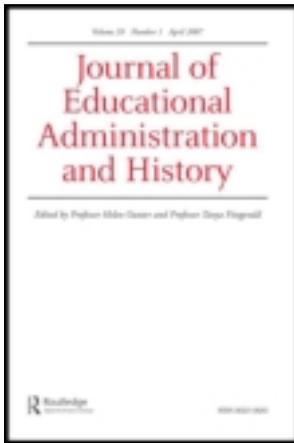


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### Towards a theory of school leadership practice: a Bourdieusian perspective

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## Towards a theory of school leadership practice: a Bourdieusian perspective

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Despite the ‘practice’ turn in the broader management literature, very little work in educational administration has engaged in a theoretical discussion about what constitutes leadership practice. Theoretically informed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, this paper contributes to the long-established critical tradition in the educational administration literature, to argue that: (i) ‘leadership’ is a label of the managerialist project of the state; (ii) leadership should be thought of as a disruptive practice; and (iii) Bourdieusian theory can enable this thinking, but not as it is frequently mobilised in the educational administration literature. The alternative put forth in this paper is not merely replacing one external narrative (managerialism) with another (Bourdieuian), but rather advancing a theoretical position on what is leadership that paves a way forward for a research programme.

**Keywords:** Pierre Bourdieu; school leadership; practice; Australia; field; habitus

### Introduction

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. This paper contributes to an established, but marginalised, critical literature in educational administration drawing on social theory to engage with contemporary research on school leadership practice. In doing so, the focus of this paper is on educational administration as a field of study, particularly how one conceptualises ‘school leadership’, rather than actual practice in schools. Theoretically informed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, I argue that: (i) ‘leadership’ is a label of the managerialist project of the state; (ii) leadership should be thought of as a disruptive practice; and (iii) Bourdieusian theory can enable this thinking, but not as it is currently mobilised in the educational administration discourse.

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Most significantly, through the analysis presented and the questions asked, the goal of this paper is a theoretical exploration of knowledge production on school leadership practice. In doing so, the argument of this paper makes redundant the current proliferation of adjectival leadership and re-centres the discussion on what is leadership and how best can we come to understand it. The brevity of a journal article understandably limits the depth to which these matters can be elaborated and therefore this paper gives an illustrative account of an alternate research programme. Importantly, this paper is about fostering scholarly debate, notably absent in the pages of educational administration journals.

### Theoretical resources

Grenfell and James (1998) argue that research drawing on Bourdieusian theory offers insights and understanding not readily visible in other approaches. Following Grenfell (2010), from this point on I adopt the convention of putting Bourdieu's key concepts in italics. This is done as a mental reminder that each of these comes with a complex and sophisticated theory of practice and should not be simply taken and substantiated as analytic metaphors. It must be noted, however, that Bourdieu never wrote about leadership *per se*, and this goes part of the way to explaining what Lingard and Christie (2003) lament as the minimal use of his work in educational administration, despite his theoretical attention to the relationship between individual agency and structural determinism. In this paper I propose an alternate research programme for the study of school leadership practice from a Bourdieusian perspective. In doing so, it brings into discussion the previously unrelated bodies of work on educational administration and that of social movements which draw on Bourdieusian theory. In a time when managerialist discourses have become the orthodoxy, the need for alternate conceptualisations which can speak back to this orthodoxy has never been greater. This paper offers a productive avenue for the pursuit of alternate ways of knowing educational administration.

The mobilisation of a Bourdieusian approach to knowledge production of school leadership practice is not without complexity. In what is generally employed as the first stage of a Bourdieusian methodology, the object of the research, in this case school leadership, is rethought or reconceptualised as a *field* (Bourdieu *et al.* 1991[1968], Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992[1992]). For Bourdieu, a *field* is a relatively autonomous social world whose practices contribute to its (re)production over time. A *field's* autonomy is demonstrated by the way it generates its markers of achievement (Maton 2005) and is reflected in the strength of its capacity to refract interference from other *fields* (Lingard *et al.* 2005). The possibility of discussing school leadership as a *field* is, however, problematic. As with Bourdieu (1998[1996]), there is general agreement that the *field* of education is weakening in its capacity to protect its boundaries, language, and practices from other *fields* (e.g. politics, journalism,

economics) and the discourses of markets and managerialism (Blackmore 2010). This infiltration of economic and political discourses, particularly around matters of the administration and management of school(ing), is evidence of a loss of autonomy and raises questions concerning the label of a *field*. It is even possible to question the very nature of education as a *field* and argue that it is part, or a sub-*field*, of the economy and national pursuits of productivity. The centrality of education in national economic restructuring is nothing new. The Reagan Government-instigated *A nation at risk*, the Thatcher Government's papers on schooling and higher education in Britain, Australian policy moves during the Dawkins period (1987–1991), and policy developments at the OECD during the same period all reflect a post-Keynesian restructuring of national economies in the context of internationalisation and global market ideology (Marginson 1997). As with notions of employment, health, justice, and the environment, education is discussed in terms of economic reform in public administration and capitalism on an international scale.

The foregrounding of the *field* of school leadership as a research object also highlights the difficulty in using Bourdieusian theory. As Crossley (2003) argues, in spite of his attention to struggle within society, Bourdieu tends to view radical political and social movements – those disruptive moments – as an exception to the rule and even his own theory. It is, however, to be noted that others (see Fowler 2012) suggest otherwise of Bourdieu's work and argue that his theory of practice is one of both transformation and social reproduction. Although, for the most part, through the mobilisation of *field*, and to a lesser extent *habitus* and *capital*, researchers establish social structures that by their very nature (re)produce existing power relations, minimising, if not negating, the possibility of alternatives. Therefore, in the context of this paper, I argue for a different means of mobilising *field*. For me, leadership is rare – as are social movements in greater society. It is a label of distinction, not inclusion. It is neither about everybody nor can it be solely reduced to 'change' as Brian Caldwell (2007) does. As a result, leadership is arguably characterised by what it is not. It is not merely made up of the constituent parts such as tasks we might describe as management or administration. Rather, leadership is disruptive. It is a 'break' in the status quo, where existing structures are modified and new ones generated, disrupting the cycle of (re)production, as Thomson (2010) states, not playing the game better, but challenging the very nature of the game and the formula for success.

Bourdieu explains these exceptions through a 'theory of crisis' or *hysteresis*, where the *habitus* falls out of alignment with the *field* in which it operates, creating a situation in which belief in the game (*illusio*) is temporarily suspended and the orthodoxy of practice or *doxic* assumptions are raised to the level of discourse, where they can be contested. In the context of leadership, the exception to the rule is not the problem. However, this disruptive nature is arguably not limited to the remarkable moves, or moment of crisis, but a durable disposition. This durability is why it makes sense to theorise leadership using *habitus*, and

arguably speaks to why Lingard *et al.* (2003) outline a normative conceptualisation of a 'productive leadership *habitus*'. Crossley (2003) uses the notion of the 'radical *habitus*' to move beyond Bourdieu's outline of a theory of crisis – the short-lived crises of a *field* – yet also shows how Bourdieu's tools for the theory of practice enable a more nuanced explanation of social movements. Two issues arise here in relation to advancing a methodology for educational administration. First, there is Maton's (2008) warning about the proliferation of adjectival *habitus* – much like the critique of adjectival leadership in educational administration discourses – suggesting that the adjective is often a compensation for the lack of analysis of the *field*. He goes on to argue that while the proliferation highlights the versatility of the concept, it reflects the temptation to decontextualise *habitus* from the approach that gives it meaning, demonstrating a bias towards distinguishing empirical features of practice rather than the underlying generative principles. Second, although closely connected, advancing a Bourdieusian methodology for the study of school leadership practice requires not the singling out of a specific thinking tool such as *habitus*, *field*, or *capital*, but a sophisticated interplay between them as each is best understood in relation to the other(s). For the strength of Bourdieu's work are the theoretical resources necessary to deconstruct, reconceptualise, and then reintegrate an object of analysis within a model of reality.

Drawing upon Crossley's work on social movements and Bourdieu's own discussion of a methodology for studying *field* I contend that the *field* of interest in deconstructing, reconceptualising, and reintegrating school leadership practice is actually the individual school. Given the (re)productive role of education in contemporary society, rather than attempting to study leadership – at least as conceptualised as a disruptive practice – on a large scale and substituting breadth for depth, it is arguably of greater benefit for both knowledge production and practice to investigate individual sites as examples of disruption, radical action, or experiments in social practice. From a Bourdieusian perspective, there is an explicit move beyond an elite class of school leaders, and therefore coherence with contemporary thought in educational administration that leadership is no longer – if it ever was – the property of a single individual or title within an organisation. The alternative put forth in this paper is therefore not merely replacing one external narrative (managerialism) with another (Bourdieuian), but rather advancing a theoretical position on what is leadership and how scholarship can engage with such a conceptualisation. Before providing greater explanation as to the alternate, there is a need to engage, albeit briefly, with the current application of 'leadership' as a label of the managerialist project.

### **'Leadership' as a label of the managerialist project**

Despite the relatively uncritical shift of focus – or in fact, because of it – in scholarship from educational administration to educational management and now educational leadership there is a need to theoretically engage with the

very notion of leadership. The past few decades have witnessed the rapid expansion of what Gunter (1997) labels ‘the educational management industry’. This voluminous literature reflects the dominance of managerialist thinking in education knowledge production and wider public policy and in the context of recent policy moves both in Australia and internationally, explicitly names ‘leadership’ as the solution of our times (Gunter 2012). This is important and a key link for mobilising Bourdieu in the discussion given his substantial interest in the role that schooling plays in advancing capitalist societies and in particular how schooling serves as a (re)productive mechanism for the existing social order. The use of Bourdieu in education to highlight (re)production in schooling is well rehearsed and aligns with the critical analysis of the managerialist project in the UK, the USA, and Australia. Building from this work, I want to expose two significant limitations in the contemporary usage of the term ‘leadership’: (i) its vacuous nature and (ii) the validation through the market, in order to frame how Bourdieusian theory can advance a research programme that centres on rethinking ‘leadership’ in education.

### *The vacuous concept of leadership*

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) suggest that leadership can, perhaps, be everything and nothing and a review of the literature can sometimes give this impression. The sheer ubiquity of the term ‘leadership’ is problematic. Our familiarity with the term and its seemingly unlimited elasticity when deployed to describe and explain any kind of social phenomenon threaten to render it meaningless when subjected to critical analysis (Kelly 2008). While assumed as a means of bringing about education reform, and hence a key leverage point for those beyond schooling to shape education, it is devoid of any particular context and is simply something out there. This ‘out there-ness’ is a substantial issue in the scholarship of educational administration as it goes with an underlying assumption that leadership, an idealisation waiting to be discovered, can be captured, deconstructed, and then ultimately replicated elsewhere. In doing so, there is a failure to acknowledge the specific social space – both temporal and physical – in which practice takes place (Bourdieu 2000[1997]). Put simply, any attempt to objectify and/or decontextualise leadership practice destroys that which it attempts to explain (Eacott 2010). Neither the composing of lists of desirable attributes (assuming that leadership is embedded within the ‘self’) nor practices (assuming that leadership is embodied in a set of behaviours – separate to the self – and/or functional consequences of those actions) engages with the relational properties of leading.

As such, leadership remains a vacuous concept connected to attributes, factors, behaviours, interventions, all of which lack a solid grounding in a specific context. However, it is the context that gives the behaviours or interventions meaning and significance. Additionally, the values, philosophies, or other aspects of the individual articulated in lists only exist through practice

– this is why Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* is both embodied and performative. They cannot be separated from the self. The lack of attention to the situatedness and specificity of contexts leads to an under-problematised engagement with the political workings of education in general, and specifically the administration of schooling. In many cases, rather than bringing to the level of discourse the discursive workings of policy and its impact on the day-to-day work of educators, mainstream educational administration research uses managerialist policy markers (e.g. test results, attendance levels), which are little more than proxies for practice, to constitute or validate leadership.

### ***Validation through the market***

Hiller *et al.* (2011) contend that research in leadership has paid far more attention to the development of theoretical explanations of what constitutes leadership than to defining the types of criteria needed to fully and appropriately evaluate leadership in relation to theoretically relevant criteria. In the educational administration literature, the impact of leadership is frequently measured in various bottom-line performance measures (e.g. student test results, attendance, staff turnover). Such causal assumptions are, however, highly problematic due to the phenomenon of the organisational black box. This has not, however, prevented the examination of leadership through manipulation – the seemingly Tayloristic notion of manipulating or measuring differences in traits, behaviours, or demographics to isolate mechanisms leading to higher efficiency/effectiveness – becoming a consistent, if not mainstream, approach in the broad research programme. My purpose here though is not to examine the question of how leaders matter (if they do at all), but instead, to engage with the criteria by which scholars determine that leadership exists.

Most leadership research, and public policy for that matter, is based on a set of assumptions and methodologies that ensure leadership is effectively constituted. With few exceptions (see Leiberson and O’Connor 1972, Gronn 2003), leadership is considered to be not only important, but necessary for organisational success. As such, there is a causal logic applied in policy and scholarship that successful organisations, in this case schools, have successful or effective leaders. The use of policy markers, such as positive changes in student test results, is a frequent sampling strategy in school leadership research, and a cause for celebration in the broader public discourse of schooling (e.g. the ‘turn-around’ principal). However, given its basis on economic measures, this stream of research further highlights the lack of autonomy that education has, and the dominance of the economy. Significantly, the constitution, or at least value judgement (effective/less effective), of leadership after the event is highly problematic and arguably theoretically barren. Theory – acknowledged or not – informs what one looks for and what one considers worthy of study. Therefore, theory is both cause and effect of data as it allows the scholar to limit the field of possible evidence and because theory is updated by the documentation that it

makes possible (Leonardo 2010). To overcome the limited recognition of a theory of leadership in both the educational administration literature, and broader management literature, where research is frequently defined by a discipline (e.g. public administration, organisational sociology, political science, economics) or an object of analysis (e.g. public policy, structural reforms), the proposal of this paper foregrounds the intellectual work – theory – because I want to stress the importance of theory to our understanding of the social world and, specifically, leadership.

### Leadership as a social movement

To make the argument for leadership as a disruptive practice I mobilise social movement theory, and particularly that which draws upon Bourdieu. Social movements are constituted through a ‘break’ in the (re)productive cycles of the social world. As Crossley (2002) argues, social movements turn back upon the society which gives rise to them, interrogating it in new ways, illuminating blind spots, and, of course, generating pressure for change. Drawing on this conceptualisation distinguishes this work from mainstream educational leadership research which frequently calls upon terms such as ‘innovation’ and/or ‘future focus’, all of which are located within the managerialist project and embody the discourses of the school effectiveness and school improvement movement, where it is about playing the game better. A pivotal point to make here is that social movements are not ‘subjects’, ‘agents’, or ‘things’ but rather relational ‘networks’. Before moving on here I want to point out the difference between a Bourdieusian relational approach and the increasingly popular actor/social network approach. For Bourdieu, the sociologically pertinent relations are those referring to the abstract systems of difference and distance in *fields* and social spaces on the basis of *capital* possession, whilst for network theorists they comprise ties and chains of interaction between individuals (Atkinson 2012). This social movement conceptualisation is about initiating ‘experiments in social practice’ (Crossley 1999b), particularly around social and political conflict, as opposed to the labour movement, which is/was primarily built around class conflict. These experiments operate at two levels. First and foremost, the sites of these experiments, in this case a school or cluster of schools, are sites of reformation and (re)production of a movement *habitus*, where the ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and acting problematise orthodoxy in practice, calling it into question, and for its reform. Second, they serve as the focal point for network building, as meeting grounds for connections to be made, networks which extend and produce *capital*, inspiring and enhancing movement activities and bolstering the *illusio* which keeps the movement alive.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, this has methodological implications. Rather than conceptualising an elite *field* of school leaders, the *field* is the school or cluster of schools involved in the social movement. In doing so, rather than making leadership a class-based construct and, to some extent, an

individual, leadership is constituted as a social movement or organisational quality, thus making redundant the current expansion of adjectival leadership (e.g. teacher leadership) and re-positioning the argument of distributed leadership to align more strongly with Gronn's (2010) argument regarding configurations. This does specific things for sampling and the construction (and deconstruction) of the research object.

Conceptualising the school as a *field* is not a stretch for Bourdieusian theory, nor is it inconsistent with Bourdieu himself as in *The social structures of the economy* Bourdieu (2005[2000]) outlines the use of the individual firm as a *field*. What centring the school as opposed to schooling does is allow for scholarship to enter the black box that is the school. In doing so, what we find is not individuals (e.g. principal, teachers, students), but a structure with relative autonomy. While it is acknowledged that there is an increasing range of influences impacting on the school, there is still substantial freedom in how the players within a school engage in the game of schooling. Bourdieu (2004[2001]) warns of the flawed logic of ignoring the relative autonomy of a *field* in preference to the constraints exerted upon it: after all, the demands placed on schools are themselves a social product, constituted through schemas of perception and appreciation and all of those who interact with them (Bourdieu 2005[2000]). Therefore, just as the *strategies* that a school adopts are reflective of its position within the larger *field* of schooling, so too is it reflective of the power positions constitutive of its internal governance or, more specifically, the social dispositions of the players (staff, students, and community) within the *field*. These dispositions, or *habitus*, establish what is important (e.g. *capital*) and by virtue, the conditions of entry, a condition which members buy into. Therefore, the *habitus*, which is required to enter and play the game of the social movement, means that the orthodoxy of current practice speaks to the individual, creating an *illusio*, or a fundamental belief in the interest of the game and the value of the stakes which is inherent in that membership (Bourdieu 2000[1997]).

The problematic at this point is less to do with the notion of the individual school as a *field* and more to do with 'At what point in time and space does a move become a movement?' Does it require a remarkable moment(s) and, if so, what are the consequences of that notion for researchers? Previously, I have argued that a focus on the remarkable moves is theoretically flawed as overlooking moves which are perceived to be the less remarkable – essentially those where remarkable moves are initiated – limits the explanatory power of research in relation to the phenomenon under investigation (Eacott 2010). What is perceived as a remarkable move is a contested terrain, and this reflects the scholarship of educational administration as a site of struggle, just as administration in schools is contested. In answering the question as to when a move is a movement, in the context of 'leadership' research, this is a contested notion – one which I would argue should never be resolved. Although research from a critical social lens will perceive of a movement differently to that of scholarship

coming from a school effectiveness and school improvement tradition, it is this contention that keeps a domain of inquiry alive. As a collection of discourses, educational administration rarely engages with its numerous traditions, essentially operating in parallel. Despite my own personal preference for critical sociologically informed analysis of educational administration, I argue that to remove the contestation that constitutes the academic *field* of educational administration would be a mistake. What is arguably needed is meaningful debate across traditions with the goal of fostering knowledge production and stimulating rigorous debate to advance knowledge. To get to this requires substantive intellectual work around how researchers constitute 'leadership' as a concept within a given project and how both the project and they are located with the academic traditions of educational administration. It is in this space where dialogue can occur across traditions about each other's thinking, or contribution to knowledge, without speaking past – or over – one another due to the abstract nature of epistemological/ontological differences. What is essential to employing the approach described in this paper is rigorous work around establishing theoretical criteria from which leadership's existence can be investigated. Significantly, in doing so, as scholars we need to be willing to accept that leadership may not exist or hold up to theoretical evaluation.

### Engaging with leadership

Having conceptualised the school as a *field*, there is now a need to engage with the relational properties of the *field*. Bourdieu articulates his approach to this in three distinct levels: (i) analyse the *habitus* of the agents in the *field*; (ii) map the relations between those in the *field*; and (iii) analyse the position of the *field* within *fields* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992[1992], pp. 104–107). This approach is intended to illuminate the structural relations between individual agents and the *field* in which they are located and the ways in which these relations are expressed (Grenfell 1996).

### Analysing the *habitus*

Following Crossley (1999a), core players within a movement can be said to have developed a *habitus* which entails the skills required to deconstruct and actively challenge the orthodoxy, or *doxa*, of education. Thus, the analysis of leadership, in part, must focus on the development of this *habitus* and, furthermore, the development of forms of 'pedagogic action' which (re)produce this *habitus*, thereby extending and perpetuating the movement (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977[1970]). I am aware of the apparent contradiction in my argument for a move beyond using Bourdieu to study (re)production. I contend that there is a difference however, and what I am arguing for is a break from the status quo and how the disposition of questioning and challenging orthodoxy can be (re)produced. This *habitus* formation is closely bound up with an individual's

biography, but their biography is in turn shaped and affected by their *field* location as well as through relations with time and space (see Wilkinson and Eacott forthcoming). This mobilisation of biography is significant but also complex. Bourdieu (1987) rejects the notion of life history on three grounds: first, it is a narcissistic technology; second, it obscures the ways in which lives are socially produced in a particular time and space; and third, it suggests the notion of one 'self'. Underlying this perspective is the need to reflexively understand the social production of experience without succumbing to the illusion that they are unique, a-historical, and transparent.

The difficulty of analysing the *habitus* within a *field* such as in this paper is the attention to the characteristics of players (e.g. biography and trajectory – life and professional), but only so far as they relate to the *field*, past and present, not necessarily the idiosyncrasies of each player. As Bourdieu (2007[2004]) notes, 'to understand is first to understand the *field* with which and against one has been formed' (p. 4). Therefore, the intellectual work around the *field* is imperative to an analysis of the *habitus*. As noted previously, the theoretical tools of a Bourdieusian approach are best understood relationally and cannot be decontextualised or spoken about in isolation. Although not writing from a Bourdieusian perspective, Smyth (2008) provides an insightful and detailed analysis of the changing nature of Australian education policy and the dispositions that have been complicit in those changes. His argument of the passivity of the 'Australian' and particularly the compliance with indirect forms of authority (e.g. policy mandates) is central to understanding how policy and practice play out in context. Most important in engaging with the *habitus* of agents within the school is the intellectual work to move beyond the narratives and, by virtue, directly observable features, of individuals' biography and trajectories and engaging with the underlying generative principles of such dispositions. This articulation is imperative to advancing a theory of school leadership practice that is built around a conceptualisation of leadership as a social movement and not merely the advancement of the managerialist project.

### ***Mapping the field***

The *strategies* adopted by a school can never be put down to a single agent. Nor is it appropriate to simply correlate some features of leadership with an organisational outcome measure. To engage with the black box that is the school, it is necessary to map, or analyse, the particular configuration, and distribution of, *capital* within the school as a *field*. This mapping is not drawn on the lines of organisation, read bureaucratic, roles within the school. Rather, as would be expected in a Bourdieusian perspective, it is based on relations between those within the *field*. These relations are based on the distribution of *capital*. Bourdieu outlines three main forms of *capital*: (i) economic, linked to wealth; (ii) social, based on useful or prestigious network relations; and (iii) cultural, symbolic culture attributes such as education, family backgrounds,

and possessions. Within a *field* these *capitals* serve as the currency of exchange in relations and, in doing so, are used to buy positions. Therefore, mapping the relations within the *field* explicitly brings *field* into discussion with both *habitus* and *capital*. In doing so, it highlights the struggle(s) inherent in the *field*. It is through the attention to struggle(s) that scholarship can substitute leadership as rational decision-making for the political, meaning power, struggles of players within the *field*.

Consistent with the conceptualisation of leadership as a social movement, it would be naive to think that an institution identified for its breaking with the status quo would not exhibit the same characteristic internally. In moving beyond Bourdieu's consensual view of society, and mainstream educational administration discourses stressing the need for a shared vision built upon consensus, the disruptive or radical institution would arguably have unity built upon contestation, where the norm is to interrogate orthodoxy and look for/propose alternatives. Within this configuration of the school there will be entrepreneurial activity; this is particularly relevant given Thomson's (2010) argument regarding the disposition of professionals to push for greater autonomy. In such a case, players with specific skills and/or knowledge, that which is both rare and valuable, engage in entrepreneurial activity to maximise their *capital* and advance their individual standing in the *field*. Of course, due to the *illusio*, the individual player believes, and rationalises, their actions as being in the best interests of the schools. This is because of the interplay between *field*, *habitus*, and *capital* and the individual players' unconscious commitment to the rules of the game. What is of interest for the investigation of leadership from a social movement perspective is how these relations play out within the *field*. If the radical behaviour is what drew attention to the school but that radicalism does not exist within the school, then this is of great theoretical importance for scholarship on leadership practice. This highlights the need to intellectually engage with the relations within the school, not only those that are directly observable, but more significantly, the underlying generative principles.

### ***The position of the field within fields***

The institution that is the 'school' owes a number of its most distinctive properties to the set of relations it holds with other institutions and society at large. These relations are not static, rather complex and ambiguous. This makes it impossible to represent them in neat frameworks. What is required is a sophisticated discussion of the situatedness of the *field* in the discursive nature of schooling and within society at large. This is arguably one of the most well-rehearsed arguments in educational administration scholarship, the role of the state and others in education. From a Bourdieusian perspective, this is explicitly about studying the relations of the *field* within *fields*. The infiltration of managerialist language, the political rhetoric of education policy, but arguably most

importantly, the centrality of school(ing) in contemporary life make it imperative to locate work in context, that is, both time and space. It is through the a-historical and decontextualised nature that much of the research on school leadership presents an under-problematised description of an empirical reality. The attention to context requires the same level of intellectual rigour as any other aspect of the investigation. The relational thinking of discussing the *field* within *field* is significant in the context of leadership becoming more central to education policy discourses, and performative regimes, and of importance as the work of education is increasingly being discussed in economic terms. Also, given the rarity of radical action, questions of purpose and the nature of social movements are temporal. The analysis of the relations between *fields* therefore requires attention to tracing the fluidity that is this relationship and the often unnoticed manner in which both space and time have played out.

### Conclusion

Bourdieu provides a set of thinking tools which he himself noted are continually shaped and reshaped through ongoing research (theoretical and empirical). They are, however, much more than just intellectual tools for research; they are part of a complex and always in motion social theory. It is in this tradition that I have sought to bring into conversation the discourses of social movements and educational administration to provide a viable alternative for the study of school leadership practice. While the brevity of a journal article has limited the nuancing of ideas, this paper offers a novel – or at least under-utilised – approach to the study of educational administration. In doing so, it has challenged some of the assumptions of mainstream educational administration research, but it moves beyond what Jansen (2008) labels ‘the self-righteous idealism of the critical perspective’ to offer an alternative. However, as Ladwig (1998) reminds us, ‘it is quite possible (and plausible) to see alternate stances take up positions on the periphery of a field at the very same time as the core or centre changes little’ (p. 35). Research focusing on a theoretical discussion of leadership practice is most likely to remain at the periphery. After all, any claim to knowing about the dynamics of school leadership practice is not an easy sell as it lacks any marketable take-home message. However, scholarship which sheds light on previously under-developed or unexplored features of practice has a far greater chance of surviving the test of time (e.g. Bourdieu) than the repetitious, prescriptive, and aspirational tone of much work in the area. While it is, perhaps, an exaggeration to conceptualise educational administration scholarship as being in crisis, the re-emergence of socially critical approaches to scholarship is in itself a social movement. Educational administration scholars at their best have been constructing social theory, although they have not always discussed it as such, and have interwoven it with their own personal history(ies). As educational leadership is a social practice, any theoretical arguments relating to school leadership are, by their very nature, dealing with

social practice. This paper is a contribution to the body of work employing a sociological perspective for understanding school leadership practice.

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