



# Introducing undergraduate students to school leadership concepts

School  
leadership  
concepts

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to investigate the role of an under-graduate educational leadership in introducing students to the complexity of school leadership practice.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Theoretically informed by Bourdieuan social theory and drawing on a questionnaire with a cohort of students, the paper evaluates a course in relation to achieving its outcomes.

**Findings** – An analysis of student responses indicates that the course did introduce students to school leadership practice and assist in the construction of a school leadership disposition.

**Research limitations/implications** – The theoretical resources used in the paper have significant implications for how researchers conceive of school leadership practice. Therefore, this paper may be the basis of further work.

**Practical implications** – The findings of this work have implications for teacher educators and specifically universities. From this paper, the inclusion of an educational leadership course in under-graduate programs should become more the norm rather than the exception.

**Originality/value** – This paper has value in two unique ways. First, there has been very little work undertaken on the role of educational leadership courses in under-graduate programs and in the context of increased political attention and no formal pre-requisites for the principalship in Australia, this work is both timely and significant. Second, this paper works with a sophisticated notion of school leadership practice and its location using social theory, a perspective that is uncommon in much of the literature on educational leadership.

**Keywords** Leadership preparation, Undergraduates, Schools, Principals, Australia, Social theories, Leadership, Learning processes

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The elusive search for what makes an effective leader or how best to prepare school leaders has challenged and inspired those who study and/or work with educational leaders, managers and administrators for many years. In fact, it is arguably the very problem that led to the establishment of educational administration as a domain of study in the first place. Despite the plethora of books, journal articles, conference papers and scholarly activity, our understanding of school leadership as a phenomenon and leaders as actors in a social space remains a contested terrain. Among the ambiguity and complexity of leadership as a concept/practice, preparation programs for current and aspiring leaders have become the panacea for developing and supporting leaders for the improvement of school standards/performance. This paper contributes to the discourse on leadership preparation from an Australian perspective. The unique contribution of this paper is the focus on a much under discussed perspective, that is, the role of a leadership preparation course in an under-graduate



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teacher education program. This work is both timely, given recent policy moves in Australia and significant given that Australia adopts an “apprenticeship model” of principal preparation (Clarke and Wildy, 2010) where “good” teachers can be promoted to the principalship without any formal qualifications other than their initial teaching degree. Although there is some evidence to suggest that time spent at lower level leadership positions can have a positive effect on school leadership (Eacott, 2010), Walker (1964), argues that personal experience in education and/or leadership posts is insufficient training for school leadership conceding that the school of “hard knocks” has produced some excellent administrators but insisting:

[. . .] that they might well have distinguished themselves much earlier and much more often if they had been able to avoid a long period of trial and error learning. It is doubtful whether we can any longer afford to be as wasteful of our resources in material and personnel as we have been in the past (Walker, 1964, p. 12).

As part of advancing national productivity and social inclusion, the Australian government has committed \$3.5 billion over five years to enable the nation’s education systems to pursue high quality education for all Australian students. School reform initiatives identify “improving school leadership, including support for school principals’ as a priority (Council of Australian Governments, 2008). However, despite this increased political attention, the role of leadership preparation in initial teacher education programs is absent from the discussion. This omission from the current discourse for improving the quality of schooling is an interesting one. In general, there is a dearth of literature on leadership courses in under-graduate teacher education programs (an exception is Menon, 2004). This context serves the purpose of producing, and reproducing, a divide between the core work of teachers and the work of school leaders. This false binary, the separation of “educating” from “educational leadership”, is a critical issue. While it helps educational leadership to legitimise itself as a domain of inquiry and provides universities, but most frequently, other providers, the opportunity to flood the market with numerous programs and products to meet the increasingly complex needs of leaders, it also serves the continued separation of educational leadership from education. In contrast, the current professional standards agenda in Australia being rolled out through bodies such as the New South Wales Institute of Teachers at the state level, and nationally by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership[1], explicitly name “leadership” as the highest standard of teaching. This explicit naming of leadership as something that is to be aspired to, but not separate from the work of teaching endorses the need for leadership preparation to begin in under-graduate teacher education programs and explicitly challenges the separation of educational leadership from teaching.

The office of the school leader is situated in the social space of education that owes a number of its most distinctive properties to the set of relationships it holds with other organisational personnel, other institutions/agencies and society at large. This conceptualisation of educational leadership has significant implications for university based educational leadership courses, especially under-graduate courses embedded in initial teacher training programs. For many under-graduate students, leadership roles seem some way off. This is reinforced through structures (e.g. different pay scales, leadership preparation programs, and greater administrative responsibilities), which constitute the role of leadership as something separate to educating. Most significantly, the construction of leadership as something separate from teaching, and the idea that

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leadership roles come sometime after teaching, shapes the perceptions of participants undertaking leadership learning courses to expect that they will be provided with knowledge and skills that will enable them to become successful practitioners. This professionalisation, or problem-solving focus, expectation of leadership learning is well critiqued in both the leadership preparation literature and the scholarship of educational leadership (see Anderson, 2009; English, 2006). However, the difference in expectations between those seeking a problem solving approach and those looking for a problem-posing course (although it is naive to assume such a simplistic binary, for the purpose of this particular point, the binary is useful) operates at an epistemological level. Epistemological discussions are inevitably abstract and as a result, participants frequently end up talking past each other rather than engaging with each other's thinking (Donmoyer and Galloway, 2010). The central argument of this paper is that under-graduate students, with minimal practical experience in the field, can critically engage with the major issues of the sector through the literature, and this engagement will ultimately have an effect on future practice. The implicit notion of causation in this conceptualisation may seem problematic. After all, Dilthey (see Makkreel and Rodi, 2002) argues that the social world is fundamentally different from the natural world and that human beings act on the basis of meaning, meaning that is socially constructed and constantly reconstructed, not caused. However, rather than merely reject the very idea of causation, this paper follows Cohen (1968, p. 416) thesis that while there is not a precise reference in the social world (as opposed to the natural world) for causation, "one has to wonder how social policy would be possible without some idea of causation".

### **Theoretical resources**

Following the work of others, in this paper I draw on Bourdieuan social theory[2] to argue that school leadership practice sits at the "intersection of" (Lingard and Rawolle, 2010), or is "caught between" (Thomson, 2010), 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 (Maton, 2005). 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. Blackmore (2010) argues, as with Bourdieu (1996), that the field of schooling is weakening in its capacity to protect its boundaries, language and, indeed practices from the intervention of politics, economics and the media. Whereas others argue that school leadership is a field in its own right, the erosion of boundaries and the infiltration of economic and political discourse, raises questions concerning the agency of school leaders and whether they simply mediate cross-field effects or instead are located between multiple fields.

The principalship is located in a unique social space in which the role itself has competing underlying assumptions. First, there is an inward looking perspective, focused on educative practice. This is evident through a set of dispositions, developed over time through exposure to particular educative experiences that is embodied by educators. These dispositions constitute the teacher habitus. Second, there is an external looking perspective, focused on economic and political measures of success.

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Although social fields are not static and the ongoing tensions of a field can be sourced from both external and internal forces, the increasing defining of what counts, 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 significant impact on the habitus of school leaders. As an individual moves from a teacher habitus towards that of a school leadership habitus their field location shifts. Moving from the field of schooling into a position caught between multiple social fields (e.g. the economic and political), the habitus is divided against itself and in constant negotiation of itself. Therefore, the habitus is somewhat doomed to a kind of duplication, or a double perception of the self, with allegiances to multiple identities (Bourdieu, 1999). School leadership preparation therefore plays a role in identity construction, but not by normalising and routinising decision-making, rather, promoting improvisation in novel situations of great complexity which require at least a pluralistic notion of identity (Lumby and English, 2009). Following English (2006, p. 466), a vibrant educational leadership course in such a context should be characterised by:

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

Theoretically, this work moves beyond seeing school leadership practice as a mediator/filter of external influences upon the school. Instead, school leadership practice is conceptualised as being caught between fields, a somewhat liquid identity, constantly and iteratively changing.

### **The educational leadership course**

Harris-John (2007) contends that participants in educational administration courses cannot become effective leaders by merely reading books and listening to lectures. The focus of this paper is the evaluation of an educational leadership course embedded in an initial teaching education degree. The course is located in the first semester of the fourth and final year of the program with only the internship to follow. Noting the theoretical framing of the course, the delivery mode for the course is a 1-1-1 model, where students attend a one hour lecture, have a one-hour tutorial and are expected to complete at least one hour of online engagement with the course each week of semester (13 weeks) using the university's online learning platform (Blackboard). While the course maintains the traditional "lecture" and "tutorial" model, the online posts provide for the explicit and systematic sharing of ideas, thoughts, experiences and insights among the students and with the lecturer, building a culture of collaboration and inter-dependence. The conversations fostered in the discussion forums are purposeful as they relate specifically to the content of the course. This collaborative environment allows all participants (students and lecturer) to co-construct their knowledge. Using peers as co-learners and not competitors for grades creates opportunities for new levels of peer support and collegial learning. When peers provide support it is understood that they are not experts but that they can offer feedback based on similar experiences, although perhaps offering different perspectives or insights.

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The assessment of student learning, a key factor in the teaching and learning of any educational program needs to reflect the growing “complexity” of the contemporary educational context. In the course there are three assignments:

- (1) a written essay asking students to articulate a personal stance on educational leadership;
- (2) an analysis of leadership practice using a school leadership model provided in the course; and
- (3) a series of online discussion boards contributions (where students make an online post for ten weeks of the course).

The three main message systems of education, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in this course are based on an interrogation of contemporary issues in the educational leadership. Nothing is to be accepted as fact and following Bourdieu, everything is to be viewed as political. Rather than focus on the acquisition of technical skills, students are exposed to social theorists such as Foucault and Bourdieu to bring to the level of discourse, the invisible or indirectly accessible elements of social practice. While educational leadership discourse is frequently critiqued for being under-theorised (Gunter, 2009; Thomson, 2001) or that theory only seems to matter if it can be directly translated into action when the school bell rings (Gunter, 2010), the course that is the focus of this paper explicitly takes a sociological approach to educational leadership. This is deliberate as Bates (2006) argues that the defining of courses on the essentials of educational leadership based on the mastery of an ever-changing repertoire of skills under conditions of risk, uncertainty, and competition is highly problematic. This is not to suggest that technicist managerial skills are not of value to potential future school leaders, but following Lumby and English (2009), they need to be de-centred in preparation programs. By doing so, the focus of programs can move from managerial problem solving, to that of problem posing (Anderson, 2009). Gunter (2010) notes that for many leadership preparation providers, especially systemic authorities, social theory is dangerous because it enables practitioners to see through the mediocrity of much policy change, and it enables practitioners to do things differently. The assessment of student work is consistent with these messages and focused much more on the quality of argument rather than the answer students provide. Assignment rubrics focus on the student’s demonstration of problematising knowledge, construction of knowledge, depth of conceptual understanding and level of elaborate communication (see Newman and Associates, 1996).

### **Research method**

This papers reports on the first phase of a longitudinal study on the impact of an educational leadership course in an under-graduate teacher education program. Future work will include document analysis, interviews and follow-up at various points in time (e.g. one, three and five years post-graduation).

#### *Data collection*

The data collection strategy drawn upon in this paper is the initial evaluation questionnaire of the course. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first is a series of items developed by Cheung (1998) for the evaluation of courses combining both face-to-face and online modes of delivery. This instrument consists of four scales:

- (1) student development;
- (2) assessment;
- (3) learning materials; and
- (4) face-to-face component.

This framework has been loosely modified and adapted in many higher education institutions as part of institutional teaching and course evaluations. The second part consists of a series of open-ended questions to elicit what students think of the course. A paper copy of the questionnaire was distributed to students during the second last tutorial for the semester[3].

*Data analysis*

Of the 63 students enrolled in the course, 51 were present during the tutorial and completed the questionnaire ( $n = 80.95$  per cent). Each item required a response on a 1-6 Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree through to 6 – strongly agree). The quantitative data from the questionnaires was coded and entered into PASW for analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, Bartlett’s test for sphericity and Cronbach’s alpha coefficient were used to investigate whether the scales hung together appropriately. For each scale the KMO was greater than 0.600 (indicating an appropriate sample to proceed to principal component analysis), Bartlett’s test was significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the alpha coefficient ranged from 0.824 to 0.884.

**Results**

Table I shows the descriptive statistics from the questionnaire. While the descriptive statistics may be interesting, of course such a claim is always debatable, and the response rate is superior to the institution’s online feedback survey (frequently below 50 per cent), the lack of any comparison groups at this stage (as noted, this paper reports on the baseline data of a longitudinal project) is a significant limitation in the data. However, before completely disregarding the quantitative data of particular interest in the context of this argument are the lowest and highest scoring items on the questionnaire.

The two highest scoring items in the questionnaire were:

- (1) The lecturer appears to have a good understanding of this subject ( $n = 51$ ,  $\bar{x} = 5.80$ ,  $\sigma = 0.45$ ); and
- (2) The lecturer encourages students to ask questions or express opinions ( $n = 51$ ,  $\bar{x} = 5.63$ ,  $\sigma = 0.66$ ).

Scale	N	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Static	SE	Static	SE
Student development	51	5.02	0.54	0.02	0.33	-0.15	0.66
Assessment	51	4.80	0.59	-0.49	0.33	0.54	0.66
Learning materials	51	4.84	0.59	-0.02	0.33	1.13	0.66
Face-to-face component	51	5.23	0.46	-0.27	0.33	-0.77	0.66
Overall	51	5.00	0.45	0.11	0.33	-0.49	0.66

**Table I.**  
Descriptive statistics of  
questionnaire

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Although it is difficult to make too much of two items, it is suggested that students felt comfortable in the subject knowledge of the lecturer and that they were encouraged to engage with the course content and express their opinions. However, the lowest scoring items in the evaluation were:

- The written assignments have clear and specific instructions ( $n = 51$ ,  $\bar{x} = 4.16$ ,  $\sigma = 0.97$ ); and
- The course materials and readings are generally easy to read and understand ( $n = 51$ ,  $\bar{x} = 4.39$ ,  $\sigma = 1.04$ ).

As with the highest scoring items, it is difficult to make too much of two items, however, these two contribute to a much larger issue in education, that is, the professionalisation of knowledge. Removing the online post assignment description, as it was generic with reading specific stimulus questions, below are the assignment descriptions for the other two tasks:

*Task two.* For this task, you are asked to draw on course materials (lectures, tutorials, online discussions, readings), literature in the field, personal experience and reflective thought, to articulate your personal view on the topic of “leadership in education”.

*Task three.* Using the conceptual framework provided during the course, and based on your experience in an identified educational setting, you are asked to critically reflect on the leadership and management practices in the setting. Particular attention should be paid to how different groups (e.g. staff, students, parents, community members, peers, and systemic authorities) construct the leadership role and the impact this has on practice.

Although very few students made comments regarding the nature of assignments, the following two bring attention to an underlying concern of students:

The assignment are so open ended, I was unsure what to do. I want more structure (Student 11).

For the third assignment I would rather just be given a scenario or something that can be easily completed (Student 47).

While a substantial body of literature on educational leadership seeks to bring certainty and rationality to leadership practice (see Thrupp and Willmott, 2003; for an interesting discussion on this), in the moment when leadership is called for, rarely is there time for rational calculation and analysis of the multiple trajectories of decisions. School leadership practice exists in an uncertain world, the open-ended nature of the tasks, combined with the explicit encouragement to students to engage with course materials seeks to introduce and orientate them into the ambiguous and complex world of school leadership.

The selection of readings is always a difficult challenge for faculty members. On one level, there is a desire to engage students with the cutting edge discourse and classic works in an area of inquiry. On the other hand, this is balanced against providing students, possibly new to the area, with work that is accessible to them. Adding further complexity to the issue are students, not all of them, who wish to have easy to read and digest readings that can be easily transferred into assignment production. In attempting to draw from a scope of readings, this course draws from: classic texts such as Taylor (1911), Weber (1968), Callahan (1962), Yukl (2006) and Hoy and Miskel (2001); articles from an international array of journals including, *Journal of Educational*

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*Administration, Educational Administration Quarterly, Educational Management Administration and Leadership, School Leadership & Management, Journal of Educational Administration and History, International Studies in Educational Administration, Journal of Education Policy, Educational Policy, International Journal of Leadership in Education, School Effectiveness and School Improvement* and *International Journal of Educational Management*; and more practically orientated journals such as *The Australian Educational Leader*. Although reading scholarly work can be difficult for some students, the diverse mix of readings for the course provide students with an introduction to school leadership and, at least it is the hope of this author, stimulates students to continue to engage with work on the topic.

In addition, some students ( $n = 35$ , 68.63 per cent) opted to complete the open-ended responses in the second part of the questionnaire. Following the transcription of the data, an analysis of the responses was conducted using conventional coding. The process was a form of content analysis, where the goal was to identify the core elements of the course that the students found most/least useful from the extensive text, through the identification of distinctive themes. The major themes identified were:

#### *Seeing the views of others*

Although mostly about the use of the online forums in both the engagement with the readings and one another's posts, but also tutorial discussions, the most frequently cited strength of the course was the opportunity to read, hear and engage with the views and opinions of others. A representative sample of comments includes:

It was good to see and listen to the views of others. It changed how I viewed the course material and how I valued leadership in educational settings (Student 35).

I liked engaging with the literature and critically analysing differing points of view (Student 30).

Reading other people's online posts and considering various stakeholders perspective really opened my eyes to other points of views (Student 12).

I found the readings and weekly posts to be relevant and further my understanding of the desired topics each week as well as allow me to see other's points of view (Student 8).

This exposure to the views of others works on two levels. The first is in the breakdown of the individualism that is consuming the contemporary university. The neo-liberal policy environment constructs a marketplace for graduates and as a result, many courses support the advancement of the individual, as opposed to the group, in positioning oneself within the market. In playing this game, students are in constant competition with one another for better grades and other forms of capital that will give them the dominant position within the cohort. This brings us to the second level, an initial exposure to the publicness of school leadership work. Although the rhetoric of teachers work focuses on the collegial nature of teaching, it remains one of the few professions where almost all of the work is conducted by individuals behind closed doors, or partitioned rooms. In contrast, the actions of school leaders are far more public. Both decisions and non-decisions are criticised by staff, students, parents, the community, systemic authorities and in some cases, the media. The deliberate choice to have students engage publicly in relation to course content and readings serves to build a collective knowledge dynamic (breaking down the individualism of learning) and introducing

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students to the complexity and overt surveillance of school leadership practice within the performative state. This is all the while developing course knowledge.

### *Developing course knowledge*

Through an investigation of historical and contemporary issues, in consideration of social, cultural, political and industrial perspectives, the course aims to prepare students to explore and understand leadership issues in education, to reflect on education policy and practices, and the ways in which educators contribute to, and shape social directions. The specific objectives of the course are that students will:

- demonstrate an analytical engagement with the literature of the field;
- articulate a well founded position on the contemporary leadership role taking into account the social, cultural, political and historical contexts; and
- apply their knowledge and understanding of leadership concepts to critically examine leadership and management practice.

Each of the objectives links directly with one of the assignments. As noted in the previous theme, the online posts were a common topic in student responses. A representative sample of comments made by students includes:

The readings were appropriate and helpful in gaining a deep understanding which will shape my future practice (Student 7).

The online posts made me think more in-depth about the core concepts of the course (Student 6).

Online discussions, seeing the ideas of other professionals, debating the weekly topics and readings were great (Student 26).

The posts really helped me to understand the course and have been beneficial to my learning as they encouraged me to think and respond to my understanding of the readings (Student 18).

On the basis of the comments made by students, the readings and posts are an effective strategy for enhancing knowledge on the topic of school leadership. Although this is not surprising given the course materials, pedagogy and assessment centred on such and ultimately, they should explicitly promote course learning. Most significant, however, is not the mere presence of online forums but the way in which they were operationalised to advance student learning. Each of the comments above explicitly cites the online posts as encouraging them to engage with greater depth with the readings. The first example links the course to shaping future practice, which is arguably the goal of any university course or program. The use of discussion boards is well supported as an instructional practice as they allow for greater refinement and drafting of responses prior to contributing (Rollag, 2010). In this particular case, the delivery mode of the course (the 1-1-1 model) gave permission for each student to engage with the readings in their own time (within the confines of the course schedule) and give more informed contributions on each topic, a somewhat rarity in the face-to-face classroom as different students dominant discussions. This leads to the third theme to emerge from the analysis of the student responses, the confidence to express an opinion in relation to developing knowledge.

*Confidence in developing knowledge*

Having content knowledge is important, but if that knowledge is to become part of public intellectualism (Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2008), advocacy (Anderson, 2009), or activism (Hoffman, 2009), among other things, then the development of confidence in expressing such knowledge is imperative. A representative sample of comments from students includes:

The posts assigned were relevant, both now and for the future, and importantly thought provoking. Encouraging us to think both now and in the future (Student 16).

The readings were relevant to future practice as an educator and encouraged me to form an opinion and further my professional development (Student 9).

The online posts have encouraged me to confidently express my personal opinions and challenge others as they have challenged me (Student 19).

The first two quotes link the readings with future practice. In such case, the readings are an integral part of the course in the identity construction of educators. If schools are to have leaders and not just local managers of an education agenda set by those beyond the school then all policies and practices must be viewed as political. Central to acknowledging and engaging in this political game is the disposition to pose problems, not just seek to solve problems, this involves asking questions and engaging in contests with fellow professional as to the educational merits of policies and practices. The third quote above directly talks to this point, confidently expressing opinions, challenging the views of others and, arguably most importantly, having your own views challenged. This contestation exposes students to the highly political nature of educational practice.

**Implications**

Menon (2004) argues that the inclusion of an educational administration course in pre-service programs would go a long way to addressing some of the job satisfaction issues of early career teachers. To do this though, leadership courses must break down the moat that exists between teaching and leadership (Lumby and English, 2009). The unique contribution towards this goal by the course described in this paper, is in introducing students to the between fields location of school leadership practice. Theoretically informed by Bourdieuan social theory this course exposes students to the complex social world of school leadership. Through analysis of student responses to course evaluation it is argued that students developed understanding of the course content, but more importantly, they developed confidence in taking a stance and critical thinking. While neither of these assertions is highly provocative and are arguably the goal of any university course it is relevant in this particular case due to the unique context of under-graduate leadership courses where participants have little experience in school leadership roles. In direct contrast with conventional leadership preparation courses where participants are already practitioners and in many cases with explicit aspirations for promotion, this course is taken by under-graduate students. Rather than developing students technical skills in what managerial competencies are deemed appropriate, the pedagogical, curriculum and assessment practices of the course focus on exposing students to alternate perspectives and actively encouraging students to take a stance and be willing to both challenge the ideas of others and have their own ideas challenged. Doing so in a public forum gives

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students the experience of increased surveillance, in which the lecturer is a participant in discussions but also the marker of tasks, and lived experience in the political nature of public intellectualism. Challenging the ideas of others, and vice versa, gives a micro level perspective of the work of school leaders and the potential social fall out of expressing a point-of-view and sometimes, the marginalisation of having a view that is not consistent with the dominant discourse.

Critical social theory explores underlying value and power structures and asks how things came to be the way they are and how they might be different. Central to Bourdieuan theory is the dominance/subordination of society and their role in the reproduction of existing power relations. By their very nature, alternate ways of being and doing are at the margins. The public nature of the discussion boards provides a reflexive sample for students in the social reproduction of society. This works on two levels. First, the dominant way of discussing concepts and issues becomes clearly evident in the transcript of discussion boards, likewise, the marginalisation of alternate perspectives. Second, students, as both individuals and a collective, can see how they contributed to the silence and/or marginalisation of alternatives. In an era when social justice issues are politically high priority, experiences such as this for students, where they both live and reflect on practice are imperative. Unlike hypothetical scenarios based in some far off classroom or school, this experience is rooted in the constant power struggles of student cohorts. While often an uncomfortable issue to discuss for some students, getting to the heart of why some student responses are engaged with, other consistently criticised, while others are ignored serves to highlight the day-to-day reality of classrooms and schools. In doing so it also removes the limited view of school leadership as only the domain of principals and other executives. Speaking on behalf of those who have been marginalised whether through economic, social, cultural or political means is work that can be undertaken by any education professional.

For under-graduate teachers, achieving this level of lived experience in leadership contexts is difficult and the awarding of a grade is far less significant than the potential effects decisions can have on children in schools. However, through engaging (and in many cases debating) the literature and the ideas/opinions of colleagues, the contestable nature of education, its purpose, and the impact of practices on student learning, serve to introduce students to the complex world of school leadership. A world that does not exist in isolation but rather one that sits, sometimes uncomfortably, between multiple social worlds. It is this unique location of school leadership practice that makes the role both unattractive and yet highly rewarding. It is not solely the domain of educators, but also politicians, economists, lawyers, public commentators, historians, philosophers, psychologists, and the list goes on. As Gunter (2010, p. 527) argues, this means that knowledge production needs to be based on reading across boundaries, geographic as well as field.

With ever increasing intervention from those beyond the field of education on schooling practice and the increasingly complexity of schooling itself, the need for leaders to do boundary spanning work has never been greater. Given that in the Australian context the most common path to the principalship is through a socialisation process, then the move from a teacher habitus to a principal habitus is more about the reproduction of existing power relations and practices. If as a society we want school leaders who are public intellectuals and engage in discussion and debates about the future of society and most importantly our children, then there is a

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need for school leaders to be aware of their positioning with greater society. The between field location of school leadership practice, as argued in this paper, requires an immersion in the complexity of schooling and an awareness of the multiple forces impacting upon practice. It is only through this reflexive positioning that school leaders can speak out and with those who have been marginalised. Without any systematic leadership preparation in Australia, the place for this initiation is in under-graduate teacher education programs.

### Conclusion

There is now very little doubt that leadership matters in schools. Interventions into school leadership, for both current and aspiring, have become a policy priority not only in Australia but internationally. However, at least in Australia, preparation programs are not necessarily required and when undertaken they are frequently more about systemic socialisation or learning about leadership than learning for leadership. This paper has reported on an explicit attempt to embed school leadership preparation in under-graduate, initial teacher education programs. Rather than resorting to the proliferation of adjectival leadership through the notion of teacher leadership, the course that is central to this paper is about introducing students, with minimal practical experience in the field, to the complexity of school leadership. Not the leadership that is attributed to being a formal title-bearing leader in a school, but leadership as a social practice that comes into being with the collision of multiple discourses, whether they be political, economic, social and/or educational, among others. The breadth of knowledge required to critically engage with such discourse collisions, as has been argued in this paper, can be stimulated through engaging with the literature of educational administration and discussing and debating the ideas of the literature. This paper comes early in the overall project and it is quite possible that alternate findings will emerge over the coming years as both this project evolves and others contribute to the discussion. What is clear for now however is that the silence of educational leadership courses in initial teacher education can no longer be tolerated. As the boundaries of fields continue to crumble, if educational leadership is to maintain its place in education with central links to teaching and learning, than the goal should be less about contributing to the moat between educational administration and education and instead about blurring the lines between the two. It is hoped that this paper both contributes to this goal and also inspires comment and/or further work by others in the area.

### Notes

1. It should be noted that while constitutionally the States/Territories 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 at all levels (Lingard, 2000).
2. Following Grenfell (2010), the convention of putting Bourdieu's key concepts in italics is adopted. This serves 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.
3. The second last tutorial was deliberately chosen to enable students to engage with the feedback during the final tutorial and be privy to changes that the lecturer will or will not make for the next offering of the course.

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