construct of Strategy', *International Studies in Educational Administration* 38, no. 1 (2010): 55–64.

⁶⁰Fenwick W. English, 'The Unintended Consequences of a Standardised Knowledge Based in Advancing Educational Leadership Preparation', *Educational Administration Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2006): 466.

Leadership as a social practice is not about rational choice, but rather the integration of both the conscious and unconscious, based on timing. The practice of leadership represents a point in time, the product of historical and contemporary struggles. Bourdieu suggests that failing to acknowledge the timing of actions is to abolish strategies itself.⁶¹ He adds that many mistakes would be avoided if every agent were to bear in mind that the social structures he or she engages with at any given time are the products of historical developments and struggles that must be analysed if one is to avoid naturalising these structures.⁶² This requires an interpretation of the 'state of play,' working at macro- (greater society), meso- (systemic, organisational), and micro- (interpersonal) levels. Put simply, programmes for school leaders need to introduce them to the conversation of the world. To enter this conversation requires a breadth of knowledge, a range of capital, which cannot always be found within the boundaries of a single field. For example, it is more about social theory than populous educational entrepreneurs. As Rapp argues, we need to move past the loudest and current elite (I would prefer to use the word 'popular') in the field to establish a new order, built on social justice and educative principles, not economic.⁶³ If orthodoxy is to be challenged alternate ways of being are needed. Not just alternate means of problem solving, but alternate ways of thinking and problem posing. This is not to say that technical skills are not needed within leadership preparation programs, rather that they need to be decentred and seen as an adjunct to the more crucial endeavours of 'educational' leadership.⁶⁴ To engage with these crucial endeavours calls on an understanding of, among other things, history and philosophy, the very courses that get squeezed out of programs in an era of professional standards and accreditation regimes. The task of interrogating and challenging orthodoxy is significant. However, if educational leaders as a profession are to resist the neo-liberal regime of the managerialist project then the movement must start somewhere. Arguably leadership preparation programmes, at least those external to specific education systems, are the logical pragmatic choice.

Conclusion

There is work to be done to understand more fully the phenomenon of school leadership. This poses a considerable challenge to scholars and practitioners alike. Given recent policy moves both within Australia (the specific context in which this article is set), and internationally (as the Australian trend is consistent with many developed and developing nations), and the discourse on

⁶¹Bourdieu, 'Outline of a Theory of Practice'.

⁶²Bourdieu, 'Vive la crise!'.

⁶³Dana Rapp, 'On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: A Plea to Educational Leaders', *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 5, no. 2 (2002): 175–85.

⁶⁴Lumby and English, 'From Simplicism to Complexity', 112.

educational leadership, there is a need to remain about more than the delineated competencies of the professional standards movement. The measures of school leadership effectiveness or the desirability of practices depend crucially on what those setting them, whether they be academics, practitioners or policy makers, believe to be the purpose(s) of schooling, a matter on which there is considerable diversity of opinion.⁶⁵ The doxa of school leadership needs to be more than challenged, it needs to be resisted. This requires a leadership habitus that is not just about having learnt the rules of the game, rules which have established the principal as the deliverer of the agenda of the state. Education is arguably losing its voice in the policy arena; until school leaders and educational leadership scholars return to the fore in the political game that is educational leadership, the defining and re-defining of the boundaries of the field of schooling will continue to be set by those beyond education. This means that knowledge production, and particularly the engagement of current and aspiring school leaders, needs to be based on reading across boundaries (geographic and field).⁶⁶ The time is now and I encourage others, whether they identify as scholars or practitioners, to not sit by as a passenger but to actively engage in the struggle for education. After all, our children deserve it.

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⁶⁵Henry M. Levin, 'Can Research Improve Educational Leadership?', *Educational Researcher* 35, no. 8 (2006): 38–43.

⁶⁶Helen Gunter, 'Review Essay: A Sociological Approach to Educational Leadership', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 31, no. 4 (2010): 523.